TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN A CHANGING REGIONAL ORDER

Edited by: Mohammad Affan

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ALSHARQ FORUM

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This book is dedicated to the memory of the late Jamal Khashoggi, in recognition of his valuable contributions to Al Sharq Forum and the Task Force on Political Islam in particular. Mr. Khashoggi was a regular participant in the Task Force roundtables and his thoughts enriched our discussions. His sacrifice for democracy and freedom of speech will remain an inspiration to Al Sharq Forum.

He shall always be remembered.

This book is the final product of a task force organized by the Research Department, Al Sharq Forum. The task force team worked from February to December 2018 and was led by:

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Content:

Introduction

Mohammad Affan

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Political Islam – both as an ideology and a social movement – has witnessed massive changes since the onset of the Arab uprisings in late 2010. Despite all their shortcomings, the Arab uprisings permanently altered the political dynamics of the Al Sharq region and left a lasting impact on its social and political structures, including political Islam movements (PIMs).

After decades of limited political participation, suppression, marginalization, co-option and containment, PIMs found themselves within an utterly new reality. In some cases, PIMs in the region were able to ascend to power and gain international acceptance for the first time in their histories. In other cases, PIMs became involved in protracted civil wars fuelled by complicated regional alliances and enmities or fell victim to bloody crackdowns concomitant with aggressive campaigns against political Islam. Overall, the Arab uprisings changed the dynamics of the inclusion/exclusion of PIMs in the Al Sharq region in a number of important ways.

Our task force has examined and analysed the ongoing transformation of PIMs in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Composed of thirteen research fellows and research assistants, it worked from February to December 2018 on seven countries where the Arab uprisings phenomenon took different forms: massive mobilization that induced leadership change (Tunisia and Egypt), limited demonstrations with a reformist agenda (Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait), and bloody civil war (Syria and Yemen). The idea behind this research design was to understand how PIMs acted and reacted in response to the different challenges and opportunities created by the Arab uprisings in different contexts.

In order to achieve this goal, the concept document of the task force specified four main themes to be studied:

Theme 1: Structural Remodelling
In this theme, the different structural and organizational transformations of PIMs were explored. These included structural adaptations such as the redefinition of the relationship between a religious movement and its affiliated party, the establishment of a violent wing or a militia, or the reconsideration of its structural relationship with the international Muslim Brotherhood (MB). In addition, unintentional structural changes that took place as a result of internal disputes or repression and crackdown were also considered, including defections and fragmentation.

Theme 2: Strategic and Ideological Transformation
This theme aimed at examining changes in the strategy and/or ideology of PIMs since the commencement of the Arab uprisings. In other words, how the different circumstances PIMs faced affected their strategies and views regarding important topics such as engagement in formal politics and commitment to peaceful change.

Theme 3: Evaluating PIMs in Government
In three cases (namely, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco), PIMs came to power, or at least became part of the government, following the Arab uprisings. Consequently, this theme was concerned with examining the policies adopted by the PIMs in power. This included their economic policies, their project of security institutions reform, their management of religious affairs, their approach to human rights and minorities, and the main features of their foreign policies.

Theme 4: Self-Evaluation and Ideological Revision
The aim of this theme was to study the evaluation and ideological revision activities that have taken place within PIMs since the Arab uprisings. These activities were reported to have happened in the cases of Egypt, Tunisia, and

Jordan amongst others. The analysis meant to cover many aspects such as the driving factors behind evaluation and revision, how they were organized, who was involved, and what their recommendations were.

Besides conducting many fieldworks and interviews with Islamist leaders and experts in Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, Turkey, and London, the task force organized two major round-table conferences in February and September and a follow-up workshop for the task force team in May 2018. Dozens of high-profile Islamist leaders from all over the region participated, as well as many prominent academics and scholars on PIMs.

Defining PIMs

The definition of PIMs was a matter of great debate and thorough discussion by the task force team during the initial phase of the project. Not all Islamic movements can be categorized as PIMs; therefore, it was important to reach a common understanding and an agreed-upon definition of PIMs in order to decide which organizations should be included in the analysis in each case study.

Needless to say, PIMs are classically defined as movements that seek to form an Islamic government (or establish an Islamic state) and to "Islamize" society. In other words, they believe in the concept of comprehensive Islam that should be sovereign over all social domains – a target that can only be achieved using the authoritative power of a state.

However, what makes the definition of a PIM so contentious is the great diversity of ideological and structural forms that are to be found under that banner. Ideologically, for instance, some of these movements, categorized as moderates, believe in gradual non-violent change and acknowledge the legitimacy of existing regimes, while others, known as radicals, seek the violent toppling of the existing systems and adopt a top-down "Islamization" strategy. Furthermore, the movement of any given PIM along this moderate-radical continuum frequently occurs according to changing contexts.

Structurally, PIMs have taken different forms: political parties, religious institutions, charity organizations, lobbies, armed groups, or hybrid forms.

What concerned us more during discussions was how to differentiate between PIMs and Salafi Jihadi Movements (SJMs). It was argued that PIMs were willing to work within the framework of the modern state and just aimed to reform/Islamize existing regimes, whereas the goal of SJMs was to transform the state system itself and even the international order if possible. Also, SJMs adopted violent means to induce political change, while PIMs were generally gradualist and non-violent. Furthermore, it was stated that PIMs were founded as social movements, while SJMs started as militias and their membership was closed, selective and neither open nor public.

Part of this argument was contested, given the fact that the MB – the classical example of a PIM – was originally founded as a challenge to the nation-state, with the aim of restoring the Islamic Caliphate and change the state system in the region. Nevertheless, it was agreed that the task force should only look into the movements' current ideologies and agendas that reflect its recognition of the modern state system. Additionally, it was argued that, on many occasions, the MB practiced violence against local rulers, as well as foreign occupiers in pursuit of its political goals. However, an agreement was reached among the team that although PIMs might use violence occasionally, they do not resort to it as a routine element in their political struggle.

Another debate occurred on whether the Salafi movements should be categorized as being among PIMs or not. Non-violent Salafi parties such as the al-Nour Party in Egypt can clearly be considered to be part of the political Islam phenomenon. Yet, not all Salafi movements establish a political wing or a party, and many of them remain exclusively religious organizations. Therefore, after discussions, it was concluded that Salafi groups that establish a political party or engage in politics routinely and systematically in a party style (i.e., field candidates into elections, advocating political platforms and agendas, etc.) should be included in PIMs.

Academic Approaches to the Study of PIMs

How to study PIMs was also an important topic for discussion in the task force. Many approaches and theoretical frameworks have previously been used in an attempt to capture this multifaceted and ever-evolving phenomenon. But it is important to bear in mind here that the selection of approaches and frameworks could be ideologically driven. For instance, securitizing the phenomenon of political Islam by focusing on dimensions like radicalization, extremism, and terrorism implicitly interiorizes the belief that PIMs are a potential or even an actual security threat. Hence, the ultimate goal of research efforts, in that case, becomes how to combat this phenomenon and neutralize its dangers, if we cannot totally get rid of it. As stated above, the phenomenon of political Islam includes a vast array of ideologies and many radical and militant groups are categorized as "Islamists", but to ignore the diversity among the PIMs or to solely highlight the extremist faction and position it as the core of this phenomenon is somewhat misleading.

Another conventional approach is to study PIMs focusing on their ideology by examining their founding documents and the basic premises of their main ideologues. This usually entails a discourse analysis approach to comprehend how these movements address issues like state, democracy, social justice, and minority rights, or a comparative approach to outline the similarities and differences between various trends within these movements. Despite being of academic value, this hardly enables researchers to go beyond the initial theoretical stances, as their political behaviour cannot be solely attributed to and explained by their ideological convictions.

Two widely used approaches in the scholarship of political Islam are the social movement and party politics approaches. The first is concerned with how PIMs formulate their agendas, mobilize resources to advocate for them, recruit and reproduce their membership, and communicate with and influence the public. The other is more concerned with formal politics: elections, poll results, political alliances, platforms, parliamentary agendas,

and the like. Both approaches focus on PIMs as manifested in their way of organizing and acting and deal neutrally with the phenomenon of political Islam, without making any special assumptions about PIMs due to their Islamic nature.

Moreover, in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, it became increasingly popular to address political Islam using a democratization approach. This approach greatly focuses on the agent factor, hypothesizing that the fate of democratization process primarily depends on the choices made by political actors. As major socio-political actors in almost all Arab uprisings countries, a great deal of research and analysis has focused on the strategies adopted and decisions made by political Islam movements and whether their behaviour has facilitated or hindered the process of democratic transition. The mere idea that political Islam could play a favorable role in democratization obviously reflects a positive attitude from the liberal perspective – an attitude that contrasts with those that perceive this phenomenon as a security concern.

A prominent feature in the new atmosphere in the wake of the Arab uprisings is regional stratification between the so-called pro-Arab uprisings and counter-revolutionary camps, with the subsequent involvement of international powers. This led many to approach political Islam from international and geopolitical perspectives, examining how PIMs managed their regional and international relations and how they shaped the agenda and the policies of such powers towards the region in return.

Within these frameworks, theories traditionally used to interpret the behaviour of political actors (such as political opportunity theory and rational choice theory) fit well to the study of PIMs. However, inclusion-moderation theory has also become very important in this field. The main premise of this theory is that political groups are expected to become more moderate if they are formally included and allowed to legally work in a pluralist political system. Many explanations have been proposed for this tendency but the principal one is that organizations seek moderation in order to appeal to

a wider range of voters. Nevertheless, this theory confines its scope to the interplay between the regime and the PIMs in terms of inclusion/exclusion, overlooking other variables.

As the task force tackled this theory, an important question arose: what does moderation exactly mean? Does it simply mean being more in alignment with liberal democratic ideology? How can we reach an appropriate definition of moderation surpassing this reductionism?

After exploring different patterns of transformation in the PIMs in the region, three main parameters were identified: whether the PIMs accepted the use of violence or not, whether they were willing to cooperate with other ideological groups or not, and whether they adopted a reform agenda or demanded radical regime change. In other words, if the PIMs in a given country abstained from using violent means in political struggles, demonstrated a real intention to work with other ideological groups, or gave up their demands for massive and radical political change, these should be perceived as signs of moderation, and vice versa.

Book Outline:

In the following chapters, seven case studies looking at different contexts will be examined starting with the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, where the Arab uprisings manifested in large popular mobilizations that resulted in the unseating of the old autocratic leaders and carried Islamists to power for a short while.

In the first chapter, Ezzeddine Abdelmoula focuses on the transformation that took place in the Tunisian Ennahda Movement. He argues that the Ennahda Movement has witnessed unmistaken changes both ideologically and structurally since the Arab uprisings began. On the ideological level, although the movement managed to preserve a broad "Islamist" framework, the intellectual content within this framework has largely changed. Structurally, the Ennahda Movement carried out an organizational remodelling and

decided to separate its political and preaching (da'wa) activities and to become a classical national democratic party, justifying this move by the need for "specialization". However, interestingly, Abdelmoula traces the roots of these changes and concludes that all these transformations have been happening gradually within the movement since its inception, simply accelerating following the Arab uprisings.

In the case of Egypt, Lucia Ardovini examines the transformation of the PIMs through the framework of the "competition for Islamic authority", as she puts it. Accordingly, she explores different trajectories pursued after the January Revolution by the MB, the Salafi trend, and the Al Azhar institution, which does not fit within the classical category of political Islam. Special attention has been paid to changing dynamics in the relationship between these three actors in the aftermath of the 2013 coup. She generally argues that the ongoing transformation of political Islam in Egypt can be summarized through the rapid move of the MB from the periphery to the center of Egyptian politics before being violently pushed back to its margins again to enter into a state of "stagnation" and "soul-searching"; the Salafist venture into politics, revealing unexpected efficiency, as well as pragmatism; and Al Azhar's growing independence from regime institutions. In conclusion, she states that it is naïve to assume that Islamism in Egypt begins and ends with the MB and says that, despite looking very different now, the Islamist narratives and actors are still active in Egypt.

In a different context, PIMs did not act as a force for change pushing for the downfall of the regime. Rather, they maintained a conservative attitude and adopted a reform agenda with relatively less ambitious political demands. In countries such as Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait, popular mobilization did not reach a threshold that really jeopardized the persistence of the regime either due to efficient strategies of dissuasion and co-option by the regime, indecisive and ambivalent opposition, unfavourable domestic and regional circumstances, or all these factors. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this choice worked out well for some PIMs, such as the Moroccan Justice

and Development Party (PJD), which managed to win the parliamentary elections of 2011 – and of 2016 – to form an Islamist cabinet for the first time in Moroccan history.

Intissar Fakir's chapter examines the dilemma that Moroccan Islamists faced in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Fakir states that the Moroccan Islamists, mainly the PJD, its proselytizing wing, the Reform and Unity Movement (MUR), and the Justice and Spirituality group (Al Adl Wal Ihsan, or AWI) used to operate within a well-defined political space and accommodate the red lines imposed by the monarchy. However, what has changed since 2011 is that public opinion has injected itself more forcefully into the political sphere, making the Islamists' task of balancing their relationship with the monarchy and with their supporters more difficult.

Although the PJD and AWI have followed different paths – the first adopted the strategy of "reform from within stability" and refused to join the uprisings, while the latter gathered forces with the February 20 Movement in an attempt to achieve a radical change in the political status quo – both are facing now great challenges in terms of withstanding pressure from the monarchy, maintaining their internal coherence, and securing public support.

The Jordanian Islamists seem to be facing the same challenges with much worse consequences. Their attempt to utilize the opportunity presented by the Arab uprisings to redefine their relationship with the monarchy "from participation to political partnership" and the backlash they suffered after the uprisings ended are the main topics addressed by Amjad Ahmed Jebreel in his chapter. He argues that despite the MB in Jordan insisted on a reformist rather than revolutionist approach, the pressure they exerted for reform was perceived by the regime as an attempt to wage "a soft coup" against the king. Therefore, after the 2013 coup against the MB in Egypt, the movement in Jordan has witnessed severe setbacks regarding its relationship with the king and its ability to maintain unity and secure popular support.

Likewise, Kuwaiti Islamists have also had difficulties in managing their relationship with the Amir since the eruption of the uprisings. In her chapter, Courtney Freer maps the PIM groups in Kuwait, exploring the origin of each group, the course of its evolution, and how recent political developments have affected its structure and ideology. Despite the presence of many axes of categorization: Salafists and Ikhwan, Sunnis and Shiites, etc., Freer emphasizes that the Islamist landscape in the post-Arab Spring Kuwait has shifted around two broad-based cross-ideological coalitions: opposition and loyalist. According to her, the Muslim Brotherhood and the activist strand of the Salafi movement have increased political cooperation with other non-Islamist ideological blocs in an effort to spur political reform, while Shiʻa Islamist groups and the purist strand of Salafis, for pragmatic reasons, have strived individually to increase their alignment with the government.

Civil wars provide a totally different context with dynamics of their own. In such cases, the line of demarcation between PIMs and SJMs becomes more and more blurred. In addition, civil conflicts stimulate great shifts in the political scene, pushing aside moderate factions for the benefit of the radicals, and politicians for the benefit of military personnel or warlords, with the necessities of military operations overshadowing ordinary political agendas. Moreover, intense civil conflicts attract regional and international powers who become engaged in the struggle, usually through local proxies.

Taking Syria and Yemen as case studies, the last two chapters address how PIMs adapted to the context of civil wars. Abdulrahman Alhaj, in his chapter on Syria, begins by tracing the origin of the PIMs and briefly describing their evolution from the establishment of the Syrian Republic to the uprisings. However, to overcome the current complexity and the fluidity of the PIM/SJM landscape, he focuses on the phenomenon of the newly formed politico-military movements that have emerged from the womb of the war. These movements are typically difficult to define: military groups-cum-political organizations-cum-proselytising committees-cum-local governance offices.

Alhaj chooses the Islamic movement Nūr al-Dīn Zinkī (NDZ) as a telling example of this new kind of movement. As one of the few military groups founded at the beginning of the uprisings that has managed to survive for seven years with a fair level of stability, the NDZ movement, according to Alhaj, fits well as a case study. Therefore, he thoroughly examines the establishment, ideology, internal structure, and the political behavior of this movement, as well as its experience in local governance. In his conclusion, he highlights how the ambiguous ideology of the movement, the vague nature of its rhetoric, the continuous shifting in its alliances, and the contradiction of its political behavior has enabled it to survive the instability and uncertainty of the civil war and helped it to maintain control over its territories for a relatively long time.

In case of Yemen, Nabil Al Bokairi examines the transformation in three main PIMs: First, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Al Islah Party), which is politically and intellectually close to the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Second, the Salafist groups, which have founded a number of political parties, such as the Nahdha Movement, the Yemeni Rashad Party, and The Peace and Development Party. The third group is the Houthi Movement "Ansar Allah" which belongs to Shiite political Islam. After exploring the evolution of the Islamic movements in short, Al Bokairi focuses on the ideological changes in these groups after the Arab uprisings: how new thoughts regarding the relationship between Islam and politics started to emerge amongst the "elite youth" of the Al Islah Party, how the Salafi trend decided to engage in party politics after a long period of abstentionism, and how a sectarian agenda shaped the political behavior of the Houthi movement.

Finally, some concluding remarks and policy recommendations will be proposed based on the task force's work. Although one might rightly argue that the transformation of the PIMs in the wake of the Arab uprisings is still ongoing and it may be too early to come up with concrete conclusions; nevertheless, after eight years, it is valid to deduce some patterns and trends from our observations and findings. After all, the phenomenon of political

Islam is not expected to cease to exist nor to transform in the foreseeable future. However, its existence may be manifested in various non-traditional forms and its transformation may give rise to unexpected outcomes and hybrids. This exactly what makes studying political Islam a necessary, yet tough, task.

Beyond Ideology: Transformation of Political Islam in Tunisia after the Arab Spring

Ezzeddine Abdelmoula

Manager of Research at Al Jazeera Centre For Studies

After almost six decades of authoritarian rule, Tunisia plunged into a rapid and multifaceted transformative process since the beginning of 2011. The social protests that started separately in remote cities and villages turned, within four weeks, into a massive change movement resulting in the fall of the Ben-Ali regime. This change created new dynamics in the country and elsewhere, and unleashed a series of transformations most of which are still at play.

A number of factors contributed to the success of this sociopolitical movement in toppling one of the most enduring and fiercest regimes in the Arab region. Among those factors was the collective nature of the uprisings that brought together different social and political components, including the Islamists who have been denied the right to organize and operate freely and legally within society since the establishment of the Islamic Tendency Movement (ITM) in 1981. This collectiveness, inclusiveness, and spirit of joint action paved the way for the following phase and was crucial to the success of the democratic transition. Not only has the political system changed during the democratic transition, but also all the different parties contributing to this transformative process.

This chapter focuses on transformations in political Islam in Tunisia represented by Ennahda Movement. Like any other sociopolitical movement at times of transition, Ennahda experienced a number of transformations to keep abreast with the changing environment and adjust to the new reality. What are these transformations and what is their impact on political Islam and the entire political setting in Tunisia? According to the author's

observations and the data collected through interviews and available documents, not all the transformations in political Islam in Tunisia occurred at the same time and with the same speed or depth. They depend mostly on the political context, and on the area in which they take place such as ideology, structure, and political positions and strategies.

The analysis and interpretation of the data gathered for this research show that transformation has been happening gradually within Ennahda since the early stages of its inception, but accelerated remarkably after the Arab spring. On the ideological level, although the movement managed to preserve its broad framework as "Islamist", the intellectual content of this framework has largely changed due to major revisions. The new "intellectual vision and theoretical reference" adopted during the movement's 10th congress in 2016 replaced the three-decade old document known as "the intellectual vision and fundamentalist approach".

The second area of change investigated in this chapter involves the political positions and strategies. Generally, the movement still maintains much of its original positions towards a number of critical social and political issues. Whether it is democracy, power sharing, citizenship, women's rights, the national and the transnational, the use of violence for political purposes, etc. very little change has been recorded. When it comes to strategies and sociopolitical repositioning, the transformations within and around the movement are unprecedented. The new dynamics that the revolution created in Tunisia, both at the level of state and society, placed Ennahda into the heart of political power and brought with it new types of challenges completely different from those it used to face when it was in the opposition ranks. This swift but unstable political repositioning is accompanied with a slow but steady social repositioning that could reshape the movement demography and affect its identity significantly.

On the structural level, Ennahda witnessed fundamental changes. Under the banner of "specialization", the movement decided during its 10th

congress to separate political action from da'wa (preaching) activities. This separation meant, in the first place, a complete restructuring whereby all da'wa related structures and sub-structures are either dissolved or left out of the organization. It also meant a total change in resource allocation policies in terms of funding, guiding, capacity building, etc. Specialization led also to the separation of other components of the movement, such as cultural and charitable activities, which should be taken care by civil society organizations.

It is true that this structural transformation came partly as a natural evolution of a movement aiming at building a modern organization, but it also came as a response to the new political realities in Tunisia after the Arab Spring. The legal recognition of Ennahda as political party in 2011 required a number of conditions including the civilian nature of the party, which prohibits the combination of religious and political activities within the same structure.

It is worth noting that the consequences of this transformation go beyond its technical and tactical aspect. It will have far-reaching implications on Ennahda's sociopolitical positioning and on the future of political Islam in Tunisia. During the 2018 municipal elections, for instance, the movement decided to have up to 50% of its electoral lists headed by non-members and non-ideological elements.[1] This decision put the new structure to test and allowed the party to penetrate additional social sectors at both the elite and the grassroots levels. Transformation of political Islam in Tunisia will, therefore, be investigated in three areas: ideology, structure, and political positions and strategies.

I. Change of ideological and intellectual framework

Like many political Islam movements, Ennahda emerged in the late 1960s as part of a wider revivalist trend across the entire Arab region and much of the Islamic world. These movements have, in turn, inherited the earliest reformist movement and preserved its key characteristics. The roots of

the activist Islamists are deeply ingrained in the reformist project, which provided them, not only with a major part of their discourse elements, but also with the basis of their vision.[2]

The historic context, in which political Islam movements appeared, required most of them to share the same ideology albeit with minor variations. They all had to maintain and defend the Islamic identity in the face of the rising secular ideologies accompanying the modernist movement, especially after the collapse of the caliphate and the declining role the institution of traditional ʿulama' (Muslim scholars) used to play in this regard. They also shared the name of al-Ikhwan and subscribed to the same school of thought, whether formally or informally, depending on their domestic circumstances.

Tunisia was no exception; Ennahda emerged in this extended void bearing similar understanding of Islam as an identity, a frame of reference and a guiding principle with the establishment of a shariʿa-based Islamic state as a goal. Although the broad Ikhwan intellectual framework constituted a building block of Ennahda's ideology, the movement was open to other sources that gradually built up and contributed to decreasing the influence of the Ikhwan component of its identity. These sources included the writings of Abu al-Aʿlā al-Mawdūdi of Pakistan, Mālik Bin Nabī of Algeria, and the literature of the Islamic revolution in Iran.[3] At a later stage, the movement turned to the intellectual heritage of Ez-Zitouna University and the Tunisian reformists including Khairuddīn al-Tunisī and Muhammad Attahir Ibn ʿAshūr. Paradoxically though, during Ghannouchi's early journey to the Mashreq (Egypt and Syria) that lasted between 1964 and 1968, his first encounters there were not the Islamists but the Arab nationalists. He even joined the Nasserite Socialist Union and became one of its activists in Damascus.[4] This multi-sourced genesis characterized political Islam in Tunisia since the beginning and prepared it to accommodate new developments during its fifty-year evolutionary journey.

Before going into details about the main developments in this journey, especially after the Arab Spring, it is worth mentioning the methodological difficulty in reading the intellectual history of Ennahda separately from that of its founder and leader Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi. Except a handful of contributions by other leaders like Abdelmajid Najjar, Sahbi Atigue and the late Salah Karkar, Ghannouchi remains almost the only source of written materials about Ennahda, its ideology and its political thought. Officially, Ennahda as a movement published very few documents that can help us trace its history. The main materials in this regard are the official statements which the movement issues to mark its anniversary, or on certain occasions to announce a political position. On the ideological level, "the intellectual vision and fundamental approach of the Islamic Tendency Movement"[5] is the most important document before the Arab Spring. It was adopted in 1986 but was relinquished and replaced by a new intellectual vision in 2016.

As we read in the introduction, this document was "the product of an intensive intellectual debate and a serious dialogue within the Islamic arena at the beginning of 1980s around a number of issues, such as the stance towards the Islamic heritage and the methodology of dealing with the religious text". For three decades, this ideological framework provided Ennahda members with a common ground and, at the same time, marked the contours of the movement as a distinct group among other Islamic groups such as the Salafists, Hizb-Attahrir and what was known at the time as the Islamic left.

During these thirty years, Ennahda witnessed significant intellectual developments regarding a number of issues such as shari'a (the Islamic legal system) and society, the Islamic state, the relation between the Ummah and its ruler(s), the intellectual heritage of Islam, the sources of political legitimacy, but all these developments remained within the boundaries of the original "Intellectual vision". The Arab Spring brought a different set of challenges and created a new context radically different

from the one in which that vision was shaped. "It was written in different contexts and circumstances dominated by different types of issues", confirms Rafik Abdessalem, member of Ennahda's executive bureau and former Tunisia's Foreign Minister. "These debates revolved around purely religious questions like ijtihad, interpretation, and the position and authority of the sacred text, etc. that were written with a fundamentalist juristic background".[6] A similar explanation is provided by Rida Driss, member of the content committee during the preparations of Ennahda's 10th congress. The old intellectual vision belongs to another era, he says. It was produced in the context of different types of struggles and came to respond to two extremisms, the secular extremism and the religious extremism. Now, it has become obsolete and inactive".[7]

The 10th congress embraced a new intellectual vision according to which "the frame of reference of Ennahda's political party is not the religious belief. The party does not adopt a particular vision regarding Allah, the universe, and the human being. Islam in this new vision is the source of values like justice, freedom, equality, solidarity, trust etc. These values are important in themselves since they derive from Islam and our intellectual heritage, but they are also important because they can be activated to build our civilizational and political project".[8]

This ideological and intellectual shift is very significant when we compare the two visions at the textual level. What is more important though is the translation of this intellectual shift into a real transformative process that is creating two different versions of Ennahda, before and after the revolution. "After the revolution, it is like we are building a new Nahda", says Abdelhamid Jlassi, former head of organization, head of the 2014 parliamentary electoral campaign, and member of the Shura Council. To summarize, the junctures that enabled Ennahda to make this move and renew its intellectual vision after the revolution, he cites a number of factors: "Ennahda has always been open to evolution and progress, and that is one of its main characters. The period of 1980s and the interaction

with other intellectual currents in universities opened new horizons for us. The type of education of its main leaders such as philosophy, law, etc. contributed to this development and that was reflected very early in its literature like the founding statement of 1981. The national pact of 1988, in which Ennahda took part and signed along with other political parties and national powers was an extremely valuable contribution. The intellectual activities that took place in the exile countries during the 1990s and the 2000s was very significant. The debates within our circles inside the country between 2006 and 2010 led to serious evaluations and revisions, and paved the way for the changes that occurred after the revolution".[9]

To these junctures, historian Abdul Latif Hannachi adds the discussions that took place during 2005 within the 18 October Commission for Rights and Freedoms, to which Ennahda was one of the main parties. These discussions concluded with documents "affirming the pursuit of the establishment of a civil state based on the principles of the republic and human rights, which derives its legitimacy from the will of the people. They affirmed the resistance to all forms of discrimination among citizens on the basis of belief, opinion, sex, social, political or religious affiliation". [10]

To conclude this section, we can recap the ideological and intellectual transformation of political Islam in Tunisia after the Arab Spring in the following points:

1. A new order of priorities: Ennahda has always considered culture and da'wa as its main priority; politics comes only as means to serve these two objectives. This order of priorities has been repeatedly emphasized in the movement's literature until shortly before the revolution. After the Arab Spring, this order has clearly changed. Not only has politics become the main goal and prime field of activity, but culture and da'wa are no longer among the movement's list of priorities.

2. A new position for Islam in Ennahda's new project: Islam has been repositioned within the political project of Ennahda. Although Islam is still considered a frame of reference, it is no longer a source of legislation or a comprehensive lifestyle as widely stated in the previous movement's literature. Islam in the new vision is mainly a source of values that Ennahda political party aspires to achieve. These values have to be transferable to actual and tangible policies at both social and political levels such as freedom, justice, dignity, progress, development, creativity, etc.

3. The place of shariʻa: Implementing shariʻa has been a central goal for all political Islam movements although with different understating and interpretation of how and when shariʻa should be implemented. In this regard, Abdelmajid Najjar, member of Ennahda Shura Council, wrote in 1991 a book on the practical methodology of implementing shariʻa.[11] For Ghannouchi, until mid-1990s, the supremacy of shariʻa is what distinguishes the Islamic democratic system from all other systems of democracy.[12] This understanding of shariʻa and its place within the Islamic system changed dramatically after the revolution. The new constitution that was drafted when Ennahda was leading a coalition government between 2011-2013, does not mention shariʻa even as "a" source of legislation. For Ennahda, this constitution accommodates its new understanding of shariʻa and represents an acceptable way of its interpretation.[13]

4. The Islamic state: It is true that the nature of the Islamic state, or "the political system of Islam" as Ennahda's founding statement in 1981 called, has never been clear. Nonetheless, the Islamic state has always been an objective and a strategic goal for the Islamic movement. In 1993, Ghannouchi published a book on the subject under the title "Public Liberties in the Islamic State", whereby he detailed the foundations, the values, and the functions of what he considers as Islamic state. In the movement's new vision there is no room for that kind of alternative state to the existing one that needs reforming rather than substitution. The state in Ennahda's new thinking after the Arab Spring is what the majority of the

Tunisian elites call "civil state". The foundations of the civil state as defined in the intellectual vision are the following: the popular choice, citizenship, democracy, the separation between authorities, securing people's rights and freedoms.[14] In his new understanding of Islamic state, Ghannouchi equates between "national" and "Islamic". He believes that "the Islamic state is the same as the national state that we live and operate in. We are not part of any transnational project".[15]

5. Beyond ideology: These intellectual transformations are driving Ennahda away from its original ideological framework. The increasing pragmatic aspect of the movement and the open door policy with which it is engaging with the changing realities in Tunisia after the Arab spring make it difficult to continue looking at it from a particular ideological framework, especially that of political Islam. It is changing on all fronts but with unequalled paces and depths. Skeptics such as Karina Piser need to reconsider their assessment of these actual transformations in light of the new dynamics, beyond what they see as purely orchestrated rebranding for short-term electoral purpose: "Judging by its program, its actions, and the people who run it, Ghannouchi's party remains a conservative Islamic party, that hasn't really changed. What Ennahda's carefully orchestrated rebranding demonstrates, however, is just how skillfully its leaders continue to adapt to the changing landscape of Tunisian electoral politics".[16] Monica Marks's "long termism" concept describes better these transformations, which I understand as open-ended and irreversible.[17]

6. From Political Islam to democratic Islam: Taken together, the repositioning of Islam, reinterpretation of sharia and abandoning of Islamic state in Ennahda's new vision indicates that the movement is indeed moving away from the sphere of political Islam. The alternative to political Islam that Sheikh Ghannouchi and the rest of the leadership are advocating is what they call democratic Islam. It might be early, at this stage, to ask what democratic Islam means exactly, but what is clear

though, is that the new trend of "Muslim democrats" needs to do a lot more, both theoretically and at the practical level, to distinguish itself from political Islam, than just the repeated superficial analogy with the Christian Democrats. Anne Wolf remarks that, "whilst Ennahda leaders are keen on comparing Ennahda to Christian democratic parties in the West, there are important differences between them. Indeed, Christian democratic parties evolved during a decline in religious observance in the West and became thus absorbed into social democracy, but Islamic belief and practice in Tunisia is stronger than ever".[18] Wolf's accurate observation indicates that the debate over this subject is underway and it has already expanded beyond Ennahda inner circles to involve researchers and scholars of political Islam in Tunisia and elsewhere.

II. Positions, strategies and sociopolitical repositioning

This section looks at transformation in another area of political Islam in Tunisia: political positions, political strategies, and sociopolitical repositioning. It discusses the impact of these transformations on the party, as well as on the political scene.

1. Political positions:

It might be surprising to note that, contrary to the dramatic changes in the sociopolitical positioning of Ennahda Movement after the revolution, its original political positions towards many issues changed very little. The widely shared perception that Ennahda changed its positions since it came to power originates primarily from the limited knowledge people have of the movement's literature, and that is understandable. First, the circulation of documents showing the movement's positions, before the revolution, has been very limited since they were banned and chased most of the time. Second, the physical absence of Ennahda and its leadership from the public sphere and the official political life for more than three decades made it difficult for the movement to communicate its positions to the wider public directly. If we refer to the movement's official statements since it declared itself an Islamic political movement (the Islamic Tendency Movement) in

June 1981, we discover that, almost all its current positions vis-à-vis national and international issues have already been stated long ago.[19]

Among these positions, for example, are the following:
- Defending intellectual freedom
- Democracy as a political system is compatible with Islam
- Citizenship is the basis of the desired political system
- Popular choice is accepted even when it brings communists to power
- Preference of multi-party system of government and refusal of single-party politics
- Power sharing and political alliances with other parties from different backgrounds
- Defending women's rights to participate in all sorts of social, political, economic, and cultural activities
- Refusing the use of violence as a means of change or to settle political and intellectual differences
- Supporting the Palestinian cause and all liberation movements across the world

Regarding all the above issues, Ennahda has largely maintained its original positions with minor changes. The specific area where we observe some noteworthy adjustments is the relationship between the national and the transnational. In this particular area, there is a clear leaning towards the national dimension. It is a conscious process of "tunisification" that the movement is going through as noted by Larbi Sadiki.[20] To Lotfi Zitoun, political advisor to the president of Ennahda, "the national dimension has to be affirmed more clearly and unequivocally. As a national party preparing itself to lead the state, Ennahda has to align completely with the national state in terms of its options, positions, foreign relations, national interests, even in domestic battles like terrorism, etc."[21]

2. Political strategies: from power sharing to consensual politics

With regard to political strategies and sociopolitical repositioning, there has been remarkable shifts. The shift from opposition to power brought Ennahda from the margins to the center of political life in Tunisia. During the last seven years (2011-2018), the party moved between multiple power positions. Its political strategies changed according to these positions and to the changes occurring in the wider political context, both domestically and regionally. These changes of strategy revealed the pragmatic dimension of Ennahda and showed a great deal of flexibility and capability to adapt and cope with the changing realities. Without exaggeration, we can safely say that these changes contributed immensely to keeping the democratic transition process on track.

The first elections after the revolution in 2011 gave the movement a majority that allowed it to form and lead the government. Instead of going for it alone and forming a single-party government, Ennahda chose to share power with two other parties from a secular background (The Congress for the Republic and the Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties). The assassination of two opposition figures in 2013 plunged the country into a severe political crisis. After the coup in Egypt, the pressures on the government increased and forced Ennahda to quit the government and reposition itself in power. Describing this strategic retreat, Ghannouchi commented: "we quit the government but remain in power".[22] This was the second strategy Ennahda employed after the revolution: "governing without government".

The third strategy was introduced after the 2014 elections that gave Ennahda the second place after Nidaa Tunis, a newly formed party. The movement could have sat comfortably in the opposition and lead the revolutionary forces, especially that the winning party is widely seen as representative of the old regime, or the counter-revolution in other words. Alternatively, it chose to take part in a coalition government led by Ennahda's historic rival and enemy, the inheritor of Ben Ali's Democratic Constitutional Rally. This "consensual strategy" (tawafuq), which raised and still raises a lot of

controversy within both governing parties and around them, is still at play in Tunisia.

It was not easy for Ennahda to effect this strategic shift with all the confrontational legacy that characterizes its relationship with the state and the political power that traditionally represents it. In his explanation of this move, Ghannouchi admits, "this consensual discourse was unpopular at the beginning and because of it we lost many votes in the elections. This option was unacceptable even within our party's institutions. I told the Shura Council this is a new process just give it a chance, if it proves successful that is what we want, if not, I will assume my responsibility and quit. Now, this consensual policy is gaining ground and rallying more supporters around it". [23] Sociologist Abdellatif Hermassi describes this strategy shift as "a crucial turn. It was not just a change of political discourse, he says, it was also a change of political thought of Ennahda. The speech that Rached Ghannouchi delivered at the electoral closing party confirms this turn.[24]

To turn these practical strategies, namely that of consensual politics, into political thought, Mehdi Mabrouk, director of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Tunis, suggests that "Ennahda develops these strategies further and introduces them as part of its intellectual alternatives. What is happening on the ground informs us and teaches us new ideas, and this should be elaborated theoretically".[25]

3. Sociopolitical repositioning
Changing political strategies cannot be understood separately from the process of sociopolitical repositioning of Ennahda. It is an interesting multi-track process that started straight after the Arab Spring but certainly has not yet come to an end.

- From an illegal protest movement operating secretly underground, in the margins of politics, society, culture, and economy into an officially recognized political party, leading government or sharing power. The state is something

completely different says Jlassi, "it is recreating Ennahda and remodeling its modus operandi. We have moved from theory to practice and from working on chapter to engaging with real issues. This shift is more important than all previous experiences we have gone through so far".[26]

- From confrontation with the state to working within the system and defending its sustainability. This is another radical change in terms of political repositioning. Since its emergence as a small religious group, Ennahda has always been in confrontation with the state, critical of its ideology, policies, and socioeconomic options. After the revolution, it has become an integral part of the system, working from within its structures (nationally, regionally, and locally) and defending it against its opponents. "This is a great achievement", thinks Ghannouchi, "it has normalized the status of Ennahda and corrected its relationship with the state. It has also had a crucial impact on the party's culture that changed from protest to construction".[27]

- From a closed puritan-like organization to an open party accessible to all sectors of society. This might be the most important transformation Ennahda is undergoing. It is repositioning the movement socially by opening its previous closed organization and lifting all sorts of barriers that used to prevent non-Islamist Tunisians to join the party. This open-door policy will certainly reshape the internal demography of Ennahda and expand its membership base. What is more important than the size though is the membership quality. This policy will move the party from the social margin into the social mainstream and place it at the heart of society. This is "one of the pressing issues over which debates within Ennahda are ongoing" notices Ali Larayed, deputy president of the party and former Prime Minister of Tunisia. This party cannot remain closed and represent only the "crème", as was the case before the revolution, he says. "Any political party that wants to represent large segments of the Tunisian society and aspires to govern has to open its doors and shift to the center", he adds.[28]

The new six-point membership requirements facilitate this transformation and moves the party another step closer to what is being coined as the neo-Nahda: 1. To be 16 years of age or above 2. To be clear of legal impediments 3. To possess moral straightness, good conduct and virtuous ethics 4. To believe in the party's principles and goals, and endeavor to implement them 5. To comply with the party's program, statute, and internal regulations 6. Not to be affiliated with another political party.[29] The 2018 municipal elections in which independent members were allowed to join the party and lead up to 50% of its electoral lists is a clear indication of the extent to which, Ennahda is able to reposition itself socially in case this open-door policy goes further.

III. Structural transformation

In this area too, transformation has been decisive and probably more visible. The legalization of Ennahda as a political party in 2011 paved the way for a major restructure that took place four years later during the movement's 10th congress. However, it is important to know that, before reaching this stage and implementing this restructure, the idea of specialization and separating different types of activities on a functional basis was present within Ennahda for some time. In 1998, for example, the late Salah Karkar suggested that the movement renounce its Islamic character and specialize in da'wa, culture, and education activities. On the political level, he called for "the formation of a completely secular political party that aims to establish the state of reason and law away from what is known as the state of revelation".[30]

In 2000, Ghannouchi addressed this issue and wrote about "the anxiety of the Islamic movement between state and society, and between the political party and the reformist movement".[31] He wondered whether Islamic political parties should organize in a comprehensive way to reflect the comprehensiveness of Islam that does not separate between religion and life, or that comprehensiveness of Islam does not necessarily mean building comprehensive political parties. He tends to favor the idea of a "functional separation between the different fronts and activities involved in the reformist project".[32]

On the practical level, up until 2010, a few months before the revolution, Ennahda continued to emphasize the comprehensive nature of its organization and activity. In a statement issued on its 29th anniversary we read, "Ennahda maintains the entirety of its reformist project including its cultural, social, and political dimensions".[33]

After the revolution, the idea of specialization resurfaced again and was discussed in 2012 during the preparations for the 9th congress. However, due to the nature of the congress that focused primarily on administrative and electoral arrangements, these debates were reported to the 10th congress, as confirmed by Rafik Abdessalem.[34]

1. Specialization as a strategic choice

In the run up to the 10th congress that took place in 2016, the organizing committee conducted a two-year extensive discussion around the structure of the movement and reached a decision to specialize in political activities only. This meant a radical restructure and a complete separation between the political sphere and that of religious and preaching activities. On the organizational level, this meant Ennahda transforms into a professional political party with no other components.

This structural transformation that took place under the term "specialization" is explained in the "strategic vision" as follows: "The debate concluded with a general agreement on the necessity to effect a real development within Ennahda to enable it to respond to the requirements of the new phase... This development entails the departure from the ambiguous mixture between a specialized party and a comprehensive movement, towards the status of a democratic political party with an Islamic frame of reference".[35] Sami Brahem, a researcher at Centre des Etudes et des Recherches Economiques et Sociales (CERES), interprets "specialization" as "a radical transformation of Ennahda into a civil political party with a degree of secularity".[36]

2. The relation between the movement and the party: a decisive turn

Specialization came to solve a long-lasting multi-layered problem that has different dimensions: intellectual, structural, and political. As we have seen earlier, the idea of effecting a functional separation between the various structures and activities that used to take place under the umbrella of the "one" Islamic movement is almost three decades old. However, the long debate over this idea has only materialized and concluded with a clear decision in favor of the party over the movement in 2016.

The common explanation that Ennahda provides for this extended delay in reaching such a historic decision is an external factor. It is the authoritarian system that created a political situation in which the movement has always been subject to oppression and pursuit. In other words, the continuing tension that characterized the relation between the state and the movement since it declared its intention to participate in political life in 1981 prevented the internal debate to evolve and progress in a natural way. In such a hostile environment, the priority would be to defend the unity of the movement rather than to take steps that might weaken it and lead to its fragmentation.

This explanation is reasonable but insufficient. In addition to this external factor, there was an internal factor too. Since the idea of separating between the movement and the party started circulating within Ennahda's institutions, there were two parties to the debate, those in favor of separation and those against it in principle. This division between the conservatives and the reformists, as some would call them, was another reason why this debate has taken so long. In Larbi Sadiki's analysis, the decision of Ennahda to move towards political professionalization "proves that several months of internal debates have come to full fruition for the reformists".[37]

What is more important than the separation between the two entities and the professionalization of the political party though, is the fate of the movement. It seems that, by adopting this strategic choice, Ennahda movement, as we know it, will eventually cease to exist, not only because all

the movement human and financial resources are allocated to the party and its activities, but also because, from now on, there will be no ownership of the movement and all that is left of it. At this stage, the trajectory of political Islam in Tunisia with regard to the relation between the movement and the party looks as follows: from a comprehensive Islamic movement (al-Jamaʻa al-Islamiyya), to movement with a political party (ITM/Ennahda), through to a political party without an all-inclusive movement (Neo-Nahda).

3. Reshaping civil society: Much of the debate over Ennahda restructure and specialization in politics was geared towards the idea of professionalization and the future of the political party. Very little of that debate focused on the "other" parts, the remaining non-political components of the movement's original project (preaching, culture, education, charity, social activism). It is true that, in terms of membership base, the movement still holds together and everyone is still involved in politics and serves the party from different angles. However, this situation is likely to change in the future and will have significant consequences, both on Ennahda party and on the Tunisian civil society at large.

a) The more Ennahda political party professionalizes and opens its doors to non-ideological entrants the more the old membership base is pushed to reconsider the reasons of its affiliation. For, the new entrants are not merely individuals; when they join, they bring with them new attitudes, new mindsets and new understanding of political action and activism. This new dynamics will ultimately result in the formation of a new political culture that is not necessarily compatible with the existing one. Those who find themselves uncomfortable with the new culture will either adapt or join civil society with their own initiatives. The continued internal debate that was triggered by the decision to restructure the movement will facilitate this mutation.

b) The more the democratic system stabilizes and becomes the only game in town, the more civil society grows and benefits from the newly available

opportunities. In authoritarian settings, civil society organizations either do not exist, or operate secretly under siege, or suffer from all sorts of oppression and harassment. It is a common practice of authoritarian regimes to create and fund parallel civil societies to marginalize and delegitimize the real ones. Although these superficial societies remain detached from reality, they contribute immensely to the distortion of social activism and hinder the natural progress of independently grown organizations. After the revolution, Tunisia witnessed massive corrective movements in many spheres including the sphere of civil society. Many organizations reorganized themselves during the democratic transition and started to rectify some of their weaknesses. The more the democratic transition advances towards building a stable democratic system, the more these organizations regain strength and influence. Along this way, they need to move beyond their ideological barriers and open up their structures to renew their social bases. Once they have done this, they will be able to explore new territories and tap into new resources. The Islamists who do not fit within their party's structures and plan to join civil society should be prepared to contribute to this historic development of the Tunisian civil society.

c) The presence and representation of Tunisian Islamists in civil society organizations is relatively limited compared to other ideological tendencies. This is partly explained by decades of forced absence from public life due to continuous harassment, imprisonment, and exile. Now, there is a great chance that the restructure of Ennahda contributes indirectly to reshaping the Tunisian civil society by injecting it with new blood, new ideas, and new groups of activists. Ennahda's new "strategic vision" shows that the movement is aware of the importance of redeploying segments of its traditional membership base, but it certainly needs to make more efforts to facilitate this strategy. "The movement have substantial human assets committed to serving the public. These assets represent constructive to engage in different domains of social action such as educational, scientific, societal, religious, cultural, human rights, etc. That engagement will gradually contribute to develop the fabrics of social work through the existing organizations and

other civil society initiatives".[38] In Ghannouchi's terms, we are witnessing a rebirth of the Tunisian civil society.[39] That being said, this area needs more discussion, not only within Ennahda, but also at the wider societal level, to explore adequate practical solutions and develop long-term strategies.

Concluding Remarks:

1. The transformation of Ennahda is happening dynamically and continuously as a result of the daily engagement with the changing sociopolitical reality in the post-Arab Spring Tunisia. At this stage, it is hard to distinguish the changes that came as a natural evolution of Ennahda from those caused by external factors and pressures exerted by the new system. However, it is safe to say that this transformative process is unfinished, irreversible, and open-ended.

2. The transformation has gone far and reached the point of no return. It has gone well beyond the level at which skeptics can argue otherwise. It is no longer a tactical exercise; it is more of a strategic shift.

3. The transformation is happening in all areas of political Islam in Tunisia with no exception. It is about ideology, structure, culture, political positions, strategies, and sociopolitical positioning.

4. Transformation is happening in all these spheres with varying degrees, paces, and speeds. Social and political repositioning, for example, is happening at a faster speed than transformation of ideology or organizational structures.

5. These varying speeds are reflected in a widening gap between the leadership and the membership base on the one hand, and among the leadership elite itself on the other hand. Sheikh Rachid Ghannouchi, for example is moving at a different speed than Ali Larayed or Abdelhamid Jlassi or Lotfi Zitoun or Rafik Abdessalem.

6. The open-door policy embraced by the party brought with it, not only new members and new social groups that will eventually change the demography of Ennahda and affect its identity. It is also fostering a new culture different from the original, which was based on Islamic morals, principles, and values.

7. Although these transformations are major compared to minor changes in other political parties that suffer from divisions and fragmentation, Ennahda, so far, succeeded in preserving its unity and coherence. It is hard to say, however if this unity will remain intact in the future, especially in case the top leadership of the movement changes.

8. Although the transformative process is wide-ranging and far-reaching, very little has been documented and turned into theoretically elaborated literature. Much of these ideas are still in the form of internal debates within the movement and in circles close to it. Examples of these debates revolve around the transition from political Islam to Democratic Islamism.

9. As this open-ended process goes on, political Islam in Tunisia will be subject to more changes, some of which are hard to predict. It is worth noting that there is an increasing talk about the birth of a "neo-Nahda".

10. In practical terms, the radical separation between the movement and the political party in the Tunisian model means that the movement will eventually disappear. With this development, we are witnessing a new phase in the trajectory of political Islam at large. In some countries, we still have an Islamic movement without a political party. In others, we have seen political parties operating alongside an existing Islamic movement, regardless of the nature of relationship between the two entities. In Tunisia, we are seeing the birth of a political party without an Islamic movement.

Notes

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Political Islam Movements in post-2011 Egypt: Old Actors, New Dynamics

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In 2013, the combined shocks of the Egyptian coup that removed the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) from power and the rapid rise and fall of the Islamic State (ISIS) have challenged conventional wisdom on political Islam, leading some academics and policymakers, as well as Islamists, to re-think their basic assumptions about political Islam movements. Both these events have challenged mainstream Islamist models of political change, and eight years after the Arab uprisings, Islamist groups that seek to operate within the boundaries of institutional politics, such as the MB, are finding themselves removed from power, brutally repressed, and internally fractured. Conversely, groups that focus on "state-building" through militia-based governance rather than participatory politics have come to embody political Islam in the eyes of international observers and policymakers.

In Egypt, Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi's "repression and elimination" policy has had a drastic impact on the MB's public image and has completely removed the group from positions of power in relation to the state and official expressions of religion. While illegality and repression are not new experiences for the movement, the consequences of the coup have left the MB in a completely unfamiliar context. Forced to leave Egypt, and with its historical civil society networks seized by the state, the MB has become unable to rely on its historical tools of resistance, and has had to develop new ways to react to oppression.[1] This has given rise to new actors shaping the narratives and perceptions linked to political

Islam in the country, such as the Salafi Hizb al-Nour and the increasingly independent al-Azhar. At the same time, the MB has fallen into a state of stagnation and, with most of its leadership either in jail or scattered abroad, it has so far struggled to maintain unity and to create a unifying strategy to address the changes in its post-coup status.

Overall, this chapter argues that a closer look at the changing dynamics of the historical competition for Islamic authority after the removal of the MB will reveal that Islamist narratives and actors are indeed still active in the country. While their inclusion and activities might look different from what we have known so far, it is naïve to assume that Islamist groups begin and end with the MB and that they have been completely removed from the equation after the events of 2013. From this, we can conclude that the study of political Islam movements in Egypt should not be solely limited to that of the MB, as there are other actors and narratives that one must consider when investigating the ongoing transformations of political Islam in the wake of the Arab uprisings. In the case of Egypt these include the politicization of Salafism and their venture into politics with Hizb al-Nour, and al-Azhar's growing independence from regime structures. Therefore, this chapter will consider all these three actors in an attempt to track the evolution of Islamism(s) in the country since the events of 2013. Given its political and historical significance, special attention has been paid to the behaviour of the MB in the wake of the coup, as this is crucial to understanding the restructuring that it is currently undergoing and in unpacking the significance of their experience for both the organization and wider perceptions of political Islam.

The research at the core of this chapter relies on a combination of qualitative methods and ethnographic work, with the aim of providing a comprehensive understanding of the current trajectories of political Islam. Overall, this project aims to analyse and track the ongoing transformation of political Islam movements in Egypt in the aftermath

of the Arab uprisings to determine whether they have entered a state of immobility or are instead undergoing a significant process of self-reformation that will have a significant impact on both their structure and their ideology.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

A vast amount of literature on political Islam has been produced over the years and, more recently, as a direct response to the so-called democratic wave of the Arab uprisings in 2011 and the 2013 deposition of the MB. Much has been written on the subsequent transformations of Islamist groups across the MENA region. However, most of the recent scholarship focuses on the current evolution of political Islam from a comparative perspective, examining the performance and development of various Islamists movements within different national environments.[2] While excellent, these contributions often offer only a limited understanding of how Islamist movements have transformed since the uprisings, focusing on the investigation of single issues or aspects of these groups, or looking at their transformation from a transnational rather than a national perspective. While works based on a specific domestic context have started to emerge,[3] more are needed in order to offer a focused analysis of how these movements are reacting to their unique national circumstances. Therefore, this chapter focuses specifically on the case study of Egypt, while acknowledging that the role the international dimension plays in influencing current trajectories of Islamism within specific domestic contexts must also be considered for a fuller picture. This is particularly evident in the fact that, while the restructuring and fragmentation of Islamism as a whole was brought to light in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, it undoubtedly became more prominent following the 2013 coup d'état against Mohammed Morsi.

This is not because the MB had any sort of monopoly over Islamist movements in the region, but as one of the oldest and most influential, its rise to power through the ballot box held a great amount of symbolism. Its

brutal suppression in Egypt and the Gulf since 2013 is a good reflection of how many Islamist groups are currently struggling against a polarised regional environment that forces them to face both domestic and transnational challenges. Stacey Philbrick Yadav notes that a lot has also changed from the perspective of the researcher, as approaching the study of Islamism today is drastically different from what it was 10 years ago. Before the Arab uprisings we had largely become accustomed to studying these movements by focusing on their civil society activities, electoral strategies, and the alliances of semi-tolerated Islamist opposition parties.[4] This landscape has now vastly changed, and while a decade ago Islamist groups were mostly constrained by domestic policies and highly organized, nowadays their functions have considerably diversified and they are greatly influenced by transnational actors. In turn, this makes it considerably harder to analyze the ever-evolving relationship between Islamists and the state. Therefore, in the aftermath of 2011, this particular scholarship also needs to undergo a transformation. Several political Islam movements have gone from opposition, to power, to repression, to a quest for a new identity in very short period of time, so there is a lot to be learned from examining how they are reacting to their experiences and restructuring themselves accordingly. With many fearing the coming of an "Islamist Winter", we are witnessing the emergence of different schools of thought that focus on political Islam and on its current trajectories across the region.[5]

Tarek Osman and Quinn Mecham, among others, argue that Islamist groups are growing increasingly authoritarian in the post-2011 regional context, which has strengthened the binary between Arab secularism and Islamism. Mecham claims that there are four main trends that characterise the fate of Islamism as a whole. These are the removal and repression of the MB, the rise of Islamist militia-based state building embodied by ISIS, increasing sectarianism and proxy wars, and Islamists' increased caution in participating in participatory politics and in directly challenging their governments.[6] He believes that the MB's deposition came with enormous consequences for Islamist groups competing in politics, and predicts that

exclusion and perceptions of injustice will eventually lead to the group resorting to militancy.[7] Tarek Osman holds a similar understanding and states that the failure to take power during the Arab uprisings "has led not to 'soul-searching' in major Islamist groups about what went wrong, but instead to 'antagonism and fiery anger' and a thirst for revenge."[8] Partisans of political Islam therefore see themselves as victims of an injustice whose perpetrators are not just "individual conspirators but entire social groups". [9] He predicts that there will soon have to be a fight to save the soul of Islamism, meaning that, as Salafist jihadist groups grow in numbers and popularity, non-militant Islamist groups and thinkers will have to defend the idea of political Islam against it being equated with violence and terror. [10] According to Osman, this will include a battle over what it means to be an Islamist.

Others, such as Shadi Hamid, William McCants and Muqtedar Khan, largely understand the contemporary regional (dis)order as a chance for moderate Islamist groups to self-reflect and re-invent themselves in the light of new regional needs and circumstances.[11] Khan particularly notes that the MB's inability to provide good governance and unite Egyptian society under a common purpose does not directly imply that political Islam and democratic governance are incompatible.[12] Similarly, the fact that the organization is widely considered one of the region's oldest and most influential Islamist groups does not mean that the MB has a monopoly on political Islam, or that its perceived failure is also the failure of Islamic values.[13] Therefore, the popular protests that escalated in the coup d'état did not mark the rejection of Islamism or democracy, but were simply a refusal of the MB's rule. While undoubtedly affected by it, other Islamist groups across the region have not been discouraged by the MB's deposition; on the contrary, the appetite for Islam in the public and civil spheres is continuously shifting forms and looking for new ways to adapt to contemporary challenges. What this means is that the question to be asked is not whether Islamist politics is dead, but rather, what it will look like in the future.

This perspective challenges a growing body of literature that looks at the MB's removal from power as an expression of a broader existential crisis encapsulating the end of political Islam at large. Advocates of post-Islamism such as Asef Bayat, Oliver Roy, and Ali Alrajjal are engaging with the wider implications of the July 2013 coup by claiming that the Islamist project finished with the removal of the MB, as "the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood was accompanied by the fall of Islamism".[14] This is significant, as the removal of the MB undoubtedly led to the resurfacing of old questions about the compatibility of Islam and democratic institutions, while also challenging the conventional understanding of mainstream Islamist models of political change. However, these claims fail to recognize both the heterogeneity of political Islam and the experiences of other Islamist groups in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Recent works such as Barbara Zollner's analysis of the participation–moderation nexus in post-2013 Egypt demonstrate that there is indeed still scope for the discussion of the political role of Islamist groups within their national contexts.[15] Moreover, the MB was not the only Islamist movement to experience a quick politicization and rise to power in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings; another example worth mentioning is the Ennahda Movement in Tunisia. Decades-old social movements with an impressive popular base and a history of oppositional politics were quick to succeed in the first round of democratic elections that followed the removal of autocrats and dictators, but these were soon confronted by the harsh challenges of transitional politics.

From this, it becomes clear that in order to gain an understanding of current trajectories of Islamism in the MENA, there is a need for an examination of how these are influenced by specific national contexts. In the case of Egypt, this means looking at the ways in which the historical competition for Islamic authority in the country has changed in the aftermath of July 2013, and how the interactions between old actors are being shaped by new dynamics.

Al-Nour and the Politicization of Salafism

The evolution and restructuring of political Islam movements in Egypt does not start and end with the MB, but also concerns the country's Salafist groups and Hizb al-Nour in particular. The movement's politicization after 2011 is highly significant, not only because it represents an unprecedented ideological and strategic shift, but also because it highlights new dynamics shaping the historical competition for Islamic authority in the country. With the MB out of the picture (figuratively and literally), Salafism is supposedly now one of the most prominent actors determining Islamist trajectories and narratives in post-2013 Egypt.

Al-Daʿwah al-Salafīyah (the Salafi Call), or simply al-Daʿwah, was founded in Alexandria in the 1970s as a response to the perceived "doctrinal laxness" of the MB.[16] Up until the 2011 popular protests, the movement was known for their doctrinal intransigence and refusal to be involved in Egyptian politics, which they viewed as a man-made system that went against the will of God.[17] However, one of the legacies of the uprisings was the politicization of Salafism, their venturing into electoral politics, and their adaptation to pragmatic behavior that barely fits within their previous ideological stances. On this note, Stephane Lacroix comments "one of the biggest surprises of the post-revolutionary period in Egypt was not the electoral victory of the MB, but the emergence of Hizb al-Nour as a strong contender and the second largest party in Parliament".[18] While the study of al-Nour's political behavior and of its broader implications for Salafism are beyond the scope of this chapter, the fact that it is now perceived by many as more "acceptable" than the alternatives, and that it is the last Islamist party standing in Egypt makes it worth of mention. Moreover, the politicization of al-Daʿwah is highly significant as it marks a historical shift towards a new form of Salafism, and feeds into questions of whether an intransigent political Islam movement can integrate into pluralistic styles of governance. However, Salafism's venture into Egyptian politics was not without problems, and has brought about both practical challenges and fundamental questions about the movement's identity and future direction.

Since its establishment in 1977, al-Da'wah has strived to spread its message through preaching and civil society activities, historically refraining from getting involved in governance – in clear opposition to the MB, whose methods it considered "unorthodox".[19] Because of this, Salafists were often spared the hard repression aimed at their counterparts, as they were seen by the regime as "politically useful", driving conservative Muslims away from the MB.[20] The movement therefore grew considerably during the 2000s, with al-Da'wah being the biggest and most active Salafi group in Egypt, but was arguably taken by surprise by the outbreak of the 2011 uprisings. The sudden openness of the political field prompted the movement to engage with significant questions of ideology, strategy, and identity that led to heated debates both domestically and abroad.

One of the main issues generating these discussions was centered around the decision to form a political party and therefore directly engage in politics, which fundamentally went against everything al-Da'wah had stood for until 2011. Just as in the case of the MB's split over the creation of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), Egypt's Salafists also faced considerable internal divisions over the creation of Hizb al-Nour in the post-Mubarak era. The politicization of their message is something that had always been against al-Da'wah's principles, but was challenged by some, such as Emad Abd al Ghaffour, who argued that they needed their own political party to have a say in the transition.[21] This obviously meant that a significant ideological and strategic shift had to take place, causing not only substantial internal rifts but also drastically changing the face (and targets) of Salafism in the country.

Ashraf El Sherif argues that Salafists split into three main currents during the political vacuum caused by Mubarak's removal, which in turn reflected the ideological and strategic divisions characteristic of the movement at the time. These were:

- Those who wanted (and still want) to support fellow Islamists against secular competitors, which therefore allied with the MB.

- Those who welcomed the role of "transnational Islamist revolutionaries", which often manifested in instances of political violence and revolutionary acts.
- Those who wanted to create a Salafist party and compete with the MB, drawing upon decades of rivalry. They also justified the desire to get involved in politics by arguing that "Islam must become involved in all aspects of life, even the political, and the Islamic movements must unite".[22]

Hizb al-Nour was therefore created from those belonging to the third current, and its establishment immediately generated a new wave of internal debates over whether it was independent from al-Da'wah or instead represented its political arm. Nevertheless, despite the movement's turbulent internal dynamics, the party joined the Salafi-oriented "Islamic Coalition" electoral alliance and officially entered the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections. Hizb al-Nour performed incredibly well considering its newly-established status, as the Salafi Alliance gained 27.8 percent of the total vote (7.5 million), second only to the FJP (37.5%, 10.1 million votes), with al-Nour gaining 111 of the 498 contested parliamentary seats.[23]

In an unexpected turn of events, a few months into their political transition Egypt's Salafists were part of a majority coalition in government and represented the second most popular Islamist group in the country after the MB. However, the sudden politicization of the movement and their lack of experience meant that their political behavior changed drastically over the course of the following months and years, which considerably complicates any analysis of the rationale behind their political choices and allegiances. Soon after the 2012 parliamentary elections, and despite ongoing internal disputes and increasing clashes with the MB, the party once again went against Salafi principles by adopting "extremely pragmatic attitudes" towards politics, and establishing alliances with groups that shared little of its religious ideology.[24] Shortly afterwards, dissatisfied with the outcome of the December 2012 Constitution and the ministerial appointments that

Morsi was making, [25] al-Nour effectively turned into an opposition party and sided with Sisi during the 2013 coup. At the time, this was justified as the only way to "protect the Islamic identity in the constitution and to guarantee the presence of an Islamic party able to preserve the gains of the Islamic current as a whole."[26] However, while al-Nour indeed remained the only Islamist party standing, and semi-tolerated, in Egypt, its expectations did not quite match reality.

To begin with, endorsing the coup against Morsi meant that all other Islamist forces in the country (such as the Asala Party and the Watan party) vowed to never side with al-Nour again, which led to the loss of a significant portion of their electoral support. In addition, the Salafists were also unable to gain a significant role in the post-Morsi political landscape, further highlighting their increasing isolation. Nevertheless, the regime's toleration of an Islamist party after the violent toppling of the MB calls for an examination of what the regional dynamics at play might be. It is no secret that Saudi Arabia and its ruling family supported and welcomed the July 2013 coup, preoccupied by their own domestic wing of the MB. This has led many to speculate that the regional power was behind the funding that allowed al-Da'wah to quickly move from an ideological movement that refrained from politics for decades to a political party with enough resources to successfully compete in the parliamentary elections.[27] The ideological alignment between the House of Saud and Egyptian Salafists is clear, as is their rejection of the MB's version of Islamism, which the Saudis perceive as a threat to their rule. [28] Therefore, this has led many to believe that in addition to the funding to al-Da'wah, Saudi Arabia might also be pressuring the movement into supporting the military coup. However, while the alleged Saudi support may indeed be allowing al-Nour to stay afloat, its influence on their political choices is casing the party to quickly lose the support of its members and fellow Islamists around the country.

In addition, from the very beginning, the Sisi regime preferred to rely on al-Azhar rather than on al-Nour to regain the popularity it lost among

the Islamists, and the party only gained one seat out of fifty in the 2013 Constitutional Assembly.[29] Moreover, having backed the military coup also meant that al-Nour could not condemn the events that followed, such as the Rabaa massacre, which led to strong criticism from Salafists abroad. Al-Nour also did not perform well in the 2015 election when, despite being the only religious party to participate, it only gained 2 percent. Adding this to growing internal disputes, the current situation al-Nour finds itself in is drastically different from the one it envisioned when entering politics. Barely tolerated by the current regime, the party now has no choice but to support Sisi if it wants to avoid becoming a military and political target, even endorsing him in the lead up to the 2018 presidential elections,[30] with many protesting that al-Nour has by now deeply betrayed the Islamist cause. This loss of support is clearly evident in the fact that the party now only holds 11 out of the 596 seats in the Egyptian Parliament, effectively removing its political agency.

Despite all this, al-Nour and the Salafists remain the only Islamists officially tolerated in the country, while the MB remains persecuted both domestically and abroad. Their decision to enter the post-Mubarak political system has been perceived by many as a fundamental change in their strategy, but it also underlines a very clear tactical approach to Egypt's changing domestic conditions.[31] Overall, al-Da'wah's decision to participate in elections bears great significance, as it establishes a political precedent for Salafism moving forward. However, since 2013, Al-Nour has barely survived and has not made any significant political moves, contributing to the other challenges that Salafism faces moving forward. These are:

- Identity-based: In order to avoid further alienation, al-Nour needs to find a way to reconcile its political engagement with its Salafist narrative and identity.
- Strategic: At present, al-Nour is just "surviving" rather than putting forward a coherent political front with a clear narrative and plan, which further feeds into their loss of internal and external support.

■ Tactical: Al-Nour needs to produce a coherent political manifesto to avoid the further fragmentation of the Salafi vote.

To an extent, one could argue that Salafism was impacted in much bigger ways than the MB by the events that followed the 2011 popular protests. While the MB had always been involved in politics, al-Da'wah experience a remarkably quick politicization that in turn led to strategic and structural difficulties. The long-term challenge that Salafists face in post-2011 Egypt is centered around their ideology and identity. The main question that needs answering is whether Salafism will manage to hold on to its Islamist credentials, and that depends on their ability to put forward a political model that is workable in an authoritarian context.

Al-Azhar, the Regime, and the MB

While it does not necessarily fall within the category of "political Islam movements", the study of al-Azhar's influence on the development of political Islam narratives in Egypt is also core to the purpose of this study. The university and mosque have historically been considered deeply influential institutions and symbolic of Islamic Egypt, and therefore have been a central element of the ever-changing state-religion nexus in the country. Considered both a state entity and the guardian of religious traditions, al-Azhar always had an ambivalent relationship towards Islamist groups, especially the MB, with whom it had a strong affinity especially in the 1970s.[32] However, this relationship has historically been marked by competitiveness and by strong criticism of al-Azhar by several Islamist groups, who have accused the institution of being co-opted and of siding with the regime in more than one occasion. This was particularly clear during the Mubarak era when, in an attempt to contain the rising popularity of the MB while also portraying the presidency as religiously legitimate, the regime transferred significant administrative duties to al-Azhar.[33] This tumultuous relationship continued into the transitional period brought about by the 2011 uprisings, which drastically changed the dynamics of the historical competition for Islamic authority in the country.

Acting as a buffer between the regime and the Islamist opposition, al-Azhar had its own interests to protect and attempted to distance itself from the 2011 uprisings, with its campuses not seeing considerable protests taking place. However, the new waves of activism that followed made al-Azhar a place for political discussion over the country's transition, constitutional developments, and for calls to return the institution to its long lost centrality, independence, and role within Egyptian society.[34] Being widely different from rising Islamist political movements such as the MB and al-Nour, under Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, al-Azhar became a forum for national dialogue and a guide through the tumultuous transitional process. Such a position obviously served the institution's quest for independence, as its break from state control was formalized in 2012 by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which granted al-Azhar a quasi-independent status through promulgating amendments to Law 103.[35] This status was left unchallenged by the Morsi government, which was in favor of preserving al-Azhar as the representative of religious authority and included it in talks about the role that Islam should play in the so-called "MB Constitution" of 2012.[36] It also appears that, despite their historical rivalry, al-Azhar and the MB maintained a mostly cordial relationship during the FJP's rule, probably due to the high number of MB supporters within al-Azhar's student body. However, this did not stop Tayeb from siding with Sisi during the 2013 coup, in a move that prompted both internal and external criticism. While the examination of the historical and ideological reasoning behind such choice are beyond the scope of this study, the role that al-Azhar has played since 2013 is symptomatic of great change within the state-religion nexus in Egypt.

The sight of Tayeb standing next to Sisi did not come as a surprise. Just like other presidents before him, Sisi sought to deprive the MB of their main source of power: the claim to religious legitimacy embedded in their socio-political behavior. The regime therefore needed to strengthen its own religious credentials, which after the 2013 coup meant engaging in the renewal of the country's religious discourse. Initially, this is why many believe that religion was in the process of being nationalized under the

guise of the feeble alliance struck between the regime and the religious institution. More importantly under the leadership of al-Azhar this would be a form of Islam that, while being heavily featured in political life, would also be drastically different from that preached by the MB and Salafists and definitely "much more coherent".[37] However, it seems that al-Azhar is not ready to renounce its long awaited independence and, for the first time in its history, is strongly standing against the will of the regime. Sisi has repeatedly called for the renewal of religious discourse while also trying to exert control over religious matters, even attempting to standardize Friday sermons in 2015 as a way to fight the country's rampant radicalization problem.[38] Despite initial collaboration, al-Azhar has refused to bend to the president demands and has often been the target of active government campaigns pushing for the institution to modernize and even accusing it of supporting ISIS for not declaring it *takfīrī*.[39]

Therefore, when it comes to al-Azhar and the role that it plays in the post-2011 Islamic context in Egypt, it appears that its historical relationship with the regime is slowly being subverted. While for decades al-Azhar has been co-opted by various presidencies seeking religious legitimacy, the institution is now much more independent and influential when it comes to setting the religious discourse in the country. However, even after 2011 and the removal of the MB government, political and religious authority remain closely entangled in Egypt. Because of this, it is unlikely that Sisi will completely strip al-Azhar of its role, as the Institution's popular legitimacy remains fundamental to the regime's political legitimization.

The Muslim Brotherhood: Islam is (not) the Solution?

On July 3, 2013, President Mohammed Morsi was deposed by a coup d'état led by armed forces and now-president Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi. The coup represented a premature end to the MB's time in government and initiated what is arguably the deepest crisis in the history of the organization so far. In the months and years following Sisi's seizure of power, nearly 1,000 MB supporters were brutally killed in the Rabaa massacre, the organization

was listed as a terrorist group by Egypt, Russia, and several Gulf states, and thousands of alleged members were imprisoned and sentenced to death. [40] With its leadership either scattered abroad or in jail, and most of its members being brutally persecuted, it appears that the organization has entered an almost unbreakable state of stagnation.

The violent removal and persecution of the MB after their short spell in power is symptomatic of its historically complicated relationship with the modern authoritarian state in Egypt. Since its inception as a grassroots social movement in 1928, the MB has been at the centre of an alternating cycle of repression and semi-toleration, but has nevertheless managed to flourish into one of Egypt's most influential opposition groups and civil society actors. Throughout the decades, the organization has managed to successfully take control of the vacuum left by the state and to fill it with much-needed notions of social values and political activism, essentially becoming what could be referred to as a "state within a state". From this, with the gradual politicization of the movement also, came the adoption of the notion that the state as a modern institution was the perfect instrument through which to achieve its ideological and political goal – the Islamization of society.[41] This was not without its problems, as such a view was never fully embraced by the MB as a whole and consequently led to numerous schisms along the lines of what is usually referred to as the "conservatives vs. reformists" debate.[42] However, the assumption that such a debate took place along generational lines, and that it was the main one at the core of the MB, fails to recognize the wide diversity of the MB's membership and the multiplicity of internal questions that it faces in the aftermath of 2013.

The ideological and strategic debates over what role politics should play within the organization have deep roots, but were embodied by the controversy over the creation of the FJP. Effectively the MB's political arm, the FJP's ascent to power brought internal divisions to the fore and led to a considerable number of members leaving the organization because of feelings of alienation and strategic disagreements.[43] Making the shift from

the periphery to the centre of Egyptian politics was already a great challenge for the MB, but it was complicated further by an internal lack of unity over the FJP's political trajectory. However, while it is undeniable that the FJP had to rule in a hostile political environment still dominated by the deep state, it fell also because of its own ideological, political and organizational shortcomings. An in-depth discussion of the circumstances leading to the MB's destitution is beyond the scope of this study, but it is necessary to point out that there are four main factors, both internal and external to the movement, that arguably led to the MB's fall and in turn to the political and ideological stagnation that the organization finds itself in today. These are:

1.   Ideologically, the FJP lacked a clear-cut vision of an "Islamic Project" and made policy decisions that were inconsistent to its ideological claims to Islamic legitimacy.[44]

2.   Politically, it severely miscalculated the amount of support and legitimacy it actually had, failing to include secular and revolutionary groups into its consultation and decision-making processes.

3.   From an organizational perspective, its rigid hierarchical structure led to appointments to political positions to generally take place on a "loyalty over expertise" basis, which in turn resulted into ineffective political choices that further fuelled popular discontent towards the group.

4.   Finally, the MB did not manage to successfully address the permanence of the status quo in the country, which saw the armed forces and the deep state still controlling the security and judicial apparatuses.[45]

These are all elements that need to be unpacked in order for the MB to regain its status as one of the most influential political Islam movements in Egypt.

Over five years after the coup, the MB is in the midst of the worst repression and internal crisis of its history so far. Since 2013, thousands of its members have been killed, tortured, and imprisoned. Most of its leadership is either in jail or scattered abroad, which makes the process of regrouping and

planning how to react to repression even more difficult. For the organization to move forward, it is necessary to reflect upon the circumstances that led to their fall, and to incorporate these reflections into the restructuring it is undergoing after 2013. Many have written on the current political processes in Egypt and on the MB's "mistakes" that led to their deposition. However, there is still a very limited scholarship looking at what this new era means for the organization's identity, ideology, message, and internal structure. While it is now clear that the fall of the MB is far from embodying the failure of political Islam as a whole, there are questions that remain about what their current status is, and on whether or not the organization is engaging in a restructuring and soul-searching process. Answers to these questions hold great significance not just for the examination of current trajectories of political Islam movements in Egypt, but also for other Islamist groups across the region.

In 2013, the MB was removed from political power in Egypt and has since entered an arguably stagnant phase from which it is hard to recover. With its leadership scattered, its members in hiding, and allegations about its youth wing resorting to violent means, the MB is now facing the hardest challenge of its troubled history so far. Forced to leave Egypt, and with its historical civil society networks seized by the state,[46] for the first time the MB is unable to rely on its historical tools of resistance and has to develop new ways to react to oppression. Most importantly, it needs to answer questions of identity about what role it wants to play both outside and inside Egypt moving forward.

In order to conduct an analysis on whether or not there are reformation/transformation processes taking place within the MB today, it is first necessary to look at what led to the events of July 2013. The starting assumption here is that any changes that would be currently in flux within the organization would be at least partially drawn from a reflection on what could have been done better when the FJP was in power. Throughout the course of 2018, I conducted several semi-structured interviews with MB members

(and ex-members) in both Turkey and the UK. The interviewees' status and affiliation within the movement varied significantly, therefore leading to the gathering of data from across the organizational spectrum. During this process, in comparing the data to those obtained between 2014 and 2016, it has been fascinating to observe that, overall, perceptions appear to have changed since then. However, when approaching this type of fieldwork, it is necessary to keep in mind that, no matter how big the sample size of participants is, it is still limited to those who successfully managed to escape Egypt and settle abroad, and is therefore not reflective of the mindset of those who remained.

Speaking to those MB members who are now based abroad, and without going into undue generalization, it seems that there is indeed a process of self-reflection that has now started and a willingness to acknowledge past mistakes in order to learn from them, at least at the individual level. While this particular narrative is in no way endorsed by the Old Leadership, there is a clear shift in reactions that can be observed when the interviewees were asked what they thought "went wrong" while the FJP was in power. Up until 2016, the most common response would be to almost immediately reject the assumption of the FJP having done anything miscalculated or counter-productive and would instead point to international conspiracies or lack of opportunities as the main element that eventually led to the July 2013 coup. On the contrary, almost all interviews conducted in 2018 contained some level of self-reflection and awareness of agency. Some of the motivations for the MB's political fall that were mentioned more often were the lack of political expertise and unwillingness to reform the sectors that threatened their rule (such as the country's security apparatus). Coincidentally, these are also the areas that according to most interviewees needed to be urgently addressed in order for the MB's reformation to be successful.

It has also become clear that, following the 2013 military coup, the MB has experienced a process of gradual fragmentation. Internal divisions and schisms over matters of strategy and ideology have deep historical

roots, but the unprecedented levels of repression facing the movement have led to the emergence of new factions and debates. The main points of contention currently dividing the organization are: 1) the interpretation of the circumstances that led to the fall of the Morsi government and the lessons that should be learned from that experience 2) the need to stipulate a coherent narrative and strategy for the MB to move forward and face the regime. There are rising tensions between the desire to let processes of self-reflection drive the MB's transformation on the one hand, and an unwillingness to stray from the organization's traditional ideology and strategy on the other. The difference in approaches put forward by these different factions go beyond the traditional clashes between the movement (*haraka*) and the party (*hizb*), and the classical but disputed struggle between the "conservatives" and the "reformists". Rather, they highlight the extent to which the MB is tackling fundamental questions about its identity. Direct involvement in partisan politics is no longer an option, but the MB now needs to decide what role it wants to play moving forward. The choice between restructuring itself as purely a social movement or remaining dormant until domestic conditions radically shift, gives two very different paths ahead. On this particular point, Amr Darrag, has noted that "the MB does not thrive in darkness, but it flourishes in the light".

The investigation into the MB's evolution in the aftermath of 2013 is still ongoing, but at this stage there are several conclusions that can be drawn about its current status:

- Since 2013, the MB has entered a state of stagnation that it currently remains in. Most interviewees from different backgrounds have voiced discontent towards the fact that there is almost no discussion at the higher levels of what needs to be done to address the coup and the regime.
- From this, there is a growing number of individuals calling for action, which suggest the gradual initiation of some adaptation processes. Nevertheless, the organization as a whole still largely remains in a state of immobility.

- There seems to be an unspoken, but shared, dissatisfaction with the Old Leadership and their unwillingness to even discuss the need for change and reformation. This can be defined as a "wait and see" strategy.

- While there is not a unanimous agreement on this, several interviewees have voiced the need for the MB to recruit or train their members to be "statesmen" and leaders. This is based on the acknowledgement that while the MB membership never lacked in engineers, lawyers, and doctors, it has not produced theorists, ideologues, and politicians in decades. In order to come out of the impasse it is in, MB members need to train professionally in the social sciences.

- The alleged use of violence by MB members after 2013 is a controversial topic that many wish not to discuss, or quickly disregard as the actions of a few that were in no way endorsed or accepted by the MB leadership. A few of those interviewed instead argued that violence was at least considered as a justified means (mostly for defence purposes) in the immediate aftermath of the Rabaa massacre. However, there is no clear data on processes of radicalization and de-radicalization at this point, so this is a fundamental element that needs to be researched further.

- While this is rarely admitted aloud, it can be observed that there are still deep divisions that run within the MB. These current schisms are very much a result of the events of 2013 and go beyond the "classic", and often contested, generational division between the "conservatives" and the "reformists". Rather, it appears that discontent with the Old Leadership's unwillingness to bring about change is cross-generational, while members who are individually becoming more pragmatic also do not belong to one particular group.

- Furthermore, there is now a considerable section of the MB membership that can be considered "dormant", composed by members who are so alienated that they have stopped engaging altogether while still keeping the affiliation. While this does not necessarily equate to defections, it is undoubtedly impacting on the morale and activities of those who remain and strive to move the organization forward. There are no clear numbers on this, but on average interviewees reckon that in the aftermath of 2013, 40–50 percent of the membership has gone dormant.

■ There is a detectable change in the way in which the strong hierarchy that are typical of the organization is being perceived. As the legitimacy of the Old Leadership decreases, a portion of the remaining MB membership is becoming more pragmatic and is much more prone to independent thinking and actions. While there seems to be no efforts to initiate a reformation process from the Old Leaders, there are independent initiatives that are now emerging within the MB.

Nevertheless, the MB has a long way to go before it breaks out of its current stagnation. To do so successfully, the organization has to agree on a coherent narrative and strategy, both of which are still currently lacking. When doing so, it will be necessary for the MB to take into consideration the ways in which Islamist narratives are being reshaped domestically in order for it to successfully regain its long-lost popular base and credibility. As these processes are still very much in flux, the MB has serious identity questions to address, most of which are related to the decades-old tensions between the political wing and the movement itself, and to what role it wishes to play moving forward.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that political Islam as a whole, including the various groups and movements associated to it, has been undergoing deep transformations since the events of 2011. In Egypt, in particular, the 2013 coup that removed the MB from power renewed longstanding questions about the compatibility of political Islam and democratic structures. Furthermore, various actors and institutions that fall under the "Islamist" umbrella face fundamental questions about their very own identity. In the case of the Salafist al-Nour, it appears that the group will very soon be confronted with the need to choose between remaining a social movement or completing its transformation into being a recognised political actor. The impact that Hizb al-Nour's political venture is having on Salafism more broadly will also have severe repercussions on perceptions of political Islam movements in Egypt, and therefore needs to be unpacked further. More specifically, some of the questions to be asked

have to do with whether or not they are capable of shaping a new form of Salafism that is compatible with both the complicated political context in Egypt and the country's changing interface between the state and religion. Similarly, al-Azhar's growing independence and alternating relationship with the regime is also re-shaping the connection between Islam and the state, and needs to be examined in light of ongoing events. At the same time the MB appears to be stuck between a rock and a hard place, struggling to find the internal unity necessary to disentangle itself from the state of stagnation that it entered in 2013. While some of its members are indeed attempting to break the internal and domestic deadlock that currently grips the organization, they are being prevented from doing so by the constraints imposed on them by the Old Leadership. Nevertheless, it seems like a process of self-reflection and the desire to be proactive about the repression its members live under is starting to gain more popularity within different factions of the MB. Overall, one of the overarching questions still in need of an answer is whether or not it is still possible to equate political Islam with a clear and tangible political agenda.

Notes

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Participation, the Public, and the Palace: Morocco's Islamists In Search of New Strategies

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Changes in Morocco's political context since 2011 have created opportunities, challenges, and uncertainties for the country's various political actors. Islamist ones in particular have made gains in the aftermath of 2011, most notably the Justice and Development Party (PJD), Morocco's largest Islamist party; its proselytizing (da'wa) wing, the Reform and Unity Movement (MUR); and the officially banned but generally tolerated Justice and Spirituality group, Al-Adl Wal-Ihsan (AWI). As the PJD's popularity rose and it achieved unprecedented electoral victories, the AWI became part of the February 20 Movement, which raised its profile and gave it greater freedom to operate. However, the changing social and political context altered these groups' underlying assumptions about political engagement. The increasing importance of public opinion and popular engagement expanded the groups' options and influence immediately after 2011, leading them to revisit how to balance their supporters' interests versus those of the monarchy.

The PJD and AWI are the dominant Islamist actors in Morocco, although the landscape of Islamist forces extends well beyond them to span the ideological spectrum. These forces have included a host of formal and informal actors; most are much smaller, such as the Party of Renaissance and Virtue, while some are banned or defunct, such as the Oumma Movement, al-Badil al-Hadari, or Salafi forces that until 2011 had largely stayed away from politics. Most of these forces remain small in comparison to the PJD and AWI, and their role and impact in the political field is rather limited. The AWI and the PJD – together with the latter's da'wa movement, the MUR – share important practical and ideological commonalities: they condemn violence,

engage at multiple political and social levels (though the AWI is banned from registering as a political party and participating in elections), and receive widespread popular support. The main difference between the PJD and the AWI is their perception of the monarchy. The PJD not only accepts but supports the monarchical institution and sees it as the only viable political option for Morocco, while the AWI sees the monarchy as responsible for Morocco's social and political ills.

To contextualize the uncertainty and challenges that the PJD and AWI face today, it is important to note that although the environment was not always favorable to Islamist forces prior to 2011, they by and large understood the political space in which they operated. They worked within relatively well-defined red lines, as did Islamists operating in numerous countries across the Middle East and North Africa. The defining feature of Morocco's Islamist actors has always been their relationship with the monarchy, which plays a dual religious and political leadership role.[1] While its political leadership is consequential for secular and Islamist parties alike, the king's role as "Commander of the Faithful" adds a particularly significant dimension. As a result, Islamist parties' ideology, politics, and social platforms have had less effect on their legality, longevity, and influence than the degree to which the monarchy benefits from or fears them. Therefore, the PJD has maintained a positive and deferential relationship with the palace as a prerequisite to its own continued existence.

However, political and social changes since 2011 have altered this equation, as public opinion has injected itself more forcefully into the political sphere. Balancing its relationship with the monarchy and its relationship with its supporters and the electorate has proven a different task for the PJD, and the party has pursued two different approaches, each with their own distinct implications for its cohesion and future. For the AWI, the calculations are different in that while its relationship with the monarchy (or rather, the rejection of the monarch's dual role) is also its defining feature, the group's relationship with the population is suffering because of its ongoing

absence from politics. This absence is compounded by the populace's call for immediate and effective responses to governance difficulties. Both the PJD (through the MUR) and the AWI maintain grassroots links through their direct involvement in charitable enterprises and small-scale development programs, but neither is able to offer the sort of change the population is demanding.

Since 2011, domestic and regional developments have added urgency to the question of how to react to public opinion. The evolution of the political context, including the PJD's and the AWI's experiences since 2011, indicates that Moroccan politics no longer primarily involves political actors and the monarchy, but increasingly also considers the perceptions of the population, which were previously much more of an afterthought. In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 protests, this benefited both the PJD and AWI as each leveraged this into greater popular support – electoral gains and visibility, respectively. But in recent years the PJD and AWI have not continued to benefit from this: they have begun to stumble, failing to deliver progress on the popular issues that won them much support right after 2011.

The PJD and the other Islamist actors appear to understand their predicament better than most other political actors do, as they try to grapple with how to recalibrate their relationship with the population versus their relationship to the monarchy. The PJD in particular has long been the main palace-accepted Islamist actor, so it has primarily sought to appease the monarchy. However, since 2011, the growing importance of public opinion – and more crucially the voters who elected them in 2011 and again in 2016 – has added an important element to its political calculations: the desires and demands of their constituency. Until 2011, the PJD had been an opposition party that held few seats in parliament. After 2011, it became a central political actor representing all Moroccans.

This new role stood at odds with what the monarchy envisioned. While the monarchy wanted the PJD to keep a low profile as leader of the coalition,

the party's promises to its voters meant it had to tackle important economic and political reforms that at times threatened the monarchy's political and economic supremacy. Morocco's more vocal public voices and the growing importance of popular perceptions in politics ar exemplified in the frequent and sustained protest movements Morocco has seen since 2011.

By regional standards, Morocco has always had frequent protests, and the government has been relatively tolerant of them as long as they remained focused on specific, discrete issues rather than systemic ones. But since 2011, the number of protests has grown substantially, and the demands have become more pointed. In 2013, a wave of protests took place against the king's pardon of Spanish child molester Daniel Galván. In 2016, Morocco's northern Rif region saw sustained protests against marginalization and poor governance, and in early 2018, another wave of protests against poor governance and government incompetence rocked Morocco's Eastern region. Since April 2018, Morocco has witnessed a sustained, widespread boycott of three large businesses that exemplify cronyism and corruption to Moroccans.

As the leader of the government, the PJD has been stuck between the limited mandate the monarchy has imposed on it and the growing power of the people. Since 2016, the PJD has struggled to balance the promises it made to the voters, who had given them a plurality, against the wishes of the palace, which feared their political ascent. For the AWI, its view of and relationship with the monarchy dictates its lack of participation in the political process. But its shunning of official politics affects its popularity, as Moroccans seek effective policy solutions and fewer principled stands. The AWI, an important popular and political force, has been largely absent during these crucial times. With the exception of organizing a large protest in the summer of 2017 in solidarity with the Rif protesters, the AWI has been largely silent and absent from the sort of popular struggle that aligns closely with its ideals. The sustained abstention from politics is gradually diminishing the group's popular standing.

The two actors face a similar challenge as the population becomes increasingly vocal about the country's long-standing political and economic woes. Islamist actors are struggling to square the needs of the populations they serve – or seek to serve – with their own particular relationship with the monarchy.

Participation Through Social Activism

The AWI is one of the largest opposition groups in Morocco. It is banned from politics and as such has never taken part in elections, but it remains an important actor. However, with the political and social changes of 2011, the group's popularity is suffering and its future is uncertain. While the AWI's history is compelling to many of its supporters, whether the group is capable of wielding as much influence over the oppositional discourse as it once did remains in doubt.

The AWI was formed in the early 1980s, but its roots stretch back into the 1970s. Throughout his life, the group's founder, Abdessalam Yassine, spoke out against what he saw as a decaying political system that is not only built on and perpetuates corruption, but also keeps its population subjugated by denying them education and development.[2] Yassine's message first came out in 1974 via what was at the time a shocking letter titled "Islam or the Deluge" to King Hassan II, who had been purging opposition movements and figures throughout most of his reign.[3] In response to the letter, which offered the king advice to help put the country on the right course, Yassine was detained for three and a half years in prison and a mental hospital.

In 1981, Yassine formed the Justice and Charity (Al-Adl Wal-Ihsan) group based on his understanding of the intersection of Islam, society, and the need for political reform. His writings, especially his book The *Prophetic Method*, formed the foundation of the group's ideological and political ethos. In the book and in subsequent writings, Yassine sets out the group's main ideas and convictions, notably the rejection of violence, the championing of education, and the need for political reforms.[4] The group identified three No's: no to

violence, no to secrecy (or clandestine activities), and no to external influence or association with external actors. The AWI's identified mission is reflected in its name. Justice, it claims, grants people their political and civic rights so they can undertake charity. Charity (or what it sometimes translates as "spirituality") refers to charity of the soul, the idea of being "good" and doing good deeds to help the nation regain its dignity. This illustrates how Yassine took central Islamic concepts (justice and charity) and applied them to the Moroccan context.[5]

The group has traditionally appealed to the lower social classes, creating a large following – something only observable through their capacity for mobilization, as they keep their numbers of adherents secret. Furthermore, fearing infiltration by regime operatives, the group is vigilant about its recruitment, and gaining membership is an involved process.[6] The group has faced years of persecution, and Yassine was held under house arrest after he was released from jail.[7] Although King Mohammed VI did ease the state's crackdown on the group after assuming the crown in 1999 as part of his broader approach to lessening restrictions on opposition, this was partly an attempt to lessen the attention the AWI received and therefore its appeal. But the group's leadership and members argue that the state still targets them using different and more sophisticated methods to harass them and limit their reach.[8] This includes, for instance, claims that the state refuses to allow the group to hold its summer camps, through which the AWI educates young people and attracts potential members.[9]

Education is the driver of the AWI's social outreach focus. In interviews, members explain, "Politics is only part of our interest. It is education, education, and education" that is their focus, invoking some of Yassine's own pronouncements.[10] Its education mandate is a hallmark and core tenet through which the group believes development is possible. Among its educational activities – which, according to members, the state often interrupts and prevents – are meetings to discuss religious issues and provide "advice," as well as summer camps, an important aspect of their youth

engagement.[11] Furthermore, the group seeks to build a strong social fabric in the communities where it is active, which the group claims is throughout the entirety of Morocco. To that end, local charitable organizations associated with the group provide a number of services to disenfranchised and underserved members of their communities. Furthermore, members themselves often provide support to individuals and families within their neighborhoods. For example, members may collect funds for a friend struggling with an issue or a neighbor who requires help with an important life event such as death, birth, or marriage. This very organic social outreach and support system – which the group claims is not funded with money from outside of Morocco but is largely done at the individual or small group level – goes a long way in generating appeal and loyalty within the community. This is at the heart of the AWI's appeal in poor and underserved communities.[12]

While this sort of social activism has served the group well in the past, addressing social needs on a larger scale is outside the group's financial or organizational capabilities. Furthermore, without any involvement in politics and governance, grassroots efforts are seen as falling short, particularly among Morocco's younger population. Concomitantly, improvements in Morocco's basic development indicators over the past 20 years are changing the nature of the country's socio-economic challenges. Since 1990, development indicators in the country have improved, including access to healthcare, education, and level of income. Moroccan life expectancy increased from 64.7 years in 1990 to 76.1 in 2017, while expected years of schooling rose from 6.5 in 1990 to 12.4 in 2017, and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita rose from $3,800 to $7,340 over the same time period.[13] Morocco's basic development indicators still lag in comparison to neighboring countries, and the country continues to struggle with myriad issues, but this progress is notable even as it is inadequate. While providing some basic services within smaller communities, as Al-Adl Wal-Ihsan has done, remains important, Morocco today has a greater need for more effective economic and social policies, which only a state apparatus or a political actor in control of a state apparatus can provide.

In terms of its approach to politics, the group continues to believe – guided by the experience of various political actors across the ideological spectrum – that participating in the current political process only serves to co-opt these actors and strengthen the monarchy's role.[14] In 1998, the group's Shura Assembly created a political "section" intended to be a political party in waiting. The political wing also provides the group with strategic direction and seeks to coordinate with other actors, including political parties, civil society groups, and officials. The AWI claims that its goal is to create a system of "just rule… its foundation is the shūra (consultation); charity is its soul. General participation and political pluralism, and supremacy of institutions and rule of law, are the guarantee of its sustainability and dynamism; dialogue and public consultations its way to provide options." But beyond this, the group provides little additional specifics. In one exception, Yassine's daughter Nadia, formerly an outspoken and constant media presence, argued in an interview with Moroccan paper Al-Ousbou'iyyah al-Jadīdah (The New Weekly) in 2005 that in principle she prefers a republican system to a monarchical one. Following significant backlash and legal action, she backtracked, explaining that these remarks were taken out of context and that they were a general observation about an abstract intellectual preference.

As the political space in Morocco began to open up in the early 2000s, the group discussed whether the time had come for it to consider political participation. However, the group's leadership maintained that it was not yet time to change their position. This meant that as long as the monarchy dominates politics, the AWI would refrain from participating. Another important factor is the group's belief in nonviolence. Such is the dichotomy of the group; while it is nonviolent and does not see a turbulent revolution as the way to effect change, neither does it believe that participation in the political process is the way to secure it. This approach of "neither participation nor revolution," rooted in the group's commitment to da'wa, is a reaction to the kingdom's constrictive environment. However, this has also allowed it to maintain its popularity while the regime has successfully stripped other

groups of their popular legitimacy through co-optation or repression.[15] On the surface, this allows the AWI to have it both ways: uncorrupted by politics, but not threatening because they shun politics; nonviolent while still rejecting the current system. The question of participation rose again in the aftermath of the 2011 Moroccan protests, generating a very different reaction.

The PJD–MUR Strategic Partnership

Even as the AWI continued to stay away from politics, the PJD was taking pains to slowly but gradually establish itself as a political player. In this sense, the PJD was fulfilling the role the monarchy had conceived for it: an easily-controlled Islamist alternative capable of drawing some support away from the AWI, which up until then the palace had seen as its main political threat. It follows that the main difference between the PJD (and by extension its daʿwa wing, the MUR) and the AWI is its conviction that change is best achieved through reform from within the existing political structure. The PJD and MUR have an intertwined, almost inextricable history and purpose. The PJD traces its founding to Chabiba al-Islamiyya, an underground group that was among the first Islamist organizations in Morocco. Chabiba al-Islamiyya gave up its clandestine activities and agreed to enter the political fold following dialogue with and coercion by the monarchy, and in 1996, former Chabiba members took over the defunct Popular Constitutional and Democratic Movement (MCPD).[16] After a period of boycotts, the MPCD participated in the 1997 elections and won a total of nine seats in parliament. In 1998, the party changed its name and henceforth became the Justice and Development party (PJD).[17]

al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya, which broke off from Chabiba al-Islamiyya in 1982, became the Movement of Reform and Renewal in 1992, later merging with the Association of the Islamic Future to form the Movement for Unity and Reform (MUR) in 1996.[18] In its founding document, the MUR indicated that it would focus on religion and social needs rather than politics. In practice, the differentiation has been one of function: the MUR focuses on

social reforms and the PJD on politics. The MUR's mission focuses on three main areas: education, daʻwa, and training. In addition, the organization has what members term "partners," including branches focused on different demographics such as women, students, and children. These partners provide a host of social services and support to the most vulnerable segments of society. This part of the MUR's work has recently grown and is helping increase the group's presence in many different parts of Moroccan society.[19]

In terms of its educational work, the MUR focuses on instilling sound Islamic principles and practices in its members and their families, together with civic duties and responsibilities. The MUR and other Islamist organizations such as the AWI share the same foundation of daʻwa, but there are subtle differences in their approaches. Specifically, the MUR's president, Abderrahim Chikhi, explains that the group has gone through the process of specifying their daʻwa goals over the course of the past few years, taking in consideration the needs of Moroccan society. "Daʻwa is not just to promote tawhid (unity) in its general meaning, rather it is also about helping encourage better behavior among Muslims," Chikhi stresses. The MUR understands that Moroccans are already committed to Islam but believes they require further guidance, for instance by reinforcing Islam's social and individual teachings. In its "revision" of its daʻwa mission, it focused on what it terms "spreading the morals of integrity."

Although the MUR and the PJD are their own entities, their connected founding, inextricable histories, and shared vision have meant they have a close and undefined relationship that generates concerns about the extent of MUR's political role and the PJD's religious role. The MUR is credited with restructuring the MPCD (now PJD), including providing strategic guidance, funding, and human resources. MUR members became PJD members, and the MUR bankrolled the PJD's electoral run in 1997.[20] The PJD's institutional framework is similar to the MUR's, and members refer to the party as the "son" or "child" of the movement.[21] After this initial period,

which the leadership characterizes as an "embrace," greater scrutiny of the PJD following the 2003 Casablanca attack led leadership figures to downplay their connection to the MUR.

The MUR's own political convictions are essentially the same as those of the PJD. As one member explained, unlike other Islamist organizations in the region, the MUR sees that the traditional Islamist declaration that "Islam is the solution" is no longer viable and that, while Islam is the best reference and provides many answers, it alone does not hold all the solutions. The MUR still very much believes that Muslim society should rely on Hadith and the Quran, but stress that the movement "has chosen democracy from the first day."[22] This statement reflects years of the conditioning upon which the group's existence and ability to carry out its social and political work rests. It also indicates the extent to which the group has come to terms with and internalized this reality. Not only is this the only way to exist in the Moroccan political sphere, it is also what the group believes the majority of Moroccans expect.

The Differentiation of the PJD

The PJD has witnessed important ideological evolutions and adaptations since its founding, including its relationship with the MUR. The Casablanca attacks put external pressure on the movement and party to inch away from each other. This converged with the MUR's debate with the PJD over how to manage the intersection of religion and politics (echoing a similar regional debate at the time) and the extent to which separation was advisable at that moment. In its extraordinary congress of 2003, the MUR elected a non-scholar leader, Mohamed El Hamdaoui, replacing Islamic scholar Ahmad Raissouni in a reflection of its desire to move in a more pragmatic direction. [23] Under the new leadership, party and movement slowly began to exhibit a gradual separation – or rather "differentiation," which remains their preferred terminology for the process.[24]

In the aftermath of the 2003 attacks, the MUR also made efforts to discourage members of clear religiosity, such as preachers or Islamist scholars, from running on the PJD ticket or campaigning for the party, and limited the extent to which the MUR leadership appeared within PJD leadership circles. [25] Chikhi, the MUR's president, explains that the MUR instead focused narrowly on da'wa, education, and training. Since the late 1990s the relationship between the MUR and PJD has gone through different phases. Initially, the two pursued a differentiation of discourses, then of function, and now it is focused on delinking their leadership.[26] Previously, the two entities' separate decision-making bodies shared members; for instance, several members held positions in both the leadership of the PJD and the MUR. In order to ensure that this crossover did not affect what they consider their independence, they have gradually decreased the number of members who have roles in both bodies.[27]

The PJD's efforts to downplay its links to the ideological and religious movement were accompanied by other efforts to limit its presence in the political field. The party restricted the number of candidates it fielded in subsequent elections. By 2011, the party had established itself as a viable political actor whose presence in parliament grew steadily and quietly.[28]

Responding to Protests

The 2011 protests provided an important opportunity for both the PJD and the AWI. Their varied responses reflected each group's perception of the country's stability and best path to reform. When protesters started taking to the streets of Morocco, the PJD and MUR judged that the protests that had brought down the Ben Ali regime in Tunis and the Mubarak regime in Egypt were also capable of bringing down the monarchy. They decided that preserving the monarchy was their priority and thus abstained from protesting. This was in keeping with their approach of avoiding confrontation, protecting the existing structures, and working within them.[29] The party and the group carefully stressed that their response was driven by a need for "reform within stability," or "the third option"—beyond either protesting,

which could bring instability, or not participating in some fashion, which would lead to stagnation.[30]

The AWI, conversely, became a strong force behind the protest movement in the country, partnering with the February 20 Movement and other leftist and secular groups. The group's decision was driven by its tendency to mobilize around important issues. It saw this as an important opportunity – if not for radical change then at least to air grievances – to demonstrate its political engagement and, more crucially, its mobilization *bona fides*. In interviews, AWI members described their mobilization in 2011 as evidence of the sort of change they could bring and a push-back against criticisms that they are irrelevant. Members often note that political engagement is supposed to be for the service of the individual, and as such their participation in protests helps people.[31]

Furthermore, the AWI was careful not to create a "ceiling" for their participation or for how the protests proceeded. If the protests could compel the monarchy to enact serious reforms (and perhaps even become a truly constitutional monarchy), the AWI wanted to be involved. If the protests were to yield even greater change, the AWI was open to any outcome – and was still guided by its principles of nonviolence (as evidenced by their peaceful participation) and pluralism (as evidenced by joining the February 20 Movement and leftist forces). Although it did not clearly articulate an end goal, its principles were clear in its engagement.[32]

The monarchy's announcement in March 2011, only weeks after the start of the protests, that it would revise the constitution took momentum out of the protest movement and divided it. Some criticized the palace-dominated process of constitutional revisions and called for a boycott of the referendum. Others saw the reforms as some tangible, if incremental, progress toward a more democratic political system. Amid differences of opinion, the protests began to dwindle. The organic and diffuse nature of the movement itself also led to diminishing numbers of protesters. Allegations that state operatives had infiltrated the movement added to the confusion.

In December 2011, the AWI left the movement for practical, strategic, and political reasons. At the height of the protests, their frequency was beginning to test the movement's ability to mobilize. Members readily admit that logistical considerations (such as missing work or finding transportation to the protests) were becoming costly for its largely working-class members. In addition to other more strategic and political considerations, this was beginning to affect the group's willingness to call on its members to mobilize. As protests continued, the leadership did not want to continue putting such a burden on its members. Once the whole protest wave began to lose its strength, the AWI was also concerned that a prolonged protest movement would give the PJD an even bigger edge. The constitutional changes and the mood the protests engendered had already allowed the PJD to compete in and eventually win elections in a manner that would not have been possible prior to 2011. Therefore, the AWI's fear was that if the protests continued, the monarchy might yield even greater political concessions in order to safeguard its future, and the beneficiary of those concessions would be the PJD.[33]

The much more cautious and calculated approach of the PJD and MUR reflected their priority of appeasing the monarchy. Although the palace accepts these two actors, it nonetheless remains wary of their growing influence. The PJD, under the leadership of Abdelilah Benkirane, and the pragmatic MUR leadership agreed that joining the protests was too uncertain and potentially costly a gamble. The monarchy's stability not only ensured a role for the PJD – one with limited competition because it was the only legal Islamist political actor – but also meant that if it stayed away and the protests succeeded in bringing reforms, its popularity would presumably benefit it more than other political actors. If the protests had turned unruly or violent, it would not be blamed for the fallout or instability and would not have to own the outcome. So rather than joining the protest movement, the PJD and the MUR, together with their branches and partners, put forth what they termed "Nidā' al-Iṣlāḥ al-Dimoqrātī" (the call for democratic reform) as a third way between protests or inaction. This included a number

of debates and discussions over the course of a year that broadly highlighted the need for reform and confirmed their commitment to stability and the current political institutions. As was its goal, the call was more of a public relations effort meant to provide greater reassurance to the monarchy and avoid criticism for their caution.

PJD Retrenchment

No political party benefited from the 2011 protests as much as the PJD initially did.

In response to the protests, King Mohammed VI proposed constitutional reforms that would give the elected government greater power, thus also giving the elected actors a greater political role. In the parliamentary elections of 2011, the PJD won a plurality of seats (107 out of 395) that allowed it to lead the new government coalition. It enthusiastically embraced its new role but quickly stumbled as its fractious coalition split and the palace worked with establishment parties to frustrate the PJD's agenda. While many in the palace and opposition parties likely viewed this as the primary way to interrupt and thwart the PJD's seemingly unstoppable electoral power, in many respects, the party held on and managed to build on its already well-established role as an actor with strong grassroots engagement. During its first mandate, the party's approach of combining an ambitious economic and social reform agenda with populist rhetoric allowed the party to advance in the 2015 local and regional elections. The party's populist rhetoric championed by then-Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane played an important role in its growing popularity. While its performance was modest overall, and the party often struggled to enact specific reforms for which Moroccans wanted to see a bolder approach, the party was perceived to have performed satisfactorily. In September 2016, these perceptions were reflected in more electoral gains, with the party again winning a plurality of votes and gaining an even higher number of seats (125 out of 395).[34]

All this allowed the party to compete with the monarchy for governance but also precipitated the monarchy's realization that the limited political openings it ceded in 2011 were having a more significant impact than intended. These changes were allowing political actors – and an Islamist political actor no less – to dominate politics and the political discourse of the country. While the party was seeking to become more attuned to the public and demonstrate its efforts in addressing the needs of voters, the monarchy naturally felt increasingly threatened by the PJD's growing popularity and political clout, and the palace moved to limit their ascent. Together with loyalist parties, the palace blocked the PJD's government formation process and eventually replaced PJD leader Benkirane with a more pliable figure, Saadeddine El Othmani, and pressured the party into a large coalition that did not reflect its electoral showing. This experience divided the party's leadership, who disagreed on how to respond to the palace's maneuverings. After a drawn-out and contentious government formation process that stretched into early 2017, the party maintained leadership of the government coalition, but this coalition is weak, and the party's own resulting internal fissures are yet to heal.[35]

The party's rifts deepened in late 2017 around an internal leadership debate. A significant faction within the PJD wanted to keep Benkirane as leader of the party in the hope that he could provide a foil to Prime Minister Othmani's deference to the palace. But Othmani won the internal election as head of the party in December, dealing a blow to Benkirane's reformist wing, which is increasingly feeling marginalized within the group.[36] These internal divisions, together with the PJD's capitulation to the monarchy, are jeopardizing its popularity. Not only has its current government coalition – seen as week even by the standards of a government that is always inferior to a dominant monarchy – struggled to respond to growing frustration over basic governance challenges, but over the past year and a half, it has also had no clear message and little cohesion.

The PJD's experience in government morphed from an initially hopeful one, in which it balanced delicate coexistence with the monarchy and the challenges of reform and development, to a process of "cooptation through participation". Under pressure from the palace, entrenched political and economic elites eager to safeguard their stakes, and the party's own internal divergences, the PJD's reputation has suffered. Today, the public criticizes and mocks the party, its leadership, its coalition government, and each of its policy initiatives, which are seen as paltry. The party is widely considered to have failed to have stood up to the known pressures of the monarchy and its systems of patronage. Many in the party admit what they long feared is coming to pass: in public opinion, the PJD is increasingly seen not as a serious independent actor, but rather another loyalist party that primarily exists to execute the monarchy's wishes.[37]

Since the 2017 government formation crisis, the PJD has largely focused on mending its relationship with the monarchy at the expense of its supporters and the Moroccan public at large. The rationale that drives the party's current approach is the same that has guided the party out of previous straits, including the May 2003 bombings in Casablanca. Then, Othmani – who was the party's leader in 2003 as well – favored a retrenchment, as he seems to now. The party's current approach reflects the same instinct to draw back until the monarchy is appeased or its gaze diverted. Othmani has reportedly even argued that the PJD ought to go back to its pre-2011 size in parliament, as its growth has been too fast and too unmanageable.[38] Many within the party feel it is headed for an electoral experience similar to that of 2007, when the party limited its number of candidates, which will be compounded by an expected low voter turnout.[39]

The AWI's Calculations

For the AWI, the decision to leave the 2011 protests was soon overshadowed by the institutional uncertainties that emerged with the death of Abdessalam Yassine. Yassine had gained an almost mythic status within the organization. He was one of the few sharp critics of the regime who lived to tell about it. As

his followers see it, his work and sacrifice built up an important movement that motivated a generation living in stagnation and fear. Thus, the question for the group was twofold: how to hold the movement together and avoid a vacuum of leadership, while at the same time to maintain its relevance in the post-2011 environment.

The AWI's challenges of keeping its cohesion and popularity were compounded by its failed gamble in joining the protests of 2011. In response, the group focused on broadening its appeal, which entailed becoming more pragmatic and building a basis for itself beyond its reliance on the messianic figure of Yassine. The group elected Mohammed Abbadi, a much less politicized figure with solid religious credentials and a more modern outlook, to usher the movement through the next phase. In that sense, it also needed to adapt to the reality that the Morocco of 2012 faced different challenges from those of 1970 and 1980. This change has, of course, been gradual and subtle – hampered in some cases by the clarity of Yassine's position on a number of issues, which he documented extensively.

The perennial question of participation is giving way to concerns about a necessary quest for broader appeal. While the group does provide a vague idea for an alternative political system, it is grappling with how to continue abstaining from politics while staying relevant at the social level. Although many within the AWI's leadership are unconvinced that Benkirane's government was able to achieve much despite all its efforts, and believe that anything it did accomplish was a giveaway by the monarchy, the PJD's rise distressed the AWI.[40] The AWI leadership often explains that the PJD's popularity is more of an indication of the strong appeal of an Islamist message than of the party's strategy, approach, or record of accomplishment. Nonetheless, within the group there is a noteworthy understanding that its lack of participation limited the PJD's competition and allowed the party to avail itself of the Islamist vote.

The AWI also argues that because support for them means boycotting elections, a lower voter turnout indicates the extent of their popularity. Voter apathy has been a long running issue in Morocco, which has one of the lowest five turnout rates in the Middle East and North Africa region (ahead of only Libya, Algeria, Jordan, and Egypt).[41] It has reflected the degree to which Moroccans distrust their political institutions and leaders, but also the extent to which Moroccans see the monarchy as the dominant and unalterable political force. Voter turnout increased slightly from 37 percent in 2007 to 45.5 percent in 2011, and hovered nearby at 42.2 percent in 2016. Furthermore, although these figures reflect turnout among registered voters, many eligible voters are not registered.[42] Using self-serving logic to interpret voter turnout rates, the AWI argues that, as a political actor, its refusal to participate in the elections also reflects the choice of the majority of Moroccans.[43]

However, the AWI's position has drawn criticism, particularly after 2011, leading some to refer to it as "the couch party," meaning it is sitting on the sidelines.[44] Their ongoing abstention solidifies notions that the group is excessively idealistic, and possibly irrelevant. Meanwhile, the prevailing view within the AWI is that the PJD's experiences, especially in 2016 and 2017, when the monarchy succeeded in dividing the PJD, have validated their choice against participation. It sees this as yet another example reaffirming the monarchy's complete control and the futility – even danger – of participation.[45] The AWI leadership is left grappling with the impact of its own refusal to participate in politics.

The AWI has made few other efforts toward implementing its vision of a civil state with an elected leadership. It seems to be mobilizing less frequently. Furthermore, its strong media presence prior to 2011 has diminished: the group seems less and less often to be at the forefront of the political debate, as it once was. This reflects a fear of losing its appeal, as has been pointed out. But engagement also risks showing that the PJD's experience has made it redundant – or worse, inferior. Waiting is not without its risks either. If

it continues waiting for a new political context, there are no guarantees its message would have the same appeal. The AWI would be staking participation on an entire new set of circumstances, which could change the context that created them.

It is therefore difficult to understand the AWI's strategy fully or reconcile its contradictions. To overcome some of these challenges, the group has stressed the need for a pact between various political actors to identify the principles and foundations for a new system, on which the population would then vote. However, the challenge of cooperation is inherent in the group's non-participatory stance. Other actors cannot work with them – or only on limited issues – because they do not believe in the effectiveness of the process, discrediting it and its participants. The group's litany of contradictions is leaving it increasingly isolated.

Although voter turnout improved only slightly in the aftermath of 2011, other indicators suggest greater political interest and engagement within Moroccan society and more readiness to assess the performance of political actors and institutions and hold them accountable. While the AWI is holding out for a new political system before it participates in politics, the Moroccan polity overall is showing more pragmatism. So far, in their quest for reforms, Moroccans have been clear about their demands. The monarchy remains popular, yet Moroccans want more transparent and sound monarchical rule, as well as greater accountability and efficiency. Moroccans are no longer making these demands to politicians alone but increasingly to the king and the monarchy as an institution.

Can the MUR Provide a Solution?
As the PJD contemplates a way out of its current impasse in these uncertain times, it is looking to its grassroots connections to mitigate some of the damage. The MUR and the PJD now refer to a "strategic partnership" and cooperation focused on the common goal of advancing their brand of social reform, political and civic awareness, and reference to mainstream

Islamism[46]. These efforts to bestow a pragmatic and less religious direction on the PJD do not necessarily mean the two entities do not support each other. The connection of the two groups was and remains strong despite these attempts.

Their rather ambiguous relationship, which has been the source of confusion and criticism of the PJD, might offset some loss of popularity. Whereas before the PJD needed to put distance between its political mandate and the da'wa mandate of the MUR, today it needs to bring it closer together. As the debate about the relationship has evolved, so have perceptions of where the strengths of the MUR and PJD lie. Prior to the PJD's experience in government, the MUR was considered the source of strength. It formed the PJD's beating heart and "electoral reservoir."[47] Over the years, the PJD benefited tremendously from the MUR's outreach and strong social ties to disseminate its message through Moroccan society, efforts that paid off in the 2011 parliamentary elections. This balance of power had been gradually shifting between 2011 and 2016 as the party became bigger and more influential under Benkirane's leadership, as reflected in its electoral showing in 2016. As the party increasingly became the source of strength, the nuances of whether – or how much – to separate the two have shifted.

The internal and external crisis the PJD is facing is likely to force the party closer to the MUR. During the latter's sixth general assembly, which began on August 3, 2018, Abderrahim Chikhi secured a second term as its president; the leadership also moved to replace the remaining two members of the executive council who were also members of the PJD's general secretariat, indicating a further step toward greater separation.[48] The movement also indicated that in the next phase it would put greater emphasis on its educational and social work, and especially the latter. It is clear that the movement is attempting to adjust to current political and societal pressures by limiting direct involvement in the party's inner workings. But as Chikhi attested, "even if the PJD wants to let go of us, we will not let go of them." He also highlighted that any struggle within the party or challenge facing

it generally serves as an incentive for the MUR to contribute to a solution. Chikhi also admitted that the lack of political restrictions gives the MUR more freedom to carry out its own reform efforts than the PJD, and stressed that, given the intertwined nature of the two in popular perception, it will always be the case that the work of one will impact the other, for better or worse.[49] The PJD will remain the main beneficiary of the MUR's charity work and social outreach, which have both grown significantly in recent years, as has the MUR's reach into state religious institutions. Anecdotal evidence suggests that MUR members now hold many important official religious posts.[50]

The PJD's challenges – together with growing protest movements – are likely driving the MUR's focus on society and its distance from politics. The MUR's degree of social involvement has grown in recent years, especially since it became a registered organization in 2011, enabling it to benefit from state funding through its NGO and foundation partners. The MUR is able to also generate income through its members, who contribute 2.5 percent of their annual income. Through this type of outreach, service provision, and relief work – and by inching away from politics – the MUR is looking to fill the need it sees in society.

Its vast network of partner organizations includes the Azzahrae Forum for Moroccan Women, Attajdid Tollabi (Organization of Student Renewal), the Basma Foundation for Social Development, and the Hope of Moroccan Children League. Each of these are institutionally independent but follow the MUR's strategic direction. Through these groups, the MUR is able to ensure its presence in a number of different fields. Through the Azzahrae Forum, the movement is able to keep up with the debate about women's empowerment, a particularly timely and sensitive discussion given recent legislation against sexual harassment and abuse. Such groups often partner with the state and other NGO actors to help address a whole host of social and economic issues in a way that the state is often not able to by itself. The MUR's links to these groups allow it to situate itself as an important social actor, perhaps in more effective ways than political outreach.

Because the MUR's presence, much like that of the PJD, is stronger in the cities, the movement has been trying to build its membership and services across rural areas that struggle with dire poverty and where there is significant need for action. For example, the MUR-associated Basma Foundation provides support for the poor, including emergency response aid that has benefited hundreds of families in the aftermath of natural disasters such as floods and extreme winters.[51] This type of swift support is something that even the state struggles to provide at times. Among Basma's current projects is one aiming to provide basic services, such as education, housing, healthcare, roads, and water, to remote villages.[52] Along with other projects providing housing, education, and training for bereft families, this has allowed the MUR to reach deeper into society. In a powerful reflection of the loyalty the movement is capable of building through its educational efforts and social and charitable work, one youth member characterized his relationship to the MUR by saying, "the movement is in the blood."[53]

While the MUR may not actively campaign for the party, its education efforts to instill more civic engagement among Moroccans benefit the actor it clearly aligns with, which remains the PJD. Likewise, the MUR's social initiatives largely benefit the PJD, by both generating goodwill and indicating a political preference. While the MUR presence within the PJD has decreased, the MUR will always be one of the PJD's strongest connections to the population. Even if the two are trying to show some distance from each other ideologically, they share the same goal of ensuring the PJD's survival and success.

Conclusion

Immediately following the 2011 protests, the PJD seemed to have found a winning formula. Benkirane adopted an ambitious message of social justice and reform, and strove to show that his government intended to respond to the population's needs. The PJD's experience from 2011 to 2016 showed that a middle ground is possible. As a result, the party was able to increase its presence in parliament in the 2016 elections. Yet the party squandered its 2016 win, and the current government has chosen a different approach

of appeasing the palace and abandoning meaningful reforms. The result has been a retrenchment that has cost it popular support, the extent of which will not be clear until the next parliamentary elections take place (likely in 2021).

The MUR is cognizant of the need for greater pragmatism as the best way to support the struggling PJD as the latter reassesses its position in Moroccan politics. The MUR leadership has chosen to focus on civic outreach and social services to offset some of the social disappointment with the PJD. The movement seems to be looking to achieve this by filling a gap in services, in addition to its own awareness-raising and educational efforts. Above all, the MUR wants to be seen as a movement of reform, one that could help offset some of the PJD's losses. Given the amount of funding and support the group generates, they may find some success in that regard. Yet in the short term, the PJD's political choices have put the legacy the party tried to build as an independent, serious political contender in jeopardy.

The AWI has struggled in its own way to adapt to the new realities of Moroccan society. On the surface, post-2011 changes seem to benefit it, as it remains the only political actor that can claim to be uncorrupted and truly independent. However, it has failed to take advantage of these circumstances. The group remained distant from politics, and its lack of a clear vision and action plan for the future points toward further isolation. The AWI has been struggling with drawing in the younger generation of Moroccans, who seem to favor pragmatic solutions. While engagement in Morocco is heading increasingly in an informal direction, the AWI have paradoxically not been able to benefit from this shift and potentially faces becoming a fringe group that has given into vacillation and hedging.

Morocco's Islamist actors are increasingly taking on the image of other political parties: coopted, divided, and ineffective. The country's parliament, government, and judiciary are consistently overshadowed and discredited by a monarchy intent on reclaiming every inch of the political space it ceded

after 2011. As these actors lose legitimacy in the eyes of the people, political participation loses its appeal. Instead, Moroccans have begun taking to the street to voice their concerns. Moroccans' frustration with the state of governance has been on vivid display since 2011. While the monarchy stifles the actions of political forces and severely limits the space in which they can operate, these actors' own approach is driving them even further from the people. The monarchy will likely always pursue the same approach to ensure its political and economic survival and supremacy, but actors like the AWI and PJD are overlooking the extent to which the population will stand behind them in the face of monarchical maneuverings. Investing further in their relationship with the population and their grassroots ties could rebalance these actors' position in relation to the monarchy.

Despite an initial hope that they would be different, Islamist actors find themselves in this position through a combination of their own approaches and palace pressures. While that might not be unexpected given the nature of the monarchy and the political system it has set up, Moroccan people expect more from their political actors and government institutions, including the monarchy. Morocco's future and its stability depend on whether these groups can meet the challenge individually and collectively.

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Chapter 4

The Arab Uprisings and the Transformation of Islamists in Jordan: (2011-2018)*

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The relationship between state and religion in the Jordanian case has been described as "conservative secularism" in comparison to other Arab states that have been undergoing bitter conflicts with both radical and moderate Islamist movements. This formula of conservative secularism has prevented the deterioration of the relationship between the regime and Islamist movements to a point of violence or eradication, as happened in other Arab states such as Egypt and Syria. However, the relationship has never reached a point of a full political partnership. It has been constantly changing and shifting based on interlocking domestic, regional, and international conditions.

Although many studies point to the uniqueness of the Jordanian case within the Arab context, the relation between the regime and Jordanian Islamists has been undergoing a state of redefinition and reformulation ever since the wave of Arab uprisings in 2010. This has taken its toll on the Islamists of Jordan, causing fractures and defections within its Islamist movements, despite the fact that some observers have confirmed that these are temporary. Such fractures and defections mirror the nature of the transitional period that the Arab world, the Middle East, and the entire global system are undergoing.

At the moment of their inception, the Arab uprisings of the early 2010s ushered in social and political mobilization in various regions across the Arab world. They also helped new political players, especially young people, to emerge as active voices in the public sphere, as well as presenting an opportunity for other social and political movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), to be heard.

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*This chapter was originally written in Arabic.

Notwithstanding the relatively different relationship that existed between the state and Islamists in Jordan, compared to other Arab states, the Jordanian state has managed to make use of the developments of the Arab uprisings in its favor, even more than the Islamists have been able to. The latter tried, at the beginning of the uprisings, to expand their movement and join the ranks of the public and the young Jordanians who were frustrated by the economic and social conditions of the country. However, the regime managed to gradually break up, empty out, and circumvent this movement, particularly after the deadlock in the Syrian uprising and the exclusion of MB in Egypt after the military regained a direct control of power in July 2013.

The situation in Egypt continues to be critical, in complete disregard of its heavy toll on the country's society and people, and its regional and international implications. It indicates the beginning of a new political phase marked by the exclusion of the MB or the containment of its regional influence through the employment of the hegemonic discourse of "combating terrorism" and labeling the Movement as a "terrorist" group whenever possible in order to suffocate Islamists and any other movement calling for peaceful/democratic change in the Arab world.

Despite the momentum built up by the popular movement in Jordan at the beginning of Arab Uprisings, the MB there have insisted on a reformist rather than a revolutionary approach. The regime appears to have managed to contain such "reformist demands" at relatively low cost while remaining capable of maneuvering and exerting pressure to weaken Jordanian Islamists, particularly the MB and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF).

So, what were the internal dynamics of Jordanian Islamism after the Arab uprisings stumbled in 2013? What is the future of the Jordanian example? To what extent will it affect the situation in Jordan in particular and the position of Islamists in the Arab world in general? Is the Jordanian case sufficient for making general conclusions about the phenomenon of political Islam and its future in the Arab world? Or should the relationship between the state and Islamists in Jordan always be explained in terms of its uniqueness, making any generalizations on the Arab level difficult?

In light of the above questions, this chapter is divided into four sections: the first examines the relationship between the state and Islamists in the Jordanian case; the second traces the stages of the relationship between Jordan and the MB; the third addresses the Arab uprisings and the Islamist movement in Jordan; and the fourth highlights the transformations of the Islamist movement in Jordan after the collapse of the Arab uprisings. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the conclusions of this study, with an eye to exploring potential scenarios for the future of the Islamist movement in Jordan.

I. The Relationship between the State and Islamists in the Jordanian Case

Three approaches exist when assessing the relationship between the state and Islamists in Jordan, as well as assessing the nature of the political regime in Jordan.

The first approach focuses on providing a description of the Jordanian example as a case of "conservative secularism". Since the establishment of the Emirates of Transjordan in 1921, the state has managed to maintain a steady and continuous balance in handling the relationship between the state and religion. This balance has consisted of avoiding both close connections and direct confrontations with Islamist movements. Politics in Jordan also follows a delicate "equation" that sets boundaries to parties in their connections with religion, limiting such connections to certain fields.[1]

"Successive Hashemite Kings have deliberately chosen a moderate 'modern secular' style for the state, based on 'parliamentary monarchy' system[2]... However, the Jordanian state has never abandoned observing the religious dimension in its domestic and foreign policy, besides being very committed to respecting popular religious rites, leaving a wide margin of personal freedom and tolerance between different religions and among the various Muslim sects."[3]

The second approach considers the political system in Jordan to be a hybrid political system. Supporters of this approach argue that "since the eruption of

the Arab uprisings, regimes in Arab states, such as Morocco, Jordan, Algeria and Oman, have taken steps towards political reform, as well as some social and economic measures, to contain popular demands and avoid the winds of change that blew off stubborn regimes that had lasted in power for decades (such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen)."[4] The top-down approaches were designed to further enable these elites to maintain power and to preserve "hybrid political systems phenomenon that have both democratic institutions and procedures, and authoritarian elements and components, resulting in a system that is neither completely authoritarian or autocratic nor democratic as far as democracy goes."[5]

The third analytical approach in the Jordanian case is more critical and comprehensive in that it considers the Jordanian regime as "patrimonial", consisting of five elements: first, patrimonialism, which puts the head of the regime in a position that enables him to manipulate and control the elite. Second, clientelism, which manifests in the proliferation of social relations that are based on customary and traditional loyalties and hierarchical relations inside the pyramid of societal power and influence, which will later translate into political clientelism within the regime. Third, rent-seeking, which distributes favors in exchange for loyalty to the regime, including (unnecessary) employment in state institutions, the provision of free services to loyal areas, or even direct cash payments. Fourth, utilitarianism, which considers clientelism or rent relations to be of "public utility" rather than corrupt practices. Finally, patriarchy and the prevention of women from holding leadership positions – or only insofar as the head of the regime permits.[6]

Based on these three approaches to assessing the relationship between the state and Islamists in Jordan, as well as the assessment of the political system there, we can claim that the first approach focusing on the uniqueness of the Jordanian example, implicitly entails that the pattern of containment of the MB and the extent of friction between them and the state will persist.

The second approach links the future of Islamists in Jordan to the changes in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of Islamists that the Arab political

regimes are effectuating within the frame of the hybrid political systems phenomenon, as well as the individual domestic considerations of each Arab state.[7]

The third approach sees that the reconciliation of "neopatrimonialism" with democracy is unlikely, given their contradictions in terms of concept, nature, and components. Accordingly, Jordan will never see a transformation towards a semi-democratic system, unless there is domestic pressure accompanied by international pressure, as well as vast societal transformations, a lasting mass movement, and the existence of democrats who truly believe in democracy, through a gradual building process that provides real opportunities for cooperation based on equality and away from narrow-minded domestic intolerance. Otherwise, the Jordanian regime will continue manipulating the inconsistencies within society to secure its domination and the people's subjugation to the reign of repression.[8]

II. The Stages of the Relationship between Jordan and the Muslim Brotherhood

In the context of analyzing the relationship between the state and Islamists in Jordan, the following remarks can be made:

i. The relationship between the government and Islamist opposition in Jordan has been less aggressive than it is in other Arab states, as previously mentioned. However, "the relationship between the Jordanian regime and the MB has always remained 'cautious and watchful'…Although, MB's members of parliament frequently criticized the government, particularly with regard to cultural and Islamic issues, it never represented a direct challenge to the regime".[9] Furthermore, when the regime "faced the most serious challenges from nationalist movements" in the 1950s and 1960s, "MB remained conservative, and gained the reputation of being less threatening to the regime".[10]

ii. There are two factors that might explain why the Jordanian regime maintains its ties with the MB in general: first, because the MB ideology is moderate by nature. Second, because the MB acknowledges and does not

challenge the legitimacy of the Hashemite ruling elite. However, the MB and its political wing IAF began to be more critical and outspoken about the regime after the signing of the Jordan–Israel Peace Treaty in 1994.[11]

iii. The relationship between the Jordanian regime and the MB is a matter of political necessity. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and then the Gulf War in 1991 contributed to involving the MB in the Mudar Badran's government, taking five ministries after the cabinet reshuffle. However, from that moment on, the relationship has been decaying. When the war ended to Iraq's detriment, Jordan looked for a way out of the strategic crisis that resulted; therefore, King Hussein decided to enter into peace negotiations with Israel and start a phase of "economic privatization" in the country, reversing his previous democratic steps and beginning to limit the power of the MB.[12]

After King Hussein passed away and his son King Abdullah II ascended to the throne, the crisis between the state and the MB entered a new phase at the end of 1999. The first significant step in this context was the dismissal of Hamas leaders from Jordan and the disappearance of traditional communication channels that used to exist during the reign of King Hussein, even during times of restrained relations between the state and the MB.[13]

Therefore, the group found itself facing new factors and a different way of handling matters, with the state being more adamantly opposed to it. The game was gradually turning into a "zero-sum game," with one party winning what the other lost. What made the situation worse was the sharp contrast in the views of the regime and the MB regarding many domestic and regional issues. In short, "the regime viewed the MB as an ally to Hamas and "the Axis of Resistance" (i.e., Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah), while the MB viewed the regime as a part of "Arab Axis of Moderation" which is pro-American and against the resistance."[14]

iv. The situation escalated after Hamas assumed power as a result of the legislative elections of 2006. As clashes erupted between Hamas and Fatah, with Hamas gaining control over the Gaza Strip in June 2007, the Jordanian Monarch strongly supported Fatah and the Leader of the Palestinian

Authority, Mahmoud Abbas.[15] "The king pressured the MB to sever any ties with Hamas on the basis that any Jordanian parliamentary group having ties with overseas groups should abandon these. After a period of internal discussions, Jordan's MB chose to maintain its policy of coexistence with the regime. The group elected a new leader and executive committee in 2006, with a remarkable absence of significant pro-Hamas figures".[16]

v. "There was also a more serious threat for the political system in Jordan, which is the spread of Jihadist thoughts of Arab Afghan militants, who had found a new base for operations in Iraq where they could not be traced by Jordanian authorities".[17]

As a result of the complicated regional situation, whether after the Palestinian 2006 elections, the increasing activity of radical Sunnis in the occupied Iraq, or the "relative change" in the regime's treatment of the MB, the group found itself only able to win 6 seats out of 110 in the 2007 parliamentary elections. That was the worst result the MB had achieved in its entire parliamentary history since 1956, when it had won 4 seats out of 40 during the peak of the so-called nationalist and leftist tide".[18]

A study indicates that "the elections of 2007 were so unusually rigged that such rigging was publicly discussed. The parliament was therefore dissolved two years earlier than its due date and the state remained with no parliament for an entire year...The political oppression and banishing the Palestinians from the state bodies and the political arena pushed the majority of the Jordanian society to withdraw from public life". [19] Therefore, a political vacuum dominated while political parties other than IAF vanished.

The parliamentary elections of November 2010 were boycotted by IAF, Popular Unity Party, and many other significant political organizations and figures. "Despite disagreement within IAF between the new hawks and the doves, their choice was to boycott the elections", to respond to the public mood.[20] These elections did not witness any activity from serious political parties; neither there were any programs or coordination between candidates to form lists that covered all areas across Jordan. This resulted

in the unprecedented dominance of tribal activity and political money, the spread of violence and clashes between these two elements that required the interference of security forces, and finally the abstention of majority of voters".[21]

III. The Arab Uprisings and the Islamist Movement in Jordan

The Arab uprisings inspired a popular movement in Jordan which demanded the resignation of Samir Al Rifai's government and the formation of another to respond to public demands made by the demonstrators. As a result, a new government headed by Marouf Al-Bakhit was founded to lead a process of political reform and a national dialogue committee was established in March 2011 consisting of 52 members representing a wide political and ideological spectrum.[22] "Negotiations were held between the MB and the state to convince the group to participate in the national dialogue committee which was supposed to pave the way for a new electoral law, constitutional amendments, the stimulation of political life, and pushing forward the democratic process. However, mutual suspicions had deepened after the historical moment of the Arab Spring and the MB refused to participate in both the committee and the subsequent parliamentary elections of 2013". [23]

Instead, in April 2011, the MB issued an extensive document announcing a reformist project aimed at "having a comprehensive national reform that would help in Jordan's renaissance on different political, social, economic, and educational levels and deepen the sense of its Arab and Islamic identity. It also aims at empowering the Jordanian state to undertake its national, regional, and Islamic duties, and achieve a major breakthrough to enhance shura and democracy, to strengthen the state and its independence in the face of regional and international threats particularly the Zionist imperialist project and others of foreign occupation and dominance."[24]

In addition, the MB used to organize weekly protests after Friday prayers in 2011 and 2012, from Al Husseini Mosque and other mosques in major cities of different governorates. The protests usually concluded with speeches by Islamist figures and their political partners. Such protests played a direct

role in framing and politically influencing popular movements, by inviting them to hold coordination meetings and draft joint work programs. In some governorates, particularly Mafraq, such endeavors clashed with influential tribal players, sometimes ending in violence. However, the Jordanian opposition was soon divided regarding their stance on the Syrian uprising. The MB and other popular and youth movements wanted to express solidarity with the Syrian people by forming committees for support and frequently organizing protests in front of Syrian Embassy in Amman. In contrast, Leftist and Nationalist parties, mainly the "socialist" and "progressive" Baath parties, as well as other professional and cultural figures, sent delegations to Syria to support Bashar al-Assad in the name of the Jordanian people. Pro-Syrian regime parties in Jordan objected to using the headquarters of the Professional Association to organize events supporting the Syrian uprising."[25]

The MB might have put too much bet on the Arab uprisings, wishfully thinking that they represent a new historic stage and another phase, particularly after the parliamentary elections in Egypt, then the victory of Mohammed Morsi in the presidential elections in 2012. That's why they raised the stakes, and one of the prominent MB leaders, Zaki Bani Arshid, announced that the group wanted to move from participation to political partnership in terms of its relationship with the regime. It is true that the group did not call for a regime change like other Arab uprisings, but the regime considered the group to be seeking a "soft coup" against the King, according to one regime source in Jordan, by focusing on constitutional amendments that severely limit his political powers, either by forcing him to choose the Prime Minister from the parliamentary majority, depriving him of his power to choose the members of the Senate or reducing his other powers".[26]

This official/security assessment of the objectives of the MB in Jordan is at odds with studies that considered that "the ceiling of popular movements in Jordan remained mostly to 'reform' the political regime, not to topple or replace it, even if we assumed that the accelerated politicization of popular movements in Jordan and the increasing criticism of the system, as well as the calls for developing a 'decisive constitutional monarchy' revealed a "growing gap between the regime and its historical social base."[27]

When it comes to "assessing the popular movement in Jordan in 2011 and 2012, we can say that it was weaker than other Arab states, as a result of disagreements about demands, movement types, coordination between different players, and the performance of the activities of the movement. The demands of the movement were not unified; the movement was fragmented so each party worked on its own, turning a blind eye to the demands of others. This was manifested in the unstable vision of such demands, and the conflict between public and private, labor and factional, and tribal and geographical demands. This fragmentation led to strengthening the government stance and its intransigence." [28]

Because of the political mishandling of the reform demands by reversing the outputs of the "National Dialogue Committee", particularly with regard to elections law and constitutional amendments, the slogans and the demands of the Jordanian political community were raised. "The movement was also heated by the mishandling of corruption cases, by closing them in a way that humiliated the public".[29]

Some argue that the Jordanian regime managed to circumvent the reform demands, which gained momentum from the Arab uprisings between 2011-2013, by using four phased tactics: "first, by using the setbacks in the Arab uprisings, particularly the Syrian uprising, as a scarecrow to calm down the heated popular movement in Jordan, and putting the people in a dilemma: either to accept the status quo or head to the unknown and chaos. Second, manipulating tribal and regional identities and using them to scare each other. Third, developing a state of "Islamist phobia" and warning all parties against approaching or co-operating with, let alone becoming an ally of the Islamists. Fourth, it managed to penetrate some popular and party movements, attracting some of them to ally with the regime against the Islamists, weakening them and leaving them in disarray.[30]

IV. The Transformations of Islamists in Jordan after the Failure of the Arab Uprisings

Despite the fact that the transformation of the Islamist movement in Jordan is still incomplete, it is still important to analyze it using three overlapping factors: first, an internal/domestic factor relating to the structure, interactions, conflicts, and defections within the Islamist case, taking into consideration the "generational" variable and the degree to which Islamist movements are able to adapt to extreme external pressure.

Second comes the Arab/regional factor that forms the immediate, direct context for the Islamist movement, as well as common ideas between regional powers and the international community regarding the future of these Islamist movements.

Some Arab regimes, particularly Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt, in coordination with Israel, played a pivotal role in suppressing and defeating the Arab uprisings and suffocating the forces of change there, including youth, social, and Islamist movements. However, such relative success in defeating the uprisings would not have been possible without international support for those conservative, anti-change forces. Arab/regional factors might become more influential in the foreseeable future, given the policies followed by the "counterrevolutionary axis". However, they might be weakened and exposed by developments on the international level, signaling that such policies might be implemented by proxy on behalf of international powers that oppose change in the Arab world.

However, some argue that "the developments of the summer of 2013 in Egypt, provided another piece of evidence of the internal and regional efficiency as opposed to the confusion of Western government when it comes to handling Arab Spring. When the situation was ripe in Egypt to overthrow the MB, domestic players did not care about the opposition of European and American powers. The anti-Brotherhood domestic powers showed strong capability of challenging Western pressure, while Gulf states provided huge financial and political support that made the Western pressure easier for the military junta."[31]

The support of the military coup in Egypt by three Arab states – Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Jordan – was evident on the diplomatic, economic, and even moral and media level. This reflects the Arab "regional agenda" against political Islam and its integration into power during the Arab Spring. This agenda has practically been adopted by the so-called "Axis of Arab Moderation," with the three aforementioned states playing a pivotal role in it.[32]

Third comes the global/international factor as defined by international policies and strategies towards Arab regimes. This factor depends on the capability of international actors to ignore the repression of the current Arab regimes, their failures, human rights abuses, repression of freedoms of opinion and expression, and shutting down of the political sphere, given that Washington and other Western capitals are choosing to pursue their immediate military and economic interests rather than supporting the values of freedom and justice beyond paying lip service.

In this context, the following remarks can be made:
i. The Jordanian regime followed an approach of "calculated escalation" against the opposition in general and the MB in particular. It arrested Deputy MB Leader Zaki bani Arshid in November 2014, and he was sentenced to a year and a half of imprisonment in 2015.

The National Policy Council (the highest policy-making body in Jordan) discussed Amman's options in dealing with the MB in the wake of Egypt's coup, limiting the options to three: the first being to ban the group and label it as terrorist following the example of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Second, to exploit this phase of weakness for the group and dictate the regime's rules for the game. The third option was to maintain the status quo while freezing any channels of communication or strategic liaisons with the group, leaving it to disintegrate and drain its own social and political credit due to its internal crisis.[33]

ii. It seems that the relative success achieved by the Jordanian regime in circumventing the demands for reform that gained momentum with the Arab uprisings in the period 2011–2013 had noticeable implications for the

Islamist movement, which started to witness various sources of pressure, including defections. In this context, the National Building Initiative Zamzam was announced on October 5, 2013,[34] and was followed by the defection of MB figures and leaders for several reasons.

Despite the fact that Zamzam was established at a time of severe crisis for the MB in Jordan, following the July military coup in Egypt, some assessments argued that the Jordanians were unlikely to be convinced that it offered anything new, given the fact that it had been welcomed by the regime on both the media and political levels, just as the establishment of the Islamic Wasat party formed by MB defectors close to the regime had been at the end of 2001. This indicates that the Jordanian regime wanted to use Zamzam to weaken the MB, which was the hard core of the Islamist political opposition, creating an image that the group was falling apart and internally fracturing. [35]

Zamzam founders, particularly the two leaders: Ruhayil Gharaibeh and Nabil Al Kofahi, insisted on the fact that the initiative was not an act of defection from the mother group, and that all it wanted was to break the Brotherhood/regime dichotomy that dominated the regional and domestic scene, building a new route to achieve the sought-after political reform in the economic-crisis-stricken county. However, Zamzam's empty and ambiguous promises of political reform have gone with the wind.[36]

iii. Following the defection from the group, the Ministry of Social Development in Jordan agreed in March 2015 to grant the defectors a permit to establish a new organization carrying the name of the "Muslim Brotherhood Group Association," under the Law of Associations. Therefore, there are now two entities representing the MB in Jordan: the first is the old group and its political wing the IAF, which has become semi-outlawed, while the other is the new defector association that has the legitimacy granted by the regime. The same year witnessed legal and political disputes between the two entities. The government also suffocated the activities of the old group under the pretext that it is illegal, closing some of its offices and banning its protests and events.[37]

With regard to the relationship between the MB and IAF in Jordan, reports indicate that it was agreed upon to leave public affairs such as political and trade union activities to the IAF, while the group retains the preaching (da'wa) work. There seems to be now a conviction in both the MB and the IAF about the necessity of separating da'wa from politics and restructuring the role of the group to be focused on the spiritual and preaching activities. The group seems to have realized the importance of renewing its policies and revisiting its thought away from a denial of the crisis and has taken steps towards declaring independence from the group in Egypt, enhancing the representation of women and youth in executive councils, and approving the concept of separating da'wa from politics. More steps might be taken over time, as this path might help the group's sister-parties in their electoral successes.[38]

iv. Similar to the Jordanian MB, Hamas in Palestine also was severely harmed by the overthrow of the MB in Egypt and its labelling as a "terrorist group" by the Egyptian government by the end of 2013, followed by both Abu Dhabi and Riyadh.

From one side, the margin of the movement for Hamas in both the Arab world and Palestine was narrowed.[39] From the other side, a group of targets was achieved for Israel: first, it revived its strategic partnership with Cairo; second, the Axis of Moderation was revived; third, Islamist resources were drained; fourth, the blockade on Gaza and Hamas was tightened; fifth, the conflict in Syria was prolonged and polarization and division in the Arab world increased; and sixth, Iran was further suffocated.[40]

According to some analyses, the events in Egypt might have led to the upgrading the level of relations with Israel to the extent of forming a joint team to co-ordinate policies relating to regional transformation, particularly in the fact of the so-called "threat of Islamic extremism." Therefore, two types of regional axes emerged based on facing Islamist groups and countries that have hostility with Abdul Fattah Al-Sisi regime and Israel: the first included Israel and other Arab states to face Islamist groups, and the other included Israel, Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus to face Turkey.[41]

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu openly says that the regional alliance that now connects Egypt, Israel, and a number of Arab states is mainly based on the common interest of defeating "Islam Extremism," after the regimes in the said states realized the importance of the Israeli contribution to the war on terror. "In this context, Former Israeli Minister of Defense and Foreign Affairs Moshe Arens argued that the coup in Egypt had resulted in the complete breakdown of the anti-Israel Front; as Sisi and some Arab leaders have found a wide range of common grounds with Israel, the top item of which is facing radical Islam. According to Arens's estimates, Sisi's regime's commitment to facing up to Islamist groups precedes Egypt's commitment to supporting the Palestinian issue. The emergence of this new axis has accelerated the throughput of the normalization of relations with the Arab world, as Egypt and other Arab states no longer consider progress in resolving the Palestinian issue a precondition for co-operation with Israel; they are rather concerned with various types of co-operation."[42]

Conclusion

The challenges facing Islamists in Jordan are increasing, leaving them in the face of open scenarios that overlap with the developments in the Middle East and the different reactions of international politics to them.

If the Islamists are facing structural shortcomings such as defections, lack of deep intellectual theorization, scarcity of self-criticism and reviews, weakness of futuristic strategic planning with an attitude of "excessive activism" and unsystematic "tactical adaptation" that might affect the future choices of Islamist leaders on the long run; the regime is also facing challenges that are not less serious, particularly the indications of liquidating the Palestinian case during the reign of Donald Trump, in what is known as "Deal of the Century," and its strategic impact on Jordan. This Deal means more of ignoring Jordan's interests and resolving Arab-Israeli conflict at its expense and for the interest of Israel.

In this context, we can refer to three scenarios with regard to the future of Islamists in Jordan:

First Scenario: The Return of Islamists

It might be argued that "Deal of the Century" might leave a room for Islamists in general and Jordan MB in particular to return to the political arena, by supporting popular protests against Donald Trump decision to move US Embassy to Jerusalem. After "years of demonizing, isolating and disintegrating MB, its members returned to the streets of the capital and cities of Jordan, and were welcomed there. Despite the tiny disputes that were present, the MB restored its presence and charisma, and proved that it is indispensable and hard to remove and that it still enjoys the title of mother group, despite the defections in the past seven years."[43]

A leading MB leader believes that the regime is facing unprecedented pressure due to many factors: first, U.S. policy under Trump with regard to Palestine and Jordan, including all different components of the deal (moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, cutting UNRWA aid to Palestine, and endeavors to annul the right of return). Second, the Saudi attempts to compete with Jordan over the sponsoring of Islamic Holy Sites in Jerusalem, a function that Jordan claims to be its historic right, plus indications of a strained relationship between King Abdullah and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Third, the deteriorating economic situation accompanying the change in the U.S.-Gulf approach with regard to offering aid to Jordan, as Jordan's mediation in the Arab–Israeli conflict is no longer needed after the Gulf states' rapprochement with Israel.[44]

Based on this opinion, the said MB leader supports "the official stance of the Jordanian state and its rejection of "Deal of the Century" and its different components. This external pressure created a need for public support of the regime. Jordan should also start a process of "repositioning"[45] and "balance shift" towards Turkey and Qatar to balance itself and broaden its options by starting cooperation with these two states, given the fact that they are both against the Deal of the Century as well. That might explain why King Abdullah visited Turkey and participated in the Islamic Summit in May 2018, despite the fact that Amman foreign policy has always been to avoid any regional coalitions and to stay neutral. No doubt that Jordan is being quickly affected by whatever is happening in the Arab world, particularly in Syria, Iraq, and Palestine.[46]

Second Scenario: Containing Islamists

In addition to the first scenario of the MB return to the political arena in Jordan, there is also a scenario of Islamists' containment that is more likely to happen in case of the emergence of an elite inside the ruling establishment that reconsiders the strategy of excluding Islamists or the emergence of new factors that restore the importance of a containment and coexistence strategy. The most strategic approach to the MB and Islamists (who are involved in the political game in general) is to contain them and keep them occupied with politics of everyday life. This forces the movement out from rhetoric to action, leaving them with two options: adopting rationalism and realism, or proving their incapability in offering alternative policies and programs. The latter option would deprive them of their old role of criticism of the regime while offering empty mobilizing rhetoric for which it is not accountable.[47]

As part of the scenario of containment, Beverley Milton-Edwards discusses the implications of the absence of effective democracy on Jordanian youth, given the current high unemployment rate[48] and the emergence of the radical threat represented in ISIS.[49] She points to the importance of drawing up a Jordanian national strategy that involves civil society players such as Islamic organizations and Islamist leaders in order to protect the youth from "violent extremism," instead of casting all Islamists as an enemy to all the other components of the society. This also sheds light on the necessity of King Abdullah starting a process of tangible economic, social, and political reform and approving an approach of combating corruption that is more respectful of the rule of law and human rights.[50]

In this context, the international community should support Jordan's policies and approaches that acknowledge the deep-rooted Islamism that is still attractive to the people and must know the differences between varied Islamist groups. From its side, the Jordanian regime must accept the legitimate criticism of the government policies and encourage the emergence of Islamist harmony with other social forces seeking reform and change. The sovereignty and existence of the Jordanian state still depends on finding ways to accommodate political Islam.[51]

Third Scenario: Lack of Regional Stability and the Possibility of Things Getting Out of Control in Jordan and the Region

Researchers indicate that the Arab region and the Middle East are going through a period of growing instability, exacerbated crises in state-society relations, and threats and risks of different types and levels, which have resulted in some Arab states being mired in different levels of civil war and internal conflict under the slogan of "combating terrorism." There is also growing pressure, and regional and international external meddling in the Arab world within the framework of a "war on terror," which in turn has resulted in compounding the internal deficiencies of the Arab world with a serious impact on the structure and the fragile stability of such states.[52]

These aggravated problems in the Arab world on the social, economic, and political levels might result, in the short and medium terms, in a scenario of a situation out of control in Jordan and the region.

One of the most dangerous risks in this scenario might be the unpredictability of its consequences and implications in the Arab states themselves, making it difficult to predict the future of Islamist movements in a regional system that is going through a serious transitional period.

Despite the challenges posed by this scenario, it remains useful for Islamist movements and other national players seeking national and cultural independence to take expedited steps in the following areas: fixing relationships, building a national consensus around a minimum platform, acknowledging the need for reform and self-criticism, staying away from any extremist or violent movements, adopting programs that attract the world's attention to the state of Arab disarray and the threats this imposes to the stability of the world and the region, and finally acknowledging the importance of adopting the slogan that "democracy is the solution."[53]

In conclusion, the MB's demands in Jordan remain reformist and not revolutionary. This is mainly due to the regime's continuous capability for maneuvering and putting on pressure to weaken and contain Islamists, particularly MB and its political wing IAF. This emphasizes the need for

developing the policies and rhetoric of the MB, as the most organized and widespread opposition force. This might help to avoid the involvement of Jordanian youth in extremism and violence due to limited political prospects and the absence of opportunities to introduce any changes other than those approved by the regime with weak reformist effects amidst crises on the economic, social, political, or security levels. All this comes in addition to the "Deal of the Century" that President Trump wants to pass, despite all its defects, which would finish off the Palestinian cause to the detriment of Jordan.

In other words, the challenge facing Islamists and others in Jordan is how to cement, institutionalize, and develop their internal structures in order to face escalating external pressure from both international, regional, or Arab sources, in this interim period of unpredictability on many different levels.

Notes

[1] Muhammad Abu Rumman and Hasan Abu Haniyyah, *al-ḥall al-islāmī fī al-ʿurdun: al-islāmiyyūn wa al-dawlah wa rihānāt al-dimuqrāṬiyyah wa al-amn* [The Islamist solution in Jordan: Islamists, the state and the pledge to democracy and security] (The Center for Strategic Studies Jordan and The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2012), 21.

[2] It is worth mentioning in this context that some Jordanian MPs wore, at the end of 2017, a necklace carrying a photo for Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein with the caption "Custodian of Jerusalem Holy Sites." This was seen as a response to Saudi attempts to question the Jordanian guardianship over the holy sites in Jerusalem, and Riyadh attempts to marginalize and undermine Amman's role in the settlement talks, as part of the so-called "deal of the century".

[3] Muhammad Abu Rumman and Hasan Abu Haniyyah, *The Islamist solution in Jordan: Islamists, the state and the pledge to democracy and security*.

[4] Ahmad Yusuf Ahmad and Nivin Masaad, Ḥālat al-ummah al-ʿarabiyyah: *2017-2018 ʿām al-amal wa al-khaṬar* [The current situation of the Arab nation: 2017-2018 the year of hope and danger] (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2018), 105.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See: Waliam Najib Nassar, *Maʾziq al–dimuqrāṬiyyah fī al–waṬan al– ʿarabī fī ẓil al-nuẓm al-bitrimuniyāliyyah al-jadīdah: al-urdun namūdhajan* [The crisis of democracy in the Arab world in the presence of neopatrimonialism: the case of Jordan] (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2018), 12-13.

[7] For more information, see: Husayn Tawfiq Ibrahim, "al-islāmiyyūn wa al-sulṬah fī duwal al-rabīʿ al-ʿarabī bayna al-siyāsah wa al-ʿunf" [Islamists and power in Arab Spring countries: between politics and violence], *Strategic Studies 250*, no. 24 (2014).

[8] Nassar, The crisis of democracy in the Arab world, 319-322.

[9] Nathan J. Brown and Umar Hamzawi, "bayna al-dīn wa al-siyāsah: al-islāmiyyūn fī al-barlamānāt al-ʿarabiyyah" [Between religion and politics: Islamists in Arab parliaments], *Carnegie Middle East Center and Arab Network for Research and Publishing*, 2011, 84.

[10]Ibid, 84.

[11] Ali E. Hillal Dessouki and Karen Abul Kheir, "Foreign Policy as a Strategic National Asset: The Case of Jordan", in *The Foreign Policies of Arab States*: The Challenge of Globalization, eds. Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hilal Dessouki (Cairo: The American

University in Cairo Press), 261- 262.

[12] Muhammad Abu Rumman, "azmat al-ikhwān al-muslimīn bi al-urdun: nihayat al-ṣirāʿ al-dāʾirī wa bidāyat al-taʿwīm al-siyāsī" [The crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan: the end of the vicious conflict and the beginning of political stagnation], *Al-Jazeera Center for Studies*, June 16, 2016, https://goo.gl/4C6DJf

[13] Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the issues in which the boundary between what is domestic and what is foreign. This means that preparing the settings for a settlement process requires choking off opposition Islamist movements, and that was the concept behind the arrests and expel of Hamas leaders in 1999 in Jordan. See: Ali Hilal and Nivin Masaad, *al-nuẓum al-siyāsiyyah al-ʿarabiyyah: qaḍāyah al-istimrār wa al-taghyīr* [Arab political systems: issues of continuity and change] (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, July 7, 2014), 201.

[14] Abu Rumman, *The crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan*.

[15] The day Hamas controlled the Gaza strip in June 2007 marked the beginning of the long tense relationship between the movement on the one hand and Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabi on the other. The movement's domestic policies and its regional alliances represent political pressure on these three countries. For more information, see: Amjad Jebreel, "al-siyāsah al-suʿūdiyyah tijāh filisṬīn wa al-ʿirāq (2001-2010)" [Saudi policies towards Palestine and Iraq (2001-2010)], (Doha: Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2014), 162-172; Adnan Abu Amir, "ʿalāqāt ḥarakat ḥamās maʿ al-ʿālam al-ʿarabī" [the relations of Hamas with the Arab world] in *ḥarakat al-muqāwamah al-islāmiyyah ḥamās* [The Islamist resistance organization Hamas], ed. Muhsin Muhammad Salih (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies & Consultations, 2015), 285-329; and Muhammad al-Said Idris, "mustaqbal al-ʿalaqah bayna maṣr wa Ḥamās [the future of the Egypt-Hamas relation] in *maṣr wa ḥamās: taḥadiyyat al-waqiʿ wa āfāq al-mustaqbal* [Egypt and Hamas: challenges of the present and opportunities for the future], *Arab Center for Research and Studies* no. 10 (October 2015), 49-70.

[16] Ali E. Hillal Dessouki and Karen Abul Kheir, *Foreign Policy as a Strategic National Asset: The Case of Jordan* (Cairo scholarship online, September 2011): 261- 262.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Abu Rumman and Abu Haniyyah, *The Islamist solution in Jordan*, 110.

[19] See: Wahib al-shair, "intikhābat al-urdun al-ʿammah 2010" [Jordan's general elections 2010], *al-mustaqbal al-ʿarabī* no. 384, February 2011, 119.

[20] Ibid, 120.

[21] Ibid, 120-121.

[22] Muhammad Abu Rumman, *The crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan*.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "al-ikhwān al-muslimīn: ru'yat al-ḥarakah al-islāmiyyah li al-iṣlāḥ fī al-urdun" [Muslim Brotherhood: the movement's vision for reform in Jordan], *Wikipedia*, last modified May 28, 2011, https://goo.gl/znJuke

[25] Hani al-Hourani, *The future of reform in Jordan*, 795-796.

[26] Muhammad Abu Rumman, *The crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan*.

[27] See: Hani al-Hourani, "mustaqbal al-iṣlāḥ fī al-urdun" [The future of reform in Jordan] in *Mustaqbal al-taghyīr fī al-waṬan al-ʿarabī* [The future of change in the Arab world], eds. Ahmad Yusuf et. al. (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies and Swedish Institute Alexandria, 2016), 771.

[28] Nassar, *The crisis of democracy in the Arab world*, 314.

[29] Ibid, 314

[30] See: Zaki Bani Irshed, "furaṣ ḥarakāt al-islām al-siyāsī al-mustaqbaliyyah fī ḍaw' al-wāqiʿ al-ʿarabī al-iṣlāḥī: al-namūdhaj al-urdunī" [The future opportunities of Islamist movements in light of the current reality of Arab reform: the case of Jordan] in *ḥarakāt al-islām al-siyāsī fī al-waṬan al-ʿarabī: al-wāqiʿ wa al-mustaqbal* [Islamist movements in the Arab world: present and future], eds. Bakr al-Badour and Jawad al-Hamad (Amman: Middle East Studies Center, 2015), 455.

[31] Jamal Abd al-Jawad, "ḥudūd al-dawr al-khārijī fī thawrāt al-rabīʿ al-ʿarabī" [the limit of foreign role in Arab revolutions], *Al-DīmuqrāṬiyyah* 57 (January 2015), 53.

[32] Muhammad Abu Rumman, "al-ikhwān al-muslimūm wa al-mustaqbal… al-ḥarakah al-islāmiyyah wa as'ilat al-miḥnah" [Muslim Brotherhood and the future… the Islamist movement and the question of strife], *Al Jazeera Center for Studies,* September 11, 2013, https://goo.gl/TKkLQm

[33] Abu Rumman, *The crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan*.

[34] For more information on the initiative "Zamzam", see: Tariq al-Neimat, "Zamzam wa al-ikhwān al-muslimūn fī al-urdun" [Zamzan and Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan], *Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* February 4, 2014, https://goo.gl/zz2gGz

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] See: Ali al-Din Hilal, ed., ḥāl al-ummah al-ʿarabiyyah 2015-2016: al-ʿarab wa ʿām jadīd min al-makhāṬir [The current state of the Arab nation 2015-2016: Arabs and a new year of threats] (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2016), 135.

[38] Abu Rumman, "'al-ikhwān ʿalá muftaraq Ṭuruq", *al-Ghad*, January 9, 2018, https://goo.gl/1xjMCv

[39] For more information on the challenges faced by Hamas and the reconstruction of Gaza and the movement's regional alliances after 2014, see: "The Arab Strategy Report, 2015", *Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies,* 2016, 230-256.

[40] See: Salih al-Nuami, "mā warā' al-iḥtifā' al-isrā'īlī bi al-inqilāb al-ʿaskarī fī maṣr" [Behind the Israeli acclamation for the military coup in Egypt], *Siyāsāt ʿarabiyyah* 4 (September 2013), 44-48.

[41] Salih al-Nuami, *al-ʿalāqāt al-maṣriyyah- al-isrā'īliyyah baʿd thawrat 25 yanāyir* [The Egyptian-Israeli relations after the 25 January revolution] (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers; Doha: *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*, 2017), 141-143.

[42] Ibid, 141-143.

[43] See: Urayb al-Rantawi, "ʿawdat al-ikhwān?", *Al-Ayyām*, December 21, 2017, https://goo.gl/500R1a

[44] Abd al-Hamid Dhunaybat (General executive of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan), Interview by author, Istanbul, September 23, 2018.

[45] In addition to Abd al-Hamid Dhunaybat, the secretary general of the Islamic Action Front, al-shaykh Murad al-adaliyyah, supports expanding alliances regionally and internationally. See: Basim al-Badarin, "ʿashā' siyāsī fī ḍiyāfat al-ikhwān al-urduniyyah: naṢaḥnā al-qaṣr bi tanwīʿ al-khayārāt naḥwa rūsyā wa al-ṣīn wa turkiyyah" [Political dinner with the Muslim Brotherhood of Jordan: we advised the authorities to diversify its alliances by turning towards Russia, China and Turkey], *Alquds Alarabi Newspaper*, November 4, 2018, https://goo.gl/ZeL32u

[46] Abd al-Hamid Dhunaybat, Interview by author.

[47] Abu Rumman and Abu Haniyyah, *The Islamist solution in Jordan*, 119.

[48] Beverley Milton-Edwards, "taqyīm taṬawwur muqārabat al-urdun fī al-taʿāmul maʿ al-islāmawiyyah" [Grappling with Islamism: assessing Jordan's evolving approach], Brookings Doha Center Publications 19 (September 2017), 19-20.

[49] For more information, see: Hasan Abu Haniyyah, "hal yushakkil tanẓīm dāʿish khaṬaran ʿalá al-urdun?" [Is ISIS a threat to Jordan?], *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, September 17, 2014, https://goo.gl/YqdV7L.

[50] Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Grappling with Islamism*, 19-20.

[51] Ibid, 20.

[52] For more information, see: Amjad Jebreel, "ittijāhāt wa imkānāt ʾiʿādat al-istiqrār ʾilá al-ʿālam al-ʿarabī" [Directions and possibilities of restoring stability in the Arab world], *dirāsāt sharq awsaṬiyyah* 76 (Summer 2016), 41-65, https://goo.gl/DG4T8G; Hasan Nafah, "al-taḥawwulāt al-siyāsiyyah fī al-mashriq al-ʿarabī fī 2018" [Political transformations in the Levant in 2018], *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*, August 2, 2018, https://goo.gl/EL6U01; Hamid Abd al-Majid Quwaysi, "dawr al-azamāt al-ijtimāʿiyyah wa al-iqtiṣādiyyah fī mawjat al-taghyīr al-qādimah bi al-minṬaqah al-ʿarabiyyah", *Al Jazeera Center for Studies,* June 4, 2018, https://goo.gl/82f6xk

[53] See: Al Sharq Forum, "Insightful Comments of Jamal Khashoggi From His Last Speech at Al Sharq Forum", Youtube video, posted [October 19, 2018], https://goo.gl/Rw7PMX

Political Islam in Post-Arab Spring Kuwait: The Rise of Political Coalitions in an Age of Pragmatism

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Unlike many countries in the region under study in this volume, Kuwait did not undergo a period of Islamist rule or even dominance of the political scene. As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising that, in the period following protests inspired by the Arab Spring, the Kuwaiti government has not led a targeted campaign against Sunni Islamists or the Muslim Brotherhood more specifically, as has happened elsewhere in the region. While the representation of Sunni Islamists in parliament has not changed drastically over the course of the Arab Spring, they have moved increasingly towards the opposition through the formation of new electoral coalitions across ideological divides, and have also increasingly run as independents, suggesting the limits of political blocs in a Kuwaiti political landscape that prohibits parties. While cross-ideological coalitions of the type seen recently in Kuwait have fallen apart elsewhere in the region, they seem to be increasingly popular within Kuwait, potentially due to the weakness of existing political blocs.

Cross-ideological coalitions have successfully altered government policy in the past, most notably leading to the restoration of parliament in 1992 and the decrease in the number of electoral districts from twenty five to five in 2006. While they have thus far not succeeded in changing policy since the Arab Spring, these coalitions have shifted traditional patterns of government patronage, electoral successes, and rhetoric surrounding political reform.

All of Kuwait's Islamist groups, whether Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi or Shi'a, have become increasingly pragmatic since the Arab Spring in terms of their selection of coalition partners. For the Muslim Brotherhood and

increasingly for the activist strand of Salafis, pragmatism involves, or has involved, increased political cooperation with other non-Islamist ideological blocs in an effort to spur political reform. For Shiʿi Islamist groups and for the purist strand of Kuwaiti Salafis, pragmatism has dictated an increasing alignment with the government. For all involved political blocs, the lack of legislation legalising political parties and the introduction of a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system in 2012 have constrained their abilities to attract followers on the basis of ideology.

As we enter firmly into post-Arab Spring Kuwait, lines between opposition and loyalist have become clearer, while the divisions between Islamist and secular are increasingly blurred; indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood's political bloc, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) and activist Salafi blocs are increasingly aligned with secular blocs pushing for political reform, while Shiʿa and Salafi quietists remain loyal to government policies.

In this chapter, I aim to explore how political developments in Kuwait have led to both structural and ideological changes within the Muslim Brotherhood's political bloc and leading Salafi blocs, including the Salafi Islamic Alliance, the Umma Party, the Salafi Movement, and the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, as well as within the Shiʿa National Islamic Alliance (NIA). I will also compare this country case to others, especially in terms of the experience of Islamist members of parliament (MPs) and cabinet members in government from both sects in Kuwait, in effecting concrete policy changes. Finally, I will assess the internal reform of Kuwaiti Islamist movements, particularly how Sunni groups have learned from the experiences of other Brotherhood branches in the region to adapt their political and social agendas.

Coalition-Building in Kuwait

Existing political science literature stresses the rarity of coalition formation in the absence of a contextual shift. Indeed, competition for resources and followers, ideological differences, and even personal or organisational power struggles mean that cross-ideological coalitions succeed only in very specific

circumstances. Suzanne Staggenborg finds that coalitions between social movements are most likely to form "either (1) when individual organizations lack the resources needed to take advantage of opportunities or fend off threats, or (2) when coalition work allows movement organizations to conserve resources for tactics other than those engaged by the coalition."[1] I argue that the Kuwaiti environment, with its lack of political parties law and checks on parliamentary power, means that individual organizations often seek partners since the system affords them greater structural flexibility.

Janine A. Clark further refines the political conditions in which coalitions thrive: "cross-ideological tensions are overcome if coalition partners focus on activities they are unable to carry out individually."[2] This observation has proven to be true for both sides of the political spectrum – a coalition with pro-government figures allows Shi'a Islamists political survival, while a broad-based opposition coalition makes it more likely that reforms will be enacted, yet does not stop other groups from maintaining their normal activities.

Clark also has documented that, even if coalitions fail to achieve their ultimate goals of altering policy, they keep their agenda "at the forefront of the public's attention. For this they feel solidarity is crucial."[3] She further finds that coalitions are most successful in times of a real or perceived external threat and with a loose coalition structure that affords freedom to members rather than creating a new framework.[4] For instance, while there was discussion of the creation of a cross-Brotherhood-Salafi group called the Kuwaiti League of Preachers in 2014, it never materialised, perhaps because it would have placed too many constraints on coalition members; similarly, a rumoured union of the Salafi Movement, Umma Party, and Principles of the Islamic Nation fell through in 2016.[5] By maintaining independent structures and separate institutions, these blocs can retain support from their bases rather than having to sign on to a new agenda that could isolate existing members, especially since they tend to draw support from different segments of the Kuwaiti population. The fact that cross-ideological coalitions

have been discussed seriously, however, suggests that these movements feel pressure from regional moves against Islamists, as well as some recent Kuwaiti government decisions seen as targeting the opposition.

Recent government decisions appear to have solidified coalitions that were forged in 2011 during the Arab Spring and even before that in the efforts to decrease the number of electoral districts and interpellate members of cabinet considered corrupt. The November 2017 ruling by Kuwait's appeals court to jail 67 opposition members from different ideological blocs – including three sitting MPs (one an ICM member) and several former MPs – for their role in having stormed parliament during the 2011 protests indicated the extent to which the Arab Spring protests still colour government decision-making today. Leading opposition figure Musallam al-Barrak was sentenced to nine years in prison, while Salafi Waleed al-Tabtabaie and Muslim Brotherhood MP Jamaan al-Harbash were each sentenced to seven years.[6] The court had previously overturned a ruling by the criminal court that had acquitted the defendants, on grounds that they did not harbour ill intentions. After being held from the end of November 2017, these opposition figures were released in February 2018, and the Cassation Court issued a final ruling in July 2018 which upheld shorter prison sentences for those involved, demonstrating the government's unwillingness to back down on the issue of punishing those involved in the most contentious protests. We expect such actions to drive the creation of loose coalitions, especially those in favour of wide-ranging political reform, such as an elected prime minister and strengthened parliamentary oversight.

The Arab Spring in Kuwait and the Creation of an Opposition Coalition
While Kuwait did not experience nearly the political transformation of other countries in the region or even in this volume, it certainly felt the effects of the Arab Spring in terms of political protests. The issue of corruption, long pervasive in Kuwaiti politics, became a flashpoint for political mobilisation. Kuwait is ranked 85 of 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, scoring an unimpressive 39 out of 100 in terms

of the perception of public sector corruption, lower than any GCC state except Bahrain.[7] Unsurprisingly, then, claims about graft in the political sphere led to the largest protests in Kuwaiti history in 2011, with frustration having built up for years before the advent of the Arab Spring.

The incumbent parliament at the time of the Arab Spring had been elected in May 2009 and was the first regime-friendly legislature in nearly twenty years.[8] With elections having been held in 2003, 2006, and 2008 due to previous dissolutions, voter turnout was low, and many candidates ran as independents, perhaps an indictment of the perceived efficacy of existing political blocs.[9] The unpopular Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammad al-Sabah, whose interpellation had been demanded by independent Salafi MPs and the ICM in the previous parliament due to allegations of corruption, was held behind closed doors in December 2009, marking the first time a prime minister was questioned in parliament. Since Shaykh Nasser, the amir's nephew, was questioned by a loyalist legislature, 30 of whose voting members had pledged their support for the premier ahead of the interpellation, however, the vote of no confidence failed.[10]

Shaykh Nasser maintained his position, and "tensions that built throughout 2010 carried over into 2011," with sustained demands for the interpellation of Shaykh Nasser and new calls for similar questioning of Interior Minister Jaber al-Khaled al-Sabah after police were accused of fatally torturing prisoner Mohammad al-Maymouny al-Mutairi.[11] Although Interior Minister al-Sabah resigned, ongoing protests throughout the Middle East continued as the Arab Spring gained momentum, spurring more unrest in Kuwait. In March, a Shiʻa MP asked to question the foreign minister about Kuwait's involvement in the crackdown on protesters in Bahrain, leading the cabinet to resign.[12]

A new cabinet was formed in May 2011, with six new ministers in place yet still under the leadership of the still unpopular Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser. The issue of corruption remained pervasive in the new government,

particularly as protests swept the region demanding accountability of governments to their citizenry. A new political crisis emerged in September 2011, when reports emerged that major Kuwaiti banks had deposited $350 million to 16 MPs (about one-third of the elected MPs) to convince them to vote in favour of certain government initiatives.[13] Earlier that year, the parliament had removed through a vote of no confidence the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development and Housing Affairs Shaykh Ahmad, on charges of corruption.[14] Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Mohammad al-Sabah resigned to protest the corruption charges, and one of the largest demonstrations in Kuwaiti history, with some 10,000 participants, took place in September.

In November 2011, following repeated calls for his resignation amid increasingly large protests, Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser stepped down. Although such a move could have satisfied the opposition years earlier, the concession did little to stem the tide of ongoing protests.[15] Kuwaiti youth and MPs from liberal and Islamist groups, outraged at what they considered rampant corruption within the system, also began demanding that the prime minister be elected rather than appointed by the amir. Continued protests led to the government's resignation and dissolution of parliament in December.[16]

The February 2012 election, perhaps unsurprisingly, was a landslide victory for the cross-ideological opposition, which includes Brotherhood and Salafi, as well as tribal MPs, who together won 34 of the 50 elected seats.[17] The Salafi and Brotherhood blocs each won all four seats they contested; the liberal and merchant factions did less well, at the expense particularly of tribal candidates, thereby widening divisions between the urban merchant elite and tribal badū.[18] This parliament was voided, however, four months later, as the Constitutional Court declared the dissolution of the previous parliament unconstitutional.[19] The Court thus reinstated the pro-regime 2009 National Assembly. Encouraged by this political victory, amir Shaykh Sabah asked the court to review the legality of the 2006 redistricting law

that decreased the number of districts from 25 to five, itself an initiative of the opposition, yet the court rejected this request.[20] The secular-Islamist opposition coalition widely protested the re-imposition of the 2009 parliament, a controversial incursion of the judiciary into political life.[21]

In October 2012, amir Shaykh Sabah, on grounds of "chaotic sedition that could jeopardize our country (and) undermine our national unity,"[22] had the cabinet change voting rules ahead of the December elections, effectively converting the system from one that allowed each voter four votes to a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system – in a move that "disregarded the court's previous ruling on the matter, as well as the opposition's demands of complying with the 2006 electoral law."[23] As a result, the opposition boycotted the December 2012 polls, leading to a low 39 percent turnout rate (compared to 60 percent in February) and, predictably, returning a pro-government National Assembly.[24] Sunni Islamist representation was the most drastically affected, decreasing from 23 MPs to four.[25] The parliament was dominated by independent MPs, with the historically pro-government Shi'a Islamic National Alliance the largest bloc represented, with five MPs. [26]

In June 2013, the Constitutional Court once again dissolved parliament, after facing down opposition claims that it was voted in under an invalid electoral law. Many opposition groups, including Islamists, tribal leaders, and liberal groups, boycotted the July 2013 polls, again in protest of the change in electoral law. As a result, the parliament between 2013 and November 2016 was dominated by a blend of liberal and tribal blocs, with independents, including "service" or pro-government MPs, holding 30 of the 50 seats.

New parliamentary elections were originally scheduled for June 2017, but many believe that they were pushed ahead to November 2016 since popular opposition figure Musallam al-Barrak was scheduled for release from prison in June 2017. As rumours swirled that the opposition would end its electoral boycott after the Constitutional Court had affirmed legality of the new

electoral law in 2013,[27] the government sought to diminish its ability to garner votes. Parliament thus passed, in June 2016, with 40 of 50 members in support, a law to bar Kuwaitis who have been convicted for insulting the amir, God, and the prophets from running in elections.[28] Due to the large number of politically motivated arrests since 2011, this law in theory prevented a large number of potential candidates from running. The other most controversial piece of legislation passed under the loyalist parliament, which has since been overturned by Kuwait's Constitutional Court,[29] requiring DNA testing of all citizens for reasons of national security.[30]

Despite such attempts to diminish opposition electoral involvement and to tighten government control more generally, the opposition won around half of the parliament's elected seats, and 60 percent of seats in parliament changed hands in an election that provoked 70 percent voter turnout.[31] Because the amir enjoyed a rather politically pliant parliament between December 2012 and November 2016, this election altered the Kuwaiti political landscape, with the opposition now able to question government decisions through institutionalised mechanisms for the first time in four years. The Brotherhood won three of the five seats it contested but informally has a fourth under its control, while the Salafis won four seats as independents. Pro-government Salafis had a poor showing; the winning candidates support the opposition but ran as independents. The cross-ideological opposition is now firmly in control of around half of the elected seats after having boycotted the legislature for nearly four years, demonstrating the ability of political blocs to maintain their following even in the absence of institutional political power; how strong and united this coalition remains, however, is uncertain.

A cabinet reshuffle occurred in November 2016, less than a week after parliament was elected and after the interrogation of the minister of information which led to prime minister's resignation, signalling that the opposition had returned to the political scene. Otherwise, the parliament has not been overly contentious, despite the fact that tribal MPs had met

before the election to plan a series of interpellations to force a cabinet reshuffle.[32] In May 2017, the opposition interpellated, in a 13-hour session, Prime Minister Shaykh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Sabah and State Minister for Housing Yasser Abul on allegations of corruption and on the revocation of citizenship during the Arab Spring. Nonetheless, the legislature did not submit a non-cooperation motion or vote of no confidence, but instead struck a deal with the government as a means of avoiding the premier's grilling by the return of citizenships of six families, including that of former MP Abdullah al-Barghash and Islamist preacher Shaykh Nabil al-Awadhi. Though this step represents limited cooperation, a legacy of distrust in the executive and increasingly in the judiciary has led the opposition to be cautious in its dealings with the non-elected government and insistent about the need for reform.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood is Kuwait's oldest and most organised Islamist political bloc, with its social movement Jami'at al-Islah al-Ijtima'i founded in 1951 largely to organise educational, social, and charitable activities, and its political arm, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) created in 1991 to run electoral campaigns. The Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood has historically enjoyed close ties with the government, to such an extent that its members have been accused of receiving benefits like control of institutions such as the Kuwait Finance House and Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

Since the Iraqi occupation, a turning point for Salafis as well (discussed below), the ICM has progressively become more focussed on political reform and thus more closely associated with the broad-based political opposition. During the mid-1990s, the ICM began joining electoral coalitions with secular members of the political opposition. In the 1992 election, the first held after the Iraqi invasion and occupation, the Brotherhood ran seven candidates as part of a broader opposition coalition that had worked to urge for the return of parliament, which won 35 of the 50 elected seats; the ICM won five of the seven seats it contested. [33] Over time, however, despite the

fact that the ICM had publicly supported 25 candidates, some of whom were secular, the coalition began to crumble.[34] The ICM continued in efforts to change article 2 of the constitution to proclaim shariʿa the rather than a source of legislation – a measure which ended up failing when it was put to a vote due to a cabinet reshuffle; five Islamist MPs then suggested the establishment of an authority to direct the public to good and away from evil in each district to report violations of appropriate religious behaviour; the Brotherhood also tried to overturn Kuwait University's decision to ban the wearing of the niqab in laboratories and backed gender segregation which passed in 1996 after having been voted down in 1994.[35] Such emphasis on the types of social issues that divided secular and Islamist members of the opposition led their coalition to ultimately crumble, even though they did work together, for instance, to fight corruption. In 1996, the ICM again won five seats, periodically cooperating with other members of the opposition. In the 2003 election, the ICM won only two seats, the worst showing in decades, leading to major internal changes which eventually led the ICM to participate more often in cross-opposition coalitions.[36] The 2006 election demonstrated the success of these new measures, with the ICM winning six seats in parliament; this occasion also marked the first time the ICM joined the opposition in vocally agitating for greater political reform. In particular, the nabīhā khamsah (we want five) movement, with ICM support, organised protests throughout May 2006 to diminish the number of districts from 25 to five; the protests became so serious that new elections were called, which affirmed the opposition's popularity. The ICM won six seats as part of the 35-member opposition bloc, and the five-district law was passed by a majority opposition parliament.

The ICM joined the opposition-wide electoral boycott from December 2012 until November 2016 due to objections to the new electoral law which granted each Kuwaiti one, rather than four, votes. Moves like the change to the electoral law have changed strategy, as well as opinions about the government more generally. The ICM was one of the first blocs to decide to break the boycott, citing the court's affirmation of the new electoral

law as legitimising it. One former ICM MP explained that there were two main reasons for ending the boycott: (1) people began to realise that the government's claims that it could not get legislation through parliament was incorrect, even with a loyalist legislature; and (2) the moment the ICM left parliament, the political environment deteriorated, as evidenced by the laws passed during that period.[37] He went on to explain that members of the ICM met with the amir directly to inform him of their decision to run in the upcoming elections, demonstrating the extent to which, though the ICM is part of the opposition, it is by no means an enemy of the regime.[38]

Since the handing down of prison sentences to members of the opposition, including sitting ICM MP Jamaan al-Harbash, the ICM has, in the words of one member, tried to be conciliatory to secure the general pardon of these prisoners, as well as the return of citizenship to people from whom it was revoked during the Arab Spring era.[39] The same ICM member, however, also expressed pessimism that reforms will be enacted, stating that the opposition is hurt by the fact that many opposition leaders will now be imprisoned and by regional currents that are making many people less willing to take a stand against the government.[40] On the whole, however, this environment has not stymied the development of a loosely organised opposition coalition in Kuwait, of which Salafis form an important part.

The Salafi Political Landscape
Generally speaking, Salafis differ from members of the Muslim Brotherhood primarily in their focus on the examples of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, with emphasis on the oldest sources as closest to the "true" meaning of Islam and thus most desirable.[41] The word *salaf* is the Arabic term for ancestors, emphasising the importance of literalist Qurʾanic interpretations.[42] Because Salafism does not have a single vision, there is no one interpretation for how Salafis behave politically, meaning that Salafis have taken on a variety of political stances. The main division is between purist and activist (ḥarakī) Salafis: purist Salafis tend to believe that Islam requires their obedience to the political leader and oppose democracy, since

it is the prerogative of God, rather than of people, to choose their leader. Activist, or ḥarakī, Salafis, on the other hand, reject the traditional notions of the requirement of political quiescence and often become active in electoral contexts, where they tend to focus more on pragmatic issues than on more ideological ones.

The emergence of the Sahwa movement, which originated in Saudi Arabia, was important in solidifying this division in the Gulf. The movement emerged largely in the 1960s "[o]ut of the interactions between home-grown Wahhabi piety and the large number of Muslim Brothers from Egypt and Syria" who were employed in the Saudi educational system, yet held religious beliefs distinct from the Saudi Wahhabi apparatus.[43] The movement gained momentum in the 1990s due to discomfort with the increasingly close ties between Gulf states and the United States after the Iraqi invasion, marking one of the first time Salafis openly criticised decisions made by their government.[44] Since the Arab Spring came to Kuwait, that country's Salafi landscape has become increasingly fractured, with the four main blocs discussed here eventually breaking down further into independent candidates.[45]

Kuwait's first Salafi organisation was created in 1981 under the banner of Jam'īyat Iḥiaʾ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, or the Society for the Revival of the Islamic Heritage (RIHS). It initially adhered to the quietist ideology of Egyptian cleric Shaykh Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Khaliq, who considered participation in parliamentary elections an acceptable action for Salafis. In fact, the RIHS was the first Salafi group anywhere in the world to participate in parliamentary elections in 1981, when it won two seats. The group contested parliamentary elections but not as a challenge to the government's authority; indeed, Shaykh Fahad al-Ahmad al-Sabah of the ruling family was one of the founders of the organisation and a funder of it.[46] The RIHS entered parliamentary life, then, not on grounds to challenge the leadership but rather considered entry into parliament as "an excellent opportunity to defend the daʿwa, to support legislation that ensures the Islamic character of society and to practice

ḥisba (commanding right and forbidding wrong)."[47] To that end, Salafis in parliament in the 1980s and 1990s, like the Muslim Brotherhood during the period, tended to back laws concerning social policies like forbidding the sale of alcohol on Kuwait Airways flights; they were also traditionally critical of other Salafi groups who insulted the amir or opposed his policies.[48]

The Salafi Islamic Association (al-Tajammuʿ al-Salafī al-Islāmī, hereafter ISA) was created in 1991 as a more activist branch of the RIHS immediately after liberation from Iraq when activist Salafi had become more popular in the Gulf. Indeed, the activist, or ḥarakī, Salafis who still follow the teachings of Shaykh Abd al-Khaliq became disillusioned and left the RIHS in 1997 to join other groups.[49] Purists came to dominate the RIHS in the mid-1990s under the leadership Shaykh Abdullah al-Sabt, leading to the eventual expulsion of Abd al-Khaliq and his followers. The ISA today, according to Zoltan Pall, effectively serves as the political wing of the RIHS.[50] Although these two groups remain technically separate, Pall explains that "it is an open secret that they are closely interlinked institutional arms of the Salafi Community—in some regions of the country, the Salafi Islamic Gathering's electoral campaigns are even organized by employees of the RIHS."[51] This unity of purpose has left a gap in the market for the emergence of other activist Salafi groups, which will be described in detail below.

The ISA's support for political reform has not prevented it from also being politically active when it comes to social issues, with its leader Ahmad Baqir in the 1990s at the forefront at efforts to form a committee to monitor moral behaviour and with the agenda largely focussed on "Islamization of the laws, institution of the shariʿa as the sole source of legislation, bans on alcohol and musical concerts etc." [52] Bjorn Olav Utvik traces a change in this agenda in the late 2000s, however, when ISA MPs campaigned on shariʿa, as well as more overtly political issues like development of the economy and granting rights to people without passports, or bidūn; another ISA MP, Khalid Sultan, even went so far as to call for an elected prime minister.[53] Unsurprisingly, then, the ISA joined the opposition-wide effort to decrease the number of

electoral districts from 25 to five in 2005, an initiative not supported by all Salafis especially those independents from the outer tribal districts; the ISA also, during the 2008 elections, warned that "the government should not meddle with elections and come down heavily on candidates who criticize it," in addition to criticising corporate involvement in elections. [54] While it is more reserved than the Salafi Movement and Umma Party, discussed below, the ISA has still steadfastly defended the constitution in the face of challenges, even on the part of the ruling family. In 2011, for instance, the ISA called for a new cabinet and prime minister with the rest of the broad-based opposition.[55] Further, quite tellingly, in the eyes of the former head of the ISA, Khalid al-Sultan, Islamisation can be "seen in many lights including serving people's needs, improving education and health services, and spreading morals and values like justice, accountability, and transparency."[56]

In 1996, al-ḥarakāt al-Salafīyah, or the Salafi Movement, emerged as an offshoot of the RIHS and the ISA, seeking to advocate political reform rather than the traditional Salafi agenda of primarily social reforms. To that end, the group has been remarkably outspoken in agitating for changes like an elected prime minister and as a result has become increasingly oppositional to the government. There is some debate about reasons for the formation of the Movement: one school of thought is that it emerged because some members of RIHS were critical of the Kuwaiti alliance with the United States; ISA politician Ali al-Umayr, however, said that the split was due to differences in specific points of domestic policy, rather than ideology.[57] For instance, he opposed the suggestion of members of the Salafi Movement that the state bail out private debtors as being overly populist and fostering greater reliance on the state.[58]

Walid al-Tabatabaie, a longtime Salafi Movement MP (though now serving as an independent) and professor of Islamic studies, has been one of the most socially conservative politicians on the Kuwaiti scene, yet is also a good example of increased Salafi political activism. He has proposed a bill

for the implementation of shariʿa penalties and has chaired the Committee against Unacceptable Phenomena in Society, but also during the particularly turbulent years 2009-2012 called for greater parliamentary power without mention of the social policies he once so vocally backed.[59] Further, in 2009, al-Tabatabaie joined two MPs from the ICM and the independent Islamist Faysal al-Muslim in a Bloc for Development and Reform, in favour of an elected government, with al-Tabatabaie even going so far as to state that Jabir al-Mubarak would be the last al-Sabah prime minister.[60] Most recently, al-Tabatabaie was sentenced in November to five years in prison for storming parliament with other protesters, which was reduced to 3.5 years in July 2018.[61]

Ḥizb al-Ummah, or the Umma Party, was created in 2005, pointedly calling itself a political party, although parties are technically banned in Kuwait. Like the Salafi Movement, it advocates for political reform and is firmly in the activist camp. In the effort to do so, it has come to resemble the Muslim Brotherhood's political branch increasingly. The Party notably was very supportive of women running in and voting in elections, with one MP associated with the Movement having voted in favour of women being granted the right to vote in 2005 when his fellow members opposed it.[62]

Hakim al-Mutayri remains a key figure of Kuwaiti Salafism, having led both the Salafi Movement and Umma Party: "On one hand, he insists on the ultimate sovereignty of God expressed through the implementation of the shariʿa as basic law, while on the other hand, he emphatically underlines the right of the people to have the decisive word in the election of rulers and the supervision of their rule."[63] The formation of the Umma Party, then, was very much aligned with al-Mutayri's political beliefs, since he has opined that people should select their leaders, as well as supervise them. In 2008, the Umma Party ran 12 candidates, more than any other political bloc, but did not have any elected. While not very powerful in parliament, then, al-Mutayri is "a strong voice within the educated segment of Kuwait's Bedouin population, which is making its voice heard ever more strongly and

which is growing faster than the rest of the population."[64] Through his support of both religious conservatism and a representative government, al-Mutayri has become a region-wide ideologue for Salafi youth – to the consternation of conservative Salafis who believe that he, like other activist shaykhs, compromises Salafi values and makes them resemble the Muslim Brotherhood too closely.[65]

Notably, the division of Kuwait's Salafis into distinct political blocs also reflects demographic divides, which also dictates which coalitions they form. The ISA largely draws support from among the urban ḥaḍar, while the Salafi Movement initially enjoyed support from segments of society (Walid al-Tabatabaie hails from a ḥaḍar family), yet eventually the bloc has gained increased support from badū.[66] The Umma Party, by contrast, has been considered largely the preserve of "young Bedouin intellectuals" following teachings of the shariʿa scholar Hakim al-Mutayri.[67] As Utvik aptly summarises,

On the one hand, from within the traditional political class of the hadar salafi, politicians are crafting a programme that fuses concern for Islamic mores with a pragmatic development-oriented agenda for reform. On the other hand, from within the emerging educated class among the Bedouin population, conservative Islamists are formulating a modern party program that calls for thorough constitutional reform in the direction of a popularly elected government, free party formation and peaceful rotation of power between competing political tendencies.[68]

Although two firmly activist Salafi groups have emerged, they have been largely unsuccessful in gaining seats in parliament, usually winning one seat through Walid al-Tabtabaie who in the 2016 elections ran as an independent. [69] These independents have also been quite critical of the executive authority, with three independent Salafi MPs having initiative the first-ever interpellation of a prime minister on grounds of "failing to perform his

constitutional duties and achieving the wishes of the people."[70] Overall, though, activist Salafis have tended to have more influence in parliament by forming coalitions with other opposition-linked blocs. The more purist ISA, in contrast, has tended to hold between eight and ten seats in parliament.[71] Notwithstanding the electoral imbalance, "Kuwaiti harakis are important members of transnational Salafi networks. The country is a significant transnational meeting point for activist-minded Salafis. Harakis from all around the world frequently make informal visits to Kuwait to meet individuals such as 'Abd al-Khaliq or al-Mutayri."[72]

The Sunni Islamist Political Landscape

The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups, particularly quietists, have long competed for government support. Indeed, as described above, the Muslim Brotherhood initially enjoyed government backing since it was seen as a bulwark against Arab nationalism that was considered more politically threatening in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the government even extended "political and financial assistance to the Muslim Brotherhood" again in an effort to stymie nationalist efforts. Most important, according to Pall, were government efforts to ensure that the Muslim Brotherhood did not have too much power over the country's Sunni Muslims. With the help of state "institutional and financial backing," the Salafi movement became a viable competitor with the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly its social branch, Jamʿīyat Iḥiaʾ al-Turāth al-Islāmī.[73] The RIHS and ISA became understandably attractive groups for government support since they did not participate in the 2011 uprisings, with only limited support for the protests among the RIHS membership. Indeed, texts behind quietist Salafism, as mentioned above, forbid rebelling against a legitimate ruler – an opinion that the RIHS and ISA made clear through Friday prayers, lectures, and over traditional and social media at a time when the Muslim Brotherhood was becoming increasingly involved with the opposition.[74] Such actions unsurprisingly made the existing division between loyalist and Salafis clearer, leading MP Khalid Sultan bin Isa to leave the ISA and RIHS. [75] While bin Isa was elected, the Salafi Community failed to gain a single

seat in parliament for the first time in its history, yet its links with the ruling family remain intact.[76]

Unable to win a seat in parliament, loyalist Salafis instead have maintained political relevance through their position in state institutions, particularly the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Perhaps most notably, Ali al-Umayr of the ISA was appointed oil minister and later minister of public works.[77] Still, as Pall explains, granting members of quietist Salafi groups positions in state Islamic institutions like the Zakat House, Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, and Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation, has been a critical means of co-opting this segment of Sunni Islamists.[78]

Competition between Salafi and Brotherhood members for such positions within bureaucratised religious establishments dates back to the 1980s, with composition fluctuating according to the government's political concerns. In fact, the Brotherhood created the idea of the Zakat House, which was led by a member Abd al-Qadir al-Ajil until his 2014 retirement. Al-Ajil was replaced by Ibrahim Salih, a member of the RIHS. Further, "[a] number of Zakat House employees who had belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood were retired or their contracts were not renewed, and they were replaced by Salafis or unaffiliated government loyalists."[79] Most department heads, along with the deputy minister Farid al-Imadi, are Salafi, understandably leading to the proliferation of Salafi-controlled mosques.[80] The Muslim Brotherhood has notably maintained positions within the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation, which supervises the country's Islamic endowments for charity, despite changes in the ministry.[81]

Overall, Utvik makes the important point that Salafi participation in the political sphere to any extent and with any views is itself important, as it "works to de-sacralize the discourse and practice of salafis in another important way. Accepting that they compete in an open political field, at least, implicitly means acknowledging the legitimacy of other ideological trends, thus giving up the claim to represent the only possible truth."[82]

This opening up could potentially lead to secularisation of the political field due to broader-reaching acceptance of secular groups, just as the Muslim Brotherhood has become increasingly willing to work in loose coalitions with secular political blocs to effect broad political reform.[83]

The Shiʿa Islamist Sphere

Kuwait houses two politically active Shiʿa Islamist contingents, most notably under the umbrella of the National Islamic Alliance (NIA). This bloc has, particularly since 2008, and despite rising regional tensions with Iran, been considered primarily loyal to the regime and supportive of its policies, in opposition to the positions taken by Kuwait's major Sunni Islamist groups. The NIA was initially founded in 1998 and traces its roots to Hizbullah of Kuwait, which first emerged in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution in Iran. As such, the NIA remains ideologically linked to Tehran and the teachings of Khomeini , as well as following the dogma of wilāyat al-faqīh.

The group describes its initial goals as "to expand religiosity among the youth and spread commitment to religion in society," as well as to "spread the concepts of faith."[84] When acting in that capacity, the group was known as the Society of Culture related to the Society of Social Culture, which was founded in 1963. [85] Over the course of the 1970s, the group created "religious cultural programs" and spread "a culture of coexistence and interdependence."[86] The NIA notably supported the restoration of parliament in 1981 (it had been dissolved in 1976), and three linked MPs were elected: Sayed Adnan Abdel-Samad, Nasser Sarhour, and Abdul-Mohsen Jamal. The group agreed to rename itself the National Islamic Alliance in the mid-1990s and is committed to "tackling corruption and delinquency."[87]

As a consequence of not participating in the opposition-wide boycott between 2012 and 2016, the NIA expanded its representation in parliament, thereby becoming an increasingly influential (though loyalist) political bloc in Kuwait in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. After the Imad Mughniyeh scandal in 2008, when several Kuwaiti Shiʿa politicians attended a memorial

for the militant who was said to have been involved in attacks on Kuwait in the 1980s and the discovery of the Abdali cell in 2015, wherein Shiʿa militants were said to have stored weapons from Iran, the INA's coalition with the government has only become more important as a means of ensuring its survival and its influence in policymaking in particular.

The Justice and Peace Assembly (JPA) created in 2004, is Kuwait's other Shiʿa political bloc. It differs from the NIA in that its members come primarily from the Shirazi school with a clear pro-government stance, and because it has very low levels of representation in parliament. It has historically promoted itself as more moderate than the NIA and has long held a clearly loyalist stance but has very low levels of representation, so fails to have much influence on policymaking.[88]

Both blocs comprise many members of the merchant elite, so they have a vested interest in maintaining the political status quo. Due to their political alignment, the only potential coalition between Shiʿa and Sunni political blocs would appear to be between purist pro-government Salafis and Shiʿa, but such cooperation is unlikely due to the theological beliefs of Salafis towards Shiʿa.

Conclusions

On the whole, Kuwait's Islamist landscape in the post-Arab Spring era has shifted around two broad-based cross-ideological coalitions: opposition and loyalist. As discussed above, the Muslim Brotherhood and segments of activist Salafis have set aside their traditional agendas focussed on social policies to agitate for broad-based political reform; Shiʿa Islamists and purist Salafis, on the other hand, have, although separately, fostered a relationship with the ruling elites to maintain some degree of influence in policy making, whether in social policy for Salafis or more broadly to maintain the political status quo on the part of the Shiʿa Islamists.[89]

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Chapter 6

The Political Benefits of an Ambiguous Ideology:
The Nour al-Din al-Zenki Islamic Movement in Syria

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The outburst of the Syrian uprising in April 2011 and its later unfolding have deeply transformed the Syrian landscape: new administrative units and movements have been formed to deal with new challenges, especially the unstoppable violence targeting peaceful protestors. The leadership of the political opposition, which had been consolidated outside rather than inside Syria, limited its concrete effectiveness on the ground. The lack of a powerful leadership to guide the protests contributed to a social response characterized by two elements: spontaneity and locality. These two characteristics would later guide the underlying dynamics and changes of political movements and their organizations on the ground. The rise of the Salafi-jihadist movements followed by the intervention of Iranian Shiite militias supporting the regime and the rise of Kurdish extremist groups all contributed to the restructuring of the revolutionary military forces, growing tensions over opposition political rhetoric, and the formation of new politico-military alliances. The conflict was also an opportunity for regional and foreign states to intervene in the war through military and financial support, especially as the coordination gap between political leadership and groups on the ground began deepening.

Seven years after the conflict, the landscape of political Islam in Syria is still fragmented, and the uncertainty and ambiguity of the political situation has led to more transformations and fragmentation. Therefore, this chapter will focus on an example of these newly formed politico-military movements that represent a new phenomenon in Syrian Political Islam: Islamic movement Nour al-Din al-Zenki (NDZ) that emerged in the western Aleppo countryside (in northwestern Syria). Although the NDZ was one

among the first movements to take on civilian volunteers during the period of the militarization of the revolution, it persisted and survived unlike many other groups that were formed at that time.

The NDZ movement has not been subject to analysis and the brief journalistic and informational reports that have emerged do not offer a thorough understanding of the movement. The reason for this neglect might be due to the fact that the movement has not played a central role in the entire political scene in Syria, as it has always been a middle-sized local movement. On the other hand, it remains one of the very few movements whose territories have not radically changed since its inception. It also enjoys significant influence and stability in these territories. Recently, the movement has been gaining unprecedented importance given its strategic location by the Syrian-Turkish border. This study therefore investigates the NDZ movement, its ideological transformations and motivation, its experience in local governance and its internal structure. The study is relying on collecting credible information through direct observation, interviews, testimonies, and documents. Given the complexity of the events being studied, I will be analyzing the collected information following a multidisciplinary approach using theories from political sociology and various other social sciences.

I.Background: Islamist Parties in the Pre-Revolutionary Era

The history of political Islam in Syria goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century and the establishment of the Syrian nation in the 1920s. Islamic charity organizations played the role of political movements despite the establishment of political parties whose role only became important in the sixties and beyond.[1] Between 1936 and 1946, a number of Islamic organizations coalesced to form the first Islamist movement in Syria: the Society of Muslim Brothers in Syria which continues to be a main actor in Syrian politics.[2] Mustafa al-Siba'i was the first elected leader of the movement. The Muslim Brotherhood movement was initially formed as part of the nationalist resistance against colonial rule and joined competition between nationalist movements for power during the independence period that followed. Like other Islamist movements of the time, both the foundational period and the founder would later guide the movement's

ideology and its future. Despite the establishment of other Islamist movements in Syria, namely al-Tahrir party, initially formed in Palestine and then in Syria in the mid-fifties, political Islam was largely undertaken by the Muslim Brotherhood while the role of al-Tahrir party remained marginal.

The Muslim Brotherhood formed alliances with various parties in Syria, including the Communist party. The situation changed upon the establishment of the United Arab Republic and the union with Egypt, whose leader at the time, Gamal Abdel Nasser, stipulated the dissolution of Syria's parties and parliaments. Consequently, military rule replaced democratic life and the Egyptian Revolutionary Command Council replaced the parliament. Although the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt were persecuted by the regime, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood supported the union with Egypt and did not oppose Nasser's policies. In other words, their political positions remained largely informed by their ideology, which opposed fragmentation. During and after the period of union with Egypt, the military ruled Syria and democracy and political diversity became a thing of the past. While military dictatorship prevailed, and the Muslim Brotherhood was left on the outskirts of political life, they were still able to muster support in the country's big cities. The group slowly developed into the main opposition front against military rule because communists, leftists, and minorities were aligned with the military.[3] The secret Al-Tahrir party, however, remained unattractive to young people protesting the regime.

In late 1978, demonstrations led by parties and syndicates in big cities broke out in Syria's largest cities (particularly Aleppo and Damascus). The demonstrations soon became more like an uprising.[4] In the meantime, Marwan Hadid declared the establishment of a new organization, The Young Fighters (al-Talīʿah al-muqatilah), on June 16, 1979 the day the infamous madrasat al-madfaʿiyyah incident took place in Aleppo, in which many Alevite soldiers were killed. The regime, however, channeled the peaceful demonstrations into armed clashes motivated by sectarianism and politics: the Muslim Brotherhood against Baathists and Sunnis against Alevites. Consequently, the death toll reached tens of thousands and the regime was able to end the conflict by carrying out a massacre in Hama (between 2-28

February 1982) after besieging the city, bombarding and invading it. The operation resulted in the killing of 40,000 civilians.

The Diaspora and the Organization's Ineffective Alliances

Tens of thousands of Islamists and others who opposed the repressive policies of Hafez al-Assad were arrested. After the massacre in Palmyra (Tadmur) prison on June 26, 1980, where around 1,000 prisoners were executed, the issue of political detainment was forced out of public discourse. In the eighties, the Assad regime ran public life with an iron fist. Intelligence and security forces administered every detail of life. As a result, members of the Brotherhood and their families were forced to flee Syria along with members of Tanẓīm al-Talīʿah, most of whom were also members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Islamist and opposition parties were then persecuted and banned from public life. A small fraction of leftist and progressive movements that were offshoot of the National Progressive Front (led by the Baath party) and the Communist labor union were able to operate in a limited way in secret. Al-Tahrir party was also able to operate in secret but in broader terms. The regime seemed to have allowed the party to operate as a reward for its stance against the Muslim Brotherhood.

On March 11, 1982, the Muslim Brotherhood established a political alliance with Syrian opposition forces in exile (in Baghdad) under the name "the National Alliance for the Liberation of Syria", but it did not end up having any concrete influence. It did, however, send a clear message to the regime concerning the persistence of an opposition. And although the alliance did not bring any direct benefits to the Muslim Brotherhood, the alliance helped the organization earn a political and national reputation in place of its religious reputation given the confrontation between the regime and the group that had been underlined by a sectarian tone and motivation.

Besides administering public life, the Assad regime had complete control over all traditional Sunni and non-Sunni religious organizations. Religious leaders supporting the regime emerged, but were unable to form any real organizations given their traditional outlook and the repressive political situation.[5] In the early nineties, Salafist sentiment began to loom in Syria

especially after the return of fighters from Afghanistan, the war against Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the coup against Islamists after they won an election in Algeria, the second Gulf War, and the first Palestinian intifada. This Salafist inclination was, however, very limited in scope and remained isolated.

Islamists in Syria remained outside of the political game, but despite that reality, Hafez al-Assad seemed obsessed with fear of Islamists taking over after his death. He thus initiated a series of negotiations with the Muslim Brotherhood after the death of his elder son Basel Al-Assad in a car accident in 1994. The aim of the negotiations was to guarantee the transition of power to his son with support of the Sunni majority population influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Assad, however, did not trust the Muslim Brotherhood because of the history of violent persecution, so he stopped the negotiations while his regime continued to persecute its members. The repressive measures that were deployed against members of the organization were soon felt by wider society.[6] Hafez al-Assad sought the help of Iran to facilitate the transition of power to his son. He also reached out to the rising power of Hezbollah in Lebanon to guarantee the neighboring country's stability. In order to secure a smooth power transition, by the end of 1999, a time when Assad's health was rapidly deteriorating, Syrian intelligence began persecuting the members of Al-Tahrir Party, whose underground activities the security was aware of. On June 10, 2000, Bashar al-Assad took office.

Upon the assassination of the former prime minister of Lebanon, Rafiq al-Hariri and the accusations against the Syrian regime, the Syrian opposition seized the opportunity to re-launch its political activity. By virtue of being the largest and the most organized body with the opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood was an important constituent to be involved in the activity. In October 2005, the opposition issued the "Damascus Declaration", in which it laid out its mission and principles. Soon after, the declaration attracted other opposition leaders, who later formed an opposition coalition in Damascus. Despite the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood constituted the largest opposition force, its representative power in the coalition was not as significant given that the location of the coalition was inside Syria.

Only five months after the proclamation of the Damascus Declaration, the Muslim Brotherhood formed another alliance with former vice president of Syria Abdul Halim Khaddam in March 2006. This alliance, "the National Salvation Front" (NSF) constituted of the Brotherhood along with Khaddam and other emerging parties little heard of outside Syria. The Muslim Brotherhood perceived the alliance as follows: "the alliances established by the opposition forces in Syria do not negate the independence and difference of each party… the organization attempted to cooperate with Al-Jabha parties including secular and nationalist parties in order to accomplish our shared national project by overcoming challenges and criticism".[7]

After a meeting between Kurdish Sheikh Mashooq al-Khaznawi and the supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood Ali Sadreddine Al-Bayanouni in Europe in June 2006, the Syrian regime assassinated al-Khaznawi, who had been in the process of building a Kurdish Islamist movement since the death of Hafez al-Assad. Clearly, the Syrian regime, which was already under international pressure, perceived a potential alliance between the Kurds and the Muslim Brotherhood a real threat. As the Islamist Kurds (Al-Khaznawi movement) appeared to be more inclined towards Kurdish nationalism, the Muslim Brotherhood revisited their strategy, opening up to the Turkish ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and urging the Turkish party to reconsider its relationship with the Assad regime. Consequently, Turkish politicians negotiated with the Syrian regime to allow Muslim Brotherhood members to return to Syria. Accordingly, the Muslim Brotherhood ended their alliance with the opposition as a step towards reintegrating into Syrian political life and the regime. This initiative, however, has not yielded any concrete outcomes.

An Unexpected Return
The onset of the 2011 uprising forced serious changes on the social and political dimensions. However, the major development shaping the unfolding events was the militarization of the uprising, a step that took place for two main reasons: the protection of the peaceful protestors and the rejection of military intervention against the population. The first motivation led to the creation of small armed units defending the protestors against the military; and the second contributed to the formation of military groups led by generals and soldiers

who had split from the army. And while the military units formed by civilian volunteers were local in nature, the military groups that were established by ex-army members took a national outlook. Moreover, the local military units were driven by ideology (often the ideology of their founders) while the military groups were not marked by any ideological impetus *per se*. The two sets of military formations would compete until the local military units toppled the national groups and the civilian militants controlled the ex-army members. Consequently, the ideology of political Islam overwhelmed the less ideological militant groups.

The necessity to control and liberate territories was an inevitable consequence of the rise of militarized resistance against the regime. Upon the withdrawal of the regime and the retreat of state institutions from some regions, military groups took over. It is also important to note that there was no distinction between the regime and the state, since they were almost analogous. Civilian and military forces were thus bound to fill the void that the regime/state had left behind. As such, militant groups found themselves governing locally without any prior experience in governance.

II.From the Womb of the War: The Formation of the NDZ Movement

Given that the uprising erupted in the peripheries of Syria rather than the urban centers, militant groups formed more rapidly in the rural areas because of their political marginalization and their growing grudges against the regime. The retreat of the Syrian army to the urban centers took place in an attempt to block the opposition from taking over these cities. Under these conditions, the NDZ movement was formed in Aleppo's countryside on November 21, 2011.[8] The nucleus of the group was formed under the name the Nour al-Din al-Zenki Brigades in the village of al-Shaykh Salman and welcomed young men from surrounding villages who joined the peaceful demonstrations to protect the protestors. It is unclear whether this was the sole reason behind the formation of the movement, which had a secretive side and drew supporters from both the western and eastern countryside of Aleppo. The hypothesis presuming that the movement was led from the bottom up requires verification through the analysis of the movement's structure, rhetoric, and activities in the years that followed.

The Spirit of the Founding Father

Normally, Islamist movements take on the ideology of their founders. Therefore, understanding the personality and thought of their founding fathers is key to understanding these movements' discourse and behavior. The NDZ movement was established by Tawfiq Shihab al-Din (born May 1, 1973), who is also described as "the Sheikh",[9] a title often attributed to religious activists to distinguish them from civil activists. Shihab al-Din, who was almost illiterate, never served in any official religious position.[10] Shihab al-Din was the son of a poor family, whose economic situation grew better off due to the construction projects that took place in the western countryside of Aleppo. Little information is available on his profession, but it is known that he once worked as a butcher. In other words, Shihab al-Din was a member of the common people, which earned him the ability to communicate with the people of his region where the education level is relatively low. Although little is known about his background, we know that Shihab al-Din belonged to a Sufi family and he only grew religiously committed and adhered to Salafism upon the emergence of the Salafist activity (led by Ṭayyār al-Ṣaḥwah) in the region a decade before the revolution.[11] The Salafist outlook of the sheikh ultimately found its way into the movement's rhetoric and goals. Despite the fact that Sufism was widespread in the region, the sheikh's innate mental agility and his ability to capture the hearts of his followers earned him respect that went beyond their prejudices against Salafism.

Some sources claim that Shihab al-Din was a member of the Fatḥ al-Islām movement led by the Salafi-jihadist Shakir al-Absi, who collaborated with Syrian intelligence during the military operation in the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr al-Barid on May 20, 2007. Yet, nothing seems to prove that claim.[12] Should it be true; the accusation could explain Shihab al-Din's jihadist inclinations and early desire to form a military group. He, however, did not participate in any civil or revolutionary activity before the uprising.

Most importantly, the movement was born as the events of the revolution were unfolding. The movement was also influenced by the other militant groups that started forming in November 2011 and that encompassed ordinary people who found their voice in the movement's goals.[13]

The Social Involvement of the Movement

In contrast to highly selective Salafi-jihadist movements that are based on a membership conditioned by ideological and security considerations, the NDZ movement is undeniably a popular movement. Furthermore, the local characteristics of the movement have deepened further over time. Unlike other local militant movements that expanded to the national level, the NDZ movement has become more locally entrenched by fostering relations among the population across its territories. The grassroots nature of the movement, in fact, has contributed to sustaining its survival and influence.

The western countryside of Aleppo is home of a Sunni-majority population that once supplied the state with civil servants and police forces. In general, the population of this area belong to the poor class, and given the scarcity of agricultural lands, people turned to state-sponsored jobs for a living. The area has also been neglected to a remarkable degree by the government. The past decade, however, has been marked by unprecedented economic growth accelerated by real estate projects that have provided new job opportunities independent from the state. Consequently, the area gradually became less in need of state services and its middle class has expanded. It is also important to mention that the western countryside is located between two important urban centers: Aleppo and Gaziantep. It is thus unsurprising to observe a higher level of civility among the population of the area compared to other areas of countryside across Syria. Most members of the NDZ movement are from the western countryside of Aleppo, the hub of the movement. Moreover, the founder Shihab al-Din was able to present an inclusive image of his movement, in which regional and provincial differences could be disregarded. The movement seems to have balanced out regional differences by succeeding in providing a space, in which every member can find a voice. Secondly, the movement was able to link its interests to its members' economic interests. And finally, the movement constructed an imagined identity that reflects the distinct characteristics of the area and its inhabitants.[14]

Shihab al-Din intelligently appealed to a shared sense of the marginalization of the countryside at the expense of the urban centers, a widespread

phenomenon across Syria. Although the neglect of the countryside is not exclusive to Syria, the policies employed by the governments of both Hafez and his son Bashar al-Assad suggest that the regime was using the countryside to boost its power and govern the cities.[15] As a result, the countryside's long struggle finally translated into the eruption of civil disobedience across its territories. Based on this discrimination between urban cities and the countryside, the NDZ movement was able to take over the many companies and economic institutions in the area. In that way, it became the main industrial force in the north, relying on facilities belonging to merchants in the economic capital of Syria (Aleppo).[16] In other words, all the facilities and economic institutions originally owned by the people of Aleppo became a source of financing for the activities of the movement.[17]

The Movement's Organizational Structure

The movement's background and ideology are necessarily reflected through its organizational structure. Although we do not have reliable information relating to its early structure, we can still deduce from the movement's performance and the nature of its alliances that the movement had a simple pyramid organizational structure composed of the leader of its troops, local leaders, and militants. That simple structure explains the speed in tactical integration and withdrawal, and points to the presence of an individual decision-making process. Upon the liberation of the western countryside and the withdrawal of the regime's forces and state institutions, the movement was compelled to provide govern and provide services. For that purpose, it formed a "religious committee" to settle disputes despite not having the necessary educational qualifications to do so. The movement also established a rescue bureau and a financial bureau responsible for the distribution of donations and overseeing economic institutions under the supervision of the movement.

NDZ Brigades joined the Shariʿa Committee of Aleppo after it was inaugurated by al-Tawhid Brigade, which constitutes one of the three pillars of the committee (along with the al-Nusra front and the movement of Ahrar Al-Sham). The main responsibility of the committee is to provide services to the newly liberated areas of the city and Northwestern Aleppo. As such,

the leader Shihab al-Din came in direct contact with the leaders of al-Nusra front, from whom he gained management expertise that he applied to the governance of his area. In mid-2014, the brigades grew to become a movement, whose organizational structure was very similar to other jihadist groups, which in turn were formed after the model of Afghani brigades. The hierarchy was gradually weakened as the organizational structure grew wider and included the principal leader, the military commander, and a Shura Council composed of an administrative committee and an executive committee overseeing all branches except for the media and the security bureaus under the direct supervision of the principal leader.

The branches operating under the supervision of the board of directors include the judiciary unit (composed of religious leaders and graduates and students of faculties of religious studies). The police, the guards, the religious supervisors, the education bureau, the rescue bureau, and the financial and inspection bureau all operate under the supervision of the judiciary unit. [18] Meanwhile, the military commander is responsible for the management of military armament, communication, camps, and training,[19] while the proselytization bureau is responsible for disseminating religious education. The organizational structure obviously shows a similarity with the al-Qaida structure as the "movement is not only a military organization", [20] but also it simulates in its framework the role of the government exactly as the al-Qaida organizations do. Although the withdrawal of Syrian state institutions compelled the movement to fill the void left behind, it managed to learn from the organizational structure of the Salafi-jihadist movements. As such, the movement succeeded in combining jihadist expertise with local needs.

Integrating the ex-army Dissidents
The phenomenon of army members splitting from the regime's army started early on. The newly formed military units were also in conflict with the opposition militant groups formed by civilian volunteers to face the violence targeting protests. The dissidents later formed what is known as the Free Syrian Army, while other Islamist groups became known as "Islamist factions." The NDZ movement maintained a position oscillating between the Free Syrian Army and the Islamist factions. For instance, the movement

considers itself as Islamist in the local context but presents itself as a fraction of the Free Syrian Army to foreign countries and powers. And unlike other militant groups in the north, the movement has allowed dissidents to join its ranks and hold leading positions. Most of the military commanders of the movement are ex-army members.

The question remains: how was the founder of the movement able to contain ex-army members while other movements failed? To answer this question, one must carefully examine the nature of relationship between the movement and the local community, because the ex-army members who joined the movement were also originally from the same area. Therefore, they were admitted as another manifestation of the local rootedness of the movement and as a way to guarantee their commitment to the local movement. Furthermore, the military experience that they bring the movement has improved the fighting of the brigades.[21]

The Need for Politics

In mid-2015, the movement established a political bureau responsible for international communication, in the context of competing with political opposition abroad and attempting to diminish its influence over the movement.[22] The NDZ movement never ceased to resist any political influence from the opposition over the military factions, despite the fact that it received financial support from both the Syrian National Council and the Syrian National Coalition.[23] From the perspective of the movement's founder: "the political and military body should rise from within. We do not want to be governed by people not belonging to the revolution. We do not recognize any body residing abroad and we communicate with whoever we share interests with".[24] The basis of that position is the protection of the movement's independence, self-determination, and attempts to attract international financial, political, and military support that were gradually dwindling. Meanwhile, other military factions were also establishing political bureaus for the same reason. Under the direct supervision of the principal leader, the movement established a political bureau in Turkey, reflecting a pragmatism uncommon amongst other factions. For instance, the bureau included members holding diverging ideological views (left and right).[25] As

such, it seems obvious that the movement aspired to present itself through diverse names and faces to the international community. The following sections will discuss how the pragmatism of the political bureau actually reflects the pragmatic attitude of the movement's leader. This pragmatic inclination is also a hallmark of the movement's activities and alliances.

III. An Ambiguous Ideology: Political Islam, Salafi-Jihadism, or Nationalism?

It is hard to classify the movement from its rhetoric without taking into consideration the transformations that it has been through. An analysis of these transformations reveals that its rhetoric is characterized by contradiction and ambiguity. A careful comparison of the movement's rhetoric with its positions will also help us understand whether its rhetoric is a direct expression of its political vision or just a tactic in a given political situation.

The political imagination of the movement's founder plays a crucial role in the formation of the movement's identity and the role it aspires to. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" as employed by Frazer Egerton in his study of militant Salafist movements in the West is an adequate analytical concept for helping us understand the movement's ideology: that is, its imagined vision of the world and the derived narrative explaining events and building the political identity of its members and the tools to understand their world and the world more broadly (in case of transnational movements).[26] In this case, religion and history, and their subsequent symbolism also contribute to the making of the movement as an imagined community vis-à-vis the state.

Contrasting the community with the state is key to understanding the process of the movement's formation as the conditions facilitating its formation are linked to the revolution, the resistance against the regime, and the void that the movement had to fill after its imagined sense of belonging to the state began dwindling. In this sense, it was not the community of the margins versus the center, but it was part of the competition within the center itself. The growing local influence of the movement and its persistence for

seven years explains the reason why a fierce opposition to the regime is one of the pillars of its ideology. We can also observe that the movement has been pragmatic and flexible in its alliances and positions except for its bold position against the regime, a position it still holds and has held since its inception. In other words, the movement was formed as a result of the militarization of some of the revolutionaries to protect the protestors. After the retreat of the regime, the movement sought to capitalize on the power vacuum by expanding its activities and roles instead of allowing civilians to govern, following the path of Salafi-jihadist movements. It also linked the people's interests to its own interests by maintaining and promoting its local presence – a fact that sustains the movement's survival. As such, negating the presence of the regime is at the heart of the movement's imagination. This was a result of the emphasis of its local roots and the diminishing of national sentiment, in addition to the necessities of its establishment.

The movement was initially formed to protect peaceful protestors against the regime. Similar to other movements, at the beginning, it did not seem to have any other political goals. That, however, does not negate the Salafist inclinations of the founder of the movement, which controls areas where religious conservatism is widespread. As such, the religious orientation of the sheikh did not raise any flags: on the contrary, it was seen as a positive trait that was a source of assurance and trust considering the absence of other references. The movement's leader repeatedly said that the NDZ Brigades (before they were renamed as a "movement") were a group that represented "moderate Islam": "we are moderate Muslims. By moderate we do not mean the middle between good and evil, we mean the true spirit of Islam".[27] All groups describe themselves as "moderate" - an ambiguous term that allow multiple interpretations. In this case, the Brigades' leader was trying to distance the group from Salafi-jihadism, balance the group's relations with other Islamist factions and maintain credibility among the movement's followers who are largely conservative.

During orientation meetings, it is reported that the movement's leader said that "politics is part of religion", that separating the two "is utter blasphemy" and that the movement's activities are "jihad" to restore "a Syrian Muslim

society". He also locates the Syrian revolution within the broader causes of the ummah (global Muslim community) saying that: "the cause is not only the cause of the Muslim Syrian population, but it is the cause of the entire Muslim world."[28] This position is in line with the Salafist orientation of the leader, but contradicts the movement's local characteristics and purported motives for its formation. In order to understand this apparent contradiction, we have to consider the context and the time when the statement was made: on December 1, 2012, when the NDZ Brigades were part of the "Religious Committee of Aleppo" largely led by the al-Nusra front. The date also coincides with the rise of Salafi-jihadism in Syria when the movement was trying to protect itself against the rise of jihadism. Although we can observe that the statement is likely in line with the leader's thought, we should also note that it had little influence over the movement's future directions and behavior.

In early 2014, the movement contributed to the formation of the Army of Jihadists[29] in northern Syria to fight ISIS. The initiative was not necessarily motivated by ideological considerations, but was rather an attempt to block any threat to the movement's influence in the western countryside of Aleppo. At this time, ISIS was controlling most of the northern borders of Syria and was about to block their supply routes, taking over Idlib's highways and the town of Atarib[30] in the Aleppo countryside.[31] The growing threat compelled the local militant factions to fight ISIS in order to protect their influence in the region. This also reflected increasing determination among the Syrian population with a deep local sense of belonging to fight a group (ISIS) that was largely led by foreigners.

The name NDZ Islamic Brigades appears for the first time in the movement's founding statement,[32] which was shared on social media platforms. The "Islamic" denomination never appeared in the movement's name before. Following the rise of ISIS, the movement removed the Syrian revolutionary flag from its logo as a way to demonstrate its Islamic identity in face of the new threat. Moreover, the group abandoned the Army of Jihadists on May 4, 2015 and renamed itself the NDZ Islamic Movement[33] only to later again remove the denomination "Islamic" when it was trying to get financial and

military support from the Military Operation Center (MOM),[34] particularly anti-tank TOW missiles.

Upon the launch of American-led coalition operations against ISIS, the movement's commander-in-chief announced in a news conference in Istanbul their support for the American-led coalition, which then also aimed to bring down the Assad regime. He also noted that the movement's main goal was to end the regime's rule and to "eradicate terrorism from Syria". As such, the movement "would collaborate with any foreign power who shares this national vision and interest".[35] In his statement, the movement's leader used secular language, including concepts of nationhood, justice, equality and fighting terrorism; a vocabulary that Islamist movements do not often use. It is likely that the secular-nationalist rhetoric of the group's leader did not necessarily reflect concrete ideological convictions but was more of a pragmatic tactic addressing the international community to gain the support of the MOM.

In late January 2017, the movement was denied financial and military support, and was under pressure to join the Syria Peace talks in Astana. The movement decided to join the alliance known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant, led by the al-Nusra front and other Salafi-jihadist groups. The decision to join the alliance seemed to less represent the movement's ideological stance and more be a pragmatic tactic.[36] Meanwhile, al-Nusra front "needed the NDZ movement to sustain its influence and transformation, and to pressure the Free Syrian Army to send its tanks; and the NDZ was the only faction that could facilitate that end."[37]

Soon, in July 20, 2017, the movement broke away from HTS because it launched a "fight against the Movement of Ahrar Al-Sham and disregarded the calls of the Shari'a Committee [of Aleppo]" given that, according to a statement issued by the movement, "God's law" that they follow and adhere to was not followed". The movement further affirmed its commitment to "the rebellious Syrian people and the fulfilment of the goals of the revolution, namely the defeat of the criminal regime and the application of

God's law on the Syrian territories".[38] As such, the movement's decision to join HTS was aimed at "forming a Muslim coalition encompassing all the Sunni groups in Al Sham so that God's law governs". Certainly, the rhetoric used in the statement was that of Salafi-jihadism, which the movement was trying to use in response to accusations of apostasy from the al-Nusra front. [39] However, the real motivation underlying the decision to split from the HTS is related to its relationship with the Islamic Movement of the Ahrar Al-Sham and concerns over the growing influence of al-Nusra front, which had the potential ability to take control of other factions' territories, as well as conditions laid down by HTS that blocked any support for the NDZ movement as long as it maintained its cooperation with al-Nusra front.

Earlier this year, a video of the NDZ militants executing a young man from a regime-allied Palestinian militia, the Al-Quds Brigade, near Aleppo was shown to U.S. President Donald Trump.[40] The scene, which unleashed rage in Syria and in the U.S. media, brought to mind ISIS videos and crimes, despite the militants being members of a movement supported by the CIA as part of its program supporting opposition military groups in southern Turkey. Trump wanted to know the reason why the U.S. was supporting this extremist group. The issue was subject to fierce discussions between senior CIA officials and the U.S. president, who was also briefed about other violations by U.S.-supported militants who had ended up fighting alongside extremist groups, including al-Nusra front. Consequently, the U.S. president decided to end the support program.[41]

Identifying the NDZ ideology is a hard task given its changing behavior, alliances, and rhetoric, and their juxtaposition with its interests. In contract to rigid ideologies, the ambiguous nature of the movement's ideology allows for broader flexibility in the group's positions.

IV.Governing in an Unstable Region
Over the last seven years, northwestern Syria witnessed many detrimental battles and fights during which some organizations formed, and others disappeared, while each organization's zones of influence and alliances shifted. The rapidly-changing region compelled the NDZ movement to

expand its territories and reinforce its influence. The movement succeeded in doing so because of two factors: first, the alliances it made in order to secure military and financial support, and its avoidance of confrontation with other groups that might threaten its influence, even including some members of the latter groups in its ranks; and second, reinforcing local belonging through social relations and local governance.

Alliances

On 1st of November 2011, the NDZ Brigades were formed by a few small brigades composed of militants from al-Shaykh Salman, Qubtan al-Jabal, and other neighboring villages. Soon after, they joined the al-Fajr Islamic movement, a Salafi-jihadist group supported by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and composed mostly of the Syrian military group "the Military Youth Front", composed of Syrian fighters coming back from Afghanistan and other foreign fighters. As such, it may be possible that the NDZ Brigades' leader thought that by joining the movement, his group would receive the military and financial support it needed.

The alliance between al-Fajr movement and the NDZ brigades did not last long. NDZ joined al-Tawhid Brigade (including the northern countryside) that was formed on July 18, 2012 and received support from regional countries. The founding statement of al-Tawhid Brigade notes that the goal of the brigade is "collective military cooperation to bring down the regime, protect public and private properties, hold accountable anyone who harms civilians and help regime soldiers who want to split from the regime's army."[42] Al-Tawhid Brigade was composed of factions from Aleppo northern countryside, most of whom are members of the Free Syrian Army. The NDZ Brigades was the only group from the western countryside. Upon the announcement of the battle of Aleppo a day after the formation of al-Tawhid Brigade, the NDZ Brigades was the first to enter the city and take control of some neighborhoods.[43] However, on December 6, 2012, the NDZ Brigades split away from al-Tawhid Brigade.[44] It seemed that the NDZ Brigades no longer saw its interest as being in maintaining its alliance with al-Tawhid as it was also aiming to expand its influence and include more brigades in its ranks. Soon after neglecting its alliance with al-Tawhid Brigade, the movement

was able to increase the number of brigades operating under its control to twenty, all in Aleppo and the countryside to the west of the city.[45] As each brigade represented a village, the influence of the movement was therefore expanded to these villages.

The NDZ Brigades established a series of alliances in order to boost its influence, expand its territories, and secure new sources of support.[46] On December 19, 2012, it formed the Fastaqim Kama Umirt Union, composed of Free Syrian army factions that helped maintain its presence in the city of Aleppo. On July 25, 2013, it split from it to join the Authenticity and Development Front, which was composed of Islamist and Free Syrian Army factions financially supported by Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that the front controlled territories in Dayr al-Zur and the Syrian desert far from Aleppo. We thus suggest that the NDZ Brigades cooperated with the front only to receive military and financial support. The NDZ then split from the front with no prior announcement.

On January 2, 2014, the Army of Jihadists was formed to fight ISIS and, as mentioned earlier, the NDZ joined it. The NDZ split from the army on May 4, 2014 and became an Islamic movement after expanding its influence in the western countryside of Aleppo and eliminating the threat of ISIS. Soon after, the movement dropped its "Islamic" modifier in order to guarantee the MOM's support.

On December 24, 2014, the movement joined Al Sham Front, a group that included the largest Islamist and Free Syrian Army factions in Aleppo and its countryside. The front was formed to overcome the influence and presence of al-Nusra Front in Aleppo. After its success in realizing its goal, the movement and other brigades withdrew from it and it was dissolved on April 19, 2015. However, afterwards more brigades joined the NDZ movement.

On May 6, 2015, the movement formed along with thirteen military brigades from Aleppo the joint operations room "Conquest of Aleppo". On October 6, 2015, the al-Nusra front attacked the movement's military checkpoints in Aleppo.[47] Despite that, the movement still maintained its presence and influence in the city.

On September 24, 2016, the movement's military division joined the Army of Conquest Coalition, a group composed of two main Islamist brigades, al-Nusra front and the Islamic Movement of Ahrar Al Sham.[48] Ultimately, the cooperation was limited to the military level so that the movement did not lose foreign support. On the other hand, the coalition supplied the movement with military support.

In January 2017, the movement joined the HTS. I have already mentioned the conditions leading to this cooperation and the group's subsequent withdrawal from the committee in July 2017. Except for the NDZ movement, all the other military brigades in northwestern Syria have split.[49] The movement, in contrast, was able to welcome to its ranks new brigades every time it joined or withdrew from a coalition. Overall, the movement never maintained its cooperation with other groups or coalitions for more than six months, and every time it splits from a coalition, it was successful in attaching other splitting brigades to it.[50]

Local Governance Experience

Not only did the NDZ movement reinforce a local sense of belonging and link the people's interest to its interest, it was also successful in transforming its local relationships into social cohesion, or "tribalism", to use Ibn Khaldun's terms. To achieve such goals, the movement followed the following tactics:
- Maintaining the composition of the movement and choosing its leadership from the local population.
- Reinforcing loyalty to the movement through allowing broad participation and offering services to all the population without discrimination.
- Filling the void that was formed upon the withdrawal of the regime forces and institutions.
- Adopting a political rhetoric based on the dichotomies of city/village, regime/revolution, and marginalization/justice.

It would not be accurate to say that the movement was able to provide a solid and enduring political and social imagination for the western countryside, yet, we can say that a certain level of social cohesion formed over the past seven years. This cohesion was the base of the social support for the

movement; however, this support is vulnarable to collapse if any of its four props becomes absent. The key to the social cohesion phenomenon is local governance, meaning the direct management of the population's needs and services. The movement was able to provide an accepted bare minimum of services that were not provided all at once, but rather gradually reflecting the experience the movement gained by virtue of working on the ground.

Upon its formation, inspired by the Al-Qaeda movement and its experiences in Afghanistan, the movement established a "religious committee" to take over from the regime's judicial system. After the defeat of ISIS in the northern countryside, the religious courts were replaced by courts following the unified Arab law, which was drafted by the Arab League, but not yet applied in any Arab country. Furthermore, as soon as the movement was formed, it established local rescue bureaus and local administrative committees. The initial burden of these committees would later allow the movement to carry out local elections. The movement's executive committee oversees the local committees' activities and policies.

On the economic level, the movement controlled the properties of merchants and traders in Aleppo western countryside and transformed them into a source of income for the movement. Some factories resumed their activities, namely pharmaceutical ones. Moreover, the movement imposed a sort a tax (utāwāt) on civil organizations operating on its territories that became an important source of income for the movement. It also controlled rescue activities and provided privileges to the families of the militants and of martyrs. Furthermore, the movement imposed a tariff at the borders with the neighboring Kurdish area (Afrin) and with the regime-controlled region. As such, the movement took advantage of the strategic location of its territories and the presence of vibrant economic activity in order to become self-sufficient and independent from foreign aid – a sovereignty that would later be one of the movement's key strengths.[51] On the other hand, the relative stability and security of the area contributed to the improvement of the economic situation, granted civil and rescue organizations the ability to operate and guaranteed the flow of money to the pockets of local administrative committees.

The health and education sectors did not, however, prosper given the limited ability and resources of the movement to finance them. For that reason, the service sector suffered for a few years and relied on the limited resources of civil organizations. Upon the formation of the Syrian interim government, the movement was then forced to collaborate with it in order to provide the necessary services. Despite that collaboration, the movement did not recognize the government as legitimate nor the Syrian National Coalition which helped in its formation.

Given the fact that the number of salaried militants had reached 6,000, the movement was obliged to take care of 30,000 members, including fighters, their families, and the families of martyrs. Altogether, it is evident that the movement could not completely fulfill the roles of state institutions, nor did it have the adequate expertise to do so. It could, however, given the experience it gained from working on the ground, provide a bare minimum of services that the population of the territories it controlled seemed to be satisfied with, hence their continuous support for the movement.

V. Conclusion

In 2016, the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War published a report on military organizations in Syria. The report listed the NDZ as an independent organization and showed that the NDZ movement had received support from the US and classified it as "Islamist" meaning that it belonged to the branch of political Islam rather than Salafi-jihadism which was the label of al-Nusra front. [52] The report authors believed that the movement was "not a major political player in the region" and that only a few members of the movement expressed a Salafi-jihadist inclination when they placed pictures of renowned jihadists including Abdullah Azzam in one of the movement's offices in the western countryside of Aleppo.[53] The incident occurred at a time when both movements were controlling the area.

However, in December 2015, Jordanian intelligence, which was assigned to classify terrorist groups in Syria, included the NDZ movement on the list. [54]This unclear classification reflects the ambiguous ideology of the movement, the vague nature of its rhetoric, and the contradictions of

its political behavior. Although the movement's ambiguous position may appear as a flaw and a disadvantage, it has actually helped this mid-sized movement to survive, cooperate with conflicting groups, guarantee the control of territories, and expand its influence.

Finally, despite the relative stability of the movement in the western countryside of Aleppo, it seems unlikely that the movement would develop any robust political rhetoric given the individualistic nature of its leadership and the unstable situation in northwest Syria.[*]

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[*] This chapter was submitted in December 2018, before the dissolution of the movement declared on January 4, 2019 in the wake of its defeat by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Editor's comment

Notes

[1] The first charity organizations were established by al-shaykh Māhir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1920). During the French mandate (1920-1946) charity organizations burgeoned, namely: Al-Ghirāʿ organization led by Muḥammad Hāshim Al-KhaṬīb Al-Ḥussaynī to protest the French mandate in the field of education; Al-Hidāyah Islamic oganization (1931) whose main figures was Kāmil Qaṣṣār; Al-Tamaddun Islamic organization (1932) with members from the bourgeois class including jurists, mosques leaders, physicians and lawyers among whom we name Aḥmad MaZhar Al-ʿAZmah and Muḥammad Bahjah Al-BīṬār. Other organizations included: Al-Taʿāwun Islamic organization, Al-Tawajjuh Islamic organization, Aʿmāl al-birr Islamic organization, Al-birr wa al-akhlāq among others. These organization were supportive of Shukrī Al-Quwwatlī for president but their political alliance did not last long. For more information, see: Radwan Ziyadah, Al-islām al-siyāsī fī sūriyyā [Political Islam in Syria] (Dubai: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2008), 9-11.

[2] The organization al-Shabab al-Muslimin established by Abu al-Suud Abd al-Salam in 1936, merged with the Aleppo-based organization Dar al-arqam that was established by Umar Baha al-Din al-Amiri in 1936. The union organized two conferences in Homs in 1937 and a third conference in Damascus in 1938 along. In 1941, the High School Students Union led by Abd al-Wahab al-Azraq joined the coalition. In 1946, the two organizations Shabab Muḥammad and al-Shabab al-Muslimin joined forces under the name The Society of the Muslim Brothers. MusṬafa al-Sibʿi was elected as its first general guide, with Umar Baha al-Din al-Amiri as his deputy.

Ibid, 15.

[3] See Abdulrahman Alhaj, *al-tayyar al uṣuli fi al-ikhwan al-muslimin: min al-Ṭali'ah al-muqatilah ila qaʿidat al-jihad al-ʿalami* [The Fundamentalist Movement in the Muslim Brotherhood: From the First Fighters to the International Jihad Movement], Kitab al-Misbar: al-ikhwan al-muslimun fi suriyya).

[4] See Michel Seurat, *Suriyya: al-dawlah al-mutawaḥḥishah* [Syria: The Barbarian State], 1st ed., trans. Amal Sarah and Mark Bialo, (Beirut: al-shabakah al-ʿarabiyyah li al-nashir, 2007), 27, 72.

[5] See: Abdulrahman Alhaj, *State and Community: The Political Aspirations of Religious Groups in Syria*: 2000-2011 (London: Strategic Research and Communication Center: 2011), 42.

[6] See, Ali al-Bayanuni, *mufawaḍat al-ikhwan wa al-sulṬah*, juzʻ 2 [Ali al-Bayanuni, The Negotiations between the Regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, episode 2], from TV program Ziyarah khaṣṣah with Sami Kleib, December 5, 2005, https://www.aljazeera.net/programs/privatevisit/2005/12/5/%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%AC2, accessed December 21, 2018.

[7] From the document issued by the Muslim Brotherhood announcing the end of their alliance with the National Rescue Front in March 3, 2009.

[8] Al-Shaykh Tawfiq Shihab al-Din, interview by Taysir Alwani, Liqa Khaṣ, Al-Jazeera, 14 March 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeOY8z1YFiY

[9] See: the statement of withdrawal from Liwa al-Tawḥid issued by the NDZ Brigade, December 6, 2012. The statement introduced by the sentence: "we are Sheikh Tawfiq Shihab al-Din", *the NDK official Youtube page*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vArlRS2m1LY

[10] Interview with a source close to the NDZ leadership (he/she asked not to be mentioned by name). According to the source the sheikh did not complete its elementary education, Istanbul, December 13, 2018.

[11] Phone interview with a close source to the sheikh's family (he/she asked not to be mentioned by name), Ankara, December 13, 2018.

[12] The sources mentioning this information are all close to the Syrian regime – a fact that weakens the credibility of the information given that, as part of its resistance against the revolution, the regime's interest resides in linking all military groups to the international jihadist web. See, for example, Abdallah Ali, "muḥawalat ightiyal qaʼid kataʼib al-Zinki: taʻm aw infilash?" [Assassination Attempt on the NDZ's Leader], *Arabi Press*, April 13, 2013.

[13] Tawfiq Shihab al-Din, interview by Taysir ʻalwani, March 14, 2013.

[14] Munhil Barish, a field reporter expert in the western countryside of Aleppo, interviewed by the author, Istanbul, September 14, 2018.

[15] See Michel Seurat, *Suriyya: al-dawlah al-mutawaḥḥishah* [Syria: The Barbarian State], 36, 241.

[16] On a field trip to the western countryside of Aleppo on October 20, 2012, the researcher observed that the institutions in question were either dismantled and

sold or turned into military points.

[17] Appropriating private property, especially businesses, became a common practice among military factions. The religious committee of Aleppo, established by the al-Nusra front, the Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Al Sham and al-Tawhid Brigade on November 10, 2012 then dismantled on September 23, 2014, further facilitated that process. See: Abdulrahman Alhaj, "taqrir al-ḥalah al-rahinah fi al-manatiq al-muḥarrarah fi al-shamal al-suri", *wathiqah li al-majlis al-waƬani (ghayr manshurah)* [Report on the current situation in the liberated areas of Norther Syria, unpublished report submitted to the Syrian National Council], March 24, 2013, 6.

[18] For more on the movement's organization structure, see Tawfiq Shihab al-Din , "qa'id al-Zinki li zaman al-waṣl: rafaḍt liqaʿ al-juraba wa ghuraf ʿamaliyyat ḥalab shakliyyah" [the NDZ leader to zaman al-wasl magazine: I refused to meet with "the cowards" and Aleppo operations room was "just for show"], *interview by Zaman al-waṣl magazine*, June 22, 2014, https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/50980/

[19] See: Muhammad Khayr al-Wazir, *tawazzuʿ faṣa'il al-thawrah wa al-muʿaraḍah al-suriyyah ʿala 'ard suriyya ḥatta nihayat ʿam 2016: al-tawajjuh, al-intishar, maṣadir al-tamwil* [the distribution of revolutionary and opposition factions in Syria until 2016: orientations, expansion and sources of financial support] (Geneva: Syria Inside, 2017), 35.

[20] Shihab al-Din Al-Zenki (NDZ leader), Interview by Zaman Al-Wasl, Zaman al-Wasl, June 22, 2014.

[21] Munhil Barish, Interview by author, Istanbul, September 14, 2018.

[22] Muhammad al-Sayyid, *"ra'is al-maktab al-siyasi li-ḥarakat nur al-din al-zinki: al-ayyam al-qadimah ḥiblah"* [The director of the NDZ movement political bureau: the upcoming days will carry good news], interview by Muḥammad Sayyid Ḥasan, Orient News, 3 July 2015, https://www.orient-news.net/ar/news_show/88687/0/%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B2%D9%86%D9%83%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%89

[23] Samir Nashar (the former director of the National Syrian Council financial bureau and a former member of the Syrian National Coalition), Interview by author,

Istanbul, 16 September 2018.

[24] Tawfiq Shihab al-Din, Interview by Zaman al-Waṣl magazine, June 22, 2014, https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/50980/

[25] Among the members are the political activist and communist Bassam Hajji Mustafa, Islamist Yasir al-Yusif, son of Ibrahim al-Yusif who led the madfaiyyah operation in June 1979 when Alevite military students were massacred.

[26] See: Frazer Egerton, *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism*, trans. Fadi Milhim (Doha, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 2017), 80.

[27] The NDZ Brigades leader, "Liqaʾ Khass" [A special interview with the NDZ Brigades leader], *Al Jazeera channel*, March 14, 2013.

[28] Tawfiq Shihab al-Din, [during an orientation meeting with other brigades], the media office of the NDZ Brigades, *YouTube channel*, 11 December 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZKYLkBQv28

[29] The Army of Jihadists was a revolutionary military alliance formed on 2 January 2014 by NDZ Brigades, the Fastaqim Kama Umirt Union, liwaʾ al-anṣar, ḥarakat al-nur al-islamiyyah, liwaʾ amjad al-islam, lia' al-ḥurriyah al-islami, liwaʾ jund al-ḥaramayn, liwaʾ anṣar al-khilafah, among others. Tawfiq Shihab al-Din was the principal leader of the coalition. See the coalition founding statement on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY7mltUQmmY

[30] See: Hwaida Saad and Rick Gladstone, "Qaeda-Linked Insurgents Clash With Other Rebels in Syria, as Schism Grows", *New York Times*, January 3, 2014.

[31] "Kata'ib al-ḥur tashun 'ḥarb taḥrir' ḍuḍ 'daʿish' fi shamal suriyya" [the free army brigades launch a 'liberation war' against 'daesh' in norther Syria], *Asharq Al-Awsat*, January 4, 2014, https://aawsat.com/home/article/16012[32] See the full statement on https://www.aljumhuriya.net/ar/file/%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86jpg

[33] See: Ahmad Aba Zayd, *Faṣa'il al-thawrah al-suriyyah fi ḥalab: durus fi al-tashaẓẓi* [the brigades of the Syrian revolution in Aleppo: the case of fragmentation] (Doha: muntadah al-ʿalaqat al-ʿarabiyyah wa al-duwaliyyah, May 3, 2015), 4, http://fairforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/syrian-revolution-in-aleppo2.pdf

[34] Based in Turkey, the MOM is a military operation center that supports the Syrian military opposition in Central and Northern Syria.

[35] From the NDZ movement's commander-in-chief's press conference in Istanbul, published on YouTube on 26 September 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-7Tsk-SC6c

[36] Munhil Barish, Interview by author, September 14, 2018.

[37] Ibid.

[38] From the statement issued by NDZ movement announcing its withdrawal from the Organization for the Liberation of the Al Sham, July 20, 2017.

[39] See the report: "hay'at taḥrir al-sham taqtul ʿanaṣir ḥarakat nur al-din zinki wa tarmihim bi-al-riddah" [the Organization for the Liberation of the Al Sham kills members of the NDZ movement and accuse them of apostasy], *Syria Noor*, August 31, 2017, https://syrianoor.net/article/11821

[40] The NDZ movement released a statement issued by the general command on 19 July 2016 in which it harshly condemned the incident and dictated "bringing to punishment all those who were involved in the crime and handing them to the investigation committee" that was formed for that purpose, see: "baʿdah dhabḥihim li al-Ṭifl… nur al-din zinki tuṣdir bayan idanah wa taʿid bi-muḥasabat al-faʿilin" [after the killing of the child, NDZ issues a statement promising the punishment of the perpetuators], *Alsouria net*, July 19, 2016, https://www.alsouria.net/content/%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%B0%D8%A8%D8%AD%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%84-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B2%D9%86%D9%83%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86

[41] See: Joscelyn Thomas, "Trump Got This One Right," *The Weekly Standard*, August 7,2017,http://www.weeklystandard.com/trump-got-this-one-right/article/2009045

[42] Video recording of the alliance founding statement as read by the brigade's commander-in-chief (ʿabd al-ʿaziz salamah). The NDZ movement founder also appears in the video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oA2mNa1zCpI

[43] See: The NDZ Brigades leader, "Liqaʾ Khaṣṣ" [A special interview with the NDZ Brigades leader], *Al Jazeera channel*, March 14, 2013.

[44] From the statement issued by the NDZ Brigades announcing its withdrawal from the al-Tawḥid Brigade, the NDZ official YouTube page, December 6, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vArlRS2m1LY.

[45] Ibid.

[46] For more on these alliances, see: Ahmad Aba Zayd (2015), 3

[47] Al-Nusra front attacked two villages, Al-Abizmu and Al-Arniq; for more see:

"ishtibakat bayn al-nusra wa al-zinki fi ḥalab" [clashes between al-Nusra front and al-Zinki in Aleppo], *Zaman alwsl*, October 6, 2015, http://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/64774

[48] The NDZ statement on the joint operation room, September 24, 2016.

[49] For more see: Ahmad Aba Zayd (2015), 4.

[50] Upon the announcement of the formation of the NDZ movement, other Islamic factions joined on July 15, 2015 including Harakat al-Zahir Bibrus and Liwa' Halab al-Madinah. Soon after other factions joined the movement, namely Liwa' Aḥfad Hamzah (December 2015), Liwa' Fajr al-Shuhada' (April 19, 2016), Tajammu' Ahl al-Sunnah and Kata'ib al-Mathni and Kata'ib Dhi al-Nurayn (August 21, 2016). These dates coincide with the times when the NDZ movement either collaborated with or withdrew from a coalition.

[51] See: Tawfiq Shihab al-Din, Interview by Zaman al-Waṣl magazine, June 22, 2014, https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/50980/

[52] Jennifer Cafarella and Genevieve Casagrande, *Syrian Armed Opposition Forces in Aleppo* (Washington: Institute for the Study War, February 13, 2016), 5.

[53] Ibid, 8.

[54] Albin Szakola and Ullin Hope, "CIA-vetted Aleppo rebels lash out at Jordan", *NOW*, December 12, 2015, https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/NewsReports/566390-cia-vetted-aleppo-rebels-lash-out-at-jordan

Chapter 7

Islamism after the Arab Spring: The Case of Yemen*
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The Arab Spring and its consequences marked a radical shift in the ideological development of what is known as "political Islam" or "Islamism", especially among the movement's younger generation whose visions and convictions were shaped and their political imaginations shaken by the Arab uprisings. Although these transformations were not widespread and were limited to the elite among the younger generation, given the rigid structures of the Islamist movements and the absence of democracy and transparency, the issue deserves a serious and a careful investigation that will help us understand the nature and the quality of these transformations.

The elite among the young generation at the heart of the Islamist movement, or more particularly, the elite generation emerging from the Islamist movement, is an influential actor in both cultural and media terms. It was also the spark that set off the Arab Spring, greatly contributing to revolutionary slogans about justice, freedom, dignity, equality, and citizenship. Moreover, the young elite generation is not disconnected from the high-caliber theoretical and intellectual debate at the heart of the Islamist movement, seeking to resolve the movement's state of disorientation caused by the overlapping demands of the political and the religious spheres.

This chapter addresses the transformations of Islamist movements in Yemen and the extent to which Arab uprisings have influenced these movements during this transitional period. The chapter will focus on a number of Sunni and Shiite movements, including al-Tajamu al-Yamani li al-Iṣlah (better known as al-Islaḥ) (The Yemeni Congregation for Reform), which is ideologically and politically related to the Muslim Brotherhood, a number of Salafist groups that were formerly barred from political activity but more recently have formed political parties such as Harakat al-Nahḍah (the Renaissance Movement) and Hizb al-Rashad al-Yamani (The Al-Rashad

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*This chapter was originally written in Arabic.

Union Party), and finally Jamaʿat Anṣar Allah (the Houthi Movement) which belongs to the Shiite Islamist movement.

Islamism: The Challenge Posed By the Term

Islamism is a Western term coined to describe movements that hold that Islam should guide a country's political system, and that Islam is not merely a religion, but that it also addresses political, economic, and social regimes. As such, these movements aim at social, religious, and cultural reform according to the values of Islam in order to recover the greatness of Islamic civilization and the Islamic caliphate.[1]

In line with this definition, Western scholarship has formulated biased and stereotypical views about Islamist movements, isolating them from their social, cultural, and civilizational context. After all, not only is Islamism as a whole diverse and multifaceted, but it is also diverse at the level of the individual movement and group. Interestingly, each movement holds that their views are the most accurate interpretation of Islam's noble aims – a situation that challenges any assessment of the phenomenon as a whole. For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood is managed by two competing trends: on the one hand, there is an organizational trend that has trouble accepting the notion of pluralist democracy; on the other hand, there is a political and cultural trend that has become a prominent promoter and defender of these values.

For that reason, Arab world specialist and political scientist François Burgat proposes a more accurate and realistic interpretation of Islamism by stating that the movement is not a phase but a societal identity, including its status as a voice of anti-colonial resistance. In his book, *Islamism in the Maghreb: the Voice of the South*, he listed three main conditions maintaining the presence of Islamism in the area: firstly, the ongoing social and economic conditions of the Arab and Muslim worlds; secondly, Islamists' rhetoric about modernism, which appears convincing to their base; and thirdly, regimes that exaggerate the dangers of Islamism and use it to serve their own political agendas.

The Origins of the Reformist Movement in Yemen

Some overlook the founding origins of current Yemeni Islamic sentiment, which is an organic extension of the Yemeni reformist movement dating back to the third century AH (ninth century AD). This period marks the first Arab-Islamic reformist movement, one that emerged as a reaction to the growing misinterpretation of the notion of freedom in Islam. This reaction resulted from making Islam limited to kinship ties after the rise of political Shi'ism and Sunnism with the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, both of which reduced Islam to the tribe of Quraysh.

Since the third century AH, Yemen witnessed the rise of Shi'ism in politics – in particular the Zaydiyyah and the Ismaʿiliyyah branches of Shi'ism that found their way to Yemen at a time when it enjoyed considerable level of independence from the Umayyad and the Abbasid powers. Meanwhile, small Yemeni states formed independently from the political centers in Damascus and Baghdad – a reality that attracted political Shi'ite movements to begin establishing themselves in Yemen. As a consequence, and from very early on, Yemenis resisted the imported political Shi'ite movement by adhering to their roots and by developing a Yemeni brand of Islam that corresponded to their Yemeni-Qahtanite identity.

Yemen and Sana'a have long been centers for students of knowledge and leaders of religious sects. Yemen was home to renowned scholars such as Abi Bakr Al-Ḥumayri ʿAbd Al-Razzaq Al-Sanʿa'i (126-221 AH), Muʿammar bin Rashid Al-Baṣri (154-195 AH), and others. Prominent scholars of fiqh (Islamic law), such as al-Imam al-Shafiʿi and al-Imam Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal used to visit Yemeni scholars to learn from them. Al-Shafiʿi's saying that "no matter how long the journey takes, a seeker of knowledge should visit Yemen" is evidence pointing to the leading role of the reformist Yemeni school and its early contribution to religious and intellectual renewal in the Muslim world.

Although the first phase of reforms were prompted by religious motivations (such as in the case of the schools of ʿAbd Al-Razzaq Al-Sanʿa'i, Muʿammar bin Rashid and others), the second phase was marked by Arab and Islamic considerations, especially with the school of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Al-

Hamadhani (d. 336 AH), who started his scholarly career by defining clear boundaries between the religious and ethnic characteristics of Islamic societies. In his book Sifat Jazīrat al-'Arab (The Characteristics of the Arab Peninsula), he analyzed the geographic features of the peninsula and the social values of its inhabitants.

The Yemeni reformist movement reached its peak with the refutations of Lisan Al-Yaman Al-Hamadhani against the adherents of political Zaydiyyah, especially its missionary Yaḥya bin Al-Ḥusayn Al-Rasi, who wanted to establish a theocracy based on the Imamate doctrine, also known as al-Baṭaniyyin doctrine in Zaydiyyah literature. According to this doctrine, the legitimate political and spiritual leaders of the Islamic community are the heirs of Al-Ḥasan and Al-Ḥusayn, the sons of 'Ali bin Abi Ṭalib. The Yemeni reformist movement emerged to resist the theocratic ideas of the political Zaydiyyah, who initiated a centuries-long conflict that threatened the entirety of Yemen's civilizational heritage.

The phenomenon of religious, legal, and intellectual renewal was one of the main manifestations of the Yemeni reformist movement, and it surpassed the religious and legal norms of the age while challenging political and intellectual authoritarianism. In doing this, it resisted intellectual stagnation and political tyranny, the two main aspects of human and civilizational decadence. Even the reformist schools of the nineteenth century, led by Rashid Riḍa and Muḥammad 'Abduh, and the Wahhabi school in Najd and the Ḥijaz do not compare to the Yemeni school. In other words, all reformist schools in the Muslim world are indebted to the writings of Al-Shawkani and Ibn Al-Amir Al-San'ani on ḥadith and uṣul al-fiqh (the principles of jurisprudence). After the sixth century AH, when the legal interpretation (ijtihad) by all schools of jurisprudence was impeded, the ijtihād school in Yemen was flourishing due to the activities of the Mu'tazili school, which blended with the Zaydiyyah school and surpassed it.

The pioneers of the Yemeni reformist school also inspired the leaders of the Yemeni national reformist movement, which led the resistance against internal and foreign injustice and tyranny, or "the colonial invader and the

colonial nationalist", in words of Yemeni poet ʿAbd Allah Al-Barduni. For that reason, we consider the Yemeni nationalist movement to be a natural extension of the original Yemeni reformism that paved the way for the movement that followed, which greatly contributed to Yemeni intellectual enlightenment and fed a growing revolutionary zeal against tyranny. Revolutions in Yemen were always led by intellectuals and reformists, such as the Al-Faqiyyah Saʿid revolution (1854) in central Yemen, the Ḥamid Al-Din Al-Khazfar revolution in Al-MuqaṬirah district (1920), and other revolutions motivated by real nationalistic and reformist agendas.

The most elaborate modern political manifestation of the Yemeni reformism was led by al-Hikmah magazine and its founder Aḥmad Al-Warith, who was able to lay the foundations of a significantly more sophisticated reformism compared to the Muslim Brotherhood. He was preceded by Nadi al-Iṣlaḥ al-Adabi (1935) (The Literary Reform Club), followed by Shabab al-ʿAmr bi al-Maʿruf wa al-Nahi ʿan al-Munkar (The Youth for Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil), the Harakat al-Aḥrar al-Yamaniyyin (The Free Yemeni Movement), and the al-Jamʿiyyah al-Yamaniyyah al-Kubra (the Grand Yemeni Organization). All the literary and intellectual production of these movements manifested itself in the constitutional revolution of February 1948, which marked a new phase of Yemeni reformism in a modern political dimension, including resistance movements and organizations.

All these bodies reflected the Yemeni reformist project in all its intellectual, political, cultural, and national dimensions. In this way, they formed the seeds of the modern layout of a national identity that included all the voices protesting the religious Imamate authority in the north and colonial power in the south. In the thirties and forties, Aden and Cairo emerged as centers of resistance against colonial rule.

It was no coincidence that that period preceded the 1948 revolution. Meanwhile, the Egyptian reformist movement, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, found its way to Yemen through Cairo-educated Yemenis, namely Mohammed Mahmood Al-Zubayri, Ahmed Al-Nuʿman, and

Al-Fuḍil Al-Wartalani. Documented by Ḥamid Shajarah in his book Maṣraʿ al-Ibtisamah (The Death of the Smile), the encounter between the Egyptian and Yemeni reformism led to the first constitutional revolution in the Arab peninsula. Although the revolution failed, a new but latent reformist phase began in Yemen and lasted until the September 26, 1962 revolution.

The Formation of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform

The new Yemeni constitution guarantees the right to democratic and cultural pluralism, and the right to political transition through popular elections. The Islamist movement was thus compelled to adjust to the new political order and take serious steps towards adjusting to the nation's new political orientation. Islamists, for instance, revisited their political vision by establishing al-Tajammuʿ al-Yamani li al-Iṣlaḥ (The Yemeni Congregation for Reform, better known as Al Islah Party), the first political party representing the country's Islamist movement and its new orientation.

The formation of the party marked an important shift in Yemeni reformist doctrine. A fierce intellectual, cultural, and religious debate raged over the party's position on issues such as political activism, democracy, pluralism, elections, and women's participation. The rhetoric on renewal ended up leading the conversation by adopting the notion and process of democratic, political, and cultural transition. That discourse marked a pivotal shift in the Islamist movement's views on many cultural and political issues.

Despite the progress noted above, a few issues remained controversial, especially the debate over women's right to vote and run for office. And although the issue was later resolved in favor of women, social norms halted further progress. More importantly, the debate over the Islamization of the constitution and the source of the law also contributed to the real transformation of Islamism.

Despite the adoption of a clear political party-like system and the establishment of the Al Islah Party as political cover for their activities and activism, the political vision of Yemeni Islamists remained ambiguous – especially concerning the tension between the religious and the mundane, and between politics and religious activism.

Although no debate was completely resolved, the Al Islah Party's political practice always preceded speculation. In other words, disputes between the two main Islamist orientations were resolved through practice rather than through the taking up of intellectual positions and theorization.

In Yemen, many parliamentary and presidential elections were held. The most transparent and democratic election held was in 1993. Islamists succeeded in securing 63 parliamentary seats from a total of 301. As a result, they constituted the second most influential political force in the country.

In the 1997 elections and after the dissolution of political alliances as a result of the Summer 1994 war, the democratic process dwindled, and Islamist reformists withdrew from the government. They did not, however, rush to join the ranks of the opposition, but they acted as a buffer force between the regime and the opposition. They remained in an in-between position as a result of their ambiguous doctrine confusing the political and the religious. In other words, they believed that open opposition would have been rebellion against the ruler according to the Salafist interpretation of the situation.

Eventually, Islamists revisited many of their political views, first announcing the establishment of the Al Islah Party as the result of their contradictory views on politics. Second, they did not join the coalition government following the 1997 parliamentary elections when they lost some of their seats. On the other hand, the Al Islah Party later joined the Majlis Tansiq Aḥzab al-Muʿaraḍah (The Opposition Co-ordination Council), a body that included socialists and Nasserists. In the 1999 presidential elections, the Al Islah Party supported the candidate of the ruling party, Hizb al-Muʿtamar al-Shaʿbi al-ʿAm (The General People's Congress). These conflicting positions pointed towards the Al Islah Party's contradictory views.

After the elections, the Al Islah Party and right-wing parties formed the coalition Taqattul al-Liqāʾ al-Mushtarak al-Muʿāriḍ (The Coalition for Opposition Union) that ran for the first time in the final parliamentary elections in Yemen in 2003. As a result, the coalition achieved only 40 seats

and formed a fierce opposition force in the face of ʿAli ʿAbdallah Ṣaliḥ's regime.

The Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Al Islah Party): Post-Revolution Challenges

The most significant political transformation of the Al Islah Party took place following the 2003 parliamentary elections. The Al Islah Party formed an opposition coalition with the socialist party, the Nasserist party, and other right-wing parties. The coalition later supported one candidate for the presidential elections in 2006, the engineer Fayṣal Bin Shamlan.

The 2006 presidential elections were the last democratic elections held in Yemen. In their wake, a number of political conflicts broke out in both the South and the North. As a result of the political turmoil, no elections were ever held again. In 2011, Yemen – a country very prone to unrest – witnessed the February 11 Revolution, which ended Salih's reign. The revolution, however, was not completely successful because the intervention of regional and international powers was able to limit the revolutionaries' demands. As a consequence, Ṣaliḥ stayed in power and planned the September 21 Coup in 2014, which ended the Yemenis' ambitions and the demands of the 2011 revolution.

Following the February 11 revolution, a coalition government was formed between the revolutionary forces and the ruling party General People's Congress while the Al Islah Party gained five seats in the cabinet. The Al Islah Party followed its usual reformist line – a position that was unsuitable for the revolutionary period, in which the people were calling for a radical change in Yemeni politics.

Reality showed that partial political reform was on its way rather than a radical revolutionary change. Following the September 21, 2014 coup that brought an end to both the revolution and Yemeni sovereignty, the old establishment re-branded and re-established itself.

The Al Islah Party was the first party to come under attack after the coup. Regional and international powers intended to weaken the Arab Spring's forces and the democratic transitional process. As a result, Yemen was left engulfed in brutal wars, in which regional powers intervened. For four years, Yemen was trapped in a maze of violence provoked by anti-revolutionary forces that initially supported the coup then resisted it. The Yemeni scene was a knot of contradictions, with both revolutionary and anti-revolutionary forces fighting with and against each other. As soon as the coup succeeded, the Al Islah Party found itself with no allies being a target for the coup and many regional powers as well. The revolution was already under attack by anti-revolutionary forces and by some regional powers that had failed to properly assess the repercussions of the war in Yemen.

For that reason, the Al Islah Party is today at a very critical phase given its complex organizational structure, the conflicting views of its member movements, and its local and regional alliances – all of which have contributed to the Al Islah Party's disorientation and political stagnation. Despite all that, it remains a significant political player on the Yemeni political scene. We must also point to that the harsh criticism and attack the Al Islah Party has been subject to has helped push the member parties further together.

Many problematic structural issues have been impeding the organizational integrity and functionality such as: the overlapping between the political and the preaching, and lack of internal democracy and transparency. Furthermore, the party appears to be led by an older generation while almost 70 percent of its ranks are youth members.

More than ever before, the youth of the Al Islah Party know that the tragic situation in Yemen is the natural result of an impotent political system and miscalculated choices. The party has not held leadership elections since its foundation. Moreover, the party's internal stagnation has limited its political influence across the Yemeni geographic, social, and cultural map.

The events of the Arab Spring in Yemen provoked the rise of a new generation with progressive views on politics, on the relationship between state and society, and on values of pluralism and human rights. The new generation introduced new ideas to the traditional Islamist worldview. Among the leading figures of the young generation is Tawakkul Karman, a member of the shura council and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Other youth members included political and human rights activists, who were members in the Al Islah party and acted through the student unions in universities, even before the 2011 revolution.

The views and the ideology those young Islahis have adopted is similar to the doctrine of "post-Islamism", which was initiated by Al Islah party's figures in the districts of Taiz and South Yemen and whose opinions were published in "Al-Jumhuriya" newspaper. Therefore, the period before the Arab Spring was characterized by fierce intellectual debate between the conservative and the reformist strands within the Al Islah party around many issues such as: women rights, individual rights in Islam, etc.

The new generation of Al Islah party has led intellectual confrontations in mosques, in newspapers, and on social media. They have tirelessly sought to share their views to win supporters and mobilize the public. As soon as the peaceful February 11 revolution caught fire, young Islahis voices including intellectuals, activists, and artists found their way to represent and lead the civil movement. On the other hand, the conservative trend was more organized and included clergymen and religious and tribal leaders.

"Post-Islamism", a term coined by Asef Bayat, is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic nor secular. It rather reflects a tendency to fuse religiosity and civil rights, faith and liberty, Islam and the freedom of choice. In other words, it aims to alter the principles of Islamism by focusing on rights instead of obligations, on pluralism instead of unified authority, on historicity instead of textual immutability, and on the future instead of the present.[2]

As such, issues of citizenship, individual freedom and rights, freedom of speech, and civil and political rights were all causes adopted by the

young intellectual elite, whose activism has marked the most significant transformation in the Islamist movement. Yet, following the 2014 military coup led by the Houthi rebels, who believe in theocracy based on the Imamate doctrine, the leadership of the Islamist movement grew more aware and convinced about separating the religious from the political, and of the danger of religious political parties.

The Transformation of the Salafist Movement in Yemen

Similar to the case of the Al Islah party, the Salafist movement in Yemen has undergone notable intellectual transformations since the February 11 revolution. For instance, the movement – or large groups involved in the movement – have given up some of their views on the constitution, elections, democracy, and pluralism. As such, the revolution represents a turning point in the orientation of the Salafist movement. Following the revolution, many Salafist parties emerged, such as the Hizb al-Nahḍah (Al-Nahda Party) in the South, the Hizb al-Rashad al-Yamani (Al-Rashad Yemeni Party), and the Hizb al-Salam wa al-Tanmiyah al-Yamani (The Peace and Development Party).

The transformations of the 'Salafist status'[3] manifested in the movement's views, doctrine, and organizational structure express the radical impact the Arab Spring had on groups with rigid ideologies such as these. Some scholars called this phenomenon a 'Salafist renewal', which begins to challenge the traditional Salafist movement's views as exemplified in al-Shaykh Muqbil Al-Wadʿi's school, which was first established in the city of Dimaj in al- Saʿda district and later expanded to Dar Maʿbar and other cities. The new Salafist movement believes in political and social activism, and has adopted a variety of views on democracy. It has also expressed some progressive and pragmatic political positions – some even more progressive than those of the socialist and Nasserist parties. One Salafist leader has asserted that the movement's positive positions on democracy and human rights were the direct results of the 2011 revolution and the subsequent peaceful political change it brought about.[4]

For that reason, the anti-revolutionary movement impeded the transformation of the Salafist movement. It even encouraged some of its supporters to join

fundamentalist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS after all peaceful options were exhausted, and sectarian violence was on the rise. Meanwhile, dictatorships in the region began leading propaganda campaigns against Islamists to win over the West and achieve their political goals.

Following the Arab Spring, Salafi–Jihadism became active again, despite having diminished during the upsurge of the revolutions. Young revolutionaries unable to continue their peaceful strife against anti-revolutionary military forces were compelled to join the alternative Salafi-jihadist groups.

The Transformation of Political Zaydiyyah

In the early nineties, following Yemeni unification and the proclamation of a unity constitution guaranteeing political pluralism and democracy, Zaydis formed a number of political parties. As discussed above, the Zaydi doctrine is based on the notion of a theocracy that limits the legitimate political and spiritual leaders of the Islamic community to the family of the prophet – a doctrine similar to Iran's Twelver doctrine.[5] According to Zaydi literature, knowledge and authority are exclusive to the family of the prophet – or as they are called in Yemen al-Sadah (the honorific) or al-Hashimiyyun (the Hashemites).[6] Accordingly, the issue of Zaydi integration in the political system following unification provoked a raging debate among Zaydis and Zaydi scholars, some of whom believed that the Imamate doctrine was a thing of the past and signed a document adopting a more moderate position on democracy. On the other hand, the Zaydis of Saʿda rejected the document. [7]

Following unification, Zaydi parties participated in the parliamentary elections but did not achieve any significant success given their overall lack of popularity. The al-Haqq Zaydi party, representing the Houthis, only won two seats in the 1993 parliamentary elections and failed to hold any seats in the following elections in 1997 and 2003.[8] After consecutive disappointing defeats, the Zaydis formed an armed political group called al-Shabab al-Mu'min (The Young Believers) that is nowadays known as the Houthi movement. It led a military confrontation with the Yemeni state in 2004 and resulted in the assassination of the movement's founder, Hussein al-Houthi.

The Houthi movement joined the 2011 peaceful protests. It also participated in the national dialogue that followed and signed the resulting agreement only to later lead the military coup and dissolve the parliament, hold the president under house arrest, form a five-member presidential council, and appoint a government in Sana'a.[9]

The events of September 21, 2014 marked a dangerous escalation, upsetting Yemen's democratic transition at a crucial point. Meanwhile, Zaydi intellectuals, academicians, journalists, and authors, who had, before the military coup, held diverse political views and belonged to different political parties began to stick to their sectarian kin. In other words, while the Houthis had reconsidered their ideology at the beginning of the revolution, they soon showed their commitment to their original beliefs in theocracy and violent practices.

Conclusion

It is still too early to assess the transformations of Islamist movements in Yemen and other Arab countries given that these transformations have not yet concluded, especially those undertaken by the young intellectual elites, who have adopted a progressive approach to democracy. Their revolutionary zeal has led to clashes with anti-revolutionary movements that have militarized communities and redirected the peaceful and civil trajectory of the revolutions.

Despite all that, it would be an error of judgment to deem the Islamist project in Yemen a failure. We must also note that the Islamist movement's political, cultural, and social visions have undertaken a radical shift. Understanding these transformations requires following a politically-unbiased methodological and scientific approach. Moreover, the setbacks of the Islamist movement have provoked an unprecedented upswing in political awareness among the country's Islamists and compelled them to revisit their positions and views in order to understand the mechanisms of political systems, international relations, and the nature of the conflicts around them. I believe that the current struggle may lead to either of the two possibilities: the flourish of illegal violent groups or the consolidation of peaceful and civil movements challenging the current political turmoil.

Notes

[1] Jalal Khahobe, and Amal Shanan. "State and Political Islam: Holy Dictates and the Challenges of The Profane". *Idrak Center for Research & Consultations,* July 11, 2016, http://idraksy.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/State-and-political-Islam.pdf

[2] Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[3] Salafism has long shunned democracy and political action. Sufis also adopt this position stated in the traditional proverb "It is of political wisdom to quit politics" *(mina al-siyasa tarku al-siyasa).*

[4] Abdul Wahab al-Humqani, Secretary General of the Al-Rashad party, Interview by author.

[5] Mohamed Vall, "The Rise of Yemen's Houthis", *Al-Jazeera English*, Mar 26, 2014. https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/middleeast/2014/02/98466.html

[6] Nabil Al-Bokairi, "Between Zaidi and Houthi", *Arabi 21*, Dec 27, 2017, goo.gl/3PrXq4

[7] Nabil Al-Bokairi, "Zaidi Political Groups, Houthis" in *Encyclopedia of Islamic Movements in the Arab World* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2013)

[8] "General Background Information: Political Parties in the Republic of Yemen", *National Information Center, Yemen*, https://www.yemen-nic.info/sectors/politics/detail.php?ID=8437

[9] "Yemen's Houthis Form Own Government in Sanaa", *Al-Jazeera English,* Feb 2, 2015, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/02/yemen-houthi-rebels-announce-presidential-council-150206122736448.html

Concluding Remarks
Transformation of Political Islam in a Changing Regional Order: New Dynamics, New Policies?

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By way of conclusion, three main remarks will be made regarding the identification of Political Islam Movements (PIMs), the variables affecting their transformation in the period following the Arab uprisings, and the course of the transformation itself:

Firstly, the phenomenon of political Islam is too complex and too fragmented to be encapsulated within a single definition or molded into fixed categories. This is not only because it is easily conflated with other inter-related phenomena such as Salafism and Salafi jihadism, but also because the boundaries between these categories are always shifting. For instance, according to the definition laid out at the beginning of this task force, scholastic Salafism, whose activities are strictly religious, should not be included under the category of political Islam. Nevertheless, shortly after the Arab uprisings, with the political opening up and rapid politicization of public space, scholastic Salafi movements in many countries either established political parties or began systematically engaging in party politics. Hence, they became a perfect fit for the category of political Islam. Interestingly enough, in most cases, this ideological, strategic, and organizational shift took place hastily and spontaneously without any thorough revision of these groups' previous stances.

The same theory could be applied to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its affiliated or analogous parties, which have responded in varying different ways to the events of the Arab uprisings. Sometimes they maintained their reformist conservative attitude (as in the case of Jordan, Kuwait,

and Morocco), while in other cases, with a little hesitation, they were transformed into a force for change (as in the case of Egypt and Tunisia). Furthermore, on other occasions, with the eruption of the civil war in Syria and as a response to the bloody coup of 2013 in Egypt, it underwent a full-blown process of radicalization. The movement in those countries became involved in practicing violence, formed armed cells, and, in the Syrian case, engaged in guerrilla fighting against their oppressors – incidents that make the distinction between PIMs and Salafi jihadi Movements (SJMs) both ideologically and organizationally even harder to make.

Lacking a widely agreed-upon definition and in a continuous state of mutation, the identification of PIMs in any given case study cannot be but selective and contentious. It was up to each researcher, according to research approach and design, to identify how PIMs manifested themselves in his or her particular case study. Accordingly, the term "PIMs" was, in some cases, used strictly as a synonym for the MB. In others, it was stretched to include local religious politico-military aggregations, as the case of the Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement or even official religious establishments such as Al Azhar, which is currently fighting for relative autonomy from the Egyptian state in a bid to claim the inheritance of the ruthlessly-excluded and temporarily-paralyzed MB in that country.

Second, the transformation of PIMs in the region has been triggered and shaped by a mixture of domestic, regional, and international variables, which are interrelated, overlapping, and constantly interacting. Although most of the chapters of this book focus more on the local political dynamics of each case study, they also occasionally refer to regional and international factors being unequivocally important. However, aside from contexts of civil war, we would cautiously argue that domestic variables had the upper hand over regional and international ones. These domestic variables include some structural, as well as actor-centric factors.

Accordingly, whether the PIMs in a given country were able to avoid the backlash against the Arab uprisings or not depended primarily upon how well they managed their relationship with other domestic actors within

the structural determinants. Those domestic actors include: other PIMs, other ideological socio-political forces, and, most importantly, the political establishment (whatever it is named: the ancient regime, the deep state, the monarch, or the amir). When the Egyptian MB, as an example, failed to wisely handle these three parties, the combined forces of its rivals, augmented by the generous support of some regional and international powers, were able to topple it. On the other hand, the careful management of these intricate relationships helped the Tunisian Ennahda to partially absorb the blow and somewhat lessen its losses.

This is not to suggest that regional and international variables should be overlooked. Rather, it is to argue that the susceptibility of PIMs to such factors markedly increased when these movements failed to secure their position domestically by reaching mutual understandings with the political establishment and forging solid alliances with other socio-political forces. In addition, regional and international powers, aside from in the cases of civil war, have managed to exert their influence largely through domestic institutions and political forces.

Third, concerning the nature of the transformation itself, despite being massive and consequential, it can be argued that there was nothing new about the nature and mechanisms of PIMs' transformation in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings: Political inclusion mostly led to moderation in the PIMs' ideology and political behavior (as in the case of the Moroccan PJD and Tunisian Ennahda), while violent crackdowns and political exclusion stimulated radicalization (as happened in Syria and Egypt after the 2013 coup); political opportunities prompted adaptation to maximize gains, such as in the instant politicization of scholastic Salafism, the increasingly independent Al Azhar institution, or the emergence of cross-ideological alliances between unexpected rivals; severe political losses led to inward-looking, aggravated internal disputes and catalyzed defections as in the cases of the Jordanian and post-coup Egyptian MB.

Of course, it would be reductionist to claim the presence of general standard rules determining political dynamics in the whole region without

considering the specifics of each case study. Nevertheless, what is meant here is the transformation of PIMs, induced by new dynamics in the post-Arab uprisings, was by and large conventional, and despite the shock of the events themselves, the nature and the course of the transformations that resulted were surprisingly unsurprising.

Political Islam in a Changing Regional Order: Policy Recommendation

In fact, since the Arab uprisings, the phenomenon of political Islam has come to represent a major political fault line in the Middle East. It has played an important role in determining the nature of relations between major international powers and the region. Regimes in the Middle East have referred to the "Islamist threat" for decades as a means of securing Western support for their authoritarian rules. Along these same lines, international powers have largely treated the region through the lenses of "exceptionalism." Hence, they have not pushed these regimes to reform and democratize their political systems in earnest; instead, they have (in)directly bought into these regimes' framing of the region and their domestic political contexts. In such a reading, the presence and salience of political Islamic movements within the larger opposition movements to these regimes have significantly decreased international political support for the cause of democratization in the Middle East.

Capitalizing on this international consent to their authoritarian policies, these regimes have not only heavily cracked down on different manifestations of political Islam, but they also often framed any other sources of opposition to their regimes as being Islamists, and thus delegitimize them. A recent, flagrant example has been the Saudi regime's attempt to frame Jamal Khashoggi as an Islamist in the aftermath of his gruesome murder at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Such an approach to the Middle East, to the phenomenon of political Islam and to the process of democratization has culminated in the contraction of public and political space for the expression of political demands and grievances. This in return has proven fertile ground for extremist groups to emerge and tap into the festering grievances and discontent of peoples living under the iron fist of regional authoritarianism. Thus, the dichotomy of authoritarianism versus Islamism has been a false one from the start. Among

the outcomes of this dichotomy have been the expansion of extremism, civil wars, state collapse, state failure, and millions of refugees. Here it is necessary to keep in mind that absent of crisis, discontent, or other grievances that nourish radical ideologies and methods, radicalism is not a winning card in the Middle East. Given this backdrop, it is important for international powers to recalibrate their approaches to the process of regional transformation and the phenomenon of political Islam, as follows:

First of all, the idea of attaining stability at the expense of regional transformation is an immature one. It is highly unlikely that the Middle East will become a stable region, unless it is radically transformed. The formula should, therefore, be stability through transformation. This stance should recognize that the process of transformation will be a messy, cumbersome, and inconvenient one. Despite this, an understanding that regional transformation is the only game in town could help facilitate sustainable, long-term, and predictable relations between international powers and the Middle East.

Secondly, this transformation will remain incomplete if it tries to leave out any of the major socio-political components of the region. In this respect, international powers should engage with all major political actors and stakeholders in the region, including Political Islam Movements, and push them to embrace an inclusive and pluralistic idea of regional transformation. Such a principled and fair approach would give international actors leverage to put pressure on political Islam movements, if needed, to reform themselves in ideological, structural, and political terms.

Thirdly, the region is unlikely to reach a post-crisis state unless there is a reconciliation between different ideological, ethnic, and sectarian groups. In this respect, international actors should encourage dialogue, engagement, and coalition-building between Islamist and secularist political groups.

Fourthly, the most effective ways of combating terrorism and radicalism in the region are to open up and democratize the political system, and to integrate mainstream political Islam movements into the body politics of the countries within which they are operating.

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ABOUT ALSHARQ FORUM

The Sharq Forum is an independent international network whose mission is to undertake impartial research and develop long-term strategies to ensure the political development, social justice and economic prosperity of the people of Al-Sharq. The Forum does this through promoting the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue, social justice, and public-spirited research.

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Transformation of Political Islam in a Changing Regional Order

This book examines and analyses the ongoing transformation of Political Islam Movements (PIMs) in seven countries where the Arab uprisings phenomenon took different forms: massive mobilization that induced leadership change (Tunisia and Egypt), limited demonstrations with a reformist agenda (Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait), and a bloody civil war (Syria and Yemen). The idea behind this research design was to understand how PIMs acted and reacted in response to the different challenges and opportunities created by the Arab uprisings in different contexts.

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