

# **ISLAMIST RADICALISATION**

## **THE CHALLENGE FOR EURO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS**

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This study was carried out with the kind support of the Fundacion Tres Culturas, Sevilla, and the Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid. CEPS' programme in this area is supported by the Compagnia di San Paolo and the Open Society Institute, which are also gratefully acknowledged.

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*Cover photo: Protest by the Islamic jihad in Bethlehem against the Danish newspaper cartoons, February 2006.*

ISBN 978-92-9079-865-1

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## PREFACE

*RICHARD YOUNGS AND MICHAEL EMERSON*

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Issues relating to political Islam continue to present challenges to European foreign policies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). As EU policy has sought to come to terms with such challenges during the last decade or so political Islam itself has evolved. Experts point to the growing complexity and variety of trends within political Islam. Some Islamist organisations have strengthened their commitment to democratic norms and engaged fully in peaceable, mainstream national politics. Others remain wedded to violent means. And still others have drifted towards a more quietist form of Islam, disengaged from political activity. Political Islam in the MENA region presents no uniform trend to European policy-makers.

Analytical debate has grown around the concept of ‘radicalisation’. This in turn has spawned research on the factors driving ‘de-radicalisation’, and conversely, ‘re-radicalisation’. Much of the complexity derives from the widely held view that all three of these phenomena are occurring at the same time. Even the terms themselves are contested. It has often been pointed out that the moderate–radical dichotomy fails fully to capture the nuances of trends within political Islam. Some analysts also complain that talk of ‘radicalism’ is ideologically loaded. At the level of terminology, we understand radicalisation to be associated with extremism, but views differ over the centrality of its religious–fundamentalist versus political content, and over whether the willingness to resort to violence is implied or not. Such differences are reflected in the views held by the Islamists themselves, as well as in the perceptions of outsiders.

Whatever one’s stance on such questions of terminology, it is clear that political Islam presents dimensions that are disconcerting from the point of view of European interests. In November 2007, we published a

volume that presented an analysis of how Islamist political parties viewed European foreign policy. That book was based on interviews conducted with some of the main Islamist parties espousing democratic norms across nine MENA states. Its conclusions were sobering. They revealed Islamists' continuing mistrust of European intentions, disappointment with the EU's failure to live up to its claim of being serious about promoting democratic reform in the Middle East and the perception that EU initiatives such as the European Neighbourhood Policy are more about excluding and containing Islamism than they are about inclusion and engagement.

In this follow-up volume, we broaden our analysis to consider some of the trends within political Islam that appear to be less benign for European interests. We are interested here in the relationship between the 'moderate' and 'less moderate' ends of the Islamist spectrum. Two distinct dimensions of the latter present challenging, but different, policy considerations for the EU: first, those Islamist groups still committed to or actively engaged in violence; and second, those strands increasingly committed to a disengaged, apolitical form of doctrinally-pure Islam. This second trend may not be violent, but is invariably hostile in its doctrine to both the West and democracy, apparently uncompromising in its ideological principles and often reluctant to channel demands and articulate interests through the political process. Experts differ on the question of whether this second trend can be described as radicalisation. But it is clear that both dimensions – violent and quietist – raise important and difficult policy dilemmas for European policy-makers.

An assessment of these dilemmas forms the backbone of this book. To this end, the book examines the following questions:

- How does EU policy affect the balance between moderate and less moderate strands of political Islam in the MENA region?
- Does the EU need to engage more specifically with the moderates? Is this the best means to assist de-radicalisation? Or is a selective focus on the moderates actually contributing to the growing exclusion, frustration and thus re-radicalisation of some Islamists?
- If this latter interpretation is correct, how far and in what way should the EU be engaging with the less moderate end of the Islamist spectrum? Should it set any conditions for such engagement, and if so what kinds of conditions? If it sets no conditions, can EU engagement really contribute towards de-radicalisation or is it of little significance

for trends in political Islam? If re-radicalisation is actually a misnomer and of no particular concern to European interests, what policy implication does this more critical reading have for EU strategy in the MENA region?

This volume proceeds in three parts.

First, Robert Springborg provides an overview of the mismatch between trends in re-radicalisation, on the one hand, and European readings of political developments in the Arab states of the southern Mediterranean, on the other.

Second, a series of regional experts dissect trends in the MENA region and reflect on what these mean for European policies. Ibrahim El Houdaiby investigates the roots of persistent radicalism in Egypt; Khaled Al-Hashimi examines the factors driving Hamas's radicalism at the individual, social, governmental and international levels; and Omayma Abdel-Latif charts the fluidity in Salafism. Senem Aydin Düzgit and Ruşen Çakir question whether Turkey is really the successful case of de-radicalisation it is often presented to be.

In the volume's third part, European experts delve deeper into the nature of EU policies. Ana Echagüe argues that fears that the EU is contributing to re-radicalisation are exaggerated. Kristina Kausch critiques the EU's failure to fulfil its commitment to engage with moderate Islamists. Nona Mikhelidze and Nathalie Tocci explore whether the EU's engagement with opposition groups in other regions provide any helpful lessons for the Middle East.

In the volume's conclusion, Muriel Asseburg seeks to relate the intricacies of internal trends within Islam to the design of European strategies. A common theme running throughout the volume is that the EU needs far more fine-grained and bespoke policies that better respond to the fact that radicalisation, de-radicalisation and re-radicalisation are all occurring in the MENA region and are driven by a multiplicity of different factors.

# **PART I.**

## **THE QUESTION**

# 1. IS THE EU CONTRIBUTING TO RE-RADICALISATION?

ROBERT SPRINGBORG

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This opening chapter provides an overview of the main questions explored by this volume: whether re-radicalisation is occurring; whether it is doing so because democratisation is not; and whether the EU could do more to facilitate democratisation or at least liberalisation, or could provide some solace or even support to Islamists so that they do not re-radicalise. Leaving aside the EU's role for the moment, the possible link between 'freedom' and 'terror' is one that has already stimulated considerable research, much of which indicates a negative correlation, i.e. the less freedom in a political system, the more likely it is to spawn terrorism. A recent empirical study conducted by the Rand Corporation, for example, of how "political reform influences calculations regarding political violence in six Arab states", found that "political openings can co-opt and moderate opposition forces" and "cosmetic reforms and backtracking erode regime legitimacy and contribute to political violence".<sup>1</sup>

It would appear, therefore, that the implicit assumptions about re-radicalisation are well grounded, suggesting that the EU should give careful consideration to how it might help reverse the de-liberalisation, re-radicalisation process and possibly even leverage it into a liberalisation-moderation one. The purposes of this chapter are to investigate the contexts within which potential EU interventions might occur, most particularly

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<sup>1</sup> D. Dassa Kaye, F. Wehrey, A.K. Grant and D. Stahl, *More Freedom, Less Terror? Liberalisation and Political Violence in the Arab World*, Rand Corporation, Los Angeles, CA, 2008.



that of contemporary Islamism within authoritarian Arab political systems, and to draw out some implications for possible EU strategies and programming.

## **1. Islamism's responses to authoritarianism**

Moderate political Islamists face increased pressure throughout the Middle East and North Africa. In the most authoritarian states, including Libya, Syria and Tunisia, they have been provided absolutely no political space within which to operate. In Lebanon and Palestine, the confrontation with Israel, combined with the very nature of politics in weak states, has pushed political Islam into the methods and structures of national resistance organisations rather than non-violent political parties. In those non-Gulf states that have permitted the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) or its offshoot organisations to contest elections, including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Yemen, authoritarianism has weakened all oppositionists, including Islamists. In the Gulf, the picture is less clear. While in Saudi Arabia moderate Islamists have demonstrated their strength in those elections that have been permitted, in Kuwait the Muslim Brotherhood offshoot, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (Hadas), lost half of its seats in the May 2008 parliamentary elections, while the more rigid and devout Salafists and Shii groupings captured record shares of the vote. Paradoxically, it is only in Iraq where moderate Islamists, albeit of a highly sectarian character, seem to be making headway against jihadist Islamists and possibly also, in the case of Sunni Islamists, against a government reluctant to grant them much political leeway.

The Islamist organisations most relevant to an assessment of the prospects of re-radicalisation are those that seemed to moderate their positions as part of their entry into competitive electoral politics, including those in the republics mentioned above and in Morocco, Jordan and Kuwait. They have all followed a similar trajectory of rising hope for their political prospects accompanying successful performance at the polls, followed by disillusionment occasioned either by deteriorating electoral appeal, being subject to harsh repression, or a combination of the two.

Even before the final round of the three-stage parliamentary elections of 2005 in Egypt had finished, for example, it was made clear to the Muslim Brothers that the regime was going to reward their surprisingly successful performance in the initial round with increased repression, an approach that the government has followed since that time. In the 2008 local government elections, the MB failed to win a seat in the face of massive

intimidation.<sup>2</sup> The high water mark for Jordan's Islamic Action Front (IAF) was achieved in the comparatively free elections of 1989. Since that time its political hopes have receded as gerrymandering of election districts and generalised governmental pressure, further intensified under King Abdullah, has reduced the number of IAF deputies in successive elections by some two-thirds, so that in 2007 it won a mere six seats.<sup>3</sup> Yemen's al-Islah Party reached the apogee of its electoral success in the 1993 elections, the first to be held after the 1990 unification, when it finished a reasonably close second to the regime's own party, the General People's Congress (GPC). Since that time, its position has been steadily eroded by the GPC, which with 238 seats now outnumbers the 46 Islah members of parliament by a margin of five to one. The Party for Justice and Development's (PJD) electoral fortunes in Morocco have similarly stagnated. Breaking onto the electoral scene in the 1997 elections when it won 9 seats, it rapidly gained popularity and captured 42 in the 2002 elections. Although it managed to win 47 seats in the September 2007 elections, its share of the popular vote was only 14%, well below what had been anticipated. One explanation of this disappointing result, in addition to low voter turnout because of apathy, was the drift of supporters away from the PJD to Sheikh Abdel Salam Yassin's Movement for Justice and Charity, an Islamist organisation that takes a harder line and refused to contest elections.<sup>4</sup> In Kuwait, voters have a choice among Islamists, with the moderate, MB-affiliated Hadas on the conservative end of the spectrum and a grouping of Salafists towards the more radical end (at least in terms of personal beliefs and practices). In the 2008 elections, the first to be held on the basis of the new electoral law

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<sup>2</sup> I. El Houdaiby contends that the post-2005 crackdown is empowering radicals within the MB. See his article, "Miscalculated Adventure", *Middle East Times*, 6 June 2008 (retrieved from [http://www.metimes.com/Opinion/2008/06/06/egypts\\_miscalculated\\_adventure/3667/](http://www.metimes.com/Opinion/2008/06/06/egypts_miscalculated_adventure/3667/)).

<sup>3</sup> As in the case of Egypt, the combination of repression and declining electoral success of Jordan's IAF is seen by close observers as empowering radicals within the organisation, as manifested in this case by the intense electoral struggle in the wake of the 2007 elections that saw the radical Hammam Sa'id win by one vote.

<sup>4</sup> A. Hamzawy, "The 2007 Moroccan Parliamentary Elections: Results and Implications", Web Commentary, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 7 September 2007 (<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19569&prog=zgp&proj=zme>).

that was widely seen to favour Hadas, that grouping saw its parliamentary bloc reduced to three seats as the Salafists recorded their best ever results.<sup>5</sup>

The recent political record of moderate Islamists is clear. Their electoral performance is in decline, while their capacities appear to be eroding as a result of sustained governmental pressure. In Morocco, Kuwait, Algeria and Yemen the existence of yet more radical Islamist political organisations may account for the enervation of 'establishment' political Islam as it is increasingly seen as having been co-opted and lost its effectiveness. In Egypt and Jordan, where more radical Islamist organisations apparently have been marginalised, the downward trajectories of the MB and the IAF, coupled with internal restiveness and radicalisation, result primarily from intensifying struggles with the regime, although disaffection with the MB and IAF is also manifest among the Egyptian and Jordanian wider publics. Why then have the bright hopes of moderate Islamists failed to materialise? And what are the reactions to this failure?

A single, over-arching explanation of failure might be referred to as 'democratisation fatigue', a notion that encompasses several elements. First and most importantly, regimes have grown leery of the liberalisation strategies that they formerly pursued and to which moderate Islamists responded by focusing their organisational energies on the political system and specifically electoral politics. While the causes of regime anxiety vary from country to country, the most common one is the very success of these moderate Islamists in mobilising support in opposition to incumbent regimes. That success has deterred further liberalisation and in most of the republics has caused it to be rolled back. For their part, Arab publics, ever alert to the signals sent by their rulers, have come to believe that the path to power will never lie through free and fair elections, so why waste time with them and organisations seeking to follow that path.

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<sup>5</sup> On the recent Kuwaiti elections, see N.J. Brown, "Kuwait's 2008 Parliamentary Elections: A Setback for Democratic Islamism", Web Commentary, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., May 2008. Brown concludes by observing, "Kuwait's HADAS has managed in less than two decades to emerge as the Arab Islamist party most thoroughly integrated as a normal political actor. Its leaders are frustrated because they feel that in a sense they have become more democratic than the political system in which they operate - and perhaps more than Kuwaiti society is ready for."

The regional context within which de-liberalisation dramas have been played out in the Arab republics reinforces democratisation fatigue. Much faith had been placed in the willingness and ability of the Bush administration to pressure rulers to democratise. That faith is now believed to have been misplaced. Simultaneously, the political successes of the national liberation Islamist movements, namely Hizbullah and Hamas – with the former fighting Israel to a draw in 2006 and imposing its will on the 14 March-backed government in May 2008, and the latter defeating Fatah in Gaza and continuing to resolutely confront Israel – suggest to many Arabs that a radical, rather than moderate approach pays greater political dividends. That Hizbullah's and Hamas's putative successes owing to their hard-line positions occurred just when the soft lines taken by the MB, PJD, Hadas, IAF and Islah were seen to have led nowhere, reinforced the view that moderation is ineffective.

Reactions to democratisation fatigue among Islamists include voter apathy, organisational fissures and radicalisation. Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and Kuwait have all witnessed declining electoral performances of moderate Islamists. A recrudescence of Islamist violence has occurred in Algeria, Lebanon and Yemen, while the growing appeal of more fundamentalist Islamists has affected recent elections in Morocco and Kuwait. Moderate Islamists, in sum, confront serious challenges. Although organisational fissures vary in intensity and type from country to country, what seems common is an old guard–young guard schism, which is most manifested in Egypt. The basic indictment of the MB leadership by many youthful Brothers is that they simply are not politically hip. If the strategy is to compete for power by traditional democratic means augmented by mobilisation of the street in non-violent protests, then the organisation has itself to be more democratic, flexible, policy literate, engaged and capable of winning the hearts and minds of the 'Facebookiyyin', that new category of hip, wired, politically engaged youths, many of whom are Islamists. Interestingly, this schism is not unlike that which increasingly is dividing regimes as well, thus opening up the possibility of new coalitions that cross the heretofore-unbridgeable divide between government and opposition. But in the meantime, the pressure upon opposition Islamists is much greater than on incumbent regimes, for the former have also to bear the weight of oppression applied by the latter. So not surprisingly, there is more evidence of moderate Islamist organisations crumbling, including the general impression that the Islamist old guard is digging in against

younger members lured by the appeals of a Facebook, interactive politics away from the fundamentalist and hierarchical principles of the MB and its fellow travellers.

The contemporary political scene therefore appears to be one that is characterised on the surface by an authoritarian status quo, beneath which there are signs of organisational decay both within the ranks of moderate Islamists and in government. Secular, liberal political organisations are conspicuous in their absence. At the same time, Arab streets are becoming more restless not only as a result of this political stagnation, but also because of perceived consequences of bad governance for their daily lives. Inflation, especially of food prices, is the most evident and politically dangerous of these shortcomings. Given these signs of surface decay and sub-surface volatility, the latter of which is further enhanced by the availability of virtual political space through the Internet and mobile phones, the potential for volcanic political eruptions is increasing. As that pressure has mounted, however, there are relatively few signs of a renewal of Islamist violence spearheaded by radical, underground organisations, causing one to wonder why.

The most obvious answer is that the deterrent capacities of regimes have been reinforced. Indeed, incumbent rulers matched surface liberalisations with sub-structural reinforcements of security and intelligence forces, presumably in order to be able to draw firm bottom lines that would set the limits of those liberalisations. The tightening-up of constitutional, legal and administrative constraints on political freedoms has accompanied the muscling-up of those forces charged with monitoring and clearing political streets. In Egypt, that has taken the particularly sinister form of plainclothes goon squads being infiltrated into demonstrations to intimidate, beat and even sexually molest demonstrators. Lest those whose nominal rights have been violated seek redress in the courts, the regime moved in May 2008 to extend the Emergency Law, which has been in effect throughout the entirety of the Mubarak era and which the president promised to rescind during his 2005 presidential election campaign. The approximately 1.4 million-strong internal security forces include vast numbers of police spies within the Orwellian State Security Investigations, so only the brave or the foolish consider plotting against the regime. And since even nominally legal political activity, including active participation in an opposition political party or human rights organisation, can result in retaliation by the state,

complete withdrawal from political life is the only truly safe, hence most common strategy, whether in the form of voter apathy or the rise of a quietist Salafism.

Another impediment to the resurgence of violent Islamism is the recent historical record of the failure of this approach. Algeria and Egypt witnessed significant Islamist insurrections that ended in costly failures. The reverberations of counter-insurgency warfare for even non-combatants were sufficiently unpleasant for them to have a lasting deterrent effect on potential host populations. The clear lesson for those contemplating the overthrow of entrenched, authoritarian regimes was that a head-on assault would not work. In Egypt, that lesson should have been learned in 1981 when Islamic Jihad thought that the combination of the assassination of President Anwar Sadat and an uprising in Asyut would spark rebellion everywhere. That they truly learned that lesson in the wake of the failed 1992-97 insurrection is suggested by the apparently heartfelt recantations of members of the Jamaah al-Islamiyya and Jamaat al-Jihad after they had languished in prison for years. The Saudi authorities' similar success in inducing former Islamist guerrillas to repent suggests that they too have come to appreciate the durability of the regimes and possibly also the theological and political deficiencies of radical Islamism.<sup>6</sup>

Olivier Roy's reference to the "failure of political Islam" is certainly correct when applied to its violent variant, a fact recognised by most Arab publics.<sup>7</sup> Egypt and Algeria were signal lessons, but so too has been Iraq, where the nihilistic excesses of al-Qaeda-affiliated insurrectionists combined with the rejection of them by Sunni nationalists and even other Islamists have discredited not only al-Qaeda in most of the Arab world, but also violent Islamism more generally. The Iraqi-related al-Qaeda hotel bombings in Amman in November 2005 brought that message home directly to Jordanians. Meanwhile, the Lebanese have approached the brink of widespread violence in recent years, but on each occasion, including that in May 2008 with the so-called 'coup' by Hizbullah, they have backed away

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<sup>6</sup> On the Saudi strategy and its results, see C. Boucek, *Saudi Arabia's Soft Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare*, Carnegie Paper No. 97, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., September 2008.

<sup>7</sup> O. Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

from it, largely out of the universal repugnance at the very thought of a reoccurrence of civil war. When jihadists seized the Nahr al Barad refugee camp in 2007, virtually the entirety of Lebanon supported the military's sustained effort to conquer them. The upsurge of Salafist activity since that time hardly represents a broader embrace of violence, although it could be a precursor of more trouble to come in forever-troubled Lebanon. All of this evidence suggests that far from being enamoured with violence, the vast majority of Arab publics have had more than enough of it, even when it is justified on the grounds of being truly Islamic. So, for example, when MB Supreme Guide Mehdi Akef in May 2008 described Osama bin Laden sympathetically as a *mujahid*, a firestorm of controversy broke out, with Egyptian parliamentarians, theologians and others condemning Akef.<sup>8</sup> Two and a half years earlier, a 'martial arts' demonstration by MB-allied students at al-Azhar was seized upon by the regime to discredit the organisation, something it could not have accomplished had the public not been apprehensive about Islamist political violence.

Having failed to bring about new political orders through either bullets or ballots, Islamists may also be turning inward towards more spiritual, less political interpretations and practices of their religion. Sufism, for example, is attracting a growing number of young Egyptians, many of whom previously expressed support for Islamism despite the fact that most Islamists are critical of this quietist manifestation of Islam, even though the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, came from a Sufi background.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Salafism – which venerates the early practitioners and practices of Islam and in its dominant version is sceptical of direct political engagement (especially the compromising sort pursued by the MB) yet also has a jihadist element – has demonstrated its strength paradoxically at the polls in Kuwait, in the vibrant Islamist world of Algeria and in the shadowy underworld of Lebanese political violence. According to some bloggers, it is also enjoying a widespread resurgence in

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<sup>8</sup> For a report on the backlash, see *Asharq al-Awsat*, 24 May 2008 (retrieved from <http://www.asharqalawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=472017&issueno=10770>).

<sup>9</sup> On the spread of Sufism in Egypt, see *Al Arabiya*, 29 May 2008 (retrieved from <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/05/29/50656.html>).

the Gulf.<sup>10</sup> In Egypt and elsewhere, internal debates within the MB and its offshoots is increasingly taken up with the question of whether these organisations should abandon or at least de-emphasise the unrewarding field of competitive politics in favour of proselytisation and long-term social change.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, just as moderate Islamists are contemplating various alternatives to direct political action and participation in electoral politics, those on the street in their respective countries are becoming more active. Again, Egypt illustrates the broader regional trend. Widespread protest activity against repressive political measures that characterised the 2005 election year and which continued for about a year afterwards, gave way to labour strikes and protests against food shortages and inflation. These events were both more widespread and violent than the political protests that preceded them, resulting in several deaths. Regime reaction, a measure of the intensity of feelings on the street, was more pronounced and erratic as well, swinging between appeasement and intimidation.

In reaction to this increase in popular protest activity, the MB has vacillated between remaining aloof and engagement. It endorsed calls for a general strike, for example, but then did little if anything to ensure its

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<sup>10</sup> On Salafists in the Gulf, see for example, M. al Habil, "The Situation of the Brothers in the Gulf: A Critical Evaluation" (in Arabic), *IslamOnline.net* (retrieved from [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1209358102635&pagen](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1209358102635&pagen)). For an account of Lebanese Salafists in the tangled and opaque world of Lebanese Islamism, see R. Rafei, "Terror Uprooted", *Al Ahrām Weekly*, 16-23 October 2008 (retrieved from <http://weekly.ahram.org/eg/print/2008/918/re7.htm>). Algerian Salafism is described as having an apolitical core with two wings, one that engages in the political system and one that espouses violence, by A. Boubekeur, *Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria*, Carnegie Paper No. 11, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., September 2008. On Salafism in Jordan, see Q. Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001. A visiting scholar at the Brookings Institution entitled a recent piece on Salafism "Salafists Ascendant in the Arab World" – see K. Al-Anani, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2008 (retrieved from [http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0612\\_arabconservatismalalani.aspx?p=1](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0612_arabconservatismalalani.aspx?p=1)).

<sup>11</sup> A. Hamzawy, "Where now for Islamists?", *Al Ahrām Weekly*, 5-11 June 2008 (retrieved from <http://weekly.ahram.org/eg/print/2008/900/op2.htm>).



membership participated. It has refused to form strategic alliances with opposition political parties or groupings, but it has had some limited cooperation with them. Internally, it has signalled that it is opening up and becoming more transparent by referring to elections for leadership positions, but then has argued that the security situation is such that complete details must remain confidential.<sup>12</sup> The draft political platform it released in a somewhat confused, informal fashion in early 2008 called for the creation of a constitutionally empowered religious committee to review legislation and excluded Christians or women from holding the presidency. The subsequent controversy led to awkward backtracking and at least temporary postponement of the effort to create a definite platform.

Thus, as the political temperature has increased, the MB has appeared to be even more confused than the government in its reactions. One might explain this on the grounds that unlike the government, it has to contend with day-to-day repression that renders political party-like operations extremely difficult; and unlike popular movements that come and go, it has an enormous stake in preserving the durability of its cadre-based, historically rooted organisation. Hence, it is torn between becoming more cautious and calculating, or alternatively, more bold in its challenges to government. The drumbeat of postings on Islamist blogs and of newspaper articles on the travails of the MB and its offshoot organisations indicates the intensity of the pressure.<sup>13</sup> The outcome of partial elections within the MB guidance council in the spring of 2008, for example, was interpreted as signalling a retreat from political engagement into *dawah*, or proselytisation, as a result of the regime's crackdown. Similarly, tensions within the Jordanian MB were seen as causing a split between the political arm, the IAF, and the MB mother organisation, resulting in the election of a new and more radical supreme guide, Hammam Sa'id.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See for example K. Al-Anani, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Internal Elections", Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 17 June 2008 (retrieved from [http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0603\\_muslim\\_brotherhood\\_alanani.aspx?p=1](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0603_muslim_brotherhood_alanani.aspx?p=1)).

<sup>13</sup> For extensive reporting on these blogs and articles that discuss the challenges faced by MB organisations, see Marc Lynch's website, Abu Aardvark ([abuaardvark@gmail.com](mailto:abuaardvark@gmail.com)).

<sup>14</sup> M. Lynch, "Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood in Tough Times", Abu Aardvark (retrieved from [bounce-2637450@emailenfuego.net](mailto:bounce-2637450@emailenfuego.net) or see also the article at <http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2008/06/jordans-muslim.html>);

The apparent obstinacy of MB old guards in Egypt and elsewhere in the face of internal challenges and growing radicalism may suggest they are out of touch, that this kind of Islamist organisation is becoming passé. The MB 'firewall', to use Marc Lynch's term, may be crumbling, and allowing elements that are more radical back into Islamist and broader Arab politics.<sup>15</sup> Since the apparent failure of the established leaderships of these venerable Islamist organisations to adjust to new conditions seems so manifest, it raises the question of why this is so. Is it just because they are old, un- or anti-democratic by instinct, tradition and practice, and fearful of all challengers, especially youthful ones, out of petty, selfish motives? Or do they have an alternative vision, one that gives little weight to electoral politics and democracy more generally, but has seen it useful to play the quasi-democratic political game while in reality nurturing hopes of a rise to power through undemocratic means?

At the very least, it would not be surprising if the old guard leadership were at best conditional, qualified democrats. The MB is rooted in the crossing of Egyptian Sufism with 1920s and 1930s fascist-style political organisation, as Brynjar Lia's fine study of it so convincingly demonstrates.<sup>16</sup> It has not only persisted in the face of repeated campaigns of extermination dating back to the monarchy, but has also survived for generations in Egypt and elsewhere as the largest non-governmental political organisation in the respective country. Most importantly, it has never enjoyed the luxury of operating in fully democratic systems. Its success has been owing to the interrelationship of its organisational coherence and capacity, its mass appeal and the political manoeuvring of its leadership. Precisely because of its comparative political weight, it has periodically been of substantial value to leaders in search of publics, including in Egypt Kings Fuad and Farouk, Abdel Nasser before 1954 and Sadat almost to the end of his life. It remains of value even to President Hosni Mubarak at present, who needs it to justify his authoritarianism, to

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and I. Gharaibeh, "Jordan: Rifts in the Muslim Brotherhood", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., June 2008.

<sup>15</sup> He has discussed this possibility extensively in his blog. See for example, "Assessing the MB Firewall", Abu Aardvark, 13 May 2008 (retrieved from [bounce-2637450@emailenfuego.net](mailto:bounce-2637450@emailenfuego.net) on behalf of Abu Aardvark or see also <http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2008/05/assessing-the-m.html>).

<sup>16</sup> B. Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt*, London: Ithaca Press, 1996.

frighten secularists and Copts into political quiescence, to serve as a firewall against jihadists, to provide some Islamic legitimacy to his rule, to demonstrate his democratic credentials and to cause the US to temper its support for democratisation.

Given this organisational character and history, combined with repeated tactical alliances with regimes, it would hardly be surprising if MB veterans believed the path to power lay directly through intra-state politics rather than through elections. Although the history of tactical alliances has not included an outcome in which the MB has gotten the better of its ally, this in the minds of MB leaders would not necessarily discredit the approach. No strategy other than revolution is truly viable in non-democratic, unyielding systems and the MB is not a revolutionary organisation. Indeed, it manifests the organic conservatism of its membership, which is predominantly comprised of the petit bourgeoisie and one that is increasingly rural and traditional.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the signs of regime decay are palpable, especially in aging Mubarak's Egypt. Any new president there will need to connect to the street, and MB veterans no doubt nurture the hope that they will provide just that service and maybe, just maybe, while so doing, become the real power in the land. And if the MB were to come even close to calling the shots in Egypt, its power in the Arab world would be multiplied many times over. Why then, many MB veterans must ask, should they risk this possibility for quixotic ventures predicated on the assumption that regimes can be induced to liberalise? Better to wait, to bide one's time until the path to state power is opened by the fracturing of the incumbent elite. In this calculation, elections can serve the purpose of demonstrating one's popularity and organisational muscle, but they can never be the only key to power.

The MB leadership's wait and see approach, if indeed that is what it is, is not necessarily in conflict with the emerging trend of quietist Islam, whether in its Salafist, Sufi, *dawah salafi* or other variant. Unless they are mobilised by leaderships that are more radical, the MB can claim to speak on behalf of these quietist Muslims. Their very presence emphasises the Islamisation of society and consequently legitimates the basic MB message.

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<sup>17</sup> On the shift of MB membership from urban to rural Egypt, see H. Tammam, "MB Goes Rural", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 17-24 October 2008 (retrieved from <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/print/2008/919/op13.htm>).

So at least this component of the apparent fragmentation of Islamism does not pose a vital threat to the MB.

Similarly, the younger generation of moderate Islamists who have adopted IT as their key political tool may ultimately not render the MB old guard irrelevant as some have prophesised. The Facebookiyyin Islamists are a captivating new force and in today's desert of Arab politics, they appear particularly promising, but the odds against their inducing systemic reform and then filling liberated political space are long. Regimes are catching up technically with the IT political provocateurs and nowhere have governments been forced to surrender the street to them. Youth has energy, but probably not much staying power, so again the MB old guard may well ride out this challenge and indeed benefit from it as well.

Political Islam, in sum, is in ferment because its path to power has been blocked. Neither ballots nor bullets have changed the status quo. The promise of achieving political success through democratic means has been dashed on the bulwarks of authoritarianism. Jihadists have alienated potential Islamist constituencies to say nothing of other Arab citizens. Hizbullah and Hamas remain locked into their national liberation struggles, but they are not mobilising imitators elsewhere despite the admiration they inspire. Islamist violence in Algeria, Lebanon and Yemen is worrying, but thus far not of critical importance in either those countries or elsewhere. The key battlegrounds remain the political institutions and processes of Arab nation states, and everywhere those grounds are tilted in favour of regimes. Hence, political despair and discontent are causing Islamists to innovate, to seek new ways of achieving their political goals. Notwithstanding the plethora of such new efforts, their prospects remain limited. It seems that the status quo is set to continue, which raises the question of why an external actor, such as the EU, should intervene directly or indirectly to alter it.

One answer is that the MB old guard may well be correct. While Islamism is fragmenting, so too are the regimes. Having forsaken liberalisation in favour of the iron fist over the last decade, many Arab regimes have created doubts within their own ranks. The growing power of internal security forces and decay of civilian political institutions, including parliaments, legal/judicial systems, local governments, political parties, unions and so on, has engendered resentments and worries even among the beneficiaries of these systems. Nowhere on the horizon can a transition to democracy be perceived, while almost everywhere it is easy to see a further entrenchment of authoritarianism. The present global economic

crisis will exacerbate this trend, especially in that the Middle East oil economy will be hard hit by the downturn in oil revenues. The growing gaps within states and between states and societies cannot go unfilled forever. Leadership successions are particularly critical moments in that they expose these gaps and invite political actors to fill them. The calculations of what we have referred to as veteran or old guard, MB-style Islamists are most probably based on exactly this reading of the situation and ultimately those calculations could prove to be correct.

In sum, the real challenge may not be the rise to power of radical Islamists or violence committed by them, but the perpetuation and even strengthening of authoritarian rule as a result of moderate Islamists becoming strategic partners of at least some elements of incumbent regimes. Authoritarianism is bad enough, but an Islamist authoritarianism would be even worse, for the countries themselves as well as their neighbours and indeed for much of the rest of the world. Thus, an EU strategy predicated on the continuation and acceptance of the status quo is flawed by the real possibility that the status quo is not sustainable and that the likely outcome of its change is yet more negative, in that non-democratic elements would be further entrenched, to say nothing of their possible anti-Western agenda. What then, might the EU do in the face of this potential threat, as well as the more commonly considered one of Islamist radicalisation owing to political frustration?

### **The present EU approach**

It is easier to say what the EU has not done to confront Arab authoritarianism and the potential threats of re-radicalised Islamism or an Islamist-authoritarian incumbent alliance, than it is to identify a coherent strategy and associated actions. It joined the US in effectively rejecting the outcomes of elections in Egypt and Palestine in 2005-06 by failing to stand against governmental intimidation of the MB in the former and by tacitly supporting the disastrous American-backed initiative to enable Fatah to conquer Hamas in Gaza militarily. It continues to be party to the isolation of Hamas and the effort to buy support for Fatah in the West Bank. Throughout the Arab world, it has chosen to work with authoritarian governments and to offer assistance without democratisation or even liberalisation preconditions. Condemnation by the European Parliament of human rights abuses in Egypt are simply so many words, as the European Commission's approach to the country remains unaffected by the officially expressed sentiments of its nominal legislative authority. An effort to reach

out to young, democratic Islamists has not been mounted. Those approaches that have been made to Islamists are primarily through their elected members of parliament, which necessarily limits the range of non-violent Islamists with which it interacts.

This brief overview of timid EU actions towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) suggests that it has no overt, self-conscious strategy to directly facilitate democratisation there, either with or without the assistance of Islamists. Clearly, it does not see itself as a possible midwife of a transition based on a possible pact between reformers in government and moderate oppositionists, crucial in the latter camp of which would necessarily have to be Islamists. There is no sign that the EU is even aware of this potential path away from entrenched authoritarianism, which may actually be the best hope for peaceful, moderate democratisation in the region.

Why then has the EU failed to be more proactive, to utilise its substantial material and diplomatic resources to counter authoritarianism and to reward Islamists for pursuing peaceful political change through democratic means? Certainly, there are historical and structural reasons. Suspicion of Islam, to say nothing of Islamism, is deeply engrained in European publics and has been further heightened by Islamist violence, and at least in some European communities, by the presence of immigrant Muslims. For politicians, let alone bureaucrats, to ignore this sentiment is to court a threatening backlash. But even without the complicating factor of suspicion or outright anti-Muslim sentiment, the fundamental EU way of doing business is state to state. The negotiations on joining the EU and even those conducted with 'new neighbours' are held between the EU and the governments of the respective countries. EU foreign assistance is virtually entirely delivered to governments or to apolitical cultural organisations. As regards the MENA, the primary difficulty confronted by the EU since the Barcelona process began in 1995 has been to reconcile Arab states' hostilities towards Israel and EU policies deemed to be supportive of it. The excessive state-centred formalism of EU relations with the MENA, which also results from the quasi-sovereign nature of the EU itself (a factor that limits its flexibility and heightens its sensitivities towards issues of sovereignty), renders interactions with non-state political actors problematic. That the most powerful of these non-state actors today are Islamists simply exacerbates the problem.

Regrettably, the obstacles to a more flexible, non-state-centric EU approach to the MENA do not end there. A more subtle, nuanced

engagement requires skilful, focused management within the context of clear policy parameters. Neither precondition is likely to be met in the foreseeable future. A certain amount of constructive ambiguity surrounds EU policy towards Islamism, while the capacity to manage potentially explosive relationships with governments and Islamists is simply not there. Nor is it likely to be developed in the near future because the EU's attention is directed elsewhere. The list of higher priority issues is long, including internal structural matters, complicated by the presence of new member states and the failure to ratify the constitution or approve the treaty-substitute for it; the global financial crisis and the EU's comparatively weak financial architecture to deal with it; the emergence of a bellicose, threatening Russia on the eastern flank; and a failure as yet to construct a viable, long-term energy policy.

Finally and possibly most importantly, many EU decision-makers actually believe they do have a coherent, effective policy for assisting the liberalisation and even democratisation of Arab regimes. They would probably concede that it is an approach that will take time, but would claim in response that efforts to force the pace of change are likely to be ineffective or even to backfire. In its essence, the operational if poorly explicated EU approach is an indirect democratisation strategy based on facilitating economic growth and improved governance for its 'near neighbours' in the MENA. The key underlying assumptions in this approach are that economic growth and better governance ultimately will pave the way for more competitive polities, and that because regimes will benefit from the comparatively non-threatening assistance that contributes to economic growth and better governance, they will allow it. Unfortunately, these assumptions are not warranted.

To assume that economic growth leads to democracy begs the question of over what period such an outcome might be expected. In the West, it required generations. China has experienced the economic forces and transformations that analysts had predicted would generate democratic change, but that change has failed to materialise. In fact, market-oriented reforms may not only be long delayed, they may also go hand in hand with political regression, and may do so for years. Evidence from China, the MENA, Venezuela, Russia and elsewhere indicates that improvements in economic performance can help sustain authoritarianism and even enable it to create new bases for legitimacy. China's example in particular suggests that while economic growth and the spread of markets may translate into greater individual freedoms and personal autonomy, this may not result in a more democratic system.

Another flaw in the assumptions underlying the EU's indirect democratisation strategy for the MENA is that the alleged chain of causality that runs from market reforms and economic growth to democracy through the development of 'classes for themselves', especially entrepreneurial middle classes and workers, is questionable. That chain of causality may well have been obtained in Western European countries, but the abstract logic that sustains it has not been supported by the experience of Arab countries and others in the past three decades. Arab middle classes for many reasons have not been democratic battering rams and there is little indication that they will become so in the near future. The crony capitalism that has developed in much of the MENA is symptomatic of the relationships between states, markets and emerging middle classes that are profoundly different from those that evolved during the West's democratisation. Similarly, where working-class political mobilisation has contributed to democratisation, such as in South Korea and Taiwan, underlying the political capacity of this class was the nature of the economies in which it was embedded. In each of these countries, the economy was dominated by a manufacturing industry organised into large-scale enterprises that required concentrations of labour. These in turn provided ideal breeding grounds for collective economic – and finally political – action. In most of the Arab world, by contrast, economic reform has eroded the last bastions of large-scale, labour-intensive manufacturing industry, which was dominated by a public sector that in fact still provides the locus for working class radicalism. The private sector, which is now creating far more jobs than the public sector, is overwhelmingly constituted of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. The conditions of employment, therefore, do not support the emergence of a working class dedicated to, and capable of, contributing to the reform of the economy or the polity.

Because MENA governments have rejected assistance activities manifestly intended to generate momentum for democratic reforms, the EU has chosen to focus instead on assistance for economic growth and to promote better governance (more effective, accountable and transparent government institutions and operations). Its justification for this emphasis on governance is that it will help consolidate a democratic breakthrough if and when the latter materialises and that it even may contribute to such a breakthrough by helping to generate or sustain economic growth. One problem with such reasoning is that authoritarian states may be either unable or unwilling to allow governance-oriented reforms to go beyond a minimal level. Making state institutions more effective is likely to require a



fundamental overhaul of those institutions (e.g. shrinking their size, reorganising them or reconfiguring them so as to change the logic that underpins them and their operations), and such reforms are bound to undermine the very political forces that sustain authoritarian states. Making government institutions more transparent and accountable ultimately would reduce the grip of power holders on key areas of decision-making, so they will be resisted by those incumbents. Ultimately, better governance requires profound institutional change, which by the very nature of their core interests and the manner in which they maintain control, Arab 'deep' or 'shadow' states are unwilling to allow. So while macroeconomic policies, laws and regulations all may become more 'market friendly', the governmental institutions – from ministries to regulatory and audit agencies – charged with the implementation and monitoring of those policies, laws and regulations cannot be changed for political reasons. Consequently, these institutions will be unable to deliver good governance or contribute to sustained economic improvements because to do so would require relaxation or removal of the mechanisms of control and the patronage networks around which they are built – the maintenance of which (even in an attenuated form) is critical to the shadow state's survival.

Economic reform eventually will need to entail deeper and more structural, comprehensive changes than those that have taken place so far. In other words, it will have to move from a focus on macroeconomic policies to a focus on institutions. Only by enhancing the capacity of the relevant institutions to design, implement and monitor these reforms can the latter have a genuine chance to succeed. But such institutional changes are hard to envisage unless the political dynamics and interests that sustain existing institutions are altered in a more democratic direction. In sum, the EU strategy of providing indirect support for democratisation is predicated on false assumptions and unlikely to achieve either its tactical or strategic objectives.

A final deterrent to the formulation of a more proactive EU policy to support democratisation in the MENA with the participation of moderate Islamists is the obvious risks involved. The status quo is deemed by the EU to be preferable to a variety of scenarios that could eventuate were an adventuresome EU engagement to contribute to destabilisation. While the most obvious and alarming scenarios involve radical Islamism coming to power, a breakdown into political chaos or a retrenchment into a truly bloodthirsty authoritarianism, there are less cataclysmic ones that also suggest caution is advisable. Mention was made above of the likelihood

that the Egyptian MB and its 'affiliates' in other Arab countries act as firewalls against re-radicalisation, firewalls that are crumbling in the face of de-democratisation by regimes and growing re-radicalisation of Islamism. Clumsy EU efforts that might be perceived as attempts to shore up such firewalls would likely be counterproductive. The growing power of Salafism at a social level has yet to be translated into political power in most Arab countries, and it may never be. But again, ill-advised EU engagements could conceivably spark Salafist reactions including widespread politicisation. Such risks are made all the more worrying by the complexity and opacity of Islamism in the Arab world, conditions unlikely to change so long as human and civil rights are not guaranteed and democratic practices are not enshrined. So in these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the EU prefers to be largely inactive, defending its passivity in the face of authoritarianism and the threat of Islamist re-radicalisation on the grounds that it really does have a strategy to promote democratisation that is based on economic development and improvements in governance. Unfortunately, this head-in-the-sand approach also has obvious dangers. What, if anything, might be done in these challenging circumstances?

### **Towards a real EU strategy**

The starting point for the construction of a new, more effective strategy is the recognition that the status quo carries serious risks, that there are limits to what the EU can do to improve it, but that a judicious engagement has the potential to reduce those risks. The primary risk is intensification of confrontation between authoritarian regimes and re- or newly radicalised Islamism. At present, both sides are digging further into their entrenched positions, with the moderate forces in both camps in danger of losing influence. Therefore, time is of the essence as trends are moving in negative directions. The context that contributes to shaping these domestic political developments is similarly unfavourable. The global financial crisis will inevitably exacerbate politically relevant economic pressures throughout the MENA. The unresolved Israeli-Palestinian and Hamas-Fatah conflicts, the resurgence of Hizbullah and rearming by the US of the Lebanese army in apparent preparation for another attempt to destroy the former, and the intensification of fighting in Afghanistan associated with a resurgence there of the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies, all signal that there will be plenty of evidence for those Islamists looking for it to prove that Islam is under threat, locked into mortal combat with the West and its Israeli allies.

An appropriate EU strategy has to come to terms with both the regional contexts within which Islamism may re-radicalise and that process within specific countries.

The regional context, despite its importance, is beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say here that the intertwined politics of the MENA, a region in which evaluation of governmental performance rests heavily on the price of bread and other deliverables of social contracts, render any strategy that does not take account of these contexts largely moot. Progress within specific countries will be hard to make against a backdrop of heightening regional tensions, especially when they appear to result at least in part from Western interventions. Growing economic hardship can easily raise political temperatures to levels at which compromises cannot be forged. Thus, the EU needs to address these most salient regional issues, while simultaneously seeking to induce MENA governments to repair gaping holes in their social safety nets, presumably by offering sweeteners.

As for specific national settings, laundry lists of objectives and activities intended to promote democracy are relevant, but probably not terribly helpful. The Rand Corporation study cited at the outset of this chapter includes just such a list and not a bad one at that. It urges the US government to “pursue realistic democracy promotion rather than a return to realism” and then recommends that it “apply sustained pressure...emphasise judicial reform and rule of law, human rights and transparency...avoid taking sides....safeguard security while respecting the rule of law...engage Islamist parties while levelling the playing field for other types of political opposition”.<sup>18</sup> In other words, it calls for direct democracy promotion by protecting individuals from the state, thereby encouraging them to participate in politics and presumably challenge incumbents. It specifically includes Islamists as those to be thus encouraged, although it indicates a desire for non-Islamists to be re-invigorated by the political oxygen provided in newly opening political space.

These are sound, balanced recommendations, but they do not go far enough in the sense that they do not include an assessment of what may happen if indeed oppositionists are empowered by protections of democratic rights and how an external actor might contribute to achieving

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<sup>18</sup> Kaye (2008), op. cit., pp. xiv-xv.

a desired political outcome. The analysis above may suggest at least how those issues might be framed in that it identifies the key political dramatis personae. Within regimes, they comprise hardliners and reformers: the former being based in executive branches, ruling parties and the means of coercion and surveillance; and the latter typically being professional, technically proficient types brought in by regimes to improve economic performance, governance quality and other state outputs. Among the opposition's liberal secularists may be latent actors, as the authors of the Rand study clearly hope, but that has yet to be proved because the conditions under which they might flourish have yet to be created. Similarly, youthful activists on campuses and in Arab cyberspace at this stage comprise proto-political actors who may assume greater importance either by dint of their own efforts or because of changed circumstances. But at present, the opposition political stage is dominated by Islamists, albeit of various different types. They range from Salafists, who at least in their imaginations might identify with jihadists, to politically quiescent Salafists and Sufis, to card-carrying Muslim Brothers, to more radical Islamists just on the borders of acceptance by states, to an as-yet-amorphous and disenchanting amalgam of young Muslim activists alienated from regimes and despairing of the capacities and outlooks of the MB, but possibly still members of it out of the hope that generational change will make it more relevant and capable. Given this array of actors, it is possible to conceive many political dramas with quite different outcomes.

The most desirable outcome would elevate the power and status of moderates at the expense of hardliners in both government and opposition forces, possibly while including heretofore largely alienated youths within the political system. Such a scenario is imaginable, if barely so. Regime moderates are weak. Hardliners are no less committed to staying in power and have plentiful resources at their disposal. The leadership of the MB is entrenched, with the reins of organisational power in its hands and a commitment to democracy only of a very contingent, tactical nature. Youths, whether Islamist or otherwise, are energetic and wired, but not truly organised and comparatively easily dispersed.

Yet the makings of a political counter-culture are there, so long as that counter-culture has room to breathe politically. In Turkey, the rise to political power of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) is the story of coalition building among these types of actors, who operated within a broad Islamist framework granted space within a comparatively open political system. The task of democracy promoters in the Arab world is to work on converting the emerging political counter-culture, which does

share liberal values whether Islamist or not, into more coherent, effective political forces. That in turn requires prying open political space, as well as assisting coalition-building efforts among these components, Islamist and non-Islamist and including regime moderates.

A strategy based on these calculations is necessarily more overtly political than the present EU one, and accordingly requires more backbone and nuance on its part. Moreover, it is not a strategy that provides for immediate success. Indeed, if the Turkish case is any guide, one could not expect dramatic results within a decade. But in the meantime, the critical contribution of instilling political hope might be reasonably anticipated. And that is vital. Presently, the strategies of both regime hardliners and entrenched MB leaders are based on hopelessness and widespread despair that there will be any fundamental change in authoritarian political orders. The path to power by these actors is seen as lying not through democracy, which they believe they will never see, but through forging alliances with other powerful actors. Participation in the trappings of democracy is for the purposes of maintaining organisational solidarity, demonstrating powers and capacities, heading off retribution, earning kudos in the West and even preparing for the day when by some miracle democracy might arrive. Still, given modern Arab history, one can easily forgive them for being cynical about that possibility. And at present, it is this cynicism and despair that fosters non-democratic thinking and possibly action, including re-radicalisation by Islamists who were prepared to give democracy a go when it appeared as if it might eventuate.

So the task at hand now is to restore some faith that a democratisation process is indeed possible, even if it is not proceeding rapidly or even discernibly at present. Since incumbent regimes no longer feel compelled to even pay much lip service to democratic commitments, to say nothing of taking real action, it is left to outsiders, such as the EU, to try to induce them to mend their ways while also indicating through other interventions the outside world's commitment to providing democratic freedoms to subject Arab populations. Although admittedly it is going to be difficult to kindle much hope, that is not an impossible task, nor is it a hugely risky one. Moreover, the negative consequences of political hopelessness and despair, which definitely include political violence and breakdown, are potentially so threatening to the EU that it is vital to seek to head them off.

## **PART II.**

# **CASE STUDIES IN ISLAMIST RADICALISATION**

## 2. TRENDS IN POLITICAL ISLAM IN EGYPT

*IBRAHIM EL HOUDAIBY\**

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The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) made more use of Egypt's limited political opening in 2005 than other opposition groups. The year witnessed a long marathon of demonstrations, elections and referendums and was concluded by the parliamentary elections in which the MB scored 88 seats - more than four times the number of seats it had won in the previous elections, and more than ten times the number of seats won collectively by other opposition groups.

This success sparked an intensive debate among Egypt's intelligentsia about how moderate Islamists should be integrated into formal politics, with the central question being whether the MB *is* a moderate group. Intensive engagement with political opposition groups in organising rallies and demonstrations, a tolerant political discourse and pragmatic manoeuvres in the political system suggested that the group - which had renounced violence in the 1950s - had taken a step further towards moderation.

Advocates of integration were disappointed a couple of years later when the MB distributed the first draft of its political manifesto to a number of intellectuals and political activists, parts of which were leaked to the media. Highly controversial within MB ranks - as revealed by the internal debates that followed - the less-than-moderate draft was reported to have restricted the eligibility of women and Copts' to run for the presidency, and established a supreme advisory council of scholars to provide advice to the parliament.

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\* The author would like to thank Dr Emad Shahin, a former instructor and an inspiring mentor for his invaluable support in the preparation of this chapter.

While most merely criticised the MB, a few scholars took the responsibility of scrutinising the contextual changes between 2005 and 2007 that had led to a strengthening of the less moderate ideas within the group. This chapter looks at the evolution of different trends of political Islam in Egypt, with a view to understanding their discourses and the flexible elements these contain, along with the reasons and rationale behind shifts in orientation.

## 1. What causes radicalism?

Radicalism is caused by a complex assortment of social, political, economic and ideological factors, some of which are more important than others are.

According to a Gallup World Poll,<sup>1</sup> the link between economic hardship and political radicalisation hardly exists. For example, 64% of politically radicalised Muslims (compared with 55% of moderates) “believe their standard of living is getting better” and 65% of them (versus 55% of moderates) say they have “average or above average incomes”. This goes against the conventional wisdom that ties radicalisation to deteriorating economic conditions.

Conventional wisdom also implies a correlation between observance and radicalisation. Empirical evidence suggests otherwise. According to Esposito & Mogahed (2007), “many of the 9/11 hijackers themselves exhibited behaviours hardly practised by a religious Muslim”.<sup>2</sup> Most of al-Qaeda’s leaders are not graduates of madrasahs, but rather of modern schools and hold esteemed degrees. Osama bin Laden has a degree in management and engineering, and Ayman Al-Zawahiri has a degree in medicine.

That is not to suggest the absolute absence of links between religious education and radicalisation – it merely points out that it is rather a specific form of religiosity that is associated with radicalisation. One should therefore search for reasons that explain the decision of some Muslims to adopt a radical line of thinking and interpretations of Islam. Although the ideological foundations of radicalism can be traced back to the early

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the statistics and figures in this chapter are based on the Gallup World Poll reported in J.L. Esposito and D. Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?*, New York: Gallup Press, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 69.



Khawarij sectarian group, the reasons mainstream Muslims move closer to this discourse need to be further scrutinised.

To understand the causes of radicalisation, one should not examine what radicals view as mandated by Islam, but rather “why specifically they choose this [radical] line of Islamist thought above all others [which is a product of] how they view their [social and political] contexts”.<sup>3</sup> It is rather an attitude towards the status quo and not religious observance that promotes radical religious doctrine. As Esposito and Mogahed note, “the real difference between those who condone terrorist acts and all others is about politics, not piety”.<sup>4</sup> Research should focus on the political and not the theological foundations of radicalism to be able to counteract the phenomenon.

## 2. Two trends of radicalism

What is it specifically about ‘politics’ that provokes radicalism? Statistics and empirical evidence alike suggest that there are two main trends of radicalism, each with a different characterisation and orientation.

### 2.1 *Hostility towards Egypt's regime*

The first trend of radicalisation is characterised by hostility towards Egypt's regime. Elements of Islamist groups denounce the state for “disrespecting Islam”,<sup>5</sup> a charge that progressed to ‘corrupting Islam’ after the constitutional amendments of 2007.

But it is not only religion that matters for Muslims. Both politically radicalised and moderate Muslims “desire to limit the power of rulers and regimes they regard as authoritarian, un-Islamic and corrupt”.<sup>6</sup>

Hostility and radicalisation, in the case of radical groups, differ from one group to another. Even so, “the starting point for most violent groups

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<sup>3</sup> T. El Bishry, “Tareq El Bishy's Reflections on ‘Islamic Anger’ Book” (*Qera'a li Tareq El Bishry Fi Kitab Al Ghadab Al Islamy*), *IslamOnline.net*, 3 January 2008 (retrieved from <http://www.islamonline.net>).

<sup>4</sup> Esposito & Mogahed (2007), op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> K. El Birry, *World is more Beautiful than Paradise – The Biography of an Egyptian Fundamentalist (El Donia Ajmal min el Janna – Seiret Usuli Masry)*, Beirut: Dar Al Nahaar, 2002, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Esposito & Mogahed (2007), op. cit., p. 93.

in Egypt is that the state is infidel, the regime is infidel, and the president is either infidel, a sinner or (greatly) unjust, but they all agree on the necessity of not recognising him, not obeying him and resorting to violence attempting to change him".<sup>7</sup> The regime's crackdown on non-violent Islamist movements attempting to engage in politics fuels this sentiment, as it discredits "non-violent participatory Islamists...while radicals will grow in power".<sup>8</sup>

Radicals exploit such clampdowns to stress the unfruitfulness of peaceful change, hence attracting more supporters. Commenting on Egypt's 2007 constitutional amendments, Zawahiri said, "these amendments are a blow to everyone who took the path of elections to enact change in Egypt".<sup>9</sup> Most of the terrorist attacks that targeted Egyptian statesmen, politicians and police officers during the 1980s and 1990s stem from this strain of radicalism.

## 2.2 *Hostility towards the West*

The second trend of radicalism is characterised by hostility towards the West. The Gallup World Poll shows that "politically radicalised (Muslims) are consistently more negative than are moderates in their opinions of all Western countries". While radicals express higher levels of criticism of moral decay and a spiritual vacuum in Western public life, not a single respondent to the poll suggested that the West should stop being immoral or corrupt in order to improve its relations with the Muslim world.

Again challenging conventional wisdom, hostility is not the outcome of a rejection of Western values as suggested by the discourse on the theme of 'why do they hate us?'. Indeed, politically radicalised and moderate Muslims alike express admiration for the West's fair political systems, democracy, respect of human rights, freedom of speech and gender equality.

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<sup>7</sup> A. El-Ela Mady, *Egyptian Violent Movements and their Interpretation of Islam (Jama'at al 'Unf al Masriyya wa Ta'wilatuha lil Islam)*, Cairo: Maktabet al-Shorouq el Dawliya, 2006, pp. 41-42.

<sup>8</sup> T.C. Wittes, "Three Kinds of Movements", *Journal of Democracy*, July 2008, pp. 6-12.

<sup>9</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, "Ayman al Zawahiri: Video: Iraq timetable of withdrawal a victory", *Northeast Intelligence Network*, 6 May 2007 (retrieved from <http://www.homelandsecurityus.com/Zawahiri050607>).

Rather, it is foreign policies that cause hostility. The first foreign policy element that provokes hostility is military aggression. Two-thirds of al-Qaeda terrorists come from countries where the United States has a heavy military presence.<sup>10</sup> Notably, 81% of politically radicalised Muslims – and 67% of moderates – describe the US as “aggressive”. Both moderates and radicals avoid sweeping generalisations, and clearly distinguish among the foreign policies of different Western countries. France and Germany (which outspokenly opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq) are scarcely viewed as aggressors, with fewer than 10% of either moderate or radical Muslims seeing them as such.

This hostility is intensified by the increasing Western military presence in the region, and is manifest in terrorist attacks targeting Western interests and tourists. A good example is the series of bombings that took place in Cairo in 2005. Dīaa Rashwan, an expert on Islamic movements, described the bombings as “terrorist attacks in a regional context”,<sup>11</sup> referring to the regional attacks targeting Western tourists following the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Other elements that contribute to hostility include the feeling of cultural invasion, that ‘the West’ does not respect the cultural heritage of Muslims and simply wants to globalise its value system and culture. Many Muslim writers and intellectuals equate the contemporary wave of globalisation with Westernisation – some are even more specific and equate it with Americanisation.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian Muslim scholar and chair of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, argues that before Western occupation forces began their retreat from Muslim countries in the 1950s, they planned for a cultural, educational, legislative and social change that would change the Muslim *umma* from within”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> R. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York: Random House, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> M.G. Arafa, “Cairo’s Bombing: A Third Generation of Jamaat Appears in the Horizon” (*Infijār al Qahera: Jeel Thaleth min al Jamaat Yalooḥu fil Ufoq*), *IslamOnline.net*, 11 April 2005 (retrieved from <http://www.islamonline.net/Arabic/politics/2005/04/article07.shtml>).

<sup>12</sup> Y. al-Qaradawi, “We and the West” (*Nahnu wal Gharb*), Yusuf al-Qaradawi Official Website, 2005 (retrieved from [http://qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu\\_no=2&item\\_no=4519&version=1&template\\_id=256&parent\\_id=12](http://qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=4519&version=1&template_id=256&parent_id=12)).

This statement echoes a conviction shared by a majority of Muslims. When asked about one thing the West could do to improve the quality of life of Middle Eastern Muslims, one of the most frequent answers given by the Gallup poll respondents was “stop imposing your beliefs and policies”. Furthermore, “Westoxification” is condemned “for robbing Muslims of their source of identity and values, and thus their unity and strength”.<sup>13</sup>

Culture and religion have profound significance for Egyptians: 98% say religion is an important part of their daily life and 87% consider their customs and traditions to be important. Bishry (2005) argues that “radicalisation will continue to exist with different degrees and [in] various forms...as long as Westernisation continues to prevail”,<sup>14</sup> since the phenomenon of Islamism is itself a reaction to Westernisation.

That is not to say that Egyptians reject Western values wholesale. They do accept Western ideas with a contextualisation that fits them into the Egyptian culture and value system. They accept a version of democracy that is different from Western democracy; it incorporates sharia as a source of legislation – indeed the only source for a majority of Egyptians. Needless to say, “when Muslims support the application of *Shariah*, what that means can drastically vary from one person to another”,<sup>15</sup> yet it all reflects the importance of religion, culture and heritage, and explains why increased Westernisation would only lead to increasing radicalisation.

A third reason for hostility is the general feeling that ‘the West’ does not respect Islam. As a Gallup poll indicates, only 12% of politically radicalised Muslims – and 17% of moderates – associate “respecting Islamic values” with Western nations. This statistic reflects reality in some Western countries. When Americans were asked what they most admire about Muslim societies, the most frequent responses were “nothing” and “I don’t know”.

What are viewed by Muslims as cultural assaults by Europeans also contribute to empowering radicalisation. The *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons and “Fitna” film are the most recent controversies. They provoked moderate and radical Islamists alike, providing a fertile atmosphere for recruitment

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<sup>13</sup> Esposito & Mogahed (2007), op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Bishry (2005), op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Esposito & Mogahed (2007), op. cit., p. 54.

by radicals. Following the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons, bin Laden appeared in a taped message asserting that retaliation to this insult will be something to remember.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3 *Convergence of trends*

These two trends of radicalism are not mutually exclusive – they converge more than diverge. The backing of Egypt’s regime by Western governments presents a pretext for linking them to one another. For many radicals, Western governments are the distant enemy, while Egypt’s regime is the near one.

Radicals highlight this relationship between regimes and Western backers to justify their hostility and violent acts against all. On several occasions, Zawahiri has underlined this relationship, sometimes calling the Egyptian regime and others in the region “Condoleezza Rice’s boys”,<sup>17</sup> and sometimes calling upon Egyptians to “attack the regime that has allied with the West, and target Western and Israeli interests”.<sup>18</sup>

## 3. **Islamist movements**

### 3.1 *The roots of radicalism*

In the early 1970s, within a very few years, Islamist students organised themselves and started coordinating their activities under the name of Jamaah al-Islamiyya. While newly released MB members were recovering from long periods of imprisonment under President Abdel Nasser, independent Islamist students took the stage with activities that attracted more students.

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<sup>16</sup> H. Yahmed, “Bin Laden Threatens Europe over Offensive Cartoon” (*Bin Laden Yatawa’ad Oroppa ‘ala al Rusoum al Mosei’a*), *IslamOnline.net*, 20 March 2006 (retrieved from [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1203758242508&pagename=Zone-Arabic-News/NWALayout](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1203758242508&pagename=Zone-Arabic-News/NWALayout)).

<sup>17</sup> M. Scheuer, “Al-Qaeda Message Aimed at US Living Room”, *Asia Times Online*, 10 May 2007 (retrieved from [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/IE10Ak08.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/IE10Ak08.html)).

<sup>18</sup> *IslamOnline.net*, “Zawahiri: We Will Fight against Israel When We’re Done with Iraq” (*Zawahiri: Sa Nuqatil Israel Ba’d al Intisar Fin Iraq*), *IslamOnline.net*, 3 April 2008 (retrieved from [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1203758655590&pagename=Zone-Arabic-News/NWALayout](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1203758655590&pagename=Zone-Arabic-News/NWALayout)).

What type of Islamism did Jamaah advocate? Key figures in the movement assert that “Islamic trends and schools of thought from which the movement has drawn ideas were to a great extent variant and diverse”<sup>19</sup> and that it “did not have a single source of intellect, but rather diverse sources, including Salafist (Wahhabi), Ikhwani, Tablighi<sup>20</sup> and Azhari ones”.<sup>21</sup>

Newly released members of the MB were highly regarded by Jamaah members and were regularly invited to preach among the group. Sayyid Qutb’s legacy and prolific writing had some minor influence on the group, which only moved to the centre of its ideology a few years later.<sup>22</sup>

In a context of political freedom and toleration, the Wahhabi influence was not enough to radicalise Jamaah. With the exception of some marginal groups (such as the Saleh Sereyya and Yahia Hashem groups, which had no ties to Jamaah), the mainstream movement had no record of violence.

The Wahhabi influence was limited to shaping Jamaah’s priorities. Its members focused on socio-religious activities, calling on men to grow beards<sup>23</sup> and women to wear the *niqab*, considering the prevalence of such features indicators of its success.<sup>24</sup> With its broad ideological orientation, the Jamaah still invited and welcomed moderate, non-Wahhabi, al-Azhar University scholars to lecture at its events.

Between 1977 and 1981, several contextual changes took place, leading to the radicalisation of Jamaah and its split into several groups.

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<sup>19</sup> M.S. Al-Awwa, *The Militant Jamaah Islamiyya in Egypt: 1974-2004 (Al Jamaah al Islamiyya al Mosallaha fi Masr: 1974-2004)*, Cairo: Maktabet al-Shorouq el Dawliya, 2005, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> An example is the school of thought of the Tablighi Jamaat, an Indian reformist movement focusing primarily on reforming religious practices. For more about the movement, see J.L. Esposito, *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Mady (2006), op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> For more on Sayyid Qutb and his relation with the MB, see I. El Houdaiby, “Four Decades after Sayyid Qutb’s Execution”, *Daily Star Egypt*, July 2008(b).

<sup>23</sup> Mady (2006), op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Awwa (2005), op. cit., p. 70.

New economic and media policies adopted by President Anwar Sadat were viewed as 'too liberal', provoking socialists economically and Islamists culturally.<sup>25</sup> Signing the peace treaty with Israel was another cause of Jamaah's radicalisation. Young Islamists, perceiving their social power and influential role, believed they could not remain silent while "a peace treaty with the Muslims' largest enemy of the time was being signed". This led to a "major transformation changing the Jamaah from a social group into a strong political opposition group". This transformation was socially triggered by pictures of Egypt's first lady kissing and dancing with US President Jimmy Carter on the day the treaty was signed, "provoking the religious and conservative public...and [was] harshly criticised by students and [the] Islamist movement in general".<sup>26</sup>

A further cause for Jamaah's radicalisation was the regime's crackdown on the student movement. Opposition to the regime's policies and president triggered the regime to intervene in student activities, postpone student union elections, freeze union funds and introduce the 1979 law that undermined students' freedom.

Tensions grew between two wings of Jamaah: one advocating violent change, calling for strict Jamaah institutionalisation and partial detachment from society, and the other calling for gradual peaceful change and further integration into society. As leaders of the latter trend joined the MB,<sup>27</sup> the advocates of violence split into a new militant organisation. Mady holds that "from this point onwards, Jamaah Islamiyya meant a new thing, a well-structured organisation that adopts violence - or power as they call it - as a means of change".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> During Sadat's meeting with student leaders, a Jamaah student leader took the floor and criticised Sadat for upholding the slogan of "the state of science and faith" while promoting a media discourse that makes one question whether the state wants its youth to be "Muslims, communists, heretics or cow worshippers". He also criticised the ban of some scholars from lecturing, thus forcing them to leave the country: "This way, all sincere scholars leave, and only hypocrits stay."

<sup>26</sup> Awwa (2005), *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>27</sup> The most important of these leaders were Abdel Monem Aboul Fotouh, Khayrat El Shater, Essam el Erian, Hemly el Jazzar, Aboul El-Ela Mady, Anwar Shehata, Sayyid Abdel Sattar and Ibrahim El Zafarany. Mady (2006, *op. cit.*) has a more comprehensive list in his book (p. 36).

<sup>28</sup> Mady (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

With ‘moderates’ withdrawing from Jamaah, Karam Zuhdy, a prominent leader and a backer of violence, started implementing his plan. Jamaah members began training with guns and weapons. Zuhdy met with Mohamed Abdel Salam Farag, another Islamist proponent of violence, whose group Jamaat al-Jihad had a stronger presence in northern Egypt. They both went to meet Sheikh Umar Abdul Rahman, an al-Azhar scholar and another advocate of violence, who became their ideologue.<sup>29</sup>

These groups allied and started working on plans to topple the regime. When Sadat stepped up his onslaught on the opposition in September 1981, a military officer belonging to Jamaah – whose members found themselves on the detention lists – proposed killing Sadat during a military parade. Although the majority were against the decision, arms had the final word and Sadat was assassinated on 6 October 1981.

The decision to assassinate Sadat was not rooted in religion. According to Awwa, “the Islamic legitimisation of [the assassination] was not an issue that was brought up during the discussions [that] preceded it”. Religion was only ushered in to justify the assassination after it had already happened. Jamaah’s conduct was always “in this order: acting then thinking [of justifications]”.<sup>30</sup> Like other Islamic movements of the time, it was a movement driven primarily by political reality and not ideology. Literature justifying the assassination was only written later when Jamaah leaders were facing trial, and awaiting or serving their sentences behind bars.

### ***3.2 Institutionalising movements: 1980s onwards***

Sadat’s assassination closed one chapter and opened another. As Hosni Mubarak took over the presidency, violence was making its way into the literature of radical Islamist groups, clearer lines were being drawn between different orientations of Islamists and higher levels of institutionalisation were emerging.

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<sup>29</sup> Umar Abdul Rahman is now serving a life sentence in the US. Several view him as the amir [commander] of the Jamaah, but Mady argues otherwise. He says the sheikh is heavily influenced by those surrounding him, and that Karam Zuhdy was always the real amir, although he preferred to work in the background. This section draws from Mady (2003), op. cit., pp. 21-23.

<sup>30</sup> Awwa (2005), op. cit., pp. 98-100.



While the split between violent and non-violent movements had already been established, internal divisions within these broad groups were further institutionalised. During the course of the 1980s, the ideological boundaries of different movements became more distinct. The contextual impact was thus limited to empowering or disempowering various groups and incrementally shifting movements back and forth on the radical-moderate continuum, within defined ideological limits.

### *Jamaat al-Jihad*

One of the most radical movements that existed at the time was Jamaat al-Jihad. Upon forming an alliance with Jamaah in 1979, both movements collaborated in assassinating Sadat. Shortly after the trials, the groups split once again.

Once released from prison, Jihad members reorganised themselves and launched a series of terrorist attacks primarily targeting Egyptian officials. They were known for using bombs in these attacks (unlike Jamaah, known for using guns), and their record includes assassination attempts on the prime minister and ministers of interior and information.

Already an offshoot of the larger Jamaah group, Jihad was racked by organisational disputes leading to further internal splits. Indeed, Jamaah leaders argue that there is no single Jihad group, but rather highly fragmented groups.<sup>31</sup> One of its splinter groups was Talaia al-Fateh, a group led by Zawahiri.

The group adopted an isolationist attitude towards society, not opting to move from the margins to the centre of Egyptian politics. This strategy was a natural outcome of its extremist views, which detached it from society. Jihad's line of thinking also distanced it from other Islamist movements and scholars, as it denounced most scholars as "regime affiliated".<sup>32</sup>

Jihad developed a "structure comprised of small secret cells, with the primary focus on [violent] action and not preaching, they had no relation

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<sup>31</sup> M.M. Ahmed, *Conspiracy or Revision: Dialogue with Extremist Leaders in Aqrab Prison (Mo'amara Am Muraja'a: Hiwar Ma' Qadit al Tataruf fi Sijn al Aqrab)*, Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 2003, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> Awwa (2005), op. cit., p. 70.

with the society".<sup>33</sup> For this specific reason, the group was unresponsive to any attempts at de-radicalisation.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Jihad changed its orientation from that of an Egyptian, Islamist and militant opposition group to a global terrorist group – a change that was initially triggered by the war in Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> It was later intensified by the military presence of Western troops in the Arabian peninsula. Some of its leaders, including Zawahiri, fled the country, while others were imprisoned.

Egypt's regime continued its strict crackdown on Jihad. Eventually, in 1995, Zawahiri announced a "freeze of military operations in Egypt due to weak capacity".<sup>35</sup> The group ceased to be a threat to Egypt's domestic politics, but is now a global threat.

Jihad stands as a classic example of multi-factorial radicalisation, set off by cultural Westernisation, followed by assaults by the ruling regime and then finally Western aggression.

In 2007, Sayyid Imam, a Jihad leader and ideologue in prison, began work on a series of 'revisions' to the group's ideas. At best, these revisions de-militarise Jihad, but do not de-radicalise it. They denounce violence for rather pragmatic reasons, without challenging the ideological foundations underpinning the use of violence.

Imam's denunciation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks is not a stance against targeting civilians. He only regards the attacks as unjustified because they manifest "treason for the friend and the enemy" – the friend being the Taliban's Mullah Umar, who ordered bin Laden not to target Americans because he is not powerful enough to stand up against them, and the enemy being the US, since the terrorists entered the US using visas. His renunciation of domestic violence against the regime is also tactical.

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<sup>33</sup> Ahmed (2003), op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> Mady (2006), op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> H. Naseira, "Jihad Revisions: Shaking not Destructing Violent Thought" (*Moraja'at al Jihad, Khalkhala Bila Hadm Lil Fikr Al'aneef*), *IslamOnline.net*, 15 December 2007 (retrieved from [www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1196786288116&page](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1196786288116&page)).

Still describing terrorist activities as acts of “jihad”, he argues against the use of violence because of “incapability”.<sup>36</sup>

That is not to suggest that revisions are absolutely fruitless. Imam’s denunciation of targeting civilians and tourists in Muslim countries involved some fundamental changes. Yet, Jihad is locked in its ideological confines and its revisionist wing has already touched the moderate edge of those boundaries. Further revisions would require the group to give up its ideology wholesale.

### *Jamaah al-Islamiyya*

The crucial difference between Jihad and Jamaah is Jamaah’s interest in reaching out to society through a social role that includes preaching. A product of a mixed ideological orientation, Jamaah’s structure was not comprised of secret cells, except for its military wing.<sup>37</sup> The group’s social activities, its strong presence in Upper Egypt, its horrifying terrorist attacks of the 1990s and early consensual revisions make it more significant than Jihad.

Jamaah’s interest in social work does not necessarily reflect peaceful relations with society. Indeed, in the 1980s the movement adopted a version of ‘enjoining good and forbidding evil’<sup>38</sup> that entailed physically enforcing what they viewed as good and punishing those who did what they saw as evil. This included, for instance, burning movie rental stores.

‘Forbidding the evil’ harmed Jamaah’s relations with society, but its charity work and preaching moderated the negative impact. Awareness of the group’s “ideology and motives to eliminate corruption and scenes of non-religiosity” through its preaching, alongside widespread public discontent with the regime, “decreased the negative social impact of violence [by] the group”.<sup>39</sup> Combined with the prevailing moral decay – partly stemming from deteriorating economic conditions and educational

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<sup>36</sup> M. Salah, “Sayyid Imam: 9/11 Attacks Disastrous for Muslims” (*Sayyid Imam: Ahdath 911 Karithiyya Lil Muslimeen*), *IslamOnline.net*, 9 December 2007 (retrieved from [www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_c&cid=1196786084584](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_c&cid=1196786084584)).

<sup>37</sup> Ahmed (2003), op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>38</sup> This is an Islamic concept closely associated with believers in both the Quran and Sunna.

<sup>39</sup> Awwa (2005), op. cit. p. 86.

standards and partly from what was viewed as Westernisation – Egyptians still had sympathy with Jamaah’s assassins. They would compare the “pious” youth of the Jamaah with others of their age, “who smoke and waste their time in cafes”.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the regime’s failure not only radicalised Jamaah, but also enabled its extreme stance to be viewed as less than such by society.

Jamaah’s reaching out to the people has never meant recognising the regime and attempting gradually to change it. According to Birry, the group’s manifesto, entitled *The Inevitability of Confrontation*, speaks of “military confrontation with the secular, infidel Egyptian regime as the only way to bring about Islamic rule”, using the MB’s political setbacks as proof of the futility of peaceful politics.

Jamaah’s attempts to reach out to society have involved efforts to save members of society from infidelity and recruit more members to empower the group to topple the regime. This integration could best be understood in light of Qutb’s notion of “mental detachment” – *uzla shu’ouriyya* – as expressed in his milestones, which has been an integral part of Jamaah thought.

Jamaah’s ideological roots are not only found in Qutbism, but also in Wahhabism. Hostile attitudes towards non-Muslims are perhaps the clearest manifestation of it. Ex-members of the group narrate the way in which Jamaah’s ideologues justified physical assaults on Copts and confiscation of their property, arguing that Copts are traitors who “cooperated with British occupation, and were a reason why Britain continued to occupy our Muslim country”.<sup>41</sup>

Security campaigns have included raids on mosques where Jamaah had a strong presence, sometimes killing some of its members. If anything, these raids have tarnished the regime’s image and affirmed Jamaah’s claims of defending Islam. As an ex-member of Jamaah notes, when he saw one of those raids, “it was a proof to me and to many others that the regime does not respect Islam...I remembered the movies of Muslims defending their religion against [the] injustice of pagans”.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Birry (2002), op. cit, p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 19 and pp. 33-34.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

As members of Jamaah lost their lives in confrontations, others sought revenge, leading to a vicious cycle of violence. As Zuhdy describes it, "it was an action and a reaction, it started with arrests and then violence and responding to it violently".<sup>43</sup> The group targeted tourists only as part of this revenge – they wanted to hit the regime where it hurt most.

Jamaah's record includes the most violent terrorist attacks of the 1990s: assassinations of Parliament Speaker Refaat Mahjoub and writer Farag Fouda; attempts on President Mubarak and on the ministers of information and the interior as well as Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz; and a handful of terrorist attacks targeting tourists, most importantly the gunfire at the Europa Hotel and the Luxor attacks of 1997.

Jamaah has had a potential for de-radicalisation that has been overlooked by the regime's security-based policies. If anything, the politics of repression and disintegration have led to a "history of missed opportunities".<sup>44</sup> An imprisoned Jamaah leader facing a death sentence illustrates the point:

I was an A student ever since I was a freshman...I think it is legitimate to expect that when I adopt a line of thought [that] I don't find influential figures in the regime accusing me [of] backwardness, extremism or ignorance. [I faced these accusations] with no one coming to ask me about my cause: where do I come from and why am I going down this road...had the regime adopted dialogue since the beginning, all problems and violence wouldn't have taken place.<sup>45</sup>

Over the course of 16 years since 1981, Jamaah has gone down a path of de-radicalisation.<sup>46</sup> Lack of communication among leaders inside prison and activists on the outside has undermined the effect of these revisions. In 1997, Jamaah leaders behind bars declared an unconditional renunciation of violence. Shortly afterwards, a terrorist attack was executed in the name of Jamaah, resulting in scepticism that delayed the regime's acceptance of the revisions for a few years.

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<sup>43</sup> Ahmed (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>44</sup> Awwa (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>45</sup> Ahmed (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> See the table of Jamaah's attempts to renounce violence in Awwa's book (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 225.

The following months witnessed intensive internal debates, until Jamaah's *shura* council came to a consensus in March 1999, declaring its "full support for the initiative". Since then, not a single operation or attack has taken place in the name of the Jamaah. The regime subsequently facilitated the renunciation of violence by releasing large numbers of detainees who had been in custody.

Jamaah's revisions are the most important for an Egyptian radical movement. After the 1997 initiative, Jamaah's leaders issued four books institutionalising the revisions. Similar to those of Jihad, Jamaah's revisions illustrate an attempt to de-militarise the group and move it towards the moderate end of its ideological boundaries.

Jamaah had had a radical stance against the president, calling him an infidel who "diverted from sharia and refuses to implement it" and therefore had to be replaced.<sup>47</sup> In its revisions, Jamaah retreated from this stance, yet still viewed faith and adherence to Islam as the regime's sole source of legitimacy.

Jamaah's views on Copts changed dramatically, but only up to the limit of the group's ideological boundaries. They quit associating Copts with crusades and renounced attacks on their lives and property. They asserted that "Copts are peoples of the book: they have equal social rights to ours, and have equal responsibilities".<sup>48</sup> This stance coincides with the least moderate stance of the MB, even using the same words. Still, it is because of ideological boundaries that it has been impossible for Jamaah to "adopt the notion of citizenship that was adopted by reputable Islamic thinkers".<sup>49</sup>

In addition, ideological limitations can easily be discerned in the group's pragmatic renunciation of violence. Revision documents "use the term[s] interest and harm as a sole justification" for the renunciation, highlighting the regime's power as the obstacle that prevents them from toppling it. Jamaah has also continued to use the terms 'combat' and 'jihad' to describe its operations and 'mistakes' that have happened therein, hence

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<sup>47</sup> H.A. Aziz, "Fourth: Jamaah's Stances and Views before and after Revisions" (*Rabi'an: Mawqif Wa Ru'a alJama'a Qabl alMuraja'at wa Ba'diha*), *IslamOnline.net*, 28 October 2007 (retrieved from [www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1193049192027](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1193049192027)).

<sup>48</sup> Ahmed (2003), op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>49</sup> Mady (2006), op. cit., p. 57.

partially legitimising them. Their revisionist literature is characterised by hostile stances towards secularists, regarding them as *the enemy*.

As noted earlier, Jamaah has never had secret organisations, but had a military wing that was dissolved after the revisions. Its group leaders have asserted that they want to operate as a ‘civil society organisation’ that promotes righteousness, educates people and helps them socially. Seeking to work with state recognition is a significant retreat from Jamaah’s earlier stances.

Another major step away from radicalisation has been Jamaah’s denunciation on moral grounds of the 9/11 attacks. Jamaah has argued that “Islam forbids targeting traders...women, children or old men...these are all innocent souls [whom] bin Laden will be held accountable for [on the Day of Judgment]”.<sup>50</sup> Distancing themselves from bin Laden’s line of thinking and renouncing violence is the furthest Jamaah can go within its existing ideology.

### *Muslim Brotherhood*

As the most popular non-violent Islamist movement, the MB grew rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1984, the group took its split with the Jamaah a step further by contesting in parliamentary elections. Forging an electoral alliance with the Wafd party, it established its first parliamentary presence.

This success provoked different reactions among the Islamist movements. While more supporters joined lines of integration and peaceful politics, radicals became more critical. Jamaah argued that the MB violated *hakimiyya* [governorship by God] by accepting the people’s judgment. “Their participation also beautified the image of the secular Egyptian regime, and portrayed it as a moderate regime that accepts Islamists, and therefore provides it with justification to crack down on Islamists who refuse to engage in its fake democracy”.<sup>51</sup> Groups that were more radical, including Jihad offshoots, considered participation in elections to be a violation of *tawhid* [monotheism], the most important pillar of Islam.

In 1987, the MB integrated deeper into formal politics as it negotiated a strategic alliance with the Al’amal and Alahrar parties, winning scores of

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> Birry (2002), op. cit., p. 25.

seats in parliament – 36 of which were won by MB members. The alliance opened a window through which MB members were able to get their message across, namely through *Ashaab*, the Al'amal party's newspaper.

The MB further integrated with opposition groups when they collectively decided to boycott the 1991 elections, protesting new election laws. A couple of years later, it started institutionalising its ideas by issuing a “declaration to the people”, which included its stances on political pluralism, women and democracy. Institutionalising the stance on Copts came a few years later, when an MB spokesperson wrote that Copts are “citizens in the Muslim State [and] should enjoy safety and security”.<sup>52</sup> This came only a few months after controversial comments made by MB leader Mustafa Mashhour, arguing that Copts could be exempted from military service and pay *jizya* [tax] in exchange. The group's position on the absolute equality of Copts, however, remained vague.

During the early 1990s, Egypt's regime allowed more space for the MB, hoping their discourse would overshadow that of violent groups. President Mubarak made a distinction between two trends of Islamism: a peaceful one that tries to work from within the system and a violent one that plots assassinations and attacks.

Civil society facilitated the growth of moderation as intellectuals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) called for dialogue with moderate Islamists to overcome the radical threat. The MB welcomed this initiative and some of its responses were published in the *Ahram* newspaper, where El-Hudaibi was quoted as follows: “I followed with great interest the series of articles...under the title ‘a call for dialogue’....We are ready for dialogue to clarify issues...here I am again calling for this dialogue.”<sup>53</sup>

This tolerance facilitated the Brotherhood's institutionalisation of moderate positions, but also catalysed the emergence of a new faction within the movement that grew more attached to political engagement. The new faction would find it hard to retreat from such stances as the political context changed, and would eventually split to form the Hizb al-Wasat party.

The Brotherhood arranged internal elections in 1994, taking institutional moderation a step further. This step was not welcomed by the

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<sup>52</sup> M.M. El-Hudaibi, *Politics in Islam*, Cairo: Islamic Inc., 1997.

<sup>53</sup> A. Bahgat, “Welcome Dialogue” (*Marhaban Bil Hiwar*), *Ahram*, 9 April 1993, p. 2.



regime, which feared the revival of the group and thus cracked down on it, sending 80 MB members to military tribunals that subsequently sentenced them to three to five years of imprisonment; only one MB member beat the manipulation and made it to the parliament. It was clear that toleration was over and that the MB was to face another period of harsh repression.

This repression only served to enhance radical sentiment. Shutting down MB discourse and excluding its peaceful political activities led to a vacuum in the Islamist atmosphere that was filled by radicals. The next couple of years witnessed a series of terrorist attacks by Jamaah members, finally leading to the 1997 Luxor attacks.

A new minister of interior was appointed following the attacks. He allowed for another period of toleration, during which the MB developed its political discourse and stood in the 2000 parliamentary elections, winning 17 seats and forming the largest parliamentary opposition bloc. Within a few months, however, the regime retaliated by shutting down the *Al'amal* party and *Ashaab* newspaper. Tens of members stood before a military tribunal to be sentenced to three to five years in prison. The group moved towards attitudes that are more anti-Western in 2003, when US troops invaded Iraq and when France banned the hijab in public schools. This hostility was manifested in statements by group leaders as well as the weekly messages by the head of the MB.

With the US pressure for reform in the Middle East, the MB again engaged with political groups in calls for democratisation. In 2005, they participated in demonstrations and rallies, and they were welcomed by most opposition groups as a strong political ally.

Following the electoral success of 2005, the regime launched a harsh campaign against the Brotherhood. Within 18 months, the regime had completely reversed the attempt to integrate moderates into the system. Scores of members were arrested including senior ones. Municipal elections were postponed to avoid another MB success. Constitutional amendments were passed restricting freedom, judicial supervision over elections and the ability to integrate Islamists - moderate and radical alike - into politics.<sup>54</sup> The MB's 'unofficial' newspaper was shut down. Numerous senior leaders

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<sup>54</sup> I. El Houdaiby, "Egypt's Constitutional Amendments: Everybody Loses", *IslamOnline.net*, 25 March 2007(a) (retrieved from [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article\\_C&cid=1173695326596&pagename=Zone-English-Muslim\\_Affairs%2FMAELayout](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1173695326596&pagename=Zone-English-Muslim_Affairs%2FMAELayout)).

were arrested, their assets were confiscated and they stood before a military tribunal that sentenced them to three to ten years in prison, despite decisions by four civilian courts to drop all charges put forward by the state security apparatus.

In that context, the MB issued the first draft of its less-than-moderate manifesto, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Hamed Quwaisi points out that the manifesto is part of a “larger crisis in Egyptian political life, where the regime has marginalised the people’s influence in public matter[s], and forced them to resign from politics”.<sup>55</sup> That is not to suggest that he does not blame the group. Indeed, he blames the “absence of a political reformist mentality” for the poor quality of the draft.

Given its institutional moderation, the regime’s onslaught did not push the MB all the way back to radicalism. The Brotherhood’s distribution of the draft to intellectuals and politicians reflected a willingness to accept criticism, while the debate that followed reflected internal diversity, a sign of political maturity.

The draft manifesto should be assessed in the light of mainstream political trends in Egypt. Political movements relying on grassroots support need to keep an eye on their supporters’ preferences, even if they believe in the ‘mission’ of social change and reform. While the majority of Egyptians emphasise the importance of sharia as the only source of legislation, the draft manifesto only emphasises it as the ‘main’ source. The group’s stance against women or Copts holding the presidency reflects a cultural deficit within society that is an outcome of the Wahhabi heritage carried by the 1970s movement into contemporary Islamist movements. According to a Gallup poll, only 50% of Egyptians support the right of women to hold leadership positions. This could only compare well with Saudi Arabia’s 40%. Statistics from other Muslim countries are significantly higher. The Brotherhood – consciously or not – keeps itself just one step ahead of society, trying to strike a balance between ideological purity, intellectuals’ fears and grassroots support.

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<sup>55</sup> H.A.M. Quwaisi, “Political Significance of the MB Party Manifesto Crisis” (*Aldalalat Alsiyasiyya Li Azmit Barnamij Hizb al Ikhwan*), *IslamOnline.net*, 22 November 2007 (retrieved from [www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1195032526684](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1195032526684)).

## *Wasat*

The Wasat party was founded by a group of middle-generation leaders who broke off from the Brotherhood in 1996. Although their attempts to acquire legal recognition failed three times (in 1996, 1998 and 2004), Wasat leaders are still struggling for this recognition and are applying for legal recognition again in 2009.

They have every reason to believe they are entitled to it. They have the support of “prominent secular journalists, intellectuals and political figures who see them as representing a moderate and enlightened form of political Islam”.<sup>56</sup> In addition, they also have the report by the Coptic-led, State Representatives Committee of the Administrative Court, which acknowledges their manifesto as “unique” – a condition for new political parties that had previously been used by the Parties Committee to deny them legal recognition.

The group has developed three different platforms, the third of which (published in 2004) is currently being revisited in order to present it to the Parties Committee. Although membership of the Wasat party is still under 1,000, it has the potential to attract large numbers of Egypt’s Islamic bourgeoisie class when it acquires legal recognition.

The Wasat membership records are highly revealing in themselves: 2% of the ‘Islamist’ party members are Copts, a significantly high percentage compared with the Coptic presence in other parties.<sup>57</sup> Over 35% of members are women, 25% are workers and 60% hold university degrees. In many ways, Wasat has succeeded in reaching out to supporters beyond the traditional Islamist base. It has accomplished the development of a mainstream national discourse with Islamic roots.

The party’s manifesto reflects moderate views. Its agenda for political reform stresses the following principles: freedom of speech; freedom of belief and religious practice for “all Abrahamic religions”; respect of human rights; “complete equality” between all citizens – men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims – in legal and political rights; judicial independence; and (most significantly) separation between religious and political institutes, along with the financial and administrative

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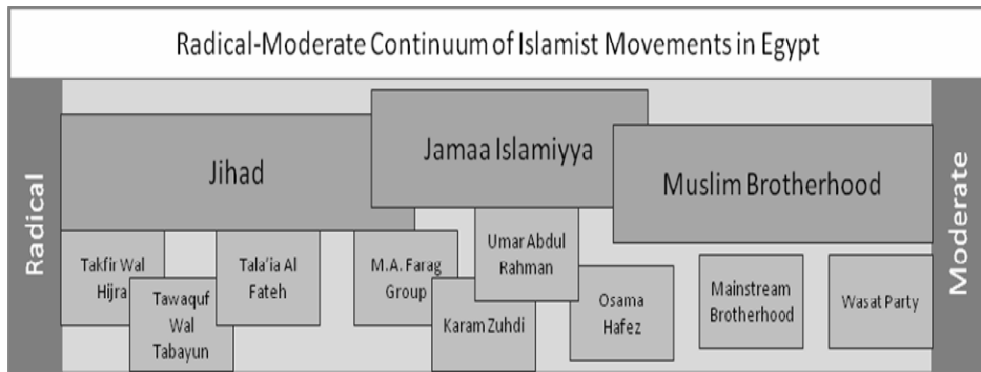
<sup>56</sup> C.R. Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Membership statistics have been provided by al-Wasat.

independence of al-Azhar from state bureaucracy.<sup>58</sup> It adopts a balanced international relations agenda by which it does not “completely accept – in a way close to surrender – the West, nor does it completely reject it”.<sup>59</sup>

Ever since its establishment, Wasat has been closer to the moderate end of its ideological boundaries (with its position in relation to other groups shown in Figure 1). In many ways, it manifests the ideological purity of its school. Detachment from a grassroots support base (compared with the MB), endorsement of intellectuals (secular and Islamist alike) and relative toleration (although not recognition) by the state have kept Wasat away from the pressure that often leads to radicalisation. This has also given its members the space to detach themselves from the impacts of other schools such as Wahhabism and Qutbism. The group’s insistence on legal recognition, despite being repeatedly turned down by the regime, is remarkable.

Figure 1. Continuum of Islamist movement ideologies in Egypt



### 3.3 Post-institutional Islamist movements

In many ways, Wasat was the first manifestation of the post-institutional trend in Islamic movements that began in the late 1990s. Egypt’s regime had focused on security measures while dealing with Islamist movements. It continuously repressed Jihad until a freeze was declared on its

<sup>58</sup> *Al-Wasat New Party Papers (Awraq Hizb Al-Wasat Al Jadeid)*, Cairo: Dar Al Tiba’a Al Mutamayiza, 2004, pp. 21-23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

operations, engaged in open battle with Jamaah until its imprisoned leaders renounced violence and dealt with the MB through partial toleration followed by periodic repression, to both overcome the radical threat and prevent the growth of the movement.

In parallel with the crackdown on Islamist movements, the regime also 'nationalised' the official religious institutes, most importantly the al-Azhar University. Aware of the extensive influence of this most prestigious Islamic institute, Nasser's regime started amending legislation to undermine al-Azhar's autonomy. Nasser, who "wanted to send a message to different parties affirming he is the only strong man in the country",<sup>60</sup> began to restrict all civil society and non-state actors. The regime continued its restrictive policies, undercutting al-Azhar's autonomy and further weakening the institution. Consequently, the credibility of al-Azhar scholars progressively diminished as they were viewed as 'state co-opted' scholars who supported or continuously turned a blind eye to the regime's social policies.

Through this strategy, the regime succeeded in containing all kinds of institutional Islamist movements and preventing them from getting out of control. It influenced the position of each movement within its ideological framework, sometimes delaying revisions within the Jihad and Jamaah movements<sup>61</sup> and sometimes pushing the MB towards the less moderate end. In this way, Islamists were constantly used as bogeymen to threaten domestic non-Islamists as well as the international community.

At the same time, this strategy also reduced the ability of institutionalised Islamist movements to attract more supporters. Meanwhile, the demand for Islamism increased with growing Westernisation and the disempowerment of official religious institutes, giving rise to post-institutional Islamists. Perhaps Wasat's split from the MB is the first significant example of this phenomenon, except that Wasat, which bypassed the MB's partial retreat from moderate stances owing to

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<sup>60</sup> M.S. Al-Awwa, *Thawret Yulio Wal Islam* [July Revolution and Islam], Cairo: Shorouq al Dawliya, 2006, p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> Jamaah leaders report several incidents in which they tried to announce their revisions but were prevented from doing so by the regime. They also claim that Jihad leaders wanted to engage in revisions but were similarly prevented by the regime and were moved to another prison (see Ahmed, 2003, op. cit. and Awwa, 2005, op. cit.).

institutional pressures, has attempted to institutionalise itself through its bid for legal recognition.

During the mid- and late 1990s, other manifestations of post-institutional Islamism emerged. Two trends are more significant than the others are. The first is the phenomenon of 'new preachers' and the second is that of 'neo-terrorism'.

### *New preachers*

The phenomenon of new preachers first emerged in the late 1990s, but became more powerful in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The failure of institutionalised movements, accompanied by scepticism towards 'official' institutions - such as al-Azhar - has left two alternatives: uncritical Westernisation or an association with Islamist movements, involving confrontations with the state and perhaps endorsement of radical thinking. Both alternatives seemed unpleasant and a societal demand for a third alternative ensued.

Independent preachers have provided a perfect third alternative: "safe religiosity, which entail[s] no confrontation with [the] state or society".<sup>62</sup> Initially, Amr Khaled was the sole star preacher, but within a few years, an exponential increase in the number of preachers took place.

New preachers are primarily young Islamist activists (mostly between their late 20s and early 40s), who did not receive a traditional religious education but are rather self-educated Muslims. For various reasons, including computer and Internet literacy, simple commercial discourses and modern outfits, they can better relate to the new generation of Muslims who are searching for spiritual elements in their lives.

Some of the new preachers and their audiences are part of the new bourgeoisie, which has achieved career and material success and wants to fill a spiritual vacuum, or are among those who have worked in the Gulf and been influenced by its tamed version of Wahhabism.

To be sure, not all preachers have preached moderation. While not explicitly advocating violence or even openly criticising the regime's

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<sup>62</sup> W. Lotfy, *The State of New Preachers (Dawlet Al Du'aat Al Jodod)*, Cairo: Dar Al Khayaal, 2005, p. 28.

policies (for obvious reasons), some preachers' discourses "were not against the use of violence, but were only violence-free".<sup>63</sup>

The popularity of each of these preachers draws on the same factors that sustain Islamist movements. It is for this specific reason that the Al Nas TV channel – presenting a predominantly Salafist-Wahhabi discourse – is the most popular among Islamist channels and that it hosts programmes for some conservative MB preachers.

Some of these preachers are affiliated with different Islamic movements and have clear ideological orientations. Some openly and constantly criticise the regime, such as Wagdi Ghoneim, a former right-wing MB member who enjoys high popularity among the middle and lower-middle classes and who presents an ultraconservative discourse highly critical of the West and the regime alike. Ghoneim, who lives in exile, appears on satellite channels and *YouTube* videos, preaching the ideas of mainstream Jamaah in a modern, less complicated manner.

Adherence to Salafism – which is radical but not violent – is now "visible in many parts of Cairo" where, for instance "women wear the *niqab*...rather than the hijab". Non-violence, though, is no synonym for Salafism or Wahhabism. Indeed, Khalil Al-Anani, a visiting scholar at the Brookings Institution, fears that "Salafism maybe transferred into Jihadi Salafism".<sup>64</sup>

Overall, new preachers represent a variety of non-violent apolitical discourses that fill the vacuum left by institutionalised Islamist movements.

### *Neo-Terrorism*

The other trend of post-institutional Islamism is 'neo-terrorism'. While Egypt's regime succeeded in disabling militant Islamist movements, it failed to cure the atmosphere that breeds radicalism. Young Islamists – critical of the inabilities of institutionalised group leaders or the renunciation of violence – moved forward with their 'sacred mission' alone. Leaders of Jamaah assert that some of the terrorist attacks of the 1990s were

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> Associated Press, "Ultraconservative Islam on Rise in Mideast", *PR-inside.com*, 19 October 2008 (retrieved from <http://www.pr-inside.com/print868674.htm>).

not carried out by the movement, but rather by “youth activists who are close to Jamaah” and who lack “sufficient understanding of Islam”.<sup>65</sup>

Neo-terrorism has been growing stronger over the years. With a “rapid boom in technology and communication, it takes no more than a connection to the Internet and a few dollars to develop a bomb and threaten the security and lives of innocents anywhere”.<sup>66</sup> As long as the causes of radicalism exist, neo-terrorism will continue its ascent and will remain impossible to control and monitor using security measures.

A series of terrorist attacks shocked Cairo in 2005. Analysts argued that the attacks were carried out by a “third generation of Islamist movements, which has not lived the developments of the 1970s and 1980s movements and has no organisational ties with them”.<sup>67</sup> Although Egypt’s regime has succeeded in pre-empting some attacks and has arrested cells of neo-terrorists (often said to have affiliations with al-Qaeda), the nature of these movements undermines the possibility of dealing with them using security measures alone.

The emergence of post-institutional Islamists only stresses the importance of integrating Islamists and addressing the causes of radicalisation. Such an emergence also reflects the partial failure of institutionalised Islamist movements, as well as the absolute failure of the regime’s policies towards Islamism.

## Conclusions

Egyptians are sceptical towards any interventionist attempts by Western countries, yet scepticism towards the US is higher than that towards Europe. It is therefore recommended that the EU distance itself from US foreign policy.

While recognising the importance of working with the current regimes of the Middle East, the EU should also forge direct, consistent relations with moderate Islamists. This requires both sides to make top-

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<sup>65</sup> Ahmed (2003), op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> El Houdaiby, “Your Best Friend Hates You”, *Conflicts Forum*, 30 September 2007(b) (retrieved from <http://conflictsforum.org/2007/your-best-friend-hates-you/>).

<sup>67</sup> Arafa (2005), op. cit.



level decisions to “maintain their engagement as a proper policy for interaction and not yield to pressure and suspend it”.<sup>68</sup>

Yet before undertaking such engagements, EU policy-makers should determine the actors with whom they want to talk. This requires developing clear criteria for engagement, which should be based on the level and potential for moderation among the different groups and individuals.

To overcome mutual mistrust, the EU could start by interacting with Islamist NGOs that are affiliated with those groups the EU decides to engage in talks. Apolitical engagement would be less sensitive for both parties as well as the regime, and would help build bridges of trust between the EU and Islamists. Although financial assistance would not be welcomed by Islamists, logistical assistance and training would serve this purpose for this phase of the engagement.

Whereas direct political engagement seems unlikely at present, decreasing hostility towards the West could be promoted through being “moderately vocal but firm and consistent with the ruling regimes, and urg[ing] them to allow immediate structural changes”.<sup>69</sup> Adopting robust stances on issues of human rights and the rule of law would help in the engagement process, and would further facilitate the moderation of Islamists and their integration in politics.

A final component in a successful strategy that would contribute to the moderation of political Islam in Egypt would be the pursuit of better cultural relations. Cultural exchange – demonstrating openness to dialogue and an appreciation of cultural diversity – together with economic integration and a principled stance on human rights and the rule of law will contribute to the emergence of moderate Islamist discourses that could overshadow radical ones.

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<sup>68</sup> E. El-Din Shahin, *Political Islam: Ready for Engagement*, Working Paper, FRIDE, Madrid, February 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING HAMAS'S RADICALISATION *KHALED AL-HASHIMI*

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**H**amas has become probably the most emblematic case of radicalisation. It is one that the EU has singularly failed to deal with. Hamas's leadership shows no signs of softening its attitude despite the political, economic and military pressure exerted upon it. A group that genuinely believes it is accountable only to God does not yield easily to pressure. Policies designed to diminish its support have backfired because they fail to understand the factors that trigger Hamas's defiant stance.

This chapter explains the four different dimensions of Hamas's radicalisation – the individual, social, governmental and international.<sup>1</sup> In breaking down the factors driving radicalisation in this way, it is suggested that light can be shed on how the EU can better foster the de-radicalisation of Hamas. The prospects for de-radicalisation can be found in militant resistance being viewed as only one component of individual resistance, the increasing social acceptability of the *hudna* [cease-fire] concept, the focus on issues of practical governance and the group's evolving relationship with the international community. Each of these dimensions holds important policy implications for the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis in this chapter is based primarily on seven interviews with senior members of Hamas in Syria in summer 2008. The interviewees agreed to be quoted as part of this research in exchange for anonymity.

## The individual level

Hamas brought itself into the international headlines with a campaign of suicide bombings in the first half of the 1990s. Although the group's charity and social work in the Palestinian territories allows it to enjoy strong support throughout the Arab and Muslim world, the campaign of suicide bombings led the international community officially to declare it a terrorist organisation. Despite international condemnation of suicide bombers, deterrent measures have failed to have an impact on the numbers of those willing to sacrifice their lives. One interviewee said that the size of Hamas's list of individuals willing to die fighting Israel is beyond the group's capacity to cope.

The current literature on suicide bombers concludes that today's suicide bomber has no single profile.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the vast majority of acts are committed as part of a liberation struggle.<sup>3</sup> Severe hardship and an absence of prospects for a better future are prime motivators of violence. Still, Islam forbids suicide, and Muslims committing suicide are to be deprived of the privilege of entering paradise. But in order to bypass the 'suicide' obstacle, the Arabic term for suicide bomber does not mention suicide, and instead refers to 'martyr' or 'martyrdom'.

With the desperate political, economic and social situation combined with religious interpretations of jihad, Hamas finds plenty of arguments that support its use of violence. Members of Hamas recount with delight stories in which Islamic heroes of the past attained victories against superior forces. After all, "a great man wants to end his life by a great part".<sup>4</sup> The immediate fight for the liberation of Palestine becomes an obligation, a duty of every individual, with some of them opting for suicide bombings. Contradictory interpretations of the term 'defence' in Islamic

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the topic and motivations of suicide bombers, see Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006; Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers – Allah's New Martyrs*, London: Pluto Press, 2005, pp. 28-41; and Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York: Random House, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Author interview, Hamas member, 2008.

texts are easily manipulated and adapted to serve personal interests, hence the continual discourse within the Islamic community on the religious validity of suicide bombings. According to religious texts, a martyr who sacrifices his/her own life to defend religion will enjoy a privileged status in the next life alongside the Prophet.<sup>5</sup>

On this point, we can see the interaction of religion and politics at an individual level. Clearly, martyrdom with all its perceived benefits in the afterlife is a purely religious aspiration, while the liberation of the Palestinian territories is more of a geo-political objective. The two complement one another and together can serve as a catalyst for radicalisation. Up to now, martyrdom remains a face-saving way out of a humiliating defeat. Defeat, in turn, is seen as resulting from an incomplete realisation of sharia rule. It is not uncommon to read in Islamist literature that problems throughout the Muslim world today are attributed to the lack of faith and failure to implement sharia. In failing to implement Islamic sharia laws in Muslim nations, regimes have suffered humiliating defeats by their external enemies.<sup>6</sup> According to some Islamist authors, secularisation, Westernisation and deviation from the true path of Islam has brought about the problems Palestinians must cope with. The only way to reverse the situation is to return to religion. More militant scholars appeal “for violent jihad becoming an individual duty”.<sup>7</sup> The appeal to arms draws from Mohamed al-Faraj’s book, *The Neglected Duty*, which argues that jihad has become a duty of every Muslim.<sup>8</sup> Islamic militants argue that the righteous Muslim cannot exist individually; s/he must strive to build and maintain a righteous community of the faithful, the *umma*. Struggling to bring that about is a duty of every Muslim.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996, pp. 8-23.

<sup>7</sup> For more on jihad being an individual obligation, see Mohamed Abd Salam Faraj’s booklet, *The Neglected Duty*, Amman, 1982 or Johannes Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Faraj was a member of the Egyptian jihadist group that took part in the assassination of former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. He also published *The Neglected Duty*, in which he elaborates why leaders are legitimate targets.

<sup>9</sup> See Ibrahim (1996), op. cit.

And Hamas manages to capitalise on an army of angry young people who have nothing to lose. "It relies on honest individuals, strongly condemns corruption, and is above all an Islamic organisation resisting illegal occupation, where defeat is not an option."<sup>10</sup> Apart from providing spiritual and ideological support to those seeking alternatives to Fatah, Hamas through its military branch is also the biggest employer in the Gaza Strip, providing thousands of Palestinians with a source of income.<sup>11</sup> Although some members have joined the group for financial benefits, the vast majority does so out of genuine belief in what the group stands for: the way to victory with God's blessing. And if being a member entails receiving a monthly allowance, dedication to the cause can only grow stronger.

Understanding this personal-level dynamic provides clues on what is required for de-radicalisation to begin. An individual willing to sacrifice life now for liberating Palestine so to be privileged in the next life needs to be provided with a strong motivation to live. The situation on the ground must be improved in a manner that allows individuals to have options from which to choose. Yet, for de-radicalisation to take place, alongside tangible improvements, religious motivations equally need consideration. Individuals willing to engage in acts of violence and die in the process rely on interpretations of certain religious texts that promise a better afterlife. But these same stories can also promise a dignifying exit from the violent path. Among many stories from the history of Islam, one stands out as a primary example of why violence is not always the answer, even when deemed necessary. Many members of Hamas fear being labelled cowards if they back down from the original oath to fight until the full liberation of Palestine is achieved, and it is probably the key motivator for not backing down. After all, death does not seem to deter them. In an attempt to dismiss all hints of cowardice if cessation of violence is declared, the example of Khaled Bin Walid, who led a troop of Muslim men to fight infidels but decided to save his soldiers from certain death when facing a stronger enemy, may be one way to help support the de-radicalisation

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<sup>10</sup> Derived from a Hamas pamphlet.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on that, see <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/gaza.html>.

process.<sup>12</sup> Opportunities for de-radicalisation are also to be found in a statement by a senior member of Hamas in Damascus: “Hamas cannot be narrowed down to suicide bombers; that is only one aspect of resistance.”<sup>13</sup> It is easy to derive from such a statement a conclusion that members are encouraged to seek alternative ways of resistance, hopefully non-violent ones.

### **The social level**

At times of war and occupation, recruitment into the ranks of militant groups becomes a relatively simple task. Prior to winning the elections, Hamas had already filled the void where the Palestinian leadership had been unable or unwilling to act. Through its Islamic charity network, the group provides education, health care and security. It is an important employer but also a religious organisation deeply entrenched in Palestinian society. As such, it succeeds in recruiting those who want to be inspired religiously and politically. Hamas’s unique position in society as well as its social-political-religious-military structure allows it quickly to adapt to the situation on the ground. At the same time, however, Hamas’s unchallenged role as an Islamic organisation places it in a position of defender of not only Palestine as a territory, but also Palestine as a holy Islamic land. Equating the resistance against occupation with defence of Islam on behalf of the entire Islamic *umma* introduces a new component into the pattern of radicalisation. The genuine belief that not only is Palestine under threat but also Islam as a whole makes it the responsibility of those on the front line to act on behalf of the entire Islamic *umma*, and Hamas is ready to undertake that responsibility.

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<sup>12</sup> Being vastly outnumbered, Khaled Bin Walid ordered his army to retreat and head back home. When they returned home, people called Khaled Bin Walid a coward and a traitor, and they wanted to punish him. The Prophet Muhammad intervened, however, and called him a hero, because he saved 3,000 lives from a certain but futile death without accomplishing anything. This same story was used by the leadership of Egypt’s Jamaa Islamia when they renounced violence in 1997. For more on that, see Alli Mohamed Alli Al-Sharif et al., *Tasslit al-Addwaa ala ma Waqaa fi al-Jihad min al-Akhtaa*, Cairo: Islamic Turath Book Shop, 2002, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Author interview, Hamas member, 2008.

Arguing that religion is under threat, recruitment and resistance become justified and accepted within Palestinian society no matter the cost. An emphasis on the importance of land, and above all Jerusalem, becomes tantamount to connecting religious identity to an obligation of every Palestinian to resist the occupation. The more extreme elements within Hamas and in the Islamic world often cite radical scholars like Abdur-Rahman Abdul-Khaliq to explain why accepting the Oslo treaty is un-Islamic. Abdul-Khaliq says accordingly "that there is no doubt that these treaties do not bind any Muslim in the world; because these have been concluded in the names of regional nationalisms that are basically invalid because these create divisions among the members of one [u]mma".<sup>14</sup> A junior member of Hamas in Syria also explains why his group cannot back down on its core principles: "Our issue with Jews is one of existence, and not borders."<sup>15</sup> Land is existence. In the simplest terms, defending land equates to defending Islam, and as mentioned previously, according to certain interpretations of the Quran it is the duty of every Muslim to stand up and resist when Islam and the *umma* are under threat. Following Hamas's electoral victory in 2006, its leaders felt vindicated, because the Palestinian people chose resistance rather than a settlement based on the Oslo accords. Apart from being seen as disadvantageous, the Oslo accords are also considered un-Islamic. They must be revoked because they deprive Palestinians of their ancestral land, and that land represents what and who they are: "Land to us is part of our origin, our religion. We cannot negotiate about our identity. We cannot negotiate about our principles. We absolutely cannot negotiate about the rights of Palestinian people, which are land, holy places, the right of return, the right of resistance."<sup>16</sup>

Even though the views of many Islamists throughout the world vis-à-vis Palestine, Israel, Jews and Zionism vary, there is a common uniting factor upon which all agree: the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine is an act of aggression and a direct threat against Muslims and Islam.<sup>17</sup> Hamas capitalises on the theological reasoning and sympathies it receives

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<sup>14</sup> See Abdur-Rahman Abdul-Khaliq, *Peace treaties with the Jews according to the Shariah*, Birmingham: Makktabah (undated).

<sup>15</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Homs, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> See Jansen (1997), *op. cit.*

from a number of prominent figures in the Muslim world. And when religion is perceived to be under threat, theological reasoning is utilised for the recruitment of new members and growing popular support. Until the status of Jews living in Muslim lands is brought into compliance with the holy book, jihad becomes a duty of every able Palestinian man and woman.

The interaction of religion and politics at the level of Palestinian society shows how land and identity are utilised as catalysts for radicalisation. Through its all-reaching social network, Hamas manages directly to communicate its agenda to a large segment of the Palestinian population. The impression that the loss of Palestine would spell the beginning of the end for Islam is a powerful mobilising tool that eventually creates one collective identity: Muslims under threat. The outcome is that from then on, every role, whether private or public, is geared towards resistance. "I have eleven children, and will do all in my power to have them join the movement,"<sup>18</sup> a Hamas spokesperson told this author in Damascus. "Clearly, I am a religious man, I am a political man, and I am a resistance man,"<sup>19</sup> was a reply by another senior member. It is apparent that the whole mindset within the Hamas membership is calibrated towards recruiting more resistance members from all strata of Palestinian society until everyone is part of the struggle. That task is made easier if war against Israel is presented as a war between those willing to destroy Islam and those defending it.

The common line of argument in most interviews carried out for this chapter for continuing the violence was that Palestinians have suffered for decades, so a few more years do not make much difference. In spite of Hamas's stance towards Israel and the subsequent consequences, support for the group seems unaffected. "People are used to suffering. [A] few days without water or electricity make no difference any longer. If liberation takes place tomorrow or in one hundred years [it] is not too important. But it will happen. After all, Prophet Muhammad returned to Mecca from exile after many years."

But just as the language of religion is used to instigate violence, the language of religion can also offer a face-saving exit strategy and a

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<sup>18</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.



roadmap towards de-radicalisation. The past few years and the early 2009 war in Gaza have shown that resistance comes at a very high price.

The refusal of both Hamas and the Israelis to sit at the negotiating table requires mediators to step in. One of only a few topics open for discussion is the possibility of a temporary cease-fire agreement. When asked why Hamas calls for a cease-fire when its entire identity and purpose is dedicated to liberating the Palestinian territories and destroying Israel, an interviewee refers to examples of previous Islamic leaders: "The cease-fire [*hudna*] is in the interest of Palestinian people. We agreed to it as it is also mentioned in the Quran. Salah Al-Din Ayoub made more than 30 cease-fire agreements with crusaders. *Hudna* is permitted and encouraged in our religion so people can take a break from violence, to reorganise."<sup>20</sup> Still, the vagueness and lack of clearly defined guidelines for cease-fire agreements within the Islamic context opens up perhaps the most viable opportunity to the solution of the Palestinian-Israeli problem. A cease-fire agreement notably does not need to be short term, but can be extended to last several decades, even a century. Those in Israel suspicious of accepting *hudna* offers are fearful that it is just an excuse providing Hamas with enough time to rearm, regroup and launch attacks once ready. While some consider *hudna* to be a deviation, a retreat from Hamas's intent to continue waging jihad until total liberation, Hamas justifies *hudna* strictly as an agreement for a temporary cessation of hostilities, and not a permanent peace treaty,<sup>21</sup> thus allowing it to defend itself against claims of selling out on its principles. Nevertheless, any deal with the enemy must be presented through Islamic terminology, as a benefit for all Muslims, and in accordance with Islamic principles.

Moreover, despite Hamas's powerful rhetoric and strong commitment to its goals, certain elements within the movement are more pragmatic vis-à-vis Israel as a reality. Following the 2006 election victory, some expected Hamas to soften its stance and accept Western demands in order to engage in dialogue. The group's leadership decided to remain loyal to the original ideology, however, which in their opinion had brought Hamas into government in the first place:

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<sup>20</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> See Khaled Hroub, *Hamas – A Beginner's Guide*, London: Pluto Press, 2006, pp. 55-58.

They put conditions upon us, but that is impossible. Israel wants us to recognise their right to our land. Hamas can accept Israel as a fact, but will never recognise their claim to what is ours. Accepting defeat means accepting permanent occupation, and that will never happen. The generations to come will not forgive us.<sup>22</sup>

Yet accepting reality is the first step, and if it entails a temporary cease-fire that can last up to a century, it provides all the parties involved with enough time to seek out a permanent solution to the problem without deadlines, and most importantly, without violence. In the words of Hamas members, accepting reality on the ground as a fact does not necessarily translate into recognition of Israel. The 1967 borders are the priority for Hamas at the moment, but not the end goal. Ambitions are much higher, and settling at the 1967 borders is only an interim solution prior to setting out for the full liberation of Palestine, no matter what that entails. Scaling down over-ambitious targets that first strove directly towards liberating the whole of Palestine could be interpreted as a moderation of the group.

Since *hudna* can be temporary – up to a century – the question arises of whether temporarily accepting Israel as a fact would also imply a period of several decades. So far, there is no indication that accepting Israel as a temporary fact does not comply with *hudna*, thus opening up a window of opportunity for finding a long-term solution in compliance with Islamic principles and suitable to Israel's interests. And when a senior Hamas member says that "Jerusalem is the capital city of the entire world,"<sup>23</sup> the possibility of reaching common ground appears closer. After all, if certain legitimate grievances were addressed, the potential for the de-radicalisation of Palestinian society would be considerable. Some of these grievances are simple to resolve, like freedom of movement and cessation of the blockade.<sup>24</sup> Propping up the local economy would provide young people with jobs and eventually preoccupy their minds with issues not limited to Hamas's communiqués of war for Palestine and Islam. Providing alternatives to the war economy opens up the prospects for a sustainable peace, in which militants would have a much harder time finding new recruits.

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<sup>22</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Homs, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Since 2006, the Israeli government has maintained a total blockade of Gaza.

## The government level

The Hamas charter published in summer 1988 describes Palestine as a country founded by Islam.<sup>25</sup> As an Islamic movement, it is present in every aspect of life, whether political, financial, military, cultural or educational. The group's spokesperson in Damascus attributed Hamas's fast rise from a small charitable organisation to a key regional player to the intellect and strategy of its pious leadership:

Our leadership derives its wisdom from the holy book and Prophet Muhammad's words. It is an Islamic resistance movement that understands the reality very well, tries to deal with Palestinian problems, and with all issues of concern to Palestinian people without compromising its values and principles. It's not anyone's tool, but an Islamic movement defending great religion.<sup>26</sup>

Although branded as an Islamic terrorist group, in an interview with the author of this chapter one of Hamas's senior leaders based in Damascus denies that Hamas is a radical organisation as presented in the West:

Hamas is not radical. Believe me. We have relations [with] any country who respects our right in Palestine. Hamas is in control in Gaza, and we want to have Islamic rule there, but we do not implement it because people are not ready for that. We do not cut off hands of thieves, but send them to prison. We even have Christian members in Hamas.<sup>27</sup>

Highly critical even of the Iranian sharia system, the Hamas leadership believes that there is a need to develop a legal and judicial system based on sharia that is not seen as the law, but more like a code of values and inspiration.<sup>28</sup> Hamas has also distanced itself from other regional and international jihadist groups, despite their open support for Hamas. Al-Qaeda even issued public condemnation of Hamas for taking part in the elections. When asked for an opinion about al-Qaeda, a Hamas leader explained the difference between terrorism and justified resistance:

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<sup>25</sup> See Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World*, New York: New York University Press, 2002, pp. 250-253.

<sup>26</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> The interview with Mr Yasser was conducted in Damascus in July/August 2008.

<sup>28</sup> See Schulze (2002), *op. cit.*

“If a foreigner occupies you – it is resistance. But not to go to attack Madrid or Germany...these are not our principles.”<sup>29</sup> The group also repeatedly condemned terrorist attacks against civilians in the West and labelled them un-Islamic.

Already in the very early stages of Hamas’s rise to the political stage in the Palestinian territories, Fatah realised that theist monopolistic control over Palestinian affairs was challenged by an increasingly popular Islamic movement. Prompted to counteract, the Fatah leadership began a campaign of Islamic propaganda with the use of symbols, Islamic themes and public prayers. Fatah also reminded people that in fact as early as 1981 it had tried to locate its struggle within the context of classical Islamic history as the rightful Islamic war.<sup>30</sup> When Hamas won the elections in 2006, however, some of its votes were anti-Fatah votes – protest votes against an incompetent and corrupt leadership within the Palestinian Authority. Hamas utilised Fatah’s shortcomings and turned them into an election victory. Once the mandate to govern was secured, the Hamas leadership felt confident enough to remain unresponsive to external and internal pressure and to proceed with the gradual solidification of its power.

When it comes to Hamas’s accomplishments since taking over the government, the record is difficult to assess. Although in charge in Gaza, Hamas still behaves like an opposition party. The events of the past few years in the region have never provided Hamas with a free reign to govern. An international boycott, the blockade, the Israeli military campaign and de facto division from the West Bank, have all made it almost impossible for Hamas to start governing Gaza. The balancing act between international pressure, internal Palestinian divisions and the Israeli blockade prevents Hamas from fully taking responsibility. The current circumstances do not allow the movement to alter the opposition mindset and engage in governing, which would also imply engaging with Israel. Hamas does not want to follow in Fatah’s footsteps.

The movement would lose greatly if it were to compromise its main position regarding the recognition of Israel without a guarantee of

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<sup>29</sup> Author interview, Hamas member, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> See Alexander Flores, *Intifada – Aufstand der Palaestiner*, Berlin: Rotbuch, 1988, p. 67.

substantive gains for the Palestinians.<sup>31</sup> Such a compromise would become tantamount to political suicide. And not only that, if Hamas were to cede ground to Israel without respective concessions, new groups would emerge capitalising on the 'sell-out'. If Hamas comes to end up where Fatah did, the question is what would start next. Clearly, the vicious circle of de-radicalisation and re-radicalisation would unfold as a never-ending story. The respective worst-case scenario, according to Hroub (2006), is the instigation of a civil war.<sup>32</sup> Although civil war failed to materialise even after the eruption of violence in 2006–07, Palestinians are now divided into those living in Gaza under Hamas's rule, and those living in the West Bank, under Fatah's rule. This de facto division allows the two Palestinian rivals to exercise their authority in a manner compatible with their ideology and political ambitions. From Hamas's perspective, Fatah serves the interests of Israel and is corrupt; as such, it is deemed unsuitable to represent the interests of the Palestinian people. Fatah gave up the right to represent the Palestinian people when it stopped the resistance against occupation and signed the Oslo accords. Even direct talks with Israelis are considered an act of treason. Fatah is deemed too weak, and hence not immune to pressure.

In the context of an Islamic resistance movement, however, weakness does not necessarily mean failure to implement policies owing to problems of a practical or strategic nature, but a notion with far more serious implications. In the eyes of followers and believers, weakness is interpreted as moving away from the divine mandate the movement claims to possess, resulting in God's punishment. If liberating Palestine is God's will, Hamas has embraced this idea and launched itself as the defender of faith, people and land, and anything other than a struggle until full victory and just peace as sought by Hamas is in defiance of God's will. The end goal is the establishment of an Islamic state based on sharia rule. If sharia is not to be implemented as originally promised, a new cycle of defeat and foreign rule over Muslims in Muslim lands threatens to repeat itself in the near future. After all, the common belief is that the failure to implement sharia has led to the inevitable outcome that is apparent today in moral decay, disease, illiteracy and the spread of vices. Exemplifying the past glories of the

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<sup>31</sup> See Hroub (2006), *op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Islamic empire at times of conformity to sharia, many Islamists argue that only sharia and just leadership with a pious Muslim at its helm will raise Muslims to where they belong. Otherwise, all the internal and external setbacks are attributable to a corrupt, inept system that has intentionally deviated from the correct path embodied in the sharia.<sup>33</sup> The creation of the state of Israel in the heart of Muslim lands attests to those claims. Fatah's loss of legitimacy within Islamist circles when it recognised the state of Israel and stopped fighting reflects the same dynamic.

Fatah's moderation and its shift towards a mainstream political party marked the rise in popularity of a more radical movement. The association of moderation with weakness and corruption played to Hamas's favour. The moderation of Fatah became the source of radicalisation as well as the success of Hamas. Furthermore, during one of the interviews, a Hamas member said that "Hamas is fighting against a mafia, and not a state".<sup>34</sup> An increasing number of references to financial, sex and corruption scandals among not only Israeli politicians but also Fatah leaders serve two distinct purposes. One intends to undermine the enemy by exposing its incompetence and 'true face'. The other places Hamas in a legitimising position where it has the mandate to rid the region of 'mafia'. Also, with the emphasis on its platform as an Islamic organisation, it puts itself above secular parties, which are susceptible to corruption for personal gain, are ideologically weak and void of spiritual guidance.

Since it took over Gaza, Hamas has given no indication of moderating its goals. As an Islamic resistance movement on the one hand, the group ascribes to divine inspiration, feels accountable only to God, equates resistance with a divine obligation and openly strives to establish an Islamic state in liberated Palestine. On the other hand, Hamas's actions in practice do not differ much from most mainstream political parties. Its leaders behave and justify their policies citing common 'political' language, and often use non-theological interpretations to explain why the movement acts the way it does. References to unemployment, utilities, infrastructure and involvement in professional trade unions show a more pragmatic and grounded approach to resolving daily problems.

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<sup>33</sup> See Ibrahim (1996), *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Author interview, Hamas member, 2008.

Participation in democratic elections indicates that Hamas is ready to work within the legal framework of the Palestinian constitution. Strong criticism of the Fatah leadership for their disregard of constitutional law and especially the 'illegal' extension of the presidential mandate reveals that Hamas can in fact be ready to assume the responsibility to govern – beyond the mere purpose of resistance. People's welfare will have to become Hamas's priority. Being more responsive to people's needs implies in turn moderation along the lines of the people's will. Closely interrelated to representative functions, a potential future peace process would be essentially facilitated by the existence of Hamas as a political party. It would provide not only somebody to talk to without the obstacle of recognising a terrorist group, but also somebody who talks of behalf of an electorate.

### **The international level**

In an interview on Al-Jazeera in March 2008, Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal emphasised that Hamas wants a Palestinian state. "Hamas wants a Palestinian state, but with sovereignty."<sup>35</sup> As previously mentioned, it is in the opinion of many that the Oslo accords do not provide Palestinians with true sovereignty, and Hamas only serves to correct the injustices previous Palestinian leaders agreed upon without having the legitimate mandate of the Palestinian people. "It is [a] war of necessity and not choice,"<sup>36</sup> was the answer of one of the leaders to Hamas's refusal to comply with previous agreements. But the blame for the current situation is not exclusively put on Fatah. A considerable amount of criticism for the current crisis is also attributed to external actors: "The number one reason for the Palestinian crisis is outside intervention, by Israel and the US and regrettably by some regional states."<sup>37</sup> Harsh treatment of Palestinians by Egypt and Jordan and their role in the blockade of Gaza serves the interests of these countries to stifle Islamic movements within their own borders. "Egyptians are afraid of Hamas and believe that our success in Gaza will spill over into Egypt through [the] Muslim Brotherhood over there. They are convinced that

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<sup>35</sup> Drawn from the interview of Khaled Meshaal by the Al-Jazeera TV channel in March 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Interview of Khaled Meshaal by the Al-Jazeera TV channel in March 2008.

Hamas's success is a disaster for Egypt, so they try to make it harder for us."<sup>38</sup> Despite the denial that war is self-serving, no Hamas member undermined the importance of violence. On the contrary, resistance was praised as one of the core pillars of the movement. "Resistance is like the head on a body...without the head, [the] body is meaningless and loses its soul...resistance is to get what is rightfully ours and to defend the nation...land cannot be liberated only through politics, talks, negotiations, and pens, but land can only be returned through resistance."<sup>39</sup>

Reiterating the value of continued resistance, an interviewed Hamas member explains the reasons for the invalidity of Oslo. "What they want us to do is accept defeat and surrender. There is a difference between surrender (*istislam*) and peace (*salam*). In surrender, the enemy rules over you. In peace, you are equal with the enemy. You are free to do what you choose."<sup>40</sup> This is why the Oslo accords cannot be accepted as a basis for permanent peace, because they deprive Palestinians of true sovereignty. "Oslo gives them control of our borders, our water underneath the earth, and the sky above our heads. We can barely claim sovereignty for the ground we walk on."<sup>41</sup>

Hamas has not been concerned with appearing legitimate in the eyes of Europeans and Americans. One leader refers to the West's double standards when it comes to Palestinians. "There is an unjust and evil oppressor assisted by [what] I call a 'one-eyed' world that looks only through American interests, and which ignores the suffering of Palestinian people."<sup>42</sup> But "occupation must be resisted and martyrdom is one thing no Hamas member is afraid of".<sup>43</sup>

When the West requires that Hamas comply with its demands so as to engage in dialogue, it is actually demanding that the movement change its principles, which are what brought Hamas to where it stands today. Since meeting these demands would therefore imply the self-destruction of

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<sup>38</sup> Author interview, Hamas member, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Homs, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Author interview, Hamas member in Damascus, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



the movement, Hamas's defiance comes as no surprise. Hamas is the most popular group in the Middle East, is perceived legitimate in the eyes of the vast majority of Arabs and Muslims, and won free and fair democratic elections in 2006. So as far as Hamas is concerned, its leadership sees no reason to change course and tarnish the group's credibility in order to be recognised by the West. They do not want to be understood as an amalgam of disparate and ad hoc militias, but as a movement that is rooted in all levels of religious and political society.<sup>44</sup> Resistance will continue for as long as they perceive the occupation of Palestine to be unjust, illegal and above all anti-Islamic. Combined with the desperate political, social and economic situation on the ground, the movement sees no alternative but to use violence. Meshaal mentions that Hamas is a reaction to Israel and enquires: "Which came first: occupation or resistance?"<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, there remains room for a more optimistic, yet challenging perspective. How to plan a strategy for the years to come and which direction Hamas will take chiefly depends on the environment in which it has come to act. And it is challenging, because transforming the movement not only entails transforming the entire conflict constellation but also transforming confrontation into something constructive.

## Conclusions

This chapter has examined the interplay of Islam and politics as a catalyst for radicalisation on four different analytical levels in the case of Hamas. What does this analysis tell us about the current situation and what can we expect for the future? The answer is fairly straightforward. The recent military campaign in the Gaza Strip will further radicalise Hamas – on all levels. Since individual living conditions are destroyed, a revival of suicide missions is likely. As the radicalisation of larger segments of society is to be expected, Hamas can base its future strategies on a fertile recruitment ground. Furthermore, the military confrontation will encourage military means of resistance at the expense of expression through political channels. The rather passive stance of the international community will further

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<sup>44</sup> See Beverly Milton-Edwards and Alastair Crooke, "Waving, not Drowning: Strategic Dimensions of Cease-fires and Islamic Movements", *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 35, No. 3, September 2004, p. 295.

<sup>45</sup> Interview of Khaled Meshaal by the Al-Jazeera TV channel in March 2008.

nurture Hamas's self-serving discourse. If the Intifada showed all of the world how Israeli occupation affects Palestinians, Hamas's tactic of provoking the enemy to show massive force in order to awake sympathies and widespread support for its cause becomes a clear success.

If, against all expectations, Hamas comes to compromise on its main goals and accepts the current reality, it might face the same lot as its competitor Fatah and be blamed for corrupting the struggle. New radical segments are then likely to take over Hamas's present role. The interplay of Islam and politics can foster radicalisation as well as de-radicalisation. Yet, without an accommodating step by those forces that Hamas directs its instrumentalisation of religion and politics against, it might also become a source of re-radicalisation.

## 4. TRENDS IN SALAFISM

OMAYMA ABDEL-LATIF

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In much current writing it is argued that Salafist thought and doctrine is responsible for a good deal of the violence that the West and the Arab world have experienced during the past two decades. The rise of Salafism (the most puritanical strain of Islam) is seen as a key ingredient of re-radicalisation. Some of these assumptions are being challenged, however, by the existence of Salafist groups that do not espouse violence as a mechanism for social and political change.

There are clearly diverse interpretations of Salafism today. The key denominator that distinguishes one Salafist group from another has to do with the stand each group chooses to take regarding the crucial question of whether there should be a separation between the religious and political domains in Salafist thought. Three main currents appear to be dominating the scene:

- a) *Al-Salafyia al-elmyia*, or scholarly Salafism, which is concerned with the study of the holy text and Islamic jurisprudence;
- b) *Al-Salafyia al-harakyyia*, or activist Salafism, which describes both politically active Salafist groups and those groups that are not politically active but occupy a place in the public sphere through their charity work and networks of social support and religious education institutes. This current also includes *al-Salafyia al-Islahyyia*, or reformist Salafism; and
- c) *Al-Salafyia al-jihadyia*, a brand of jihadist Salafism that concerns itself with implementing jihad. This strand commands much media attention but does not have a significant powerbase.

Following the 9/11 attacks, Islamists – and Salafists in particular (both activist and non-activist) – faced what one observer described as the “biggest crisis in their recent history”. Their scholarly and humanitarian

institutions became the target of a state security hunt in different parts of the Arab world. Their activities were curtailed. Pressure was exercised that forced them to compromise their long-held convictions. The outcome was a successful policy of reigning in their most radical figures. Saudi Arabia provided the example. But such policies also targeted the non-activist current of Salafism, which had traditionally been preoccupied with the scholarly aspects of the holy text and had focused much of its activity on charity work. Most importantly, this strain of Salafism had no interests to pursue in the political game.

This chapter looks at these particular Salafist movements. It attempts to map out the most prominent groups on the scene today and capture the debate that is taking place among these groups regarding three key issues: a) the approach to politics, b) the relations of these groups with ruling regimes and c) the use of violence. It takes examples from Salafist movements across the Arab world, but places special emphasis on those in Lebanon. The chapter reveals significant variation in the directions that different Salafist movements are taking. External actors need to be much more mindful of this and develop policies to embrace the fluidity of debates among Salafists.

## 1. Defining Salafism

Some Arab scholars, such as Muhammad Abed al-Jabir and Fahmi Jedaan, consider every Islamist a Salafist. The assumption goes that since all Islamists are committed to an old founding text (the Quran and the Prophet's Sunna), then it is only natural to conclude that all the variations of Islamist groups are Salafist (including al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun (the Muslim Brotherhood), jihadist groups, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Turkish Justice and Development Party, the Tunisian Ennahda and the Egyptian al-Wasat).

For Islamists, however, Salafism has a more specific meaning. It stands for the school of thought that takes *al-salaf al-salih*, the righteous predecessors (i.e. the Prophet and his companions), as its only point of reference. It does not attempt to provide new interpretations or views other than those already existing. Its main preoccupation is with the fundamentals of the faith and doctrinal purity. Yassir Burhami, a leading Egyptian Salafist, understands Salafism to be "Islam pure" as descended from the Prophet. Such a definition reflects how Salafists perceive themselves to be the true guardians of the faith. This explains why they are constantly accused by their opponents of being exclusionary. Such a

definition excludes a wide range of political Islamic forces that might have embraced Salafist doctrine when they began, but which have moved far from it through years spent in politics.

Although Salafist movements say their ultimate mission is to emulate *al-salaf al-salih*, this should not suggest that they live in a frozen moment in the history of Islam, for these movements are the products of modern times. In other words, these are modern movements and they interpret the holy text and select from the life of the Prophet and his companions whatever suits their message of the day. Although the recent manifestations of the activist branch of Salafism should be understood within the context of the rise of Islamist politics in the Arab and Muslim world during the past three decades, it originally dates from the 1920s and 1930s. This branch found expression in the form of emerging social movements, religious institutions and charity associations. These included the Muslim Brothers of Egypt (during its early years), Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyah [Supporters of the Prophet's Sunna], al-Jam'iyah al-Shar'iyah [Association of Islamic Youth in Syria], the Scholars Association in Algeria and the Movement for the Return of the Caliphate in India and Indonesia.

The most important manifestation of Salafism, however, emerged at the turn of the last century under the rubric of reformist Salafism, *al-Salafiyah al-Islahiyah*. This brand of Salafism calls for a new interpretation of the text that engages with society's problems and concerns and offers an alternative to the Western model from within an Islamic frame of reference.

During the past three decades, the emergence of Islamist forces that have made breakthroughs in electoral politics across many parts of the Arab and Muslim world have forced a debate among Salafists regarding the place of politics and political activism, which was once considered taboo.

Unlike other Islamist activists, the Salafists do not possess a specific vision of politics. They have failed to articulate a political platform or project, and their opponents charge that they are preoccupied with what is *halal* [permitted] and what is *haram* [forbidden] and are still not qualified to be part of the political process. Yet, two political factors are cited as shaping Salafism's evolution and discourse: relations with the 'imperial' West and the emerging nation-state. Both have provoked the Salafist movement to staunchly defend Islamic identity at all levels - religious, political and social.

While the Salafists are the only Islamist group that does not have a structural hierarchy as such, they still share some commonalities with other contemporary Islamist movements. Early Islamists were concerned with developing a new paradigm for a renaissance that is grounded in an Islamic frame of reference, whereas the main concerns of the neo-Islamist movements are identity and ways to defend it.

## **2. Salafists' approach to politics and ruling regimes**

Traditionally, the Salafist approach towards political activity has often been driven by suspicion and hostility. Some of the key dividing lines between the traditional Salafist and activist Salafist groups have to do with their stances vis-à-vis three main issues: the political process, ruling regimes and the use of violence.

### **2.1 Political activity**

Salafists are far from united about where to place politics and political action among their priorities. There are two dominating points of view among Salafists. The first condemns any act of political participation to the point of imposing a ban on their followers. Political participation for Islamists, they argue, always comes with a heavy price. One of the founding fathers of the Salafist movement, Sheikh Nasser Eddin Al-Albani, is of the view that politics should be shunned altogether. This position reflects the traditional Salafist view that the real solution to the problems of the *umma* involves focusing on two main principles – filtering religion from all the *bidah* [innovations] and educating Muslims about the faith.

Traditional Salafists criticise those Islamists who seek change through either embracing political action or resorting to violence. For them both methods lead to nowhere because the original ill is in correcting the faith. Abdel-Aziz Kamel, editor of *Al-Bayan* (a Salafist magazine published in London), believes that from a Salafist perspective political activism means “changing the status quo in favour of Islam”. He considers “resistance to occupation” as the highest degree of political activism. Kamel argues that political activism should not be confined to the ballot box. One of the weaknesses of the Salafist movement, he once wrote, is that the place of

history and intellectualism is central to its discourse and vision, leaving no space for political activism.<sup>1</sup>

Other more radical Salafist movements impose a ban on politics entirely, which extends to include any form of participation in the political process, as expressed by their famous slogan of 'no politics in religion and no religion in politics'.

Salafist groups based in Europe hold that same view. They refuse to engage in any form of political action. For example, Salafist groups in France were conspicuously absent from the debate of December 2003 to January 2004 about the veil. Among the thousands of protesters and the several Islamist associations that joined forces against the ban, none belonged to the Salafist movement. An interpretation of what one observer described as the 'insularity' imposed on Salafists was that they were abiding by the fatwas of Saudi scholars.

But if experience is anything to go by, it has proven that many of these movements have changed their rigid positions with respect to politics and have accepted the status quo. The Yemeni Al-Hikmah Association is a case in point, as later discussed.

A different approach to politics is taken by a second group of Salafists. In his 1985 book, *Muslims and political action*,<sup>2</sup> Abdel-Rahman Abdel-Khaleq argued that politics was at the heart of religion and political activities cover more than just governance. He defended "the democratic system" and urged followers to "invest in it" because the alternative was "a tyrannical system". He held that "[t]he political system which allows Muslims to form political parties should be supported". Abdel-Khaleq also supported participation in parliaments, because it helps to guarantee that legislation will not be passed that is contradictory to Islamic law. Opponents from the more radical Salafist groups accuse traditional Salafists of being complacent.

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<sup>1</sup> "Interview with Abdel-Aziz Kamel", *Islamonline.net*, 22 June 2008 (retrieved from [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1212925442892&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1212925442892&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout)).

<sup>2</sup> A.-R. Abdel-Khaleq, *Muslims and political action*, Riyadh: Adar al-Salafyia, 1985.

## 2.2 *Relations with ruling regimes*

Another important characteristic of Salafist thought pertaining to politics is the stance taken on relations with ruling regimes. Traditional Salafists do not legitimise any acts of protest or rebellion against the ruler, no matter how unjust he might be (i.e. 'no denial, no boycott and no rebellion').

Instead, they call for full political conformism to the ruler, which is the defining element of their approach to politics. Change should only be sought through giving advice. Contrary to other Islamist movements, which use violence as a way to change the status quo, traditional Salafists have maintained what could be described as relatively stable and good relations with the ruling regimes. Salafists of this stripe are not perceived by the state as a threat to regime security or stability, as has always been the case with other political Islam forces.

Salafists themselves argue that relations between any Salafist group and the ruling regime are governed by the political realities of each country. Some observers call this brand of Salafism *al-Salafyia al-rasmiya* or 'official' Salafism. Its key feature is its subservience to the ruling regimes, at times working closely with them. It provides religious legitimacy to support the rulers' actions and dispel any popular questioning of state policies under the slogan of 'no to sedition'. The most obvious example of this brand of Salafism exists in Saudi Arabia. It is often referred to as *al-Gamyyia* or *al-Madkhalyia* (expressing an attribution to Sheikh Adel Gami or Sheikh Rabe' al-Madkhali). This Salafist strain believes that the authorities should make decisions on behalf of the *umma* and that there should not be any rebellion against the ruler so long as 'the calls to prayers can be heard in the streets'.

Although some analysts like to place jihadist Salafism in a league of its own, it could be argued that this brand of Salafism - born during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and consolidated over years to reach its peak and most dramatic moment on 9/11 - is the extreme form of activist Salafism, *al-Salafyia al-harakyia*. Jihadist Salafism places special emphasis on politics and the need to rebel against rulers.

## 3. **Salafists' change of heart**

### 3.1 *Salafist movements in Saudi Arabia*

The confrontation that took place between the al-Qaeda organisation on the one hand and both US and Arab regimes on the other is among the main



factors that have helped shape the discourse on Salafist movements during recent years. This confrontation, conducted under the catchphrase 'war on terror', eventually led to dramatic changes within the Saudi Salafist movement. The beginnings of this transformation could be discerned when prominent Salafist figures, previously known as staunch opponents of the US and its Arab allies, reversed their positions. These included Sheikh Safar al-Hawali, Salaman al-Ouda and Muhammed Srour Zein al-Abdeen. These figures have worked hard to temper the rebellion of the Salafist youth who were opposed to the Saudi regime and its alliance with the US, liaising with al-Qaeda followers and sympathisers in Saudi Arabia.

Some observers regard Ouda's change of heart as a manifestation of the emergence of this new current within the Salafist movement in Saudi Arabia.

Since its foundation, the most famous branch of Salafism - Wahhabi Salafism - has allied itself with the political regime of al-Saud (although the more radical elements have grown increasingly aggressive against the regime because of its alliance with the US and the West). This new stream also takes a pacifist approach to political and social change. Thus, the dilemma facing this emerging Saudi Salafism (i.e. pro-government and anti-violence) is whether it can articulate a vision of social change that would be acceptable to its followers. This process of reflection and self-criticism has forced leading Saudi Salafist figures to dilute their radicalism. The Salafist movement in Yemen has undergone a similar process, as discussed below.

### ***3.2 Transformation of the Salafist movement in Yemen***

In one decade, the Al-Hikmah Association, a young Salafist movement in Yemen, has gone through massive changes regarding its discourse and stance on politics. Initially, it followed the path of the traditional Salafist school, and rejected the notion of political parties, parliamentary elections and democracy. It maintained good relations with the ruling regime and was silently hostile to the opposition.

The association then underwent both ideological and political transformations that have led to the de-radicalisation of much of the basis of its founding vision. One of its leading figures, Sheikh Muhammed bin al-Mahdi, has spoken openly about the need to engage in dialogue with the

Zaydis (a Shia sect in Yemen) and praised “the Islamic brotherhood” – a bond between the two. Such rhetoric had been unheard of from a Salafist organisation.

Al-Hikmah’s political transformation has been reflected in their close relationship with power circles and their attempts to revise their stance on the issue of political parties. For example, they now accept a multi-party system, although they still condition their acceptance with the view that political parties should depart from an Islamic frame of reference.

Even so, Al-Hikmah’s experience has proven that Salafists tend to have an ambiguous relationship with politics. While they have made clear their alliance with the state and their silent hostility to the opposition, the leaders of Al-Hikmah insist that they are not politically active and that theirs is not a political party, but rather a charitable and social movement that cares about the Islamic call.

Such statements continue to reflect a vague – and at times confusing – relationship with the political domain, particularly given the change to much of the anti-political discourse. Ahmed al-Daghshi, an expert on the Yemeni Salafist movements, has argued that it will not be long before the Salafists launch their own political party.<sup>3</sup> He bases his argument on the idea that much of the Salafists’ rigid discourse concerning democracy and electoral politics has reduced – after the process of revision – to an issue of *ijtihad*.<sup>4</sup>

It shows that the movement has come a long way since its early days, when in 1993 they launched a campaign against parliamentary elections, calling them illegitimate. What is more, they also used mosques to incite voters against participating in what they described as ‘the democratic

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<sup>3</sup> “Interview with Ahmed al-Daghshi”, *Islamonline.net*, 5 June 2007 (retrieved from [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1180421326371&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1180421326371&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout)).

<sup>4</sup> *Ijtihad* refers to the effort of a qualified Islamic jurist to interpret or reinterpret sources of Islamic law in cases in which no clear directives exist. In the early Muslim community, every qualified jurist had the right to exercise such original thinking, mainly *ra’y* [personal judgment] and *qiyās* [analogical reasoning].

secular game'. In 1997, this radical stance and rejection turned into silence – or what could be referred to as 'implicit consent' – as an outcome of the revision process.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.3 *Traditional and reformist strains in Egypt*

Egypt's Salafists have gone through a different experience. They are a mix of traditional and reformist Salafists. The bulk of their work is focused on educational and proselytising activities within the mosques. They target the individual with a view to making a better Muslim out of him/her and they are most active on university campuses. Unlike other Egyptian Islamists, the Salafists have no hierarchical structures or organised entity. They refer to the words 'collective action', the most important condition of which is 'not to confront governments' and not to resort to underground or violent activities. They nonetheless point out that not condoning violence does not mean that they do not recognise jihad by force. They have taken a clear position on jihad in the Muslim countries they regard as being occupied by enemies, such as Bosnia, Iraq, Palestine and Chechnya.

Their tools of influence include seminars and religious courses as well as medical and educational support for poor families. Despite being a pacifist movement that has not been involved in any violent activities, Salafists have had their difficult times with the security apparatus. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, security forces sought to put an end to their activities and institutions. Alexandria, the Mediterranean governorate that is host to the most influential Salafist movement in the country, witnessed a number of security strikes against Salafists. These resulted in the arrest of key leaders in 1994, a ban on the publication *Sawt al-dawaa* and the closure of the Al-Furqan Institute (the first Salafist institute from which Salafist preachers graduated). From 1994–2002, Salafist activities continued on university campuses but then these also came to a standstill.

Egypt's Salafists do not have a specific political project or vision for the country. In spite of the political turmoil that the country has been going through and the many issues that have caused political and social polarisation, Salafists have kept their heads above the murky water of politics and have rejected any attempts to be dragged into it. There was one

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<sup>5</sup> "Interview with Ahmed al-Daghsi", *Islamonline.net*, 5 June 2007 (op. cit.).

incident, however, in which they flexed their muscle – in support of the nomination of the first woman candidate on the Muslim Brotherhood’s list in the year 2000 in Alexandria. This was an unprecedented move for the Salafists, and Jihan Al-Halafawy spoke clearly about the support and encouragement she received from the Salafist base during her electoral campaign.

Nevertheless, Salafist leaders still dismiss any involvement in the political game. The reason, Burhami suggests, is that being part of the political game of today means that one has to compromise one’s ideals and principles. He argues that “[t]he experiences of Islamist movements in politics is not encouraging at all as we have seen how they have given up their Islamic ideals and identity for a position here or an opportunity there”.<sup>6</sup> Thus, “Islamists cannot be allowed to participate in elections and use the tools of democracy except after they make compromises at the expense of their Islamic values”.

Burhami also believes that avoiding political participation in its present form of organising protests, participating in elections and setting up political parties is in itself an act of political protest. “Not being part of this political scene is one way to delegitimise it.” Yet the Salafists have taken a clear stand regarding the different crises facing the *umma*.

#### 4. The stance on violence

The legitimacy of the use of violence with its two levels – symbolic violence and physical violence – has also been at the heart of much of the debate among Salafists. Traditional Salafist figures have held an unambiguous position on the issue.

Burhami rejects the notion that jihadist Salafists are the military wing of the Salafist movement. He criticises what he describes as “jihadi Salafists” who are not committed to the “jurisprudential restrictions and conditions for jihad”.<sup>7</sup> He points out that they have gone too far in acts involving bloodshed, such as planting explosives in public places including

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<sup>6</sup> Y. Burhami, “Political participation and the balance of power” (in Arabic), *Sawt al-salaf*, 20 March 2007 (retrieved from <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=664>).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

streets, markets and even mosques, and in calling other Muslims apostates. He does not condemn these acts outright but says, “Muslims should be committed to the rulings of jihad as ordained by Islam”. He also explains that jihad is “an act in which people should find mercy and not a means to vindication”. This sums up the traditional Salafist school of thought in relation to current actions conducted by those who call themselves jihadist Salafists.

Such criticism should not be taken to mean that traditional Salafists renounce the concept of jihad altogether. They remain firm believers in the concept of jihad and despite their condemning some of the operations committed in its name, to them it remains ‘a sacred duty’. Some Salafist figures have spoken about the need to ‘rationalise jihad’ in accordance with the general interests of both Islam and jihad, and in a manner that could render the concept an unquestioned consensus of the *umma*. One of the key conditions set by Abu Hafs Rafiki (who is known to be a staunch Moroccan Salafist) is that jihad should obtain the support of both scholars and the *umma*, thus preventing it from being a divisive issue. He has said that scholars’ acceptance and support is what legitimises jihad and makes it significant. Traditional Salafists have implicitly criticised what they describe as the operations that do not target the real enemy because these allow the opponents of jihad to call it terrorism and extremism and scare off Muslims. Echoing the view of many traditional Salafist figures on the issue, Rafiki has explained that “[e]ven the jihad against the occupiers in Palestine and Iraq should not lead to bloodshed. Public places should not be targeted. ...[P]eople understand jihad to be fighting but the more important meaning of jihad is the call for God.”<sup>8</sup> He has also spoken about the need to have a political platform parallel to military activity and has said that the most important conditions for a successful jihad is to increase the number of supporters of the concept among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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<sup>8</sup> “Interview with Abu Hafs Rafiki”, *Islamonline.net*, 10 May 2007 (retrieved from [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1178193317702&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1178193317702&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout)).

## 5. Lebanon and its brands of Salafism

One notable example of Salafism's evolution can be seen in Lebanon. In mid-August 2008, Hizbullah, the Lebanese Islamic Resistance Movement, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a Salafist group based in the Lebanese city of Tripoli. The event was hailed as a major breakthrough – given the doctrinal complexities and enmity that has historically dogged relations between the Salafists and the Shia in general. The MOU took place against a background of sectarian-inspired violence between Tripoli's Sunnis and the country's Alawite minority of Jebel Mehsen. The agreement was initially rejected by a segment of Tripoli Salafists who are Saudi-funded, thus creating a schism among the Salafist rank and file. The Salafist rivals agreed to put the MOU on hold to allow time for more discussion. Yet the most significant outcome of this move was that even within the circles of those considered the most literal and extreme among Islamists, there are prospects for change in what could be viewed as a radical and dogmatic discourse on politics.

Explaining the motives behind the agreement with Hizbullah, Safwan al-Zo'abi, head of the Kuwaiti-funded Endowment for Islamic Heritage (Waqf al-Turath al-Islami), said that “we wanted to send a clear message that Salafists are not terrorists and that they accept to dialogue with the other no matter how ideologically or politically different it is from us” [sic].<sup>9</sup>

Another leading Salafist figure echoed the same view. Salafism, explained Hassan al-Shahal of the Tripoli-based Guidance and Proselytisation Institute, is “an intellectual rather than a militant current. ...Salafists and terrorists are two completely different things. Those Salafists who embraced militancy and commit acts of violence have deviated from ‘*nahj al-salaf al-salih*’ [the approach of the righteous predecessors].”<sup>10</sup> Analysing this development can help provide clues to thinking among the ‘new Salafists’.

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<sup>9</sup> Derived from an interview with the author in Beirut, September 2008. The analysis in this chapter draws upon three interviews (two in Tripoli and one in Beirut) conducted in September 2008 for the purpose of this research. All the interviewees agreed to be quoted.

<sup>10</sup> Author interview in Tripoli, September 2008.

## 5.1 *The rise of the Salafists*

The Salafist movement is the oldest Islamist movement in Lebanon. It is considered a Wahhabi Salafist movement, which puts a high premium on teaching the Quranic text and Hadith. It embraces a conservative vision of politics and society. Its followers hold an ambivalent view of the Lebanese state: while some consider it an illegal entity, other Salafists say they can seek reform but only without resorting to violence. In the 1980s, the group attempted to form a military wing called 'the Islamic army', but it was short-lived and the group's military ambitions ended. In 1990, the movement operated through the Islamic Charity and Guidance Association, whose goals were to reform society, build mosques, schools and centres for teaching the Quran, as well as to help the poor and needy.

In 1996, the Lebanese government accused the association of inciting sectarian hatred in its education curricula. It was dissolved. The followers moved to another charity organisation called the Endowment for the Revival of Islam, which focused on social work. In 2006, the Salafist movement set up an association called the Zad al-Akhera Institute. The growth of the Salafist movement in Lebanon has been linked to the emerging role played by Saudi Arabia – which has replaced the traditional venue of Al-Azhar in Egypt – as a destination for Lebanese preachers to receive their religious education. Many have come under the influence of the Wahhabi school of thought and have taken home some of its ideas. Unlike other Islamist movements, the traditional Salafist movement is a social one, which shuns politics and does not involve itself in the electoral game.

Leaders of the traditional Salafist movement identify it as 'the true face of Islam'. They have no political project or vision for Lebanon, they say, other than spreading *dawah* [the call for Islam] in society. "Our *dawah* is a call to go back to the basics of Islam," says Dai al-Islam al-Shahal, head of the Islamic Hidayah wa al-Ihsan Association and a leading Salafist figure.<sup>11</sup> This undertaking is primarily done through religious institutions, Quranic schools and charity organisations under the movement's supervision. The Salafist movement enjoys an expanding social base, particularly in the north of the country, mainly thanks to their social services. Their method of

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<sup>11</sup> Author interview in Tripoli, September 2008.

influence has two strands: their religious schools and a network of social services. This approach has enabled them to accumulate social capital, again especially in the north, where poverty rates are the highest in the country. Filling the void left by an absent Lebanese state is a classic case of Islamists moving in to address a vacuum left by the state.

Although according to its leaders the Salafist movement is (in theory) an independent apolitical movement, it has not been immune to the deep political polarisation that has gripped the country during the past few years. In politics, they make no secret of being closer to the 'March 14<sup>th</sup> camp'. Such a political alliance between the traditional Salafists and Western-backed political forces may come as a surprise to some, but it can be understood within a context of two factors. First has been the sectarian affiliation – since former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was viewed by the majority of Lebanon's Sunnis as their leader. Despite disagreement with Hariri over a number of issues, Salafists did not seek confrontation with Hariri because a) the bulk of his social base was made up of Sunnis and b) it would have belied a sense of opportunism on the part of some Salafist leaders. In that sense, both could claim to be standing against a common enemy (politically speaking), namely Hizbullah. Yet at least in public, Hariri did not associate himself or his movement with Salafist movements.

Alarming press reports that repeatedly spoke of a growing presence of al-Qaeda on Lebanese soil raised fears that religious extremists now see Lebanon, like other failing states, as an attractive terrain in which to establish a foothold. Indeed, following the end of the Lebanese army's military campaign against Fatah al-Islam in September 2007, many questioned the fate of Salafism in Lebanon. Salafist leaders acknowledge that the three-month confrontation pushed jihadist Salafists into the margins, leaving the ground open for the more peaceful form of Salafism – scholastic Salafism.

Even though the north is home to as many as 20 Salafist associations in the form of religious teaching institutes and a vast network of charity organisations, these associations do not organise themselves under a unified leadership. There has been a previous attempt to address the issue of an absence of leadership: in 2004, Hassan al-Shahal set up the Islamic Politburo as an umbrella under which Salafist organisations could come together. His goal, in his words, was to "monitor the political developments in Lebanon". This reflected an unprecedented interest



among Salafists in Lebanese political affairs. It also broke with a long tradition of aversion to politics that had been inherited from the 30 years of Syrian presence in Lebanon. With the assassination of Hariri in February 2005, the Salafist movement embraced political Sunnism as a political ideology. Under the slogan of 'defending *ahl al-sunna*', some Salafists lifted the ban on engaging in politics. This interest was clearly manifested during the 2005 elections, when they helped Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (the dominant political movement among Lebanon's Sunnis) through campaigning and votes to achieve a landslide victory.

It is difficult, however, to measure the influence of the Salafists as a political force on the scene today. While some observers suggest that the strength or the weakness of any Salafist organisation should be measured in terms of the number of institutions it owns and the number of personnel it employs, others believe that the Salafists are powerful in as much as they mobilise the street. Hence, in times of deep polarisation and sharp sectarian divisions, as is the case in Lebanon today, the balance is tipped in favour of those Salafists who embrace an extreme hard-line discourse against Hizbullah and by association the Shia. There is another view that suggests the Salafist movement derives its significance from the crucial role it could play in exacerbating sectarian tensions and conflicts. This is evident in the statements and religious sermons of some Salafist figures, who conjure up the threat that the Shiites, and with them the Alawites, pose to the Sunnis.

## 5.2 *The 'new Salafists'*

What is significant about the 2008 MOU between Hizbullah and the Tripoli-based Salafist group is that it has brought into focus those Salafists whose discourse differs from the mainstream Salafist movement. The differences between the two parties – those who signed and those who opposed the move – are old ones. These clearly surfaced during the meeting convened by the Mufti of Tripoli, Sheikh Malik Shaar, in mid-July at the Islamic Sunni Centre. This meeting brought together 50 Salafist personalities, among whom were the previously mentioned Hassan al-Shahal and Safwan Al-Zo'abi, the latter being one of the architects of the agreement with Hizbullah. Absent from the meeting was Dai al-Islam al-Shahal, a representative of 'official' Salafism.

This meeting saw the birth of what came to be dubbed in the media as the 'new Salafists', a term coined to refer to those Salafists who have adopted a discourse different from the conventional one. They have

championed dialogue with Hizbullah, refused to be party to sectarian-inspired conflict with the Shia and refused to be subservient to either the political establishment (Tayyar al-Mustaqbal) or the religious establishment (Dar al-Fatwa). In this sense, the initiative with Hizbullah can be seen as the outcome of this new Salafist discourse. The new Salafists claim to represent most Salafists in the north. The main association leading this new current among Salafists gets its funding from Kuwait, as opposed to the rest of the Salafist associations, which obtain their funding from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Its charity projects are spread across every village in the miserable north.

Underlining the divergences between these new Salafist forces and other Salafist groups, the former have opted for the following approaches:

- a) *They have offered a discourse about Salafism that differs from that prevailing among Muslims and the Lebanese.* In this respect, as Zo'abi declared, the meeting and the dialogue with Hizbullah are intended to show the "true moderate face of Salafism". Zo'abi denounces some Salafist groups that are interested in "fomenting tension and intimidating others"<sup>12</sup> – an allusion to the alliance between Dai al-Islam al-Shahal and the Future Movement.
- b) *They have refused to be used as a scarecrow to frighten the Shiites, as one of Tripoli's Islamists put it.* Nor does this Salafist faction want to be implicated in a battle against the Shia to the benefit of Tayyar al-Mustaqbal, which many Salafists consider a secular movement. According to Zo'abi, "[p]eople viewed Salafists as backward and barbarians...we wanted to tell them that we are human beings, we want to dialogue, we recognise the other. We have proven that we are by far more moderate than many political parties described as such."<sup>13</sup>

### 5.3 *A reformist Salafist: A voice in the wilderness*

Sheikh Muhammad Al-Khoder represents a group of Salafist figures who are leading a reformist movement. He formed the Lebanese Islamic Forum for Dialogue and Dawah. Being critical of the state of Islamist movements

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<sup>12</sup> Author interview in Beirut, September 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

in Lebanon today, Khoder believes the forum is an attempt to search for common ground on which to found a common Islamic project/vision. Khoder considers the traditional Salafists to be out of touch with reality. Although it has a wider following among the young, the movement has nonetheless failed to articulate a political project. Khoder explains that “Islamist activists – Salafists in particular – lack both a leadership and a vision for political and social change”.<sup>14</sup>

Khoder has articulated what can be described as a reformist vision. It is a view that accepts ‘the other’. His is a Salafism that adapts itself to a multi-confessional society such as that of Lebanon. The challenges facing Khoder and his supporters include how to change the perceptions and views of their followers – mostly young men – who have been fed a rigid religious discourse. “We want to move our young men from ideas of extremism and we are receiving a positive response to that,” he said. The real challenge, however, is the internal schism within the Salafist movement itself. This schism has been exacerbated by the position adopted by the traditional Salafist leaders, who block any initiatives for change and reform. “There are attempts to project us as undermining the Salafist traditions [and as having] given up our principles and therefore not representing the Salafist movement.”<sup>15</sup>

His views on relations with the other sect of Islam make him part company with his traditional Salafist counterparts. While he acknowledges the doctrinal differences with the Shia, he insists that the Salafist *ulema* [scholars] have not called the Shia apostates. It is not their approach to exclude the Shia altogether. The conflict in Lebanon is not a sectarian one, he believes. It has a regional edge to it. The biggest threat according to Khoder is the US-Israeli hegemony: “It is the new Middle East Project which aims to change the identity and culture of the region that remains the biggest threat to us.”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, Khoder takes the same position as Hizbullah, a fact that he acknowledges yet is hesitant to go public with for fear of being undermined by other more traditional Salafists.

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<sup>14</sup> Derived from an author interview in Tripoli in September 2007 for O. Abdel-Latif, *Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists: A Growing Force*, Carnegie Paper No. 6, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., January 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

The relationship of this group with the traditional Salafists is one of competing for turf and influence among the young Sunnis. Traditional Salafists enjoy a more popular base, and Khoder explains that the more radical they are, the more popular they become. At times of sectarian tension, the traditional Salafists take over, as proven true by the obstacles imposed on reconciliation with Hizbullah.

## Conclusions

The central argument of this chapter is that there is growing evidence to suggest that the stances and discourses of Salafist movements concerning politics, the use of violence and relations with other Islamists are not unchanging or dogmatic. Examples of Salafist movements in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon show how such movements have shifted from a radical position on the political process – with some imposing a total ban on all political activity – towards embracing some of the fundamentals of the political process such as elections. Contrary to their rigid outlook and discourses, Salafist movements have proven capable of moving from the stricter and more radical end of the spectrum towards a more mainstream approach to politics.

These movements are not static. They are operating in ever-changing socio-political contexts and as much as they seek to influence such contexts, they are undoubtedly influenced by them.

But experience has also proven that more often than not Salafists have developed an ambiguous relationship with politics. This is not so much the result of a deliberate effort as it has to do with a lack of an overarching vision of politics and its role in their world vision. Being newcomers to a political scene that has long been dominated by other more seasoned forces of political Islam, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the political naïveté of the Salafists is hardly surprising.

For the EU this implies that dialogue with Islamist groups of all stripes is important and channels of dialogue should be kept open. But for it to be a fruitful one, the Europeans must abandon their habit of going to meetings with a list of demands to which the Islamists should adhere. A constructive dialogue means that both parties think of each other as equals, rather than one party dictating its list of ‘shoulds’ and ‘should nots’ to the other.

## 5. TURKEY: A SUSTAINABLE CASE OF DE-RADICALISATION?

SENEM AYDIN DÜZGİT AND RUŞEN ÇAKIR

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Political Islam has been on the rise in Turkey in the last two decades owing to a variety of factors including the impacts of globalisation and the related popularity of identity politics, large waves of migration from the countryside into the cities, the poor performance of centrist parties in government, increasing democratisation and the rise of a religious middle class particularly in Anatolia.

Daniel Brumberg's classification of political Islamist movements is particularly useful in the analysis of the Turkish case. Brumberg divides political Islam into three main categories: "radical/militant fundamentalists", "reformist fundamentalists"/"tactical modernists" and "strategic modernists". He defines radical fundamentalists as those groups that explicitly reject democracy and aim at establishing an Islamic state, often with recourse to violence. Reformist fundamentalists/tactical modernists also pursue an Islamic state as their ultimate goal, but agree to make use of democratic instruments and discourses in achieving it. Strategic modernists differ from these two groups in terms of both goal and strategy. Brumberg defines those groups that fall under this category as Muslim liberal democrats that embrace liberal democratic values and seek to extend religious freedoms in a political environment where they co-exist among other political movements in a secular order.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. Brumberg, "Rhetoric and Strategy: Islamic Movements in the Middle East", in M. Kramer (ed.), *The Islamism Debate*, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv, 1997.

It can be argued that the Turkish case embodies all three kinds of movements. Reformist fundamentalism can be found in the Welfare Party and its successive incarnations (namely the Virtue Party and the Felicity Party), while the concept of strategic modernism could be used in assessing the Justice and Development Party (AKP), albeit with reservations on the part of some segments of Turkish society. Although radical fundamentalism can be claimed to have little weight in Turkey compared with much of the Middle East, the case of Hizbullah deserves attention, not only because of its strength in the 1990s, but also because of more recent claims that it is experiencing a revival in south-east Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. The moderate course

### 1.1 *From the Welfare Party to the AKP: A major shift in discourse and policy*

The Welfare Party was the first political party with an explicit Islamist orientation to come to power in Turkey, as a dominant partner in a coalition government. The party claimed 21.6% of the votes in the 1995 general elections and formed a coalition government with the centre-right True Path Party, with its leader Necmettin Erbakan as the prime minister. Before coming to power, Erbakan had often praised sharia rule and advocated its implementation in Turkey.<sup>3</sup> Once in power, the party adopted certain domestic and foreign policies in direct conflict with the republican constitutional order. Reactions to these policies reached their peak in 1997 when the National Security Council moved to oust the Welfare Party from government, in what has been termed as a ‘post-modern coup’. The Welfare Party was closed down in January 1998 by the Constitutional Court and its key figures, including Erbakan, were banned from politics for five years. Upon closure, the party’s parliamentary group joined a short-lived Virtue Party, whose programme reflected a more moderate posture and placed greater emphasis on democratisation and the

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, “Kurdish Militant Group ‘Turkish Hezbollah’ Issuing Terror Threats”, *International Herald Tribune Europe*, 21 December 2006.

<sup>3</sup> C. Karakas, *Turkey: Islam and Laicism between the Interests of State, Politics and Society*, Report No. 78, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Frankfurt, 2007, p. 25.

fostering of closer relations with the European Union.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the Virtue Party was also closed down by the Constitutional Court in 2001 for being the 'centre of anti-secular activities', after which the movement formally split into two parties: the Felicity Party of the 'traditionalists', led by Erbakan's closest associate, Recai Kutan, and the AKP of the reformists, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Felicity Party remains strongly committed to the Welfare Party line in its goals of establishing a society based on an understanding of ethics and morality that rests on Islam and in its anti-Western outlook that also entails a strong belief in the incompatibility of Islam with Western values. It is explicitly against the United States and is strongly opposed to Turkey's accession to the EU. Western civilisation is perceived as unjust and corrupt, where Europe is presented as an enemy of Islam whose ultimate aim is to divide and partition the country. It advocates that Turkey should instead turn to the Muslim world and lead the Islamic states towards a 'more just world order'. This discourse, which is reminiscent of the Welfare Party, has not fared well in the general elections. The party only managed to win 2.5% of the votes in the 2002 elections and obtained a slightly lower 2.3% in the 2007 elections, failing to qualify for representation in the parliament for two consecutive electoral periods.<sup>5</sup> In the face of decline, in October 2008, the party elected Numan Kurtulmuş as its new leader, a younger political figure with a Western education. It remains to be seen whether this will translate into any substantial moderation of the party's policy line.

In contrast to the Felicity Party, the AKP quickly disassociated itself from the old leadership and ideology. The party came to power in the 2002 general elections, obtaining 34% of the votes. It expanded its support base further in the 2007 general elections, in which it received 46.6% of the votes and formed its second round of single-party government. The party's performance in government so far is a major example of de-radicalisation in the sense that a shift has occurred from reformist fundamentalism, in which an Islamic state is pursued within a democratic order, to strategic modernism, in which the party espouses liberal democracy and a global

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<sup>4</sup> Z. Öniş, "Political Islam at the Crossroads: From Hegemony to Co-Existence", *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> There is a 10% electoral threshold for representation in the Turkish parliament.

liberal economy. The party has undertaken fundamental reforms in the field of democratisation, started accession talks with the EU and achieved economic stability. Nevertheless, towards the end of its first term in government and particularly in its second round in office, significant segments of Turkish society, the judiciary and the military expressed deep concerns regarding the AKP's commitment to secularism and democracy, which culminated in the closure case against the party in March 2008.

## ***1.2 The AKP in power: Prospects for sustainable moderation***

It can be argued that the AKP has not yet made any major legal changes that challenge the secular order in Turkey. Yet, as the recent closure case indicates, this helps little in alleviating the secularists' fears of the party. Secularists in the country are aware that radical Islamist movements seeking to establish a state based on sharia have low chances of survival in the Turkish context. Both the Turkish military and the judiciary are known to be strong opponents of radical Islamic movements. Furthermore, public opinion polls suggest that radical Islamism is also opposed by the vast majority of Turkish society. A recent survey undertaken by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) found that 76% of the population is against the implementation of sharia, while only 9% favour it. Even among the AKP voters, 70% were found to oppose sharia. The survey also found that even those Turks who define themselves as "religious" do not perceive a contradiction between being a Muslim and being modern and secular.<sup>6</sup>

It is not just domestic constraints that are perceived to set limits on radical Islamism in Turkey. It can also be contended that the country's external context pushes it towards moderation since Turkey is strongly embedded in the West in economic, strategic and institutional terms. It is in the course of EU membership and is a long-standing member of NATO, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Moreover, the extent to which the Turkish economy is integrated

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<sup>6</sup> A. Çarkoğlu and B. Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye'de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset* [Religion, Society, and Politics in a Changing Turkey], TESEV, İstanbul, 2006.



into the global economy would make it very costly for any political movement in power to adopt an anti-Western and anti-globalisation discourse.

Still, it is also a fact that religiosity is on the increase in Turkey. In the same TESEV survey, 44.6% of the respondents were found to identify themselves primarily as a “Muslim” (compared with 36% in 1999), while only 29.9% identified themselves as a “citizen of the Turkish Republic” and 19.4% as a “Turk”.<sup>7</sup> What the secularists fear is that this growing religiosity in Turkish society, mainly through the medium of social pressure, may lead to the gradual Islamisation of social life in Turkey. The TESEV survey found that around one-third of the population is concerned about the rise of Islamism and the erosion of secularism in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> This segment holds that rather than major “legal-political changes”, the government’s “piecemeal administrative decisions” and “social influence” will promote religiosity in Turkey to the extent that the advances of the secular republic in areas such as gender equality will ultimately be eroded.<sup>9</sup>

One of the key examples of this view given by the secularists is the party’s public-sector recruitment policies. The secularists are particularly worried that the AKP is Islamising the education system and the judiciary through favouring individuals with Islamic backgrounds, such as graduates of İmam Hatip religious schools, in its appointments.<sup>10</sup> While there is little empirical data to substantiate this claim,<sup>11</sup> the appointment of the governor of the central bank and more recently the head of the High Education Board (YÖK) from among those close to the party have helped little in dispelling such concerns. The government has also been accused of turning a blind eye to illegal Quran courses, promoting Islamic conservatism through school textbooks and taking a permissive approach

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> M. Somer, “Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey: Implications for the World, Muslims and Secular Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 7, 2007, p. 1278.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, “AKP’nin Eğitimde Kadrolasma İnadi Yargiya Carpti” [AKP’s Recruitment Policies in Education Blocked by the Judiciary], *Radikal*, 12 August 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Somer (2007), op. cit., p. 1279.

towards the encouragement of Islamic practice in public schools.<sup>12</sup> Although such incidents are from time to time reported in the mainstream media, it is hard to treat them as reliable indicators of the extent to which the party is promoting Islamisation in education. Indeed, they could very well be the acts of bureaucrats and civilians who believe that promotion of religiosity is acceptable under AKP rule.<sup>13</sup>

These cases do not mean that the secularists do not additionally perceive any direct legal-political challenges to the secular system by the AKP. The headscarf controversy is one of the key examples cited by the secularists in this respect. A Council of State decision in 1984 and a 1997 Constitutional Court decision prohibit the use of headscarves in all public institutions, including schools and universities. In his first term in office, Prime Minister Erdogan introduced two proposals partially to reverse the ban, both of which were successfully blocked by the secularist elite. In his second term in government, the AKP made its third attempt by advancing the proposal of the Nationalist Action Party to lift the ban in universities. Although the amendment was later turned down by the Constitutional Court, it led to severe tensions on the political scene and paved the way to the closure case opened against the AKP in March 2008. The Court ruled against lifting the ban in July 2008, but also concluded that the party had become the 'centre for activities against secularism'. The Court's official justification of its decision, published in October 2008, shows that the bulk of the evidence cited by the Court in branding the AKP as the centre of anti-secular activity rests on the party's position and the speeches of its key figures on the headscarf ban.<sup>14</sup>

Another controversial legal-political step concerns the government's proposal to increase access to education for graduates of İmam Hatip religious schools. Based on a YÖK decision issued in 1997, graduates of vocational schools who take the university entrance examinations can earn higher scores if they apply for bachelor programmes that coincide with the kind of vocational school from which they graduated. This implies that

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<sup>12</sup> See for example, "Parents Reveal Scandal at High Schools", *Turkish Daily News*, 1 June 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Somer (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 1279.

<sup>14</sup> For the official justification of the decision of the Constitutional Court, see the *Official Gazette*, No. 27034, 24 October 2008.

İmam Hatip school graduates have to achieve higher scores than do the graduates of regular high schools to enter into non-theology faculties. In December 2005, the ministry of education issued a regulation that allows İmam Hatip graduates to earn degrees from regular high schools by taking corresponding courses and thus to be on a level playing field with regular school graduates in entering non-theology faculties. YÖK objected to the regulation, however, leading to its suspension by the Council of State in February 2006.

For the secularists, both the headscarf controversy and the dispute over İmam Hatip schools are gradual attempts at Islamising Turkish society and the state bureaucracy. In the case of the headscarf debate, the secularists (women in particular) view the headscarf as a “visible symbol of the Islamisation of Turkish society”.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the ban in universities, it is often asserted that the young women who do not wear a headscarf would be compelled to do so over time owing to social pressure, particularly in Anatolian towns where there is already strong attachment to Islamic/conservative values. With respect to the dispute over İmam Hatip schools, the secularists complain that the AKP is attempting to infiltrate the state administration by facilitating the entry of Islamists into the related faculties in universities. For the AKP and its supporters, both cases involve the removal of discrimination and the promotion of individual liberties.<sup>16</sup>

It may indeed be argued that both attempts are related to tackling discrimination and that the fears are overstated. The TESEV survey, for example, found that although 64% of its respondents believed that the use of the headscarf had increased over the years, its use was actually found to have decreased between 1999 and 2006.<sup>17</sup> The perceived increase may be linked to rising migration and urbanisation, which has led to the growing visibility of headscarved women in society. Furthermore, there is a high

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<sup>15</sup>A. Rabasa and F.S. Larrabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, RAND Corporation/National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, CA, 2008, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> The TESEV survey found that the percentage of headscarved women fell from 73% in 1999 to 61% in 2006. See Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2006), *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

degree of societal support for both lifting the headscarf ban in universities and facilitating the entry of İmam Hatip graduates to non-theology faculties.<sup>18</sup>

These initiatives could be considered positive and necessary steps, had they not been separated from the broader issue of democratic reform in Turkey. The AKP government – particularly in its first term – undertook important measures towards democratic reform to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. Nevertheless, especially from 2005 onwards, the reform process slowed down considerably, leading to disappointment among both EU circles and the reformist forces within the country. The government was perceived as attempting to appease the status quo forces in Turkey, for example through its reluctance to abolish outright Article 301 of the Penal Code, which regulates offences that involve “insulting Turkishness, the Republic, the parliament and state institutions” or to undertake any reform relating to the Kurdish issue. The party started preparations on the drafting of a new ‘civilian’ constitution soon after the 2007 elections, but the constitution project was abruptly put on hold in early 2008. After the closure case, the party seems more cautious about pressing for legal-political changes that may be interpreted as promoting Islamisation,<sup>19</sup> but it is also apparent that the AKP is very reluctant to take any steps on the democratisation front.

This stance can partly be explained by the rise of nationalist sentiments in the country in response to the resumption of violence by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the perceived need on the part of the AKP to forge an alliance with the highly nationalist establishment to

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<sup>18</sup> The TESEV survey found that 71% of the public is against the headscarf ban in universities and 82% of the public believes that İmam Hatip graduates should be on a level playing field with regular school graduates in the university entrance examinations (*ibid.*, p. 96 and p. 24).

<sup>19</sup> One of the cases that is demonstrative of such caution involves the proposal of an AKP MP on the protection of children, which included establishing a place of worship in schools for students of every religion. The proposal was immediately dropped after a warning by Prime Minister Erdoğan to refrain from controversial actions in the eyes of the public in the aftermath of the closure case. See “PM Lashes Out at Deputy for Controversial Youth Proposal”, *Turkish Daily News*, 13 August 2008.

alleviate any prospects of closure. The weakening of the EU anchor resulting from the mixed signals coming from Europe can also be considered a factor behind the reluctance to undertake democratic reform. Regarding the impact of the EU, the *Leyla Şahin v. Turkey* case – in which the European Court of Human Rights in November 2005 rejected an appeal to allow women to wear the headscarf in universities – can be considered a turning point for the AKP's perception of Europe in the promotion of democratisation in Turkey. It can be argued that this case led to a serious reassessment among certain segments of the party as to how far Europe could contribute to changes in Turkish secularism through an agenda of democratisation and human rights.<sup>20</sup>

Such reluctance to take the necessary steps to consolidate Turkish democracy poses a serious risk for the sustenance of the moderation of political Islam in Turkey. Democratic consolidation can be regarded as the “ultimate insurance of secularism”.<sup>21</sup> While there are secular states that are not democratic, “all established democracies have some type of a consolidated secular system enjoying acceptance by the majority of the socio-political actors”.<sup>22</sup> Yet democratic consolidation would strongly depend on economic development and a credible external anchor as well as ideological changes on the part of both the Islamists and the secularists.<sup>23</sup>

The economic performance of the AKP in its first term in government was impressive, with inflation under control and interest rates declining. Still, these results were made possible by the favourable international economic climate, which is no longer present in the party's second term. The AKP will have to find novel means of tackling the challenges of continued economic growth and new job creation in a deeply unfavourable global economic environment, to sustain the support of the middle classes that play such an important role in its moderation and to pursue further

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<sup>20</sup> S. Aydın and R. Çakır, “Political Islam in Turkey”, in M. Emerson and R. Youngs (eds), *Political Islam and European Foreign Policy: Perspectives from Muslim Democrats of the Mediterranean*, CEPS, Brussels, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Somer (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 1281.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1282.

democratisation.<sup>24</sup> An unequivocal commitment to Turkish membership by the EU would also play a crucial role in the consolidation of Turkish democracy by enhancing the credibility of the Union as a promoter of Turkish democratisation. The AKP would also need to reprioritise the EU accession process, not only for the future of the reform trajectory, but also for its own systemic survival. This became evident once again with the closure case opened against the AKP. Reforms undertaken by the AKP to attain harmonisation with the EU constituted the main official justification of the Constitutional Court for its decision not to ban the party.<sup>25</sup>

Both the secularists and the Islamists would also have to readapt their ideology to expand their views on a pluralist democracy. The issues of “ambiguity” and “trust” consequently become highly significant in this context.<sup>26</sup> One of the main impediments to the building of trust between the Islamists and the secularists relate to the AKP’s ambivalence on issues that lie at the heart of the debates over secularism in Turkey. The AKP’s preferred label of “conservative democracy” claims to “give voice to the Turkish people’s values and to bridge the gap between the state and the people”.<sup>27</sup> How such shared “values” are defined, justified and selected remains (for the secularists, dangerously) ambivalent. Similarly, such ambivalence is also present in the party’s line on the public role of Islam, on which the AKP does not articulate a clear position.<sup>28</sup> This ambivalence in turn fosters fear among the secularists that the party has a hidden agenda of gradually Islamising Turkish society.

A sustainable moderation of political Islam in the framework of democratic consolidation furthermore requires the existence of strong secularist opposition parties that would push the AKP towards extending the democratisation process. Such parties would compete with the AKP for

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<sup>24</sup> Ş. Pamuk, “Globalization, Industrialisation and Changing Politics in Turkey”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 38, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> *Official Gazette*, No. 27034, 24 October 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Somer (2007), op. cit., p. 1283.

<sup>27</sup> S. Tepe, “A Pro-Islamic Party? Promises and Limits of Turkey’s Justice and Development Party”, in M. Hakan Yavuz (ed.), *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006, pp. 121-122.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*; see the discussion on pp. 123-132.

the party's moderate constituency by being in favour of expanding individual rights and freedoms, and they could help decrease polarisation along the religious/secular axis in Turkish society. There is currently an absence of such parties in the Turkish political context. The Republican People's Party, which is currently the major party on the left, is almost indistinguishable from the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party in its defensive nationalism and its reluctance concerning democratic reform.<sup>29</sup>

The moderation of political Islam under the AKP should thus not be taken for granted. As the compatibility between Islam and free market values became a central element of the Islamic identity in Turkey, especially from the mid-1990s onwards, a new Islamic middle class emerged that is not only visible, but is also a strong competitor for state power.<sup>30</sup> This new middle class upholds economic liberalism, but is socially conservative, particularly on gender-related issues.<sup>31</sup> As recently observed by the famous Turkish scholar of Ottoman and Turkish history, Şerif Mardin, the promotion of Islamic/conservative social values by the AKP, combined with social pressure stemming from this new middle class, creates a strong potential for the increasing Islamisation of Turkish society. Mardin highlights that this may not be the ultimate intention of the AKP; yet the party policies that promote societal Islam, such as ignoring illegal Quran courses, may indeed facilitate such social dynamics, possibly to the extent that they shift the party further to the right.<sup>32</sup> The AKP is not a monolithic or homogenous party, but consists of various factions including those that have joined it from the ranks of conventional centre-right parties. Nevertheless, there is still a strong Islamist core, meaning that there may always be potential for gradual Islamisation under conditions of

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<sup>29</sup> Z. Öniş, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists: Political Parties and Paradoxes of Europeanization in Turkey", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Pamuk (2008), op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> European Stability Initiative (ESI), *Islamic Calvinists: Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia*, ESI, Berlin/Istanbul, 19 September 2005.

<sup>32</sup> See Ruşen Çakır's interview with Şerif Mardin in R. Çakır (ed.), *Mahalle Baskısı: Prof. Dr. Şerif Mardin'in Tezlerinden Hareketle Türkiye'de İslam, Cumhuriyet, Laiklik ve Demokrasi* [Small-Town Pressure: Islam, Republic, Secularism and Democracy in Turkey from the View of Şerif Mardin's Theses], Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2008.

incomplete democratic consolidation and an absence of strong secularist rivals who would help keep the party in check and pressure it to follow a moderate course.

## 2. The violent fringe

Radical/militant Islamic fundamentalism with recourse to violence has generally remained a marginal force in Turkey. There are two main radical/militant Islamic fundamentalist groups currently present in the country, namely al-Qaeda and the Turkish Hizbullah.

### 2.1 *Al-Qaeda*<sup>33</sup>

A Turkish al-Qaeda cell was responsible for the consecutive bombing of two synagogues as well as the British Consulate General and the HSBC Bank headquarters in Istanbul in November 2003. The perpetrator was arrested by the Turkish police in August 2005, after which 33 suspects were arrested in 2007.<sup>34</sup> Further investigations revealed that Turkish militants in al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan had organised a cell before 11 September 2001, that the Istanbul bombings were ordered directly by Osama bin Laden and that preparations for these bombings were carried out under the guidance of Muhammad Atef – also known as Abu Hafs al-Misri – then leader of al-Qaeda’s military wing. Initially, Atef assigned two targets for the Turkish militants: the Incirlik Air Base in Adana and an Israeli tourist ship travelling to the southern port of Antalya. The militants decided that it was impossible to stage an assault on Incirlik, and postponed an attack on the Israeli cruise ship because of a lack of intelligence.

This attack came as a shock to Turkey given the widespread belief in the country that al-Qaeda would not perpetrate crimes in a Muslim country. Yet, there were already sufficient grounds for concern about the possibility of al-Qaeda attacks in Turkey. It is well known that many Turkish radical Islamists, who had earlier fought in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir, had later joined the international network of al-

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<sup>33</sup> Some parts of this section draw from R. Çakir, “Turkey in Denial of al-Qaeda”, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Jamestown Foundation, January 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee (2008), p. 27.



Qaeda. It is also known that hundreds of Turkish radical Islamists have been trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It can be reasoned that Turkey constitutes an obvious target as a Muslim country with close ties to the West. Its secular political system, which (albeit with its problems) has managed to incorporate the Islamists, presents an alternative model where Islam and democracy coexist. On top of that, although Turkey has recently experienced some setbacks in its relations with the US, it has generally supported US actions in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

As part of its global strategy, Turkey has long been used by al-Qaeda as a transit country that provided key logistics such as international money transfers and a base for international travel for its members. It can be argued that Turkey's importance for al-Qaeda significantly increased with the war in Iraq, where it became a crucial route for the transmission of weapons, members and money to Iraq via Syria. Following the US occupation of Iraq, there was also a steady outflow of Turkish volunteers ready to fight in the Iraqi insurgency. Newspapers often report stories of Turkish nationals who die in suicide attacks or in armed combat. For instance, Habib Akdas – the ringleader of the Istanbul bombings – was reportedly killed in a US bombardment of al-Anbar province in September 2004. Similarly, it is claimed that Gurcan Bac, another leading member of al-Qaeda, died in a clash in Fallujah in 2005.<sup>35</sup>

The 2003 attacks confirmed fears that Turkey is now a major target country for al-Qaeda attacks. Two years after the Istanbul bombings, Louai Muhammad Hajj Bakr al-Saqa – an al-Qaeda operative of Syrian origin – was arrested after a failed plot to attack an Israeli cruise ship near Antalya. Even though al-Qaeda has so far never staged an attack on Turkish soil using non-Turkish operatives, the al-Saqa incident shows that it would be possible. The latest al-Qaeda attack in Turkey was directed at the US consulate in Istanbul in July 2008. Three Turkish policemen were killed in the attack, which was described by the Turkish security forces as al-Qaeda's retaliatory response to the recent effective operations carried out by the Turkish security forces.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Hürriyet*, 15 February 2005.

<sup>36</sup> *Taraf*, 10 July 2008.

In fact, in the wake of the Istanbul bombings, groups linked to or inspired by al-Qaeda have been the target of greater scrutiny by the Turkish intelligence services and the security forces. As is the case in many parts of the world, however, it is much harder to trace small groups that have no direct link to al-Qaeda than larger movements that are better organised. For example, on 9 March 2004, two Islamist youths independently sought to bomb 40 Freemasons congregating at the Masonic Lodge in Istanbul's Kartal district.<sup>37</sup> Security prevented the two from deploying the bomb properly. The activists had no direct connection with al-Qaeda, but were clearly inspired by the network.<sup>38</sup> Far from being professional militants, Turks influenced by al-Qaeda are generally ordinary citizens. One of the suspects arrested as part of a major operation in the central Anatolian city of Aksaray in December 2007 was a high school English teacher, and four others were likewise employed and socially integrated individuals. Al-Qaeda style militancy in Turkey continues to attract individuals outside the usual profile of young, single, unemployed/underemployed youths.

Turkish intelligence services and security forces are well equipped and experienced in counter-terrorism. Yet for several reasons, Turkey is ill prepared for a potential fight against al-Qaeda. One of the main reasons is that Turkish counter-terrorism is overwhelmingly focused on the PKK. Furthermore, Turkish public opinion remains unconvinced of the threat posed by al-Qaeda. Some believe that this organisation does not exist, having been fabricated for manipulative purposes by countries such as the US and Israel. Others accept that al-Qaeda is real, although they do not view it as an organisation countering US and Israeli hegemony, but rather as a tool used by these countries to colonise the Middle East. With Turkish-US relations strained as never before, a larger number of Turks are also inclined to sympathise – or at least empathise – with al-Qaeda's stated goal of combating US policies. Many Turks continue to believe that it is impossible for al-Qaeda to target Turkey, especially as the country is run by a party with Islamist roots. Others subscribe to the theory that al-Qaeda did not, in fact, target Turkey in November 2003. According to this view, the intended victims of the synagogue bombings were Jews, and therefore a

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<sup>37</sup> Freemasons are considered pro-Zionist by many Turkish Islamists.

<sup>38</sup> *Hürriyet*, 12 March 2004.

“concern” of Israel, even though the victims were Turkish rather than Israeli citizens. Similarly, attacks against the British Consulate and HSBC Bank have been dismissed as attacks upon the UK, although again, most of those killed were actually Turks.

## 2.2 *The re-emergence of Hizbullah in Turkey*

### *The emergence, rise and fall of the movement*

The Turkish Hizbullah – not to be confused with the Lebanon-based Shiite Hizbullah – is a militant, Islamist Sunni group based in south-east Turkey where a conservative understanding of Islam is predominantly embraced. A handful of Kurdish youngsters initiated the movement at the end of the 1970s, and it was institutionalised immediately after the military coup of 12 September 1980.

Between 1988 and 1990, Hizbullah laid the foundations of jihad. It was influenced by the Iranian revolution and it received both financial and logistical support from Iran.<sup>39</sup> During this period, its leader Hüseyin Velioglu reportedly summarised his strategy as follows: “There should be no other movements opposing the regime besides ours. Being the only alternative to the regime is a must in order to consolidate people’s opposition to the regime in one alternative. After becoming the only alternative, the reckoning will be between the regime and this one alternative.”<sup>40</sup> In line with this strategy, the main target of the organisation was initially not the state, but the PKK, which was a strong competitor for people’s allegiances in the region. Hizbullah turned increasingly violent in its efforts to defeat the PKK and draw public support by appearing more hard line than the PKK. The conflict between the two, which raged between 1993 and 1995, led to heavy losses on the part of the PKK. It was finally brought to an end through the mediation efforts of the leaders of the Kurdistan Islamic Movement in Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdish Revolutionary Hizbullah party. Soon after, an internecine conflict emerged between two

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<sup>39</sup> See R. Çakır, *Derin Hizbullah* [Hizbullah Goes Deeper], Istanbul: Metis, 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in R. Çakır, *The Reemergence of Hizbullah in Turkey*, Policy Focus No. 74, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., September 2007, p. 6.

factions within the organisation: the more moderate Menzil group argued for gradualism and the İlimcis for imminent jihad, resulting in the success of the latter.

In the 1990s, the organisation began to expand its activities into western Turkey by carrying out a number of assassinations, which also paved the way to its decline. On 17 January 2000, the police raided a house in Istanbul, killing the organisation's leader Velioglu and leading to a major clampdown of the organisation by the Turkish security forces. Approximately one year after this first operation, the organisation assassinated Diyarbakir's chief of police, Gaffar Okkan, as revenge for its leader's death. This resulted in a second crackdown against Hizbullah, where both the perpetrators of the assassination and the majority of the organisation's top leadership were caught. Some members fled abroad to Europe, Syria, Iran and Northern Iraq.

It is often argued that the Turkish security forces overlooked Hizbullah atrocities when the organisation was fighting the PKK in the 1990s, but there is no strong empirical proof to substantiate this claim. The data published by Turkey's semi-official news source, the Anatolia Agency, suggests that the security forces countered Hizbullah during the years the latter was working to eliminate its adversaries, despite the organisation's ability to establish strong control over the streets in many of south-eastern Turkey's towns and provinces.<sup>41</sup> Still, it was only after the organisation had ended its operations against the PKK that the security forces went after it more aggressively. As one police report states, "[a]s activities declined, the number of operations increased...The most important factor in this case was that the security forces were too busy with the PKK, which was operating in the region and was more of a serious threat than Hizbullah in the years when Hizbullah was founded."<sup>42</sup> That Hizbullah's operational strategy was more covert than the PKK's was another factor that contributed to Hizbullah's growth.

After the intensive crackdown, Hizbullah stopped its armed attacks (at least temporarily) and entered a phase of serious internal strife. The US-led, post-11 September 'global war on terror' also contributed to this

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 10.

process, as Hizbullah did not want to be another target of international powers seeking to fight terrorist groups. Furthermore, after 2002, Hizbullah escaped critical attention owing to Turkey's preoccupation with the PKK.

### *Hizbullah's ideology*

The movement's leader, Velioğlu, identified three main stages culminating in the establishment of an Islamic state. The first one is 'propaganda', in which the Islamists would try to convince people to live in accordance with Islam and to establish an Islamic state. The next stage is 'community', in which the local communities would be reorganised in accordance with Islamic rules. The third and the final stage is 'jihad', in which armed struggle would be used to establish and defend the Islamic state. Party politics is considered a great sin that is strictly forbidden since it is perceived as recognition of the present establishment.<sup>43</sup>

The movement is primarily centred on Turkey's Kurdish-populated regions. Nonetheless, its aims are universalist, in the sense that it aspires to emancipate the entire Islamic society by seeking to "establish an Islamic system on earth that will demolish tyranny, injustice, segregation and exploitation".<sup>44</sup> Hence, although most of its members are Kurdish, it does not pursue a Kurdish nationalist agenda.

For Hizbullah, 'jihad' and 'martyrdom' are inevitable. Martyrdom is valued very highly since it is considered the "greatest benefit for the Muslim *ummah* and the greatest investment for the *ummah's* future".<sup>45</sup> Contrary to most radical movements in the region, Hizbullah is not critical of tradition. Instead, it often praises traditional religious orders and sects in its propaganda material to gain popular support.

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<sup>43</sup> M. Kürsad Atalar, "Hizbullah of Turkey: A Pseudo-Threat to the Secular Order", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2006, p. 327.

<sup>44</sup> I. Bagasi, *Kendi Dilinden Hizbullah ve Mücadeleden Kesitler* [Hizbullah in Its Words and Important Aspects of the History of the Struggle] (unknown publisher), 2004, p. 56.

<sup>45</sup> F. Hamza, "Sehadet bir Ruhtur", *Inzar Dergisi*, Vol. 17, February 2006, quoted in Bagasi (2004), *supra*.

### *Revival of Hizbullah*

Despite the massive clampdown, Hizbullah is still alive in Turkey. The resurgence of the organisation was confirmed in a 2007 briefing to a group of parliamentarians by the head of the National Intelligence Organisation, in which it was stated that Hizbullah was awakening after a long period of silence.<sup>46</sup> Following this assessment, the National Security Council reached the same conclusion in November 2006 during a meeting that dealt with the organisation. This revival has come with a fundamental change in strategy, however, which involves a shift from violence to grassroots support. Firat News Agency, known for its close relations with the PKK, claimed in December 2006 that Hizbullah had become ‘civilianised’ and had begun to raise funds and organise social activities through institutions, primarily through an association known as *Mustazaflar Derneği* [Association of the Oppressed]. The most striking example of its new strategy, which includes being more visible, was a gathering held in February 2006 in Diyarbakir, where tens of thousands of people protested about the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in the “Respect to the Prophet” rally. The second major example came during another rally in Diyarbakir, called “Love to the Prophet”, which took place in April 2006 and was similarly attended by tens of thousands.

Hizbullah now functions legally, through existing associations and by publishing periodicals, books and a weekly newspaper. This can be deemed a radical change, given that the organisation had in the past not published a single pamphlet or organised a single public meeting for propaganda purposes. It now argues that Muslims have to make use of communication and information technology in “serving the aims and targets of the Islamist case” as a platform for “education, invitation and communication”.<sup>47</sup> In line with this, the organisation’s members and sympathisers within and outside Turkey have also begun to communicate through the Internet.<sup>48</sup> Social connections among its members have intensified.

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<sup>46</sup> Çakır (2007), op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> “From the Editor”, *Intizar*, November 2008.

<sup>48</sup> The most popular website is [www.yesrip.com](http://www.yesrip.com).

These developments suggest that, unlike in the past, the new version of Hizbullah wants neither to entrap itself in an all out war with the state nor to be washed away by a spiral of violence. Thus, one may be tempted to define this transformation as a case of ‘de-radicalisation’ of the Turkish Hizbullah, in the sense that the organisation no longer resorts to violence. Nevertheless, given the organisation’s history of atrocities and brutality, its full abandonment of violence is difficult to imagine. The members of the organisation have so far not acknowledged their violence in any of their publications. Instead, they view past deeds as acts of “self-defence” committed in response to the attacks of the “enemies of Islam”, such as the Turkish state.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the members’ continued praise of former leader Velioglu as the ‘martyr guide’ lends credence to the organisation’s respect for violence. Hence, it can be argued that once it feels securely grounded, a now-docile Hizbullah could indeed turn violent.

#### *Hizbullah, Europe and the al-Qaeda connection*

It is reported that since 2002, Hizbullah has intensified its actions among Kurds in Europe, mainly through the similar strategy of establishing associations, organising discussion groups and socialising at activities such as weddings.<sup>50</sup> In fact, its new leader, Isa Altsoy, was a former member who took refuge in Germany after the major clampdown by the Turkish security forces. One of the fundamental strategies of the new leader is to firmly establish Hizbullah in Europe by expanding its support base among the Kurdish expatriates on the continent and by profiting from the freedoms in the EU.

Some political analysts have also hinted at a connection between Hizbullah and al-Qaeda, suggesting that Hizbullah might be a bridge between Europe and Iraq for foreign fighters. Through their Internet statements, Hizbullah members fiercely deny any connection with al-Qaeda. Indeed, drawing similarities between the radicalism of an Iranian revolution-inspired Hizbullah and that of al-Qaeda would be a serious

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<sup>49</sup> M. Zeki Güney, “Şehit Rehber Hüseyin Velioglu’nun Mücadelesi Üzerine” [On the Struggle of the Martyr Guide, Hüseyin Velioglu], *İntizar*, No. 2, April/May/June 2008.

<sup>50</sup> S. Cagaptay and E. Uslu, “Hizbullah in Turkey Revives”, PolicyWatch No. 946, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., 2005

mistake. There is no substantial evidence to confirm such a connection. Even so, although it can be held that the current disarmament of Hizbullah makes tactical cooperation unlikely, one cannot rule out the possibility that Hizbullah may work with al-Qaeda operationally.

### *Countering Hizbullah*

Hizbullah is currently thriving in Turkey's south-east. Turkish security forces have clearly underestimated its resurgence after a major clampdown on the organisation. While the PKK's status among the Kurds in the south-east is declining, Hizbullah has been developing projects to fight poverty and to increase its social status in the region.<sup>51</sup> It seems to be attracting significantly more supporters than the PKK to take part in the demonstrations held by its legal organisations. Developments in Iraq and in the region as well as the PKK's stagnating political crisis have favoured Hizbullah's emergence as an alternative to the PKK in south-eastern Turkey. The AKP's single party rule is also believed to have facilitated the actions of the organisation. The AKP's rise has further legitimated various political interpretations of Islam and has consequently created room for organisations like Hizbullah to exist. It can even be contended that the moderation of political Islamist parties operating at the legal level have actually increased the attractiveness of Hizbullah in the post-11 September context.

An exhaustive analysis of the present and future of Hizbullah would require scrutinising Lebanon's Hizbullah, Hamas, Iraq's Muqtada al-Sadr movement and Afghanistan's Taliban, in that order. All these organisations emerged as second fiddles to violent nationalist or traditionalist groups and remained so for a long time. Yet, with the exhaustion and degeneration of the main structures (leftist movements and Amal in Lebanon, Fatah and the PLO in Gaza and the West Bank, all of the traditional mujahidin organisations in Afghanistan, and SCIRI and Dawa in Iraq), these 'second fiddles' reached out to large audiences that viewed them as both fresh blood and the only hope. This state of exhaustion is somewhat present in south-eastern Turkey (regarding the PKK) and currently throughout the rest of the country (regarding the AKP). That being the case, it can be

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<sup>51</sup> S. Öztürk, "İste MGK'da Ele Alınan Hizbullah Dosyası" [Here is the Hizbullah File Assessed at the National Security Council], *Hürriyet*, 16 April 2007.



argued that Hizbullah has viable prospects for the future in the sense that it can become an influential power in south-eastern Turkey in the mould of Lebanon's Hizbullah and Hamas.

The rise of Hizbullah would likely result in a less stable south-eastern Turkey, a region that already requires far-reaching reforms on Turkey's road to EU accession. This necessitates careful scrutiny of Hizbullah's actions, including its use of media and other means of propaganda. Cooperation with European governments is crucial since the organisation is reported to have growing financial and social networks in Europe. Furthermore, possible networks and connections between Hizbullah and other radical groups with which it has strong potential to enjoy closer links – such as al-Qaeda – also need to be carefully observed for the wider interests of the West. The brutal Hizbullah atrocities of the 1990s and their denial by the present organisation should serve as a warning that the possibility of its further radicalisation remains serious. Even if violence is dropped for good, there are grave doubts over the compatibility of Hizbullah's ideology with democracy and fundamental freedoms.

## **Conclusions**

Political Islam in Turkey has given rise to cases of de-radicalisation at two different but related levels. One concerns the political party system, where there has been a significant moderation of ideology and policy from the Welfare Party to the AKP. The second one concerns the revival of Turkey's radical and violent Islamist group, Hizbullah, which now employs the legal means to increase its grassroots support in south-east Turkey. Neither instance nor kind of moderation should be taken for granted, however. The sustained moderation of the AKP will depend on the emergence of a strong secularist and democratic opposition, economic performance, progress in democratic consolidation and a strong EU anchor. The future course of Hizbullah is harder to tell. So far, the organisation has not dealt with its violent past nor officially renounced violence in any of its recent propaganda tools. Moreover, its ideology, discernable mainly from the variety of publications it currently produces, still espouses the establishment of an Islamic state, with weak democratic credentials. This situation requires caution and closer inspection by both Turkey and the EU, not only because the organisation is expanding among Kurds in Europe, but also because of its suspected operational links with other radical groups, notably al-Qaeda.

## 6. THE RADICALISATION OF MODERATE ISLAMIST PARTIES: REALITY OR CHIMERA?

*ANA ECHAGÜE*

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**W**arnings about the impending radicalisation of moderate Islamist parties have become commonplace. Islamist parties are disappointed by their experience of playing by the 'rules of the game'. They have come to realise that participation in only partially liberalised political systems does not translate into influence in decision-making. Many observers argue that consequently they are ready to take a more radical approach to achieve change.

In contrast to other contributions in this volume, this chapter argues that there is little evidence that mainstream Islamist parties are moving in this direction. The threat of radicalisation is used by incumbent regimes to justify their clampdown on these parties, while moderate Islamist parties actually continue to emphasise their commitment to the political process. They have certainly become frustrated with the limits placed on their political participation. And voters have become disengaged. But the moderate parties themselves remain committed to the political process and they have not adopted more extreme positions. Suggestions that the EU's support for partial processes of liberalisation is fomenting re-radicalisation are not convincing.

## Towards participation

Moderate Islamists have been increasingly willing to participate in the political system and renounce the use of violence.<sup>1</sup> They seek gradual reform within the constraints of existing political institutions rather than a radical overthrow of the system as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Yet a fear persists that “commitment to the procedural rules of democratic elections is not the same as commitment to democratic politics or governance” and that some groups may not “themselves engage in violence but...condone, justify, or even actively support the violence of others”.<sup>3</sup> Proponents of this view fear that Islamists are only feigning moderation.<sup>4</sup> That is why much of the debate about Islamist movements has focused on whether their participation in elections is only a strategy to seize power or whether they are truly committed to the values of democracy.

Some authors advocate focusing on parties’ “core beliefs” and attitudes towards specific issues such as minorities and women.<sup>5</sup> But shifting the debate from an emphasis on political behaviour to the plane of values, and possibly culture and identity, risks opening the door to the stigmatisation of political actors on the bases of normative judgments. Where these actors are seen as opposed to European values, they are more likely to be labelled ‘radical’. In any case, Islamist parties do not have a monopoly on illiberal views, which are often widespread across all parties and frequently a reflection of the beliefs widely held by society. Use of a common, political and procedural framework as a standard for engagement would avoid singling out Islamists as ideological actors and would be more practical. The EU should encourage participation across the board rather than try to pick winners based on their beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Asseburg (ed.), *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors: Conditions and Programmatic Change*, SWP Research Paper No. 4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, April 2007, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> J. Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> T. Cofman Wittes, “Islamist Parties: Three Kinds of Movements”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 3, July 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Schwedler (2006), op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>5</sup> Wittes (2008), op. cit., pp. 9-10.

Furthermore, although moderate Islamists defend socially conservative positions, they advocate reform of the political system and call for a strengthening of parliament, increased participation, a clear division of powers and an independent judiciary, an end to corruption and a focus on governance and respect for human rights – all goals in line with EU principles. They seek gradual reform within the existing system and do not question the legitimacy of the state or the political framework. Their approach to the realisation of power is gradualist, centred on persuasion and a peaceful Islamisation of citizens, demands for Islamist policies from government and exemplary behaviour as observant Muslims:<sup>6</sup> “The Muslim Brotherhood believes in changing society from the bottom up. Our patient and incremental approach is working...We know our strategy will take a long time to yield results but we are committed to this course and are determined not to waste our resources on futile actions.”<sup>7</sup>

They participate in elections, and aware of the limitations posed by state control, attempt to find room to contest state power. They make the most of any political openings offered by the regimes<sup>8</sup> and generally have a much broader support base than any other opposition group.

Islamist parties have traditionally emerged from wider social movements, with the party designed as the institutional branch of the original organisation. In some cases, when a party is formed, a distinction is drawn between missionary (*dawah*) and political activities, while in others the party’s activities are perceived as only one element of the organisation’s general political and social activities. In the latter case, the party’s organisational loyalties remain indirect, the external organisation is the leadership’s source of legitimacy and the party depends on external resources for mobilisation, support, financing and human resources – all of which undermine the party’s institutionalisation. Alternatively, parties that have a degree of autonomy from their founding organisation are better able to adapt to the political workings of the system and evolve into a ‘normal’

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<sup>6</sup> R.S. Leiken and S. Brooke, “The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 2, March/April 2007.

<sup>7</sup> “An Interview with Abdul Monei Abu El-Foutouh, Member of the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood”, *Islamism Digest*, August 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Asseburg (2007), op. cit., p. 5.

political party, open to new members, adapting and compromising.<sup>9</sup> Formal recognition on the part of the EU and member states of parties, as distinct from movements, could be an incentive with respect to 'normalising' these parties.

In Morocco, for example, the May 2003 attacks in Casablanca led to a review within the Party for Justice and Development (PJD) of the relationship between the movement and the party. A division of labour was agreed, with party responsibilities including the reform of state institutions and policies, and movement responsibilities focusing on education and missionary activities. Parallel organisations, a party newspaper and the diversification of party income reflect this division. Still, some contend that a relationship of informal dependency remains between the party and the movement, such that the former's success depends on the support of the latter.<sup>10</sup> The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is divided between reformists, who favour the formation of a party as a platform to spread its message, and conservatives, who represent the controlling majority and do not make the distinction between missionary and political activities. In instances where Islamists have severed their connection with missionary activities, they have often been the object of attacks by non-politicised Islamist forces, which have accused them of pragmatism with the implied charge of straying from true Islamic values.<sup>11</sup>

EU policy-makers should also make an effort to distinguish among the different groups and tailor their approach accordingly, rather than lump together all groups under an overarching Islamist label. Islamist groups include *legal parties* (the Islamic Action Front or IAF, al-Indab, al-Asalah and al-Islah), often allied with the regime, which have participated in government and are trying to achieve change from within or are even more conservative than the regime itself. There are also *legal opposition parties*, brought into the system but which do not participate in government

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<sup>9</sup> E. Wegner, *The Contribution of Inclusivist Approaches towards the Islamist Opposition to Regime Stability in Arab States: The Case of the Moroccan Parti de la Justice et du Développement*, EUI Working Papers, RSCAS No. 2004/42, European University Institute, Florence, pp. 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> A. Hamzawy, "Where Now for Islamists?", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 900, 5-11 June 2008(a).

(e.g. the PJD and al-Wefaq), either owing to self-imposed limitations or to those imposed by the regime. In addition there are groups that lack formal political recognition but which still engage in the political process through independent representatives (Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood or Kuwait's Islamists). The non-violent end of the Islamist spectrum also includes groups outside the political process that lack legal recognition and are unable or unwilling to participate in the political process. Some choose to operate outside the system (the Justice and Charity Party and the Haq group), rejecting the rules established by the regime but still engaging with it in an effort to affect change. Others are banned or illegal parties that are striving for legalisation and are willing to work within the democratic processes (al-Wasat).

The view that electoral commitment by Islamists is only tactical and cynical – an issue of ‘one person, one vote, one time’ – reflects the fear that often paralyses EU policy towards Islamist parties. But the importance given to a distinction between instrumental and principled attachment to elections is overblown. Choosing to participate in pluralist political practices may make sense strategically, but even to be considered it is necessary to be able to justify it in terms of ideology. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood has justified participation on the grounds that “the *umma* [the Muslim community] is the source of *sulta* [political authority]” and an Islamic society will naturally support Islamic leaders.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, participation by Islamists in elections requires a broadening of boundaries in order to allow for the inclusion of a wider diversity of actors, practices and narratives.<sup>13</sup> A discursive shift can then lead to the emergence of a normative commitment that validates the concept of elections. Regardless of whether Islamist participation in elections has been prompted by self-interest or a commitment to the logic, if not the spirit, of electoral engagement, it has encouraged acceptance by many Islamists of the electoral principle.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Leiken & Brooke (2007), op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> Schwedler (2006) op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> J. Piscatori, *Islam, Islamists and the Electoral Principle in the Middle East*, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden, 2006.

In general, the participatory experience is said to exercise a socialising, feedback effect,<sup>15</sup> which should appeal to EU policy. It is widely assumed that the political integration of Islamists generally leads to their moderation. The “learning hypothesis” or “inclusion–moderation hypothesis” states that participation in the political arena will socialise Islamist groups towards a more pragmatic approach.<sup>16</sup> The institutional constraints of the political system together with the exposure to alternative views are believed to play a moderating role. Participation in the political system leads to both technical and behavioural adaptation. At a more technical level, in order to benefit from inclusion, Islamists have to develop competencies in the rules of the game, including bargaining, budget constraints, drafting and proposing legislative initiatives and the formation of strategic alliances. In behavioural terms, adaptation to the system can lead to the internalisation of participatory and pluralist practices, which may eventually be reflected in the parties themselves. Indeed, both internal group organisation and decision-making practices have become more participatory in most Islamist parties, with internal structures now generally involving mechanisms for accountability and structures of representation.

Although some authors go as far as to argue that inclusion in pluralist political processes may lead political actors gradually to adopt more open and tolerant views, this is difficult to assess. What does seem to be the case is a greater parliamentary focus on issues of constitutional reform and pragmatic, policy-oriented economic and social matters to the detriment of questions related to religious faith. Political pragmatism has started to take precedence over the clear definition of a recognisable ideology.<sup>17</sup> In adapting to the informal rules of the system, Islamist actors

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> K. Niethammer refers to the “learning hypothesis” in “The Paradox of Bahrain: Authoritarian Islamists through Participation, Pro-Democratic Islamists through Exclusion?”, in M. Asseburg (ed.), *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors: Conditions and Programmatic Change*, SWP Research Paper No. 4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, April 2007, p. 45. Schwedler (2006, op. cit.) explains the “inclusion–moderation hypothesis”.

<sup>17</sup> S. Amghar, “Morocco”, in M. Emerson and R. Youngs (eds), *Political Islam and European Foreign Policy*, CEPS, Brussels, 2007, p. 16.

have become more willing to compromise, tailoring their agendas to changing external circumstances and thus behaving in a manner similar to other political actors.<sup>18</sup>

For example, in Morocco the PJD's parliamentary activism during the 2002–07 parliament stands in stark contrast to their emphasis on ethical and religious issues during the 1997–2002 cycle. As do most other Islamist parties, they now focus on the independence of the judiciary, expanding the supervisory and legislative powers of the lower house and ensuring that the executive branch is accountable to parliament as well as on issues such as corruption, unemployment and poverty.<sup>19</sup>

In the beginning, we focused on articulating general principles. Over time, we became more experienced and capable of evaluating government policy in a detailed way, as well as making political deals. This is progress, and we are looking to expand this expertise in the future.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, since the MB won 20% of the assembly in Egypt in 2005, MPs have focused on concrete matters such as affordable housing rather than on cultural and religious issues. They have also striven to coordinate their legislative efforts by forming an internal experts committee that groups Brotherhood candidates according to their specialties. These electoral advances and their moderate, practical criticisms have made for an increasingly tense relationship with the Egyptian government.<sup>21</sup>

In an interview, Badr Al Nashi, president of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) in Kuwait stated that

I also believe that participating in the legislature has increased ICM interest in issues of political reform and development.

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<sup>18</sup> I. Werenfels, "Algeria's Legal Islamists: From 'Fifth Column' to a Pillar of the Regime", in M. Asseburg (ed.), *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors: Conditions and Programmatic Change*, SWP Research Paper No. 4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, April 2007, pp. 40-41.

<sup>19</sup> A. Hamzawy, *Party for Justice and Development in Morocco: Participation and its Discontents*, Carnegie Paper No. 93, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., July 2008(b), p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> "Interview with Saad Eddin Al Othmani, former leader of the PJD", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, December 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Leiden & Brooke (2007), op. cit., p. 114.



Previously we focused more on general issues of morality and societal reform, but now we focus on specific issues such as educational reform, employment, the economy, and political issues such as electoral redistricting and reforming laws on publications and political parties.<sup>22</sup>

On the negative side, individual self-interest and corruption, if prevalent in the system, can also be internalised. Islamists are well aware of the perils of accommodation and the loss of their distinctiveness as alternative political actors, and thus they often put measures in place to combat these effects.<sup>23</sup> To avoid the negative traps of accommodation and erosion of the party's political capital, some parties set strict guidelines for parliamentary conduct. These include obligations related to voting discipline, attendance at all plenary sessions and parliamentary commissions, a duty of parliamentary output, the contribution of a percentage of remuneration to the party (in an effort to maintain the MP's moral appeal) and general secretariat intervention in the appointment of the parliamentary group's key offices.<sup>24</sup> They also strive to maintain their distinctiveness through an emphasis on transparency and strong support for anti-corruption initiatives.

### **The limits to participation**

As Islamist parties have engaged more deeply in the political process it has become apparent that regimes are determined to place strict limits on the extent of that participation. A fear has arisen that these limits are engendering a 're-radicalisation' of moderate Islamist parties. If inclusion leads to moderation, does exclusion or an incomplete or unsatisfactory inclusion into a not-fully-democratic system have a radicalising or re-radicalising effect? Could radicalisation be caused by the inability to realise substantive reform by working within the system? Or do radical Islamist groups emerge as dissident movements frustrated with the integrative approach of mainstream Islamist groups?<sup>25</sup> How willing are Islamist

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<sup>22</sup> "Interview with Dr Badr Al Nashi, president of the Islamic Constitutional Movement", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, April 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Wegner (2004), op. cit., pp. 4-6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> Schwedler (2006), op. cit., p. 17.

groups likely to be to continue their participation in a system that does not grant them any meaningful political power?

Any political reforms undertaken by authoritarian regimes within which Islamist parties operate have simply been efforts at ensuring regime survival by mitigating any potential threats. Within this context, governments use a variety of strategies to weaken Islamist challenges, including selective inclusion (Algeria), political integration and domestication (Morocco) and outright exclusion from the system (Tunisia).<sup>26</sup> Thus, regimes have been selective in their application of the inclusion criteria. Rather than legalising all Islamist parties that are prepared to comply with the rules of the system, they tend to tolerate those that are seen to be more accommodating and unlikely to confront them. Selective inclusion has also been practised as an attempt to fragment the moderate Islamist spectrum.<sup>27</sup>

Some regimes, seeing in the Islamist groups useful bulwarks against leftist or Arab nationalist opposition groups, began including them in the political process long before they initiated reforms in the 1990s. Eventually, those Islamist groups that had played a supportive role towards the government took advantage of the new institutional opportunities arising from the process of political liberalisation to form political parties. For example, in Jordan the IAF was created by the Muslim Brotherhood to contest the elections after the regime legalised political parties in 1992. The Brotherhood had always been mindful of power relations and careful not to antagonise the regime. When the IAF was created, it had no real political objectives beyond the liberation of Palestine. The IAF has never been a militant radical movement – it has never challenged the monarchy and has always worked within the constraints imposed by the regime.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, many Islamist parties that participate in pluralist processes and elections have never sought political change by any means other than reform. As allies of the regimes in power, they have never considered overthrowing the regime or advocating a revolution.

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<sup>26</sup> I. Werenfels, *Between Integration and Repression: Government responses to Islamism in the Maghreb*, SWP Research Paper S. 39, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, December 2005, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Werenfels (2007), op. cit., pp. 39-40.

<sup>28</sup> Schwedler (2006), op. cit., pp. 65-67.

In other instances, Islamist groups were brought in as part of an effort to diminish their potential as opposition groups. As the groups with by far the largest support base, some regimes believed it was less costly to include and co-opt them than to repress them. Inclusion was also an attempt by a regime to temper their demands. Exposure to the institutional environment was expected to force the groups to compromise and thereby reduce their demands, and by becoming part of the political elite they were expected to lose their appeal as opponents. Inclusion would also increase the regime's control over them.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Islamist opposition movements were channelled into institutions controlled by the state, suppressing possible threats and safeguarding the existing structures of power.

The processes of political liberalisation initiated to appease opposition to the regimes did not address the main obstacles to reform, namely the concentration of power in the hands of the regime and the absence of checks and balances. While the opposition is ensured sufficient representation to keep them participating in the system, they are unlikely ever to gain a majority or obtain a meaningful role in government. In instances where the Islamists' participation in elections has allowed them to broaden their support, this has often led to interference and repression by the regimes. Moreover, regimes are known to use intimidation, patronage, restrictions and all manner of tactics to keep Islamist groups under control.

Differences in the treatment of Islamist parties can also be attributed to variations in the nature of authoritarian regimes. In monarchies, where the king and the ruling family do not compete in elections, a greater tolerance for Islamist groups can be expected. By contrast, in republics, where the rulers are supposed to come to power on the basis of electoral outcomes and require legitimisation through the dominance of their party, Islamist victories are much more threatening as they could signify the end of the regime. This explains why repressive clampdowns tend to occur in republics and why republics have generally not legalised Islamist movements and instead only tolerate Islamists standing as independents.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wegner (2004), op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> E. Wegner, "Inclusion or Repression: The Cost-Benefit Calculations of Authoritarian Rulers", in M. Asseburg (ed.), *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors: Conditions and Programmatic Change*, SWP Research Paper No. 4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, April 2007, pp. 77-78.

## Dealing with 'bounded' participation

Islamist parties have devised strategies to deal with the constraints within which they operate. The most common strategy has been to hold back on participation to avoid making the regime feel threatened. Islamist parties are also careful to emphasise moderation, even when in opposition, picking their battles carefully and adopting a gradualist approach.

Strategising by the PJD meant it was a critical supporter of government until 2000, when a more uncompromising faction gained ground and the party moved to the opposition. After the May 2003 attacks, however, a return to a more prudent strategy towards the government was considered necessary. While limited participation had been the party's strategy since the beginning, the party decided to adopt an even lower profile in the elections. Although the party had covered more than half of the constituencies in 2002, in 2003 a large number of lists were withdrawn and participation was reduced to less than 10%.<sup>31</sup> The party congress in April 2004 was also reflective of this strong accommodative attitude, as the risks of discontent among its support base were judged less important than the risks deriving from an increasingly hostile environment for the PJD. The party has recently shifted again towards a position of 'constructive opposition'. This allows it to both satisfy its base and continue a process of integration through forging political alliances. The PJD's criticisms of the government are aimed at representing its base while the party is careful not to jeopardise its alliances with the state on other issues.<sup>32</sup> Similar reasoning underpinned the PJD's refusal to participate in government in 1998 and 2002, preferring instead a limited parliamentary presence.

By now, most Islamist groups have moved from being critical supporters of government, fearful of pushing too far, to more daring and judgmental opponents. Some have even shown their willingness to forge political coalitions with non-Islamist movements. For example, the IAF has always considered itself an opposition party. When the regime moved towards signing a peace treaty with Israel, given the loss of seats the IAF had experienced in 1993, the group decided to join several other parties in coordinating an opposition bloc in parliament to offset the majority bloc of

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<sup>31</sup> Wegner (2004), *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>32</sup> Amghar (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

regime loyalists. An initiative by the general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 2004 illustrates that cooperation is an important principle for the Brotherhood in their goal of reform. The Brotherhood collaborated with secularists, liberals and other parties such as Hizb al-Amal [the Labour Party] and the Wafd party.<sup>33</sup> In Yemen, Islah began to question its formal relations with the ruling General People's Congress after the 1994 civil war, when it saw its political influence deteriorate. The defeat of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) meant that President Ali Abdullah Saleh no longer needed Islah as an ally for the General People's Congress against the YSP. Since then, Islah has had a gradual rapprochement with the YSP. In Kuwait, while the ICM has perhaps been the only successful party in terms of passing legislation using constitutional prerogatives, it still exists outside the structures of political power and accomplishes its work by harassing government rather than by forming it.<sup>34</sup> They also engage in cooperative efforts:

A national dialogue continues between the ICM and liberal groups, with all issues on the table. All political forces in Kuwait agreed months ago on a list of issues including reforming the electoral system, amending the publications law, passing a law of political assembly, and reforming the judicial system.<sup>35</sup>

In view of the constraints of the political systems within which Islamists operate, they at times could be moved to consider whether the potential opportunities of working within the system are sufficient. They will have to assess the trade-offs of participation within such tightly controlled regimes, although they have so far been averse to confrontation, it remains an open question whether this could change upon the realisation that they do not stand to gain from participation.

The restrictions placed on Islamists' political participation have exacerbated the somewhat schizophrenic tendency in the pursuit of

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<sup>33</sup> "Interview with Abdul Monei Abu El-Foutouh, Member of the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood", *Islamism Digest*, August 2006.

<sup>34</sup> N.J. Brown, *Pushing Toward Party Politics? Kuwait's Islamic Constitutional Movement*, Carnegie Papers No. 79, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., January 2007, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> "Interview with Dr Badr Al Nashi, president of the Islamic Constitutional Movement", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, April 2006.

pragmatic political participation and the social conservatism that is important to the party bases. Islamists find themselves caught between the need for compromise in order to participate in the system and the fear of alienating a large segment of their supporters. The Islamist parties' traditional supporters have been ideologically devoted and often disinterested in, if not opposed to, the parties' commitment to the democratic process. They are more moved by advocacy for conservative social programmes, Islamic education reforms and criticism of official foreign policy positions. Thus Islamist parties, even when participating in the political process and attempting to garner broad support, cannot stray too far from the interests of those whom they represent. The pursuit of both political participation and the social conservatism that is key to their bases can be destabilising.<sup>36</sup> The ambiguity of their vague political programmes reflects an attempt to reconcile these two pursuits and to bring together different factions within the party. Fragmented support for Islamist parties aggravates the problem, as competition among Islamist parties within a country is often intense. Their support base is not homogeneous and includes those who back the entire project of the party, others who are attracted by values of honesty and transparency, and some who are simply frustrated voters from other parties.<sup>37</sup>

The PJD, for example, is increasingly finding itself in a position where it has to justify its commitment to political participation. Given the restricted political system and the conditions imposed by the ruling establishment, the PJD has adopted moderate positions on various societal and political matters. At the same time, it has had to be careful not to alienate its main supporters, who are drawn to it because of its religious frame of reference. These supporters need to be convinced of the validity and indispensability of participation. The party cannot afford to take religiously motivated constituencies for granted, especially as it has to compete with the more popular Justice and Charity Party, which refuses to participate in the political process.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Piscatori (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> Wegner (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Hamzawy (2008b), *op. cit.*

Most parties are further divided into factions defined by issues such as their attitudes towards participating in the political process, accommodation of the ruling regime and cooperation with other non-Islamist groups. While the more extremist factions or individuals are usually downplayed by their party, they remain vital to maintaining the support bases of the group. Their differences are sharpened by the lack of progress, recent electoral losses and pressure from the regimes. As a result, some parties have seen an ascendancy of hardliners to positions of power while in others there is an ongoing internal debate about the relative merits of political pragmatism versus ideological conviction.<sup>39</sup>

For example, President Hosni Mubarak's crackdown on the opposition has exacerbated the differences between various currents within the Muslim Brotherhood. Since the 1980s, middle-class professionals have pushed it in a more transparent and flexible direction. This reformist faction, however, has to contend with older conservatives in high positions in the organisation who have suffered brutal repression at the hands of the state.<sup>40</sup> The widespread social unrest and economic problems in Egypt today has led some observers to speculate that conservative leaders within the Brotherhood, who have traditionally been sceptical about political participation, could accumulate more influence and impel the movement to reconsider legal participation.<sup>41</sup>

Factions within the PJD are defined by their attitude to the regime. There are those who favour critical support of the government for fear of becoming too strong a political party and losing the shelter of the sidelines, and those who favour a role in opposition because they feel that an alliance with the government threatens the Islamic identity of the country.<sup>42</sup>

The most extreme case is that of *Islah*, where divisions of labour run along the lines of differing factions. Conservative sheikhs liaise with the highest levels of power while the MB leaders run the party bureaucracy, such that party policies sometimes appear to be in contradiction with the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Leiken & Brooke (2007), op. cit., pp. 113-115.

<sup>41</sup> A. Hamzawy and M. Herzallah, "Which Path Will the Brotherhood choose?", *Daily Star*, 18 April 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Wegner (2004), op. cit., p. 18.

individual statements of powerful sheikhs. One faction justifies democratic practices for purely strategic purposes while another attempts to accommodate democratic practices within their ideology. Recently, the tensions among the various trends within Islah have threatened to split the party, particularly as those running the party bureaucracy have pushed to invigorate the party's role as an oppositional actor.

Extreme pressure from the regime has at times led to splits within Islamist movements. In the 1990s, as the government was cracking down on Islamists, differences over whether to register as a political party led to a split within the MB, with one group leaving to form the more liberal Hizb al-Wasat (Centre Party). In a similar fashion, Haq split from Wafaq in 2006 in a dispute over participation in the elections. Some predict that splinter groups and radical elements could rebel against mainstream movements that play according to the rules of the political game.

When regimes go too far in their efforts to interfere with the system or in elections, their actions can result in boycotts. Still, while from time to time Islamist parties will decide to boycott elections owing to dissatisfaction with the process, there do not seem to be any signs of a permanent disengagement by any party. For example, the IAF's boycott in 1997 was argued on the grounds of a series of extra-parliamentary procedures considered unconstitutional (press and publication amendments), but they have participated since then. In the same way, despite deciding to boycott the 2002 parliamentary elections, Wafaq is now considered to be on the moderate side of the spectrum. The Muslim Brotherhood decided to boycott local elections two days before they were scheduled to take place in April 2008 and it stepped up its confrontational rhetoric and called on all Egyptians to join the boycott. While Mehdi Akef, the general guide of the Brotherhood, warned that the government's actions could trigger violence he was careful to emphasise his group's commitment to peaceful activism. Indeed, many observers fear that Islamist boycotts of elections could eventually incite popular revolts that could end in violence.

Failure to achieve results through political participation has reopened an internal Islamist debate on how best to effect change, yet at least among the established parties there has been no move to disengage from political participation or threats to abandon a policy of peaceful change.

The clearest consequence of the lack of progress on the political participation front seems to be growing disenchantment with



parliamentary politics, as reflected for example in the low percentage of participation in the 2007 elections in Morocco. Elections are seen as fraudulent or merely cosmetic. The general disinterest, disappointment and sense of uselessness regarding the voting process can also be attributed to the lack of positive results. Given that for the most part parliaments are powerless and dominated by a majority loyal to the regime, efforts by the Islamist parties to shape the legislative process have been in vain. This powerlessness and inability to affect policy provides damning evidence for those opposed to accommodating the regime.<sup>43</sup> Public disinterest and disappointment extends not only to the process, but also to the Islamists themselves as reflected in their poor electoral results. As parliamentary systems in which Islamists participate are seen as cosmetic attempts to cover up autocracy rather than real opportunities to influence governance, participants stand accused of legitimising an undemocratic regime.<sup>44</sup> This could lead to increased support for groups operating outside the system. If Islamist parties are denied the opportunity of meaningful participation, their supporters could turn to actors who are more radical or they could choose to disengage completely from the political process – neither of which is an option in the interests of the EU.

In sum, despite the perception that regime intransigence will lead to the radicalisation of Islamist parties, the empirical evidence does not seem to support this. If anything, it is the voters who are disengaging and withdrawing their support from the Islamist parties. Furthermore, it seems that one cannot even speak of a splintering of the parties as differences between the more hawkish or liberal elements are often reconciled internally. Indeed, the main result of the latest setback in the polls for the Islamist parties has been a round of internal discussions that have culminated in renewed commitment to the system.

When Hammam Sa'id, known as a hardliner, was elected general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan in May 2008, many predicted heightened confrontation between the regime and opposition. Since being elected, however, he has toned down his rhetoric and made an effort to reach understandings with the government on key issues. As ties between Islamists and the regime have improved, so too have relations between the

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<sup>43</sup> Piscatori (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> Wittes (2008), *op. cit.*

internal Brotherhood/IAF factions after nine months of crippling internal divisions that had threatened to break up the movement.<sup>45</sup>

Although the disappointing results of the 2007 parliamentary elections in Morocco led observers to predict an abandonment of political participation or even an engagement in clandestine activities, the PJD has made clear its commitment to participate in the system and rejected a withdrawal from politics as a signal of its disappointment over the political and electoral process. Instead, it has begun an internal dialogue to revise its position on key issues, leading to renewed focus on demanding real constitutional reforms and questioning the government's laxity in combating electoral corruption.<sup>46</sup>

The instrumental and ideological merits of participation continue to hold sway despite the unfairness of the system. Participation allows for the use of institutional instruments and methods as protection from the regime's repression and enables the party to maintain a public presence. In addition, participation serves the party's objective of struggling for gradual and meaningful reform.<sup>47</sup> So it would appear that for now the incentives of remaining within the system outweigh the merits of defecting.

When asked whether the Muslim Brotherhood would not be able to engineer the downfall of the regime quicker by becoming a more confrontational opposition, a member of the guidance bureau stated:

This regime lost its legitimacy a long time ago. But the institutions of the state are owned by the people and if we withdraw from these institutions, we would be achieving nothing. It is very wrong to think that just because we participate in elections and have a presence in some of the institutions of the state we are lending the regime legitimacy.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Shadi Hamid, Jordan: Fair Winds for the Brotherhood", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, October 2008.

<sup>46</sup> M. al-Khalfi, "The PJD between Inclusion and Cooptation", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, March 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Hamzawy (2008b), op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> "Interview with Abdul Monei Abu El-Foutouh, Member of the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood", *Islamism Digest*, August 2006.

Confrontational strategies are the exception. In 2006, the ICM joined a coalition adopting a more confrontational approach in its push for electoral reform, which ended up favourably for them. Despite such instances of taking a more confrontational approach, any violent radicalisation is unlikely.

## **Conclusions**

While the EU might feel comfortable with the model of partial liberalisation prevalent in Arab states, which disempowers groups that it finds ideologically distasteful, it is losing credibility by providing cover for authoritarian regimes. It is not in the EU's interests to turn a blind eye to tactics that authoritarian regimes could just as well use against secular parties if these ever achieved enough support to be deemed a threat. In addition, the EU is playing a dangerous game with its neglect of moderate Islamist parties. In sidelining the parties that have historically had the most support, the EU is seen to be disregarding the will of a majority of the population. Although parties that have agreed to play by the rules of the game are unlikely to go back on their commitment, they do stand to lose the support of their voters, who could in turn support actors who are more radical or simply choose to disengage from politics. In this way, the EU gives strength to those who argue for fighting the regime from outside the system. The EU should not determine engagement with parties based on ideology but rather on practices and stated commitment to some minimum standards. The standard for engagement should be a willingness to participate in the legal political process and acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the constitutional framework. In this way, the EU will encourage pluralism and maybe even moderation.

## **PART III.**

# **EUROPEAN ENGAGEMENT?**

## 7. EUROPE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH MODERATE ISLAMISTS\*

*KRISTINA KAUSCH*

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Direct engagement<sup>1</sup> with Islamist political movements has typically been a no-go area for European governments. In recent years, however, the limits of the European Union's stability-oriented approach towards cooperation with authoritarian rulers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to defend the EU's strategic interests in the region have become ever more obvious. The attempts of incumbent MENA rulers to portray the European choice of interlocutors in the region as either stabilising governments or de-stabilising Islamists are increasingly perceived as short-sighted and contradictory. Recent debates suggest that the search for viable alternative policy approaches is leading to a shift in the attitudes of European policy-makers towards moderate<sup>2</sup> Islamist actors.

There is no shortage of incentives to divert the course of EU policies in the region. Preventing the radicalisation of Islamist movements in the region is an integral part of the EU's counter-terrorism strategy. It has

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\* This chapter was also published as a FRIDE Working Paper in January 2009.

<sup>1</sup> 'Engagement' is here understood as any form of formal or informal direct contact. The degree of intensity and institutionalisation of engagement may vary greatly, ranging from personal conversations over occasional informal encounters to long-term institutionalised partnerships.

<sup>2</sup> This chapter refers to 'moderate' Islamists as those parties or movements among the Islamist spectrum that have eschewed or formally renounced violence in the domestic context and aim at achieving their goals within the margins of the political process.

become common wisdom that substantial political reform will only happen through effective pressure from within. Non-violent, non-revolutionary Islamist parties that aspire to take power by means of a democratic process have therefore often been portrayed as potential reform actors that carry the hopes of a volatile region towards genuine democratic development and long-term stability.<sup>3</sup> The moderation of many formerly violent Islamist movements, their integration into national political processes and their increasing ability to turn broad societal backing into electoral successes have turned moderate Islamists into interesting political interlocutors.

Analysis and debates on political Islam have mushroomed in recent years, helping to differentiate Western views on Islamists' goals and means to some degree. Scepticism of the intentions of Islamist movements and the potential benefits of engagement with them is widespread. Many observers question the true democratic commitment of moderate Islamists and ascribe a hidden totalitarian agenda to them.<sup>4</sup> Some critics argue that open engagement with Islamists by foreign governments would provide Islamists with undeserved attention and legitimacy. Some doubt that Europeans can have any substantial impact on Islamists' internal direction. Others argue that the very assumption that Islam serves as the foundation for political identity in the region is mistaken.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there are some who even deem the categorisation of Islamist movements on a moderate-radical continuum as misleading. Reservations about the substantial "grey zones"<sup>6</sup> in the political platforms of mainstream Islamist movements are

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, A. Hamzawy, *The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists*, Carnegie Policy Brief No. 40, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., August 2005; and M. Asseburg (ed.), *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors: Conditions and Programmatic Change*, SWP Research Paper No. 4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, April 2007.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, T. Bassam, "Why they can't be democratic", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 3, July 2008.

<sup>5</sup> D. Brumberg, "Islam is not the Solution (or the Problem)", *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 97-116.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed assessment of such democratic ambiguities, see N.J. Brown, A. Hamzawy and M. Ottaway, *Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Gray Zones*, Carnegie Paper No. 67, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., March 2006.

broadly shared by both critics and advocates. In spite of all fair scepticism, however, the lack of viable alternatives appears to lead to a growing consensus among analysts that some form of engagement will be necessary.

The time to engage is now. Many argue that advantage should be taken of the relative openness currently shown by moderate Islamists towards the idea of engaging with the West, and especially Europe, in order to reach out to them and establish strategic links. Moreover, removing the stigma that has been attached to political actors with an Islamic reference over the last decades is becoming particularly important in the context of the increasing frustration of Islamist parties over the inability to have a meaningful influence on political realities in their countries through the political process. Overall, it has thus been dawning across EU capitals that Islamist actors can and should no longer be ignored. But how far has this timid inclination to engage found its way into policies and diplomatic practice? Has there actually been a shift of approach towards a systematic engagement with those who used to be the "untouchables"<sup>7</sup> of EU relations with the MENA?

Much talk about Western engagement with moderate Islamists stands in contrast to thin evidence. While headlines about bilateral contacts by EU member states with Hamas and Hizbullah dominate, little is known about the systematic engagement with moderate Islamist opposition parties and movements in the rest of the region. The present attempt to help address this lacuna assesses neither mainstream Islamists' democratic credentials, nor the potential usefulness of engagement with specific groups. Clearly, the very political delicacy that has inhibited an open public debate on this issue also makes it difficult to conduct primary research on the topic. Hence, this chapter aspires to provide no more than a broad and fragmentary overview of the tendencies in the engagement of European governments with moderate Islamist groups across the MENA region; the motives and fears behind this engagement; and the channels, levels, policy frameworks and limits in which it typically takes place. Based on this

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<sup>7</sup> R. Youngs, *Europe's Uncertain Pursuit of Middle East Reform*, Carnegie Paper No. 45, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., June 2004, p. 12.

assessment, the conclusion drawn states a number of implications for EU democracy and de-radicalisation in the MENA.<sup>8</sup>

### **A cost-benefit analysis of engagement**

Not surprisingly, the emerging consensus among analysts in favour of engaging with moderate Islamists is not yet matched by an equally strong consensus among European government representatives. Providing long-term stabilising support for autocratic regimes in the region does not sit easily with actively seeking engagement with the first serious opposition the region has seen in decades. Moreover, a persistent, often ill-defined uneasiness towards Islamist interlocutors in general appears to be stalling the EU's search for a common direction.

Against the background of competing policy priorities in the MENA, individual diplomats keen on engaging with Islamist political actors are finding it difficult to assemble the necessary political support. EU policy circles, aware that some sort of shift of policy will be necessary, currently "fear the political implications of raising the issue", as many are concerned that it "would look like a change of position". The questions of when and how to engage with Islamists in the diverse national settings across the MENA are largely being debated on a flexible case-by-case basis. Fearing potential negative implications for bilateral relations with the host government, most member states have been keen to maintain full decision-making power on this issue at the national level.

The main determining factors of engagement include the degree of European interest in establishing dialogue with a specific group (for example, a rising political force likely to win elections); the diplomatic risk entailed (the group's legal status and overall relations with the regime); the interest in engaging as opposed to other strategic interests that require

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<sup>8</sup> The main findings of this chapter are based on personal interviews carried out specifically for the purpose of this study with approximately 45 European diplomats and Islamist politicians representing ministries, embassies and institutions. The interviews were conducted in European capitals (Brussels, London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid and The Hague) as well as those in the MENA (Cairo, Tunis and Rabat) between June and December 2008. With regard to the information used in this chapter, the interviewees agreed to be quoted on a personally non-attributable basis.



good relations with the domestic regime (such as regional conflict, cooperation on anti-terrorism, trade, migration, energy) and the possible repercussions engagement may have in the European domestic context (for example, in large, Muslim immigrant communities).

EU government relations with Islamist opposition parties and movements in the MENA vary greatly according to different national settings:

- In **Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain**, Islamist movements (such as the Justice and Development Party, PJD; Islamic Action Front, IAF; Islamic Constitutional Movement, ICM; al-Wefaq) are legal, recognised political actors with parliamentary representation. Contacts with European government representatives take place regularly. Thanks to the comparatively liberal environment in these countries, European embassies are also able to make occasional contact with illegal but non-violent Islamist movements (for example, the Justice and Charity movement in Morocco) on a low-key basis, even though this is considerably more sensitive. While the regimes leave no doubt that they do not appreciate such contacts, meetings with illegal moderate groups are not usually prevented, nor do they lead to major diplomatic rows.
- In **Algeria and Egypt**, moderate Islamists also enjoy parliamentary representation, either as members of a legal party (Movement for the Society of Peace, MSP; Movement for National Reform, MRN; Islamic Renaissance Movement) or as independents (Muslim Brotherhood, MB). In Algeria, the MSP forms part of the governing coalition, but it sees itself rather as the opposition. In both countries, contact is being made with Islamist parliamentarians, even though the regimes do not appreciate this and often give diplomats a hard time. In Algeria, incentives to meet Islamist parliamentarians were often considered too low to risk good relations with government counterparts for the sake of engagement with a co-opted, unpromising Islamist opposition. In Egypt, interest in the Muslim Brotherhood is substantial and most European embassies occasionally engage with MB parliamentarians and to a lesser degree with non-parliamentarians.
- In **Tunisia and Syria**, Islamist parties are illegal. Contacts with Islamists at the domestic level are practically impossible because of heavy constraints, surveillance and the political repression of Islamist

movements. The regime's confrontational relationship with the outlawed an-Nahdah and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and the resulting constant surveillance by the secret services, impede any direct domestic contacts. In contrast, encounters between European diplomats and exiled members of outlawed Islamist movements do take place on European soil, beyond the direct radar of national security services.

- The most complex, controversial and sensitive cases are, of course, **Palestine** and **Lebanon**. While both Hamas and Hizbullah do not clearly fulfil the criterion of non-violence used here to describe 'moderates', they cannot be left aside as any assessment of European engagement with moderate Islamist movements must be seen in the light of the politicised regional context shaped by these two cases. Open engagement with Hizbullah was largely uncontested when the party was in government, and now most EU member states still consider engagement justified and necessary, as Hizbullah is a legal party and an integral part of the Lebanese political landscape. It is acknowledged that "there will be no solution without them". EU formal political contacts with Hamas have officially been banned since Hamas was listed as a terrorist group by the EU in 2006. As a non-EU member, Norway is free to engage with Hamas, and is the only European country to have done so openly. Several EU member states have nonetheless maintained contacts with Hamas in spite of the ban, using diplomatic grey areas to bypass the common EU line.

Within this variety of national settings, a number of different motives guide the EU's interest in engaging with particular groups. The motive most frequently mentioned by EU diplomats is obtaining reliable information about the goals, policies, internal debates and trends of the group in question, and its analysis of domestic and regional developments. Aware of notable past Western misreading of trends in the region, it is understood that European analysis of domestic and regional developments must be based on first-hand information from representative stakeholder sources on the ground. Embassy staff in particular stress the need for direct contact to enable them to provide a realistic report of the political situation in the country to their capitals. They claim that the image portrayed of Islamist and other opposition groups in a region where the mass media are controlled by the regimes has constituted an insufficient basis for informed European policy decisions.

Engaging with Islamists in a bid to influence domestic developments positively in anticipation of an upcoming political shift or surge in democratisation, albeit often stressed by analysts, is rarely mentioned as one of the major driving forces behind European engagement. Exerting influence is mostly understood in the sense of improving Europe's image, rather than boosting democratisation. At the same time, the notion of positively influencing the development of Islamist movements through engagement – socialisation – has gained substantial weight in the context of European security and anti-terrorism policies with a view to preventing radicalisation.

Improving their image is also an argument frequently mentioned by Islamist leaders in favour of engaging with European actors. By engaging with the West, they hope to upgrade their image from an undifferentiated and blurred extremist/terrorist notion towards the picture of a moderate, potentially reformist force. By deconstructing what they perceive as prejudices in European public opinion, many moderate Islamist movements ultimately hope to shift European policy-making towards the region away from stability-oriented cooperation with authoritarian governments.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, engagement with Western governments and sometimes even with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can bear a series of risks for Islamist actors domestically. Depending on the varying degrees of harassment that different movements and individuals may expect from their home regime when accused of plotting with foreigners, Islamist politicians are often reluctant directly to engage with foreign officials without the regime's knowledge. Frequently, the latter's reaching out to the West provides the occasion that regimes need to target and clamp down on a particular group or individual. There are countless examples of instances in which MENA regimes have tried to prevent European officials from meeting with Islamists, and of Islamists having been punished as a direct consequence of such engagement. Often Islamists reject invitations to Europe or other engagement offers out of fear of

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<sup>9</sup> For an account of Islamist leaders' views on European foreign policy, see M. Emerson and R. Youngs (eds), *Political Islam and European Foreign Policy: Perspectives from Muslim Democrats of the Mediterranean*, CEPS and FRIDE, Brussels and Madrid, 2007.

domestic clampdowns. The risks for individual Islamists increase with the potential public repercussions of contacts with the West.<sup>10</sup> Outlawed movements such as the MB therefore increasingly ‘outsource’ these interactions to their European branches, which are well connected and maintain regular contacts, for example, with parliamentarians across Europe. On the domestic front, some troubled Islamist leaders say that they will now prioritise direct engagement with European NGOs and think tanks, which are somewhat less of an anathema to the regimes, hoping that this will eventually sway Western public opinion in their favour.<sup>11</sup>

### **EU institutions: Hitting a brick wall**

Common EU policy lines regarding engagement with opposition groups in general, and Islamists in particular, are hard to discern. The EU member states’ lowest common denominator in this regard is the EU’s list of terrorist groups and individuals.<sup>12</sup> The inclusion of a group or individual on this list is being mentioned by most of the member state representatives as the one absolute criterion inhibiting any sort of political contacts. Indeed, much of the debate on engagement with Islamists in the MENA revolves

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the Muslim Brothers in Cairo rejected European embassies’ offers to meet in the direct run-up to the 8 April 2007 local elections, stating that they “did not want to give the regime extra reason to clamp down” on them. MB leader Khairat el-Shatir was arrested in 2005 following his publication of an article in the *Guardian*, in which he encouraged the West to trust in and engage with the Brotherhood (K. el-Shatir, “No need to be afraid of us”, *Guardian*, 23 November 2005).

<sup>11</sup> In an attempt to balance engagement interests with a reconciliatory course towards the regime within the margins of the law, the Egyptian MB has often stated that while it would not meet with foreign government representatives in secret, it was open to meeting with foreign officials at any time in the presence of an Egyptian foreign ministry representative. Notwithstanding that the Egyptian authorities are unlikely to allow (let alone attend) such a meeting, the failure of Western governments to ever respond to this offer is being interpreted by Brotherhood members as confirmation of the West’s persistent choice of stability over democracy.

<sup>12</sup> See the EU’s list of persons, groups and entities subject to specific measures to combat terrorism, last updated by EU Council Common Position 2008/586/CFSP of 15 July 2008.

around the listing of Hamas as a terrorist group. Incidentally, the vast majority of European diplomats interviewed for this chapter judge this to have been a mistake committed too hastily, as it not only paralysed the EU's role as an actor in the Arab-Israeli conflict but also 'poisoned' the general EU debate on engagement with other Islamist actors.

Engaging with and strengthening non-violent, non-revolutionary Islamist actors in order to prevent radicalisation has become a common notion in European policy discourse. EU policy documents in recent years have been replete with explicit and implicit calls to engage more actively with moderate Islamist organisations both within and outside Europe. The EU's 2005 strategy document on *Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism* states: "We need to empower moderate voices by engaging with Muslim organisations and faith groups that reject the distorted version of Islam put forward by al-Qa'ida and others. ...We must ensure that by our own policies we do not exacerbate division."<sup>13</sup>

According to Commission staff, the idea of engaging with moderate Islamists "flashes from many EU documents", but these implicit allusions and vague hints of non-exclusion are "nothing coherent and too vague to be taken as a clear policy". A notable exception is the May 2007 European Parliament resolution on reforms in the Arab world, drafted by former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard, which recognises that "the moderation of Islamism depends on both the stability of the institutional framework in which they evolve and the opportunities which the latter offers to influence policy-making". The resolution calls upon Europe "also to give visible political support to...those political organisations which promote democracy by non-violent means, excluding sectarian, fundamentalist and extremist nationalist forces but including, where appropriate, secular actors and moderate Islamists...whom Europe has encouraged to participate in the democratic process, thus striking a balance between culture-based perceptions and political pragmatism".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Council of the European Union, *The European Union Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism*, 14781/1/05 REV 1, Brussels, 24 November 2005, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> European Parliament, Resolution on reforms in the Arab World: What strategy should the European Union adopt?, 2006/2172(INI), 10 May 2007.

Yet, action on demands for a proactive inclusion of Islamists has been negligible. Engagement has been undertaken by EU member states mostly on a decidedly informal, bilateral, low-key and ad hoc basis. There is no common EU policy line on engagement with moderate Islamist interlocutors in a general sense. In early 2006, following on the heels of the elections in Palestine, an ad hoc Task Force on Political Islamism was set up within the Directorate-General for External Relations in the European Commission. The ad hoc task force aims at overcoming the EU's lack of information on Islamism worldwide. Since 2007, the task force has also organised internal training programmes on Islamism, which have now become part of the Commission's mainstream training. Furthermore, some efforts have been made in the Council to foster an EU consensus regarding definitions and categories (for example, adopting a common 'lexicon' of relevant terminology and 'mapping' Islamist movements).

The Commission task force drafted a discussion paper arguing in favour of the EU's and member states' engagement with non-violent, non-revolutionary Islamist groups, which was eventually submitted to the Council and External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner for her consideration. According to one civil servant, one of the main goals of the paper was to "uncramp" relations with these groups by agreeing on a set of general principles of action. The paper was well-received by the commissioner, who even suggested developing specific staff capacities within the Commission, especially with a view to preparing for the launch of the new External Action Service. However, the Commission failed to gain the necessary support from member states for a common approach, some of which showed "quick opposition" to the paper. Several adjusted and modified versions of the paper likewise failed to obtain the necessary support, and the idea of developing a common EU line on engagement with Islamists ended up on the backburner for the time being.

Commission and Council Secretariat staff report an "emotionally charged debate" and "a huge amount of ignorance and prejudice" both within the Commission and among member state representatives, many of whom have "no differentiated views on Islamism" (with one of the newer member state representatives reportedly comparing the rise of Islamism at large with the totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin). Some advocates of the common approach felt they had "hit a brick wall" in their efforts to lobby for a consensus on this matter. They also attribute this failure to the EU's

stance on Hamas after the Palestinian elections, which “strongly reinforced sensitivities” and “paralysed the discussion on this issue”.

Among the opponents of the common approach, a Portuguese diplomat voiced the concern that regardless of the Islamist issue, there could be “no general policy regulating opposition contacts that fits all”. A French representative stressed that it was not a question of creating special conditions for Islamists, but of including them “just like all other representative societal groups”, and therefore a particular “Islamist strategy” was not only unnecessary, but would also lead to an unhealthy exposure of a particular group defined by a religious reference. Moreover, the whole initiative had been inspired partly by pressure from the US government, which had “always wanted us to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood”. According to a Swedish diplomat, Swedish scepticism is rooted in the conviction that “all that is not forbidden should be allowed” and thus a set of common principles at the EU level would create unnecessary additional regulations to the detriment of diplomatic flexibility. Furthermore, the scope and depth of engagement also depends on the priorities and financial resources of each member state. A German diplomat explained that the idea of adopting common principles on how to approach Islamists was, from the German point of view, “completely beside the point”, as dealing with these issues on a bilateral level was both diplomatically safer and more efficient. Any common EU initiative was likely to appear as an “attempt to bring the [forces of] good to the Islamic world” and would be “a sure way of immediately turning all the governments of the region against us”.

As far as EU technical and financial cooperation with Islamist organisations is concerned, Commission staff assure that there is no explicit EU provision that prohibits channelling aid to Islamist groups. Islamist civil society funding is said to be determined according to what drives the group's interest in each case. In practice, however, while working-level contacts are reported to be frequent, parties and civil society organisations with an Islamist leaning are de facto mostly excluded from formalised involvement in EU aid and cooperation programmes.<sup>15</sup> Overall, neither the

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<sup>15</sup> A. Boubekeur and S. Amghar, *Islamist Parties in the Maghreb and their Links with the EU: Mutual Influences and the Dynamics of Democratisation*, EuroMeSCo Paper No. 55, EuroMeSCo, Lisbon, October 2006, p. 21.

Barcelona process nor the European Neighbourhood Policy has been advancing engagement with moderate Islamists. This is not expected to change under the forthcoming Union for the Mediterranean.

The European Parliament has always had a rather different approach. As it is subject to less scrutiny and constraint by both the European and MENA governments' sensitivities, the European Parliament has a long history of direct engagement with Islamist political actors. Parliamentary delegations meet Islamist parliamentarians in inter-parliamentary exchange and visiting programmes across the region, and European Parliament resolutions explicitly advocate a proactive, open engagement with MENA opposition groups, including moderate Islamists. Similar ties also exist with a number of national parliaments in Europe (such as the German-Egyptian parliamentary group). Unfortunately, the European Parliament's more proactive approach towards Islamist political actors goes relatively unnoticed; so far, it has failed to have a meaningful influence on the policies of European governments.

### **Member states: Political constraints**

The fundamental policy dilemma of European governments with respect to the MENA is the widespread perception of a permanent contradiction between the long-term development agenda, on the one hand, and the short-term security and trade agendas, on the other. Including all relevant societal actors for the sake of broad participation and de-radicalisation, and maintaining smooth relations with MENA governments, are two lines of action European governments are having trouble reconciling. The wider European public and even governmental institutions are also severely split over the issue. Several civil servants point to the "unpopularity" of advocating engagement with Islamists in their ministries. A Dutch diplomat remarked that by engaging with Islamists "you don't get popular" and that where engagement was not officially forbidden, it was "definitely not encouraged". Diplomats from several member states noted substantial internal obstacles in this respect and even feared disadvantages to their careers. Internal sensitivities in European ministries are largely ascribed to undifferentiated views on Islamism and the fear of harsh reactions on the part of domestic constituencies. As one diplomat noted, "rationality has nothing to do with it", concluding that the entire political environment in Europe was "not conducive to such a dialogue".



It is therefore not surprising that during interviews, most European government interlocutors ask not to be quoted on a personally attributable basis, and often display reluctance and insecurity regarding the information they are allowed to reveal. In addition to the fear of career setbacks, the lack of capacity and the inability to communicate fluently in Arabic are also mentioned as common obstacles that inhibit diplomats from proactively seeking dialogue with Islamists. On several occasions, diplomats (including French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner)<sup>16</sup> have sought to relativise engagement with controversial groups through apologetic remarks (e.g. “we are not the only ones”). Insecurity and controversy within ministries, and even within the very units dealing with engagement, is at times considerable. One European diplomat working on dialogue with the Islamic world stated that he saw “no need for a position like mine” as dialogue was “dangerous” and “leading nowhere”, and that he was therefore “trying to destroy [his own] function”.

In a few instances, diplomats deliberately leaked information about confidential policy shifts towards certain Islamist groups in an attempt to prevent their government from taking actions of which they personally disapproved. In 2005–06, a British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) official leaked to the press a number of secret internal memos advocating a more active UK engagement with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood – a policy shift reportedly approved by then foreign secretary Jack Straw. The leaks led to several very critical articles in the *New Statesman* and the *Observer*, and a polemic debate about “the British state’s flirtation with radical Islamism”.<sup>17</sup> The FCO whistleblower later claimed he had leaked the documents to “expose dangerous government policy” and that his own unease was shared by many others in the FCO.

European officials also emphasise the role of Muslim immigrant communities in Europe as a major factor linking engagement with Islamists abroad to the domestic context. A French representative even identified the different immigrant communities in EU member states as the one key factor

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<sup>16</sup> See “France Admits Contacts with Hamas”, *New York Times*, 20 May 2008 (retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/world/europe/20france.html>).

<sup>17</sup> M. Bright, “When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries: The British state’s flirtation with radical Islamism”, *Policy Exchange*, July 2006.

conditioning the way each EU member state deals with Islamist movements abroad. Certainly, France, the UK and Germany, the EU states with the largest MENA immigrant communities, are also among the countries that most proactively approach the issue of engagement.

The aftermath of 9/11, and the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings have seen several European governments set up specific units/posts with proper human and financial resources in their foreign or development ministries and embassies. These new units have aimed at enhancing dialogue and cooperation between the West and the Islamic or Arab world, with varying scope, approaches and priorities. Institutions have included a division for “Dialogue with the Predominantly Islamic World” in the German foreign office (since 2002), an adviser for relations with the Islamic world at the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs (2002), an ambassador-at-large for relations with the Islamic world at the Spanish ministry for foreign affairs and cooperation (2006) and a unit for “Engaging with the Muslim World” in the UK (which in 2007 was tellingly merged into the anti-terrorism department). Moreover, specific “Islam observers” have been placed at 25 German embassies around the world (2002) and regional public diplomacy officers for the Arab world/MENA have been located at the Dutch (2008) and British embassies in Cairo, respectively. In addition to specific institutions, a number of special policy initiatives seeking to enhance dialogue and understanding along with political cooperation and cultural/social exchange between Europe and the Muslim world have been established (including the Alliance of Civilisations initiated by Spain and the Swiss-led Montreux Initiative).

The French ministry of foreign affairs does not have a specific unit for engaging with Islamists, but the staff of the semi-independent policy-planning unit of the Quai d’Orsay is reported to have a greater margin of manoeuvre with regard to contacts. Notably, unlike similar posts in other member states, the mandate of the French *conseiller pour les affaires religieuses* is strictly limited to religious affairs and clearly separated from political dialogue activities with Islamists. The UK, eager to prevent radicalisation against the background of its military engagement in Iraq, is the European country that most systematically links external and internal dimensions of engaging with Islamists through an integrated inter-ministerial approach with a clear security/anti-terrorism focus. The UK model is widely seen by other member states as a good example institutionally, as its integrated inter-ministerial approach is believed to

maximise synergies between the internal and external dimensions of political Islam. At the same time, the UK's unequivocal security/anti-terror focus also raises some criticism as reinforcing simplistic perceptions equating Islamism with terrorism. While the security dimension is decisive in all national policies, some European countries approach the issue from a more pronounced security focus that directly links Islam or Islamism with anti-terrorism measures (the UK and Switzerland). Others set a stronger focus on inter-civilisational dialogue in a broader sense, including from a long-term, democratic development angle, and draw clearer institutional lines between security and inter-civilisational dialogue units (Germany and Spain). Meanwhile, some do not appear to engage much at all (smaller and Eastern European member states). Sweden and Norway consider themselves particularly suited to engage in dialogue activities owing to their lack of negative historical baggage in the region.

An overarching theme affecting Europe's relations with Islamists is the former's prevailing religious or culturalist perceptions of Islamism. European political activities, institutions and policy documents aimed at engaging with Islamist political actors are often undertaken under the heading of interfaith, inter-civilisational or intercultural dialogue. France, with its distinctive laic heritage, is a notable exception in this regard. Germany, by contrast, has a unit for Dialogue with the Islamic World in the German foreign office that is financed from the ministry's culture budget line, although – as German diplomats admit – the unit's activities and objectives are of a political rather than cultural nature. Several European diplomats in charge of dialogue cautioned against mistaking the decidedly political engagement issue for a religious matter (“we are not here to bring rabbis, monks and imams together”). This concern is often shared by moderate Islamist politicians who complain about being invited to talk about Islam instead of pressing societal problems in the MENA.

There are some concerns among EU diplomats that the current engagement debate is directed towards “engagement for its own sake”. Many emphasise that dialogue with Islamists is not a goal in itself, but must be a means to achieve clear strategic objectives. Another common notion across European ministries and EU institutions is that the challenge is not engagement with Islamists as a specific target group, but rather their inclusion in dialogue activities and civil society initiatives as currently undertaken with secular societal groups. They stress the need to “de-essentialise Islamism”, that is, to avoid replacing negative discrimination

with positive discrimination or exposure, and instead to include all representative groups in regular activities regardless of their religious or secular references. Even those who are critical of enhanced direct engagement stress the need for the EU to “actively demonstrate that there is no rejection of any political actors”.

### **Trial and error in a diplomatic grey zone**

Among European governments, clear criteria for the choice of permissible interlocutors are rare. Beyond the limits of the EU’s terror list as the only set criteria, there is agreement that engagement with groups or individuals that have not renounced violence as a means of action is taboo. There are differences, however, as to whether that includes implicit endorsement of violence or armed resistance against foreign occupation. In a similar vein, groups linked to terrorist groups/activities are considered off-limits, although here again individual member states are coming to very different assessments as to what that means in practice. There is broad consensus that engagement with individuals in public office, especially elected MPs, is permissible and desirable, even though not all EU member states take advantage of it.

There is no general consensus on engagement with moderate Islamist actors who do not hold a public office, in particular with representatives of outlawed parties and organisations. All interlocutors emphasise the difficulties of engaging with outlawed groups. While the criterion of legality is mentioned by some member states as a precondition for engagement, for others this does not constitute an obstacle per se, but rather reduces the number of channels through which engagement can take place.

Formal political contacts with opposition Islamist movements and individuals at the ministry or ambassador level are rare exceptions. The level at which contacts are deemed appropriate largely depends on the respective group’s legal situation and its degree of integration in political institutions. The great majority of direct contacts between European government representatives and moderate Islamists take place in the large diplomatic grey area of active and passive informal contacts. Indirect contacts through intermediaries are unproblematic and frequent in most settings, but lack the advantages of first-hand engagement. Striking the balance between first-hand insights and diplomatic provocation is a challenging tightrope walk for diplomats, at times entailing substantial

diplomatic and personal risk. Maintaining engagement with a low profile is widely considered not only a matter of precaution but also of efficiency, as the success of engagement with many groups depends heavily on discretion.

Engagement with Islamist parties in power largely follows the pre-defined channels and terms of international diplomacy (and is therefore not the focus of this chapter). When engaging with Islamists in opposition, the democratic legitimacy of an elected deputy provides foreign governments with a conveniently given channel for engagement, making it easier to justify contacts before the country's authorities. Moreover, the legitimacy and official policy-making role of elected MPs further raise the level of EU interest in engaging with them. But even in the case of elected parliamentarians, contacts are usually not appreciated by the regime, so engagement must often take place above all informally and in the context of larger meetings involving other parties and factions as well. Several embassy personnel expressed doubts that contacts limited to parliamentarians were enough to provide a realistic picture of the internal developments of certain Islamist movements, as depending on the electoral framework, parliamentarians elected by their local constituencies are not necessarily key figures in the higher leadership of their party/movement.

The most politically delicate – and least assessed – cases are those where Islamists have no parliamentary representation, so there is no pre-defined formal channel for foreign diplomats to approach them. The legal status and more importantly the *de facto* quality of the group's relations with the regime are decisive in determining the diplomatic risk entailed in engagement. In this context, European diplomats typically stress the primacy of intergovernmental relations. Many officials claim that engagement with the Islamist opposition is underscored by the same conditions and rules as engagement with other opposition groups. Evidence from the MENA region, however, shows that such claims are an expression of wishful thinking rather than a reflection of political realities.

With a few exceptions, most European capitals do not give any explicit written directives to their embassies as to which groups they are allowed to meet or under what conditions. In most cases, this decision is left to the ambassador or the personal discretion of the political embassy staff. Likewise, most of the dialogue personnel at the foreign ministries in Europe do not have clearly outlined mandates or directives, leaving most activities to the 'common sense' and priorities of the diplomats in charge.

The absence of over-rigid, technocratic policy directives is widely seen as crucial to guaranteeing the necessary flexibility of action on the ground. Yet, the relative absence of clear directives from above on a matter as politically sensitive as engagement with Islamist organisations is a striking feature across many EU member states and institutions, often to the detriment of institutionalisation, policy coherence and the formation of strategic relationships.

In a few cases, European capitals have instructed embassies not to engage with a specific group or with Islamists in general. After creating a special division for dialogue with the Islamic world in Berlin in 2002, the German foreign office gave directions to the embassies not to enter into direct contact with Islamists under any circumstances. In the following years, German diplomats say, reports from the embassies made clear to those in charge in Berlin that differentiated, reliable reporting about the political situation in the region was impossible without the option of entering into direct contact with all the important social and political actors. Consequently, the directive was loosened, allowing direct contact in principle but “without shouting it from the rooftops”.

Embassy receptions and similar social occasions are often considered a convenient opportunity by both sides to meet under relatively low diplomatic risk. Embassy staff report how they are at times visiting “otherwise uninteresting conferences” at which they know Islamists will be present, “taking advantage of the coffee breaks” to meet members of outlawed groups in particular. But not even these meetings are free of diplomatic risk, as demonstrated by various incidents.<sup>18</sup>

To evaluate the diplomatic risk involved in meeting a particular individual, diplomats stress the importance of labels. For example, parliamentarians can be met in their capacity as elected officials, but not necessarily as party representatives. While there is little objection to meeting elected Islamist parliamentarians even if their party is banned, it is considered essential to meet individuals solely in their capacity as parliamentarians. It is also considered important to avoid singling out their

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<sup>18</sup> On one occasion, the UK deputy head of mission in Cairo invited Muslim Brotherhood parliamentarians among many other guests to a reception at his home and the Brotherhood’s MPs themselves leaked this to the press, leading to frictions with the Egyptian authorities.

faction among other parliamentary factions when organising larger meetings or conferences. More broadly speaking, it is deemed preferable to approach selected individuals in their personal or professional capacities (such as judges, lawyers, bloggers and human rights activists), rather than the party/movement as an institution.

In some countries, meeting Islamists in their capacity as party representatives is not possible at all, while in others it is only feasible in the context of conferences or other public meetings that equally involve representatives of other parties. Conversely, diplomats meeting with members of controversial Islamist groups often claim to have done so in a private or non-diplomatic professional capacity. Where bilateral meetings are agreed, embassies ensure that these take place at the lowest level possible of the diplomatic hierarchy. Direct contacts on an ambassador level, even informal, are rare exceptions that are likely to lead to diplomatic difficulties following publication in the media.

In some delicate cases, European governments sent (or did not object to) semi-official intermediaries/stooges to hold the talks. Most prominently, this happened in the Palestinian context when the EU found itself deprived of its political role in the Arab–Israeli conflict after having barred itself from having political contacts with Hamas in 2006. Eventually, several European governments looked for ways to bypass the engagement ban without risking a political upsurge. Among EU member states, Sweden and the UK were reported to have been the first to resume talks *de facto* through intermediaries. France found itself in the headlines in spring 2008 when a retired French ambassador was reported to have had direct contact with leading Hamas officials, sparking the *Le Figaro* headline, “The French are talking to Hamas”. Bernard Kouchner said in a somewhat ambiguous reaction that these had not been official political contacts, as the retired ambassador did not represent the French government. At the same time, he defended the step, saying the encounters were “not relations; they are contacts”, and that France “must be able to talk if we want to play a role”.<sup>19</sup>

In many instances, European ministries (directly or indirectly through non-governmental intermediaries) invite Islamists to conferences, study tours or meetings in their European capitals. Several ministries

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<sup>19</sup> S. Erlanger, “France Admits Contacts with Hamas”, *New York Times*, 20 May 2008.

organise seminars on or linked to the topic of moderate Islamism in their capitals, also inviting representatives of moderate Islamist parties as participants.<sup>20</sup> European governments frequently fund NGOs and political party foundations that engage directly with Islamists. On numerous occasions, European NGOs and think tanks have organised seminars and other fora involving European MPs, government representatives and moderate Islamists, both in the MENA countries and in Europe. Indeed, some analysts recommend that the German party foundations, which tend to complement the German authorities by engaging in more politically delicate fields, should play a key role in engaging Islamists in the MENA without risking major diplomatic trouble.<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusions

Taking into account the limited value of discussing ‘engagement with Islamists’ on an abstract regional level, along with the limited willingness of European governments to provide information on this issue, a number of conclusions can still be drawn.

*Consensus on principle, clash on terms and conditions.* In spite of widespread reservations regarding the democratic bona fides of certain groups and the impact that is to be expected from engagement, there is a sense among EU member states that some form of greater strategic engagement with moderate Islamists in the MENA will be unavoidable. However, the issues of how, when, with whom and why remain of great

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<sup>20</sup> The Dutch ministry of foreign affairs reportedly organised (through a US-based NGO) a series of closed meetings involving dialogue with a specific group of participants, including representatives of different Islamist groups, at The Hague. The meetings took place on a regular basis and aimed at exchanging information and increasing mutual understanding. According to participants, eventually the dialogue meetings “bled to death” when “everything had been said”, not least because some of the European funders pulled out and US funds could not be used owing to the moral objections of some group members.

<sup>21</sup> But even the party foundations are not immune to political frictions. For example, a conference held by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Beirut, which was organised in cooperation with a local think tank associated with Hizbullah and which included the participation of Hizbullah members, caused a major diplomatic uproar.



controversy and are unlikely to be resolved in the near future. This controversy has led to a lowest-common-denominator policy at the EU level that touches on the region's hotspots and which is likely to remain reactive rather than preventive. Such policies will lead to anything but de-radicalisation.

*Inclusion remains theory.* Despite frequent abstract declarations of intentions, a development of strategic ties with moderate Islamist groups in the MENA through systematic contacts has not yet taken place. Member states, keen to maintain full sovereignty on this issue, have largely been engaging in bilateral, informal, low-key contacts on an ad hoc basis. Systematic and formal engagement is the exception rather than the rule and there is hardly any evidence of open institutionalised partnerships, let alone funding. The timid trend towards an inclusion of all relevant societal actors at the discourse level has not yet found its way into policies and political practice.

*Emotions over expertise.* While the substantial intellectual work and debate on political Islam has helped to ease some of the prejudices and simplistic views on Islamist activism, the level of both expertise and rational debate about this issue is still frighteningly low even among European government institutions. The lack of direct contacts and reliance on second-hand information go hand in hand with persistent monolithic views on Islamism. Many European high-level decision-makers have never personally met and exchanged views with a representative of an Islamist party. Decisive in this respect are the strong repercussions that such actions would have among European electorates, themselves afflicted with the fear factor of the post-9/11 era that too often equates Islamism with terrorism.

*Stigma of response to Hamas paralyzes debate.* The EU's clumsy response to the rise of Hamas in the Palestinian Territories has become a stigma representing the inability of European governments to respond adequately and coherently to the rise of Islamist political actors in the region.

*Religious and culturalist perceptions of Islamism.* Surprisingly, the EU – itself among the strongest advocates of secular politics – and member states respond to the rise of faith-based politics in the MENA with an ill-defined blur of religion, culture and politics in institutions, policies and discourse. Difficulties in formulating coherent policies are greatest where Islamism is understood as a religious rather than a political phenomenon. While in some instances, the blur of religious, cultural and political notions may be designed purposefully to provide diplomatic cover, in many other cases it

raises questions about the knowledge, political intentions and objectives underlying member states' policies and substantially exacerbates a rational European debate about engagement.

*Missing a window of opportunity?* Moderate Islamists in the MENA will continue to be dangerously isolated and policies supporting democracy will carry on lacking credibility as long as European governments are not willing to stand up to their authoritarian MENA counterparts. If anything, peace and democratisation by engagement and integration has been a proven strength of EU foreign policy. It is very hard to understand why the EU fails to apply this strength in its relations with Islamist movements, whose peaceful, democratic development is so crucial to the future of both the EU and the MENA.

*Contributing to re-radicalisation?* European policies have been advocating the integration of Islamist movements into the political process as a means of moderation and de-radicalisation. But to the degree that the political participation of Muslim democrats in set authoritarian frameworks does not pay off, the perceived uselessness of political contestation is likely to empower radical currents that advocate a reversal of the moderation of positions and strategies. Processes of re-radicalisation, it is widely argued, have already begun. The EU must shift its policy towards engaging with, encouraging and empowering moderate Islamists to prevent an undermining and reversal of the processes of moderation and political integration that it has itself been encouraging. If the EU fails to make the shift towards the inclusion of all relevant actors, it will only reinforce the impression that its policies towards the MENA are actually about containing both Islamism and political change.

## 8. HOW CAN EUROPE ENGAGE WITH ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS?

*NONA MIKHELIDZE AND NATHALIE TOCCI*

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Since the late 1980s and particularly since the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, research on political Islam has been much in vogue in Europe and the United States. Whether openly stated or inadvertently assumed, the vast majority of Western approaches to political Islam are tainted by a distinctly culturalist undertone, focusing on the religious rather than political underpinnings of Islamist movements.<sup>1</sup> This has meant that political Islam is often viewed as a different, if not unique, phenomenon, whose uniqueness defies conventional political analysis and precludes meaningful comparative analysis with other regions in the world. It has also meant that the rare Western attempts to engage with political Islam often start with and remain trapped in an attempt to test the ‘democratic credentials’ of Islamist movements. By focusing on what Islamists think about democracy, many attempts at engagement ignore the fact that Islamists operate in authoritarian contexts and are thus unlikely to have concrete and tested views on democratic governance. They also pay insufficient attention to other aspects of political, economic and societal life on which Islamists tend to have more developed views.

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<sup>1</sup> For an exposition of this critique, see E. Hurd, “Political Islam and Foreign Policy in Europe and the United States”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2007, pp. 345-367. There are of course several important exceptions to a culturalist approach to the study of political Islam. For a recent publication following a different approach, see for example M. Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007.

Based upon these premises, this chapter tackles two principal questions: First, why engage with Islamist movements? And second, how engage with them? In what follows we are concerned exclusively with mass Islamist parties, which are primarily national in character, support base and objectives, and which are fundamentally detached and distinct from global jihadist movements.<sup>2</sup> To answer these questions, this chapter first sets out the objectives that Western engagement with Islamist actors could realistically pursue, explaining how the formulation of these objectives hinges upon a 'political' rather than 'religious' reading of Islamist movements. Second and precisely because we do not consider political Islam a unique phenomenon, we turn to Europe to seek lessons and best practices of engagement with national opposition movements in other authoritarian contexts. In particular, we analyse American and European methods and experiences of engagement with opposition actors in Franco's Spain, Kuchma's Ukraine and Shevardnadze's Georgia, before applying, *mutatis mutandis*, these lessons to the case of Western engagement with political Islam.

In tackling these questions, the caveat is the assumption that the West actually desires and promotes democratisation of the authoritarian states of the Middle East. The desire for democratisation necessarily cohabits, at times uneasily, with other foreign policy objectives, such as the pursuit of stability, energy security, migration management or the pro-Western orientation of strategic Middle Eastern countries. Democratisation and the regime changes that would come with it would shake the short- to medium-term stability of the region and may hinder the accomplishment of strategic objectives in the realms of energy, security and migration. It may also lead to a reversal in the pro-Western orientation of many states in the region, in view of the antagonising attitudes held by Islamist movements towards the West. Especially the latter problem did not apply to the cases of the Spanish socialists or Ukrainian and Georgian liberals, all of whom were committed to the West. In other words, lessons for engagement with Islamist actors must be understood in a context in which other and sometimes competing goals exist and often prevail. And this was not

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<sup>2</sup> For an interesting discussion of the fundamental difference between the two phenomena, see L. Guazzone, "The Success of Islamist Parties Works against Al-Qaida", *International Spectator*, Vol. XLI, No. 2, 2006, pp. 95-100.

necessarily the case in other contexts. Yet, in so far as democracy promotion in the Middle East has been one of the self-styled goals of the West over the decades, the analysis below sets aside these considerations, simply taking Western aims of democracy promotion at face value.

### **The objectives of Western engagement with political Islam**

Which objectives could be realistically pursued by the European and American actors toying with the idea of engagement with Islamist movements qua mass-opposition political actors in authoritarian contexts? Three principal objectives come to the fore.

A lower-threshold objective is to understand Islamist movements and their evolution, and through them – in view of their societal and political relevance – understand trends in the Middle East. The recent history of Western policy in the region is rife with gross miscalculations of the fundamental trends at work. Examples include the overestimation of Ayad Allawi's strength in Iraq in 2005, the surprise victory of Hamas in Palestine in 2006 or the unexpected alliance between Christian leader Michel Aoun and the Shiite Hizbullah in Lebanon following the latter's walkout from government in the autumn of 2006. Much of the reason for these miscalculations is the over-reliance of Western actors on the messages delivered by liberal, secular 'friends' in the Middle East, which while being supported politically and financially by Europe and the US, have little standing in the region. The West may not necessarily like the picture painted by Islamists or their interpretation of trends in the region; but as political actors more embedded in society than their liberal, secular counterparts, they could provide information and analysis that would help the West formulate its foreign policies more accurately and effectively. This does not mean that the West should halt its consultations with liberal and secular groups. It is simply to say that it should diversify its sources of information and exchange to gain a more complete and nuanced picture of trends in the region.

The second more ambitious objective is that of engaging political Islam in order to enhance its role as a force for political change in the region.<sup>3</sup> The rationale for this objective does not stem from the inherent

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<sup>3</sup> On this, see for example E. El-Din Shahin, *Political Islam: Ready for Engagement*, FRIDE Working Paper No. 3, FRIDE, Madrid; see also A. Hamzawy, *The Key to*

acceptance by Islamists of democracy and its virtues.<sup>4</sup> It rather derives from the political reality of these movements as mass opposition actors. In so far as political change comes by shifting domestic (as well as regional and international) political balances, and given that Islamists in the Middle East represent to date the only mass opposition groups worthy of the name, a second possible objective would be to engage Islamists for the purpose of promoting democracy. Given that democracy cannot be imposed or generated by externally breeding secular liberals, if the West is serious about democracy promotion, it must be prepared to engage with who is out there by working with Islamists in their struggle for political participation. In some instances, Western actors have started treading this path. Examples include the efforts made by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) in supporting an Islamist–socialist coalition in Yemen in 2003–04. It also and most notably includes the insertion of the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development, the Jordanian Wasat or the Yemeni Islah in the NDI’s programmes for party building, parliamentary strengthening, women’s participation, advocacy, strategic planning, recruitment, constituency outreach and media training.<sup>5</sup> Yet these remain ad hoc and limited initiatives carried out by American non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and they are not extended to Islamist actors that are viewed as more radical or anti-systemic by their regimes or by the West.

The third and most ambitious objective, relevant in conflict contexts, is to ensure the success of peace processes on the ground. In conflict situations such as Palestine, Lebanon or Syria, peace does not simply require a formal agreement signed by ‘moderate’ elites. If an agreement is to be accepted by the people and subsequently implemented on the ground, it must hedge against the ‘spoiler’ potential of domestic

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*Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists*, Policy Brief No. 40, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 2005.

<sup>4</sup> M. Asseburg, *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors*, SWP Research Paper No. 4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> M. Yacoubian, *Engaging Islamists and Promoting Democracy: A Preliminary Assessment*, USIP Special Report No. 190, United States Institute for Peace, Washington, D.C., August 2007.

opponents.<sup>6</sup> To do this, popular radical actors such as Hamas and Hizbullah must be brought into the picture, as their engagement and involvement may well be the only recipe for acceptance. The underlying factor to bear in mind here is that those excluded from a peace process often tend to oppose it. Hence, it is important to engage with actors such as Hamas and Hizbullah, because of both their spoiling potential and the popularity of their political messages. Driven by this logic, the EU Observer Group coordinated by Alistair Crooke, involving diplomats from different European embassies, had established such a dialogue between 2000 and late 2003, although this was subsequently halted.<sup>7</sup>

### **Lessons from Europe: The Cases of Spain, Ukraine and Georgia**

How can these complementary objectives be met? In seeking lessons and best practices, what can be learned from Western experiences of engagement with opposition actors in other authoritarian contexts in the past? As noted at the outset, Western interest in political Islam is growing. Yet engagement with Islamists remains at a stage of infancy. In the case of the US, American institutes have worked with Islamists in relatively 'unproblematic' countries such as Morocco, Yemen and to a lesser extent Jordan. In these countries, Islamist parties are legally recognised and do not work against their pro-Western regimes. At the same time, they espouse a more open rhetoric on democracy, rights and the rule of law than their regimes do, making them evident targets for democracy promotion programmes. In the EU, while official engagement is harder to come by, there have been attempts such as the initiative on "Dialogue with the Islamic World" launched by the German ministry of foreign affairs in 2002, the informal dialogue opened by a group of member state embassies led by Sweden with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 2003–04 and the training seminars on political Islam held by the Commission since 2007.

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<sup>6</sup> On the concept of spoilers in peace processes, see E. Newman and O. Richmond (eds), *Challenges to Peacebuilding: Managing Spoilers during Conflict Resolution*, Tokyo: UN University Press, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> See A. Crooke, "Bottom-up Peace-building in the Occupied Territories", Conflicts Forum, Beirut/London/Washington, D.C., 2007 (retrieved from [www.conflicts.forum.org](http://www.conflicts.forum.org)).

The list of existing initiatives stops somewhere around here.<sup>8</sup> In view of this, in the search for best practices in Western policies of engagement we turn to other experiences in Europe, examining the cases of Spain, Ukraine and Georgia in the past. The rationale for this choice may not be apparent at first, given the evident geographical, historical and political differences separating Islamists in the Middle East from socialists in Franco's Spain or liberals in Kuchma's Ukraine or Shevardnadze's Georgia. Yet given the limited track record of Western engagement with Islamists alongside the political reading of Islamist movements in the Middle East, the comparison may prove fruitful.

Western engagement with Spanish socialists and affiliated civil society groups during Franco's rule played an important role in inducing democratisation in Spain. More starkly, the Orange revolution in Ukraine and the Rose revolution in Georgia have been interpreted by some as being Western-exported or "manufactured" revolutions.<sup>9</sup> These processes of democratic transition have featured critical foreign interventions in the political, economic and social realms, interacting with domestic actors and factors in these three countries. How can we assess the impact of international measures of engagement with opposition parties and civil society actors in these countries, and what lessons can be drawn from these assessments for Western policies of engagement with Islamist actors?

### *The nature and format of Western-Islamist dialogue at the civil society level*

In the three cases under investigation, external engagement was carried out primarily by like-minded civil society actors. In the case of Spain, a critical role was played by European socialist parties and trade unions. Non-governmental groups and transnational networks such as the Socialist International (SI) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) played prominent parts in supporting Spanish socialists under

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<sup>8</sup> For a preliminary assessment of Western engagement with Islamist actors, see Yacoubian (2007), op. cit. See also the contribution by Kristina Kausch in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> G.P. Herd, *The Orange Revolution: Implications for Stability in the CIS*, Central and Eastern Europe Series, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the UK, Shrivenham, January 2005, p. 2.



General Franco.<sup>10</sup> Often these groups proved more influential than official European or member state efforts in assisting transition and engaging with their counterparts in Spain.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, in Ukraine and Georgia, engagement with liberal and pro-Western opposition actors was carried out by American NGOs such as Freedom House, the NDI and the IRI, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Open Society Institute (OSI) as well as by European foundations such as the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (in the case of Ukraine).<sup>12</sup>

When applied to the case of Western engagement with political Islam, this observation reveals three important lessons. First and on the upside, the Spanish, Ukrainian and Georgian precedents highlight the considerable impact of non-state forms of external engagement. A critical mass of engagement is necessary to generate visible results, and the panorama of engagement initiatives with political Islam is still rather bleak. Nevertheless, meaningful external engagement need not and indeed must not be limited to official institutions, whose room for manoeuvre is rather limited in view of state-to-state relations with authoritarian regimes, many of which have problematic and tense relations with Islamist movements.

Second and on the downside, engagement in these three countries was carried out between 'peers'. Hence, European socialists engaged with their counterparts in Spain, whereas American or European liberal groups did likewise with their liberal and pro-Western peers in Ukraine and

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<sup>10</sup> Other such organisations or networks included the European Confederation of Socialist Parties, the British Labour movement (comprising the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress (TUC)), the French Socialist Party and the French Socialist Union, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) with its Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the German Trade Union Federation. See P. Anaya Ortuno, *European Socialists and Spain: The Transition to Democracy, 1959-77*, London: Palgrave, 2002, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> G. Pridham, "The politics of the European Community, transnational networks and democratic transition in Southern Europe", in G. Pridham (ed.), *Encouraging Democracy: The International Context of Regime Transition in Southern Europe*, London: Leicester University Press, 1991, p. 239.

<sup>12</sup> M. Pinto-Duschinsky, "Foreign political aid: The German political foundations and their US counterparts", *International Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 1, 1991, p. 35.

Georgia. The analogous situation does not apply to the Middle East. In some instances, such as for example the case of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), parallels have been drawn between political Islam (or Muslim democrats) and Christian democratic parties, with calls for the AKP to eventually join the European Peoples Party. But these parallels have been made mainly to shed the strictly Orientalist understanding of political Islam in Turkey rather than to realistically expect or induce structural ties between Christian and Muslim democrats.

Third, because Islamists do not have obvious peers in the West, there are no pre-existing natural fora for socialisation between Islamist and Western actors<sup>13</sup> – and hence much of the misunderstandings between the two. This suggests that a first necessary step of engagement – related to the objective of understanding Islamists and conversely being understood better by Islamists – would be to establish fora for dialogue with Islamist academics, politicians, parliamentarians, civil society activists and media operators. This is the form of engagement that has taken place most. Yet the terms of dialogue have been set by the West, significantly limiting the scope to understand these movements. Arguably, this dialogue could be more productive with a reversal of its terms of reference. To better understand political Islam and the Middle East, Islamists could be asked to set the agenda for dialogue in order to raise questions and topics viewed by them as important. This approach would allow Western actors to gain a deeper understanding of and different perspectives on where the Middle East is heading and what is the role of the West there. This discussion could also focus on the political programmes of Islamist movements, particularly on those social and economic issues where their views are most developed. Furthermore, this dialogue should not shy away from sensitive political subjects such as suicide bombings or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; skirting around these questions or attempting to force agreement on them is unlikely to yield influence on the views of Islamists, particularly those seen by the West as the most 'radical'.

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<sup>13</sup> A potential peer group for Islamists in the West could be Muslim migrant communities and their own Islamist organisations. This potential is still to be realised, however, and Muslim communities and their Islamist associations remain largely marginalised in Europe and the US, and are yet to play an effective foreign policy role.

### ***Training and capacity building with opposition actors: Broadening the scope of engagement***

Moving from the first objective of understanding political Islam to the more ambitious second and third objectives of promoting the reform and peace potential of Islamist actors, what can be learned from the experiences of Spain, Georgia and Ukraine?

Western engagement in our three case countries took the form of capacity building and training directed at different sectors.<sup>14</sup> In Spain, engagement primarily took the form of political party building. The party building of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) was undertaken chiefly by the SI, which over the period 1946–61 channelled funds to train the party's rank and file,<sup>15</sup> established permanent offices of the PSOE in Spain and provided for the full-time employment of its senior officials. French socialists supported the PSOE by printing its newspaper *El Socialista*. The German SPD arranged training programmes, provided advice to party leaders on policy and campaign techniques and sponsored meetings of the Conferencia de Unidad Socialista. Likewise, in the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, Western foundations concentrated heavily on party building. In the run-up to the Orange revolution, Viktor Yushenko's election campaign was supported almost entirely by Western foundations.<sup>16</sup> In the case of Shevardnadze's Georgia, the growth of the only two real opposition parties, the National Movement and the United Democrats, was supported by USAID (United States Agency for International Development), the NDI and IRI, through training programmes, seminars and assistance in efforts to build coalitions around reform agendas. In the Ukrainian case in particular, party training was carried out alongside institutional capacity-building programmes aimed at

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<sup>14</sup> L. Whitehead, "Democracy by convergence and Southern Europe: A comparative politics perspective", in G. Pridham (ed.), *Encouraging Democracy: The International Context of Regime Transition in Southern Europe*, London: Leicester University Press, 1991, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Anaya Ortuno (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> M. McFaul, "Ukraine Imports Democracy: External Influences on the Orange Revolution", *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2007, pp. 67-68.

the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada. Hence, there were initiatives such as the Indiana University Parliamentary Development project, which provided technical assistance to increase parliamentary effectiveness.

Capacity building also branched out to wider sectors of civil society. In the Spanish case, special emphasis was put on building trade union capacity. The German IG Metall [West German Metalworkers' Union] supported the Union General de Trabajadores with the publication of its periodicals, *El Noticiero* and *Servicio de Prensa*. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions assisted Spanish trade unions in their actions against the regime, supporting workers financially during strikes, enhancing organisational unity across industries and levels of government, and training activists on publicity techniques.

In the Georgian and Ukrainian cases, greater emphasis was placed on youth organisations, NGOs and the independent media. Important actors behind the colour revolutions were the youth organisations PORA ['It is time'] in Ukraine and KMARA ['Enough'] in Georgia. These movements provided the necessary educational and training functions to mobilise thousands of young activists on issues such as freedom of expression, the establishment of transparent power structures, and the holding of free and fair elections. They conducted numerous regional pickets, mass rallies and distributed printed material in the most isolated regions of the country.<sup>17</sup> PORA notably created a website that became one of the most popular online information sources before and during the revolution, allowing activists to overcome the general information blockade at the time. Its activities were backed by the US administration, through its ties with key members of the Ukrainian diaspora.<sup>18</sup> The US-Ukraine Foundation,

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<sup>17</sup> V. Kaskiv, I. Chupryna and Y. Zolotariov, "It's Time! PORA and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine", in J. Forbrig and P. Demeš (eds), *Reclaiming Democracy: Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central and Eastern Europe*, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington, D.C., 2008, p. 139 (retrieved from [http://www.gmfus.org//doc/ReclaimingDemocracy\\_web5.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org//doc/ReclaimingDemocracy_web5.pdf)).

<sup>18</sup> F. Arias-King, "Orange People: A Brief History of Transnational Liberation Networks in East Central Europe", *Demokratizatsiya*, Winter, 2007, p. 18 (retrieved from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3996/is\\_200701/ai\\_n19432273/print](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3996/is_200701/ai_n19432273/print)).

supported by USAID, helped organise the *Znayu* campaign and trained young opposition representatives. In Georgia, KMARA's origins can be traced back to a group of reformist students at Tbilisi State University, who benefited from links to major Georgian NGOs as well as the two principal opposition parties. These organisations provided KMARA with legal representation, services and training.<sup>19</sup> Its activities were supported by the IRI, Freedom House, the German Marshall Fund and the Westminster Foundation, as well as several Western embassies. In addition, the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF) carried out several projects on youth education, aimed at encouraging modern and democratic thinking among younger generations. For this purpose, it financed several study tours of Georgian youth to visit European partner organisations. The opposition youth momentum in both Ukraine and Georgia was also supported by private philanthropists like George Soros, whose OSI and Central European University in Budapest aimed at reinforcing democratic values through Western-style, social science education. Indeed, many of the young revolutionary leaders from Ukraine and Georgia were Western-educated.

NGOs also proved pivotal in triggering the colour revolutions. In Ukraine, USAID financed the Citizen Action Network programme, which strengthened the legal framework to protect and encourage civil activism, and trained NGO representatives in political debate, organisational and financial capacity and in recruiting supporters. Freedom House and the German foundations worked with smaller NGOs at regional levels,<sup>20</sup> by financing activities to foster citizen empowerment and human rights education. The US-Ukrainian foundation supported the largest NGO, Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU), which focused on voter education and mobilisation. The CVU later proved important in conducting monitoring activities and exit polls, along with spreading information about the violation of voters' rights in the 2004 elections. Meanwhile, the IRF encouraged cooperation between NGOs and government structures, encouraged civil society monitoring of government regulations and established the Civil and Political Consultative Council of the Ukrainian

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>20</sup> C.A. Wallander, "Ukraine's Election: The Role of One International NGO", *International Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 2005, pp. 2-3.

Verkhovna Rada to enable civil society leaders to voice their opinions to the speaker of parliament. The IRF additionally supported the “New Choice 2004” NGO coalition working to ensure a free and fair electoral process in Ukraine, and funded programmes aimed at monitoring election campaigns, supporting exit polls and assisting civil society actors in their protection of voters’ rights and voter mobilisation. Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Romania, as well as the World Bank, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), the Canadian embassy in Ukraine, the Agency for International Development, the American Lawyers Association, the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs and the MacArthur Foundation also promoted projects to strengthen civic monitoring in various policy and governance areas.<sup>21</sup>

In Georgia, most of the NGOs established during the 1990s proved their strength and influence during the Rose revolution; most had been established and had survived through Western funding. Western assistance helped NGOs build organisational sustainability, attract qualified staff and learn from international experiences how to act independently of government.<sup>22</sup> Public and private international donors such as the MacArthur Foundation, Cordaid, the Open Society Georgia Foundation, the European Commission and USAID also financed Georgian research institutes, including its research on democratic transition and its education programmes in tolerance, non-violent communication and human rights awareness.<sup>23</sup> The Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies was supported by the Canadian Bureau for International

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<sup>21</sup> See the *IRF Annual Report for 2004 year* (retrieved from [http://www.irf.kiev.ua/files/eng/projects\\_re\\_810\\_en\\_ar\\_2004.html](http://www.irf.kiev.ua/files/eng/projects_re_810_en_ar_2004.html)).

<sup>22</sup> G. Nodia, *Civil Society Development in Georgia: Achievements and Challenges*, Policy Paper, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Citizens Advocate Program, Tbilisi, 2005 (retrieved from [http://www.cipdd.org/files/7\\_114\\_458194\\_CivilSocietyDevelopmentinGeorgia-textEng.PDF](http://www.cipdd.org/files/7_114_458194_CivilSocietyDevelopmentinGeorgia-textEng.PDF)).

<sup>23</sup> Other donors that focused on research included the Center for International Security and Arms Control of Stanford University, the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Mensen in Nood Caritas Nederland, the United Nations University and UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women). These donors funded many of the projects of the International Centre on Conflict and Negotiation (ICCN). See the website of the ICCN, “Projects” (retrieved from [http://www.iccn.ge/view\\_cat.php?cat=1](http://www.iccn.ge/view_cat.php?cat=1)).

Education, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Center for International Security and Cooperation, the Club de Madrid, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Frontera Eastern Georgia, the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, the Graduate Institute of International Studies, the Geneva Institute of International Studies, the Open Society Georgia Foundation and the Open Society Institute Budapest, Stanford University and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.<sup>24</sup> The United Nations Association of Georgia, working to enhance civil participation in decision-making, was financed by USAID, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Eurasia Foundation, the UNDP and the German federal foreign office.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Western training and capacity-building programmes focused on the independent media. In Georgia, the Rustavi2 TV channel and in Ukraine the STB, Novyi Kanal and ICTV channels played critical roles in the revolutions.<sup>26</sup> Here too external engagement was of the essence. In Ukraine for example, USAID funds helped establish the STB, supported independent, regional broadcasting stations and helped train regional journalists. USAID also supported the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), which produced political debates and talk shows, and provided legal assistance to independent journalists in Georgia and Ukraine. Media grants were similarly provided by the Knight Foundation, the McCormick Tribune Foundation, the OSI, the Ford Foundation, the Scripps Howard Foundation and the IRF.<sup>27</sup> The IRF in particular encouraged media independence by fostering the establishment of an independent journalists' trade union and helping to create the Civic Council on Freedom of Speech and Information in Ukraine, which voiced the views of Ukrainian NGOs in the media sphere. It also financed

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<sup>24</sup> See the homepage of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (retrieved from <http://www.gfsis.org/pub/eng/index.php>).

<sup>25</sup> See the website of the United Nations Association of Georgia, "Programs", "Democracy and Governance" (retrieved from <http://www.una.ge/eng/democracy&governance.php>).

<sup>26</sup> D. Anable, *The Role of Georgia's Media – and Western Aid – in the Rose Revolution*, Working Paper Series, Politics and Public Policy, Joan Shorenstein Centre on the Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23

programmes to expose the violation of journalists' rights and helped establish the website "Maidan", which provided information to help Ukrainian voters make informed political choices.

The experiences of Spain, Georgia and Ukraine offer a wealth of lessons for external policies of engagement through training and capacity building. These lessons should by no means be applied to Islamist movements alone – but should rather concern all opposition actors with an interest in and commitment to reform *and* with genuine roots in society. By contrast, externally breeding reform actors with little domestic standing is a waste of resources at best or a cause for popular resentment and frustration at worst.

Three principal lessons from Western capacity-building and training initiatives in our three case countries can be extrapolated and applied to the question of external engagement with political Islam. First is the need to deepen the degree of training and capacity-building support to opposition political parties. We have already noted how the NDI and the IRI have been active in this field. Yet the Spanish precedent especially suggests the necessity of a critical mass of support, whereby the PSOE received campaigning, strategy and party development training and funds from the SI, the German and French socialists, the British Labour Party and the German foundations. Likewise, opposition parties in Georgia and Ukraine were supported by a wide range of European and American foundations, universities and private philanthropists. It is high time that European actors build on the efforts made by American organisations, not least given their somewhat better reputation in the region compared with the US.<sup>28</sup>

Yet party training is feasible only in those countries – such as Morocco, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon – in which Islamist actors are legally recognised and allowed to operate. In other countries, this is not the case, making it difficult if not outright impossible for Western actors, including non-state ones, to engage in training and capacity building of 'illegal' parties. In cases such as Palestine and Lebanon, Western actors might be reluctant to engage in capacity-building activities with parties viewed as radical or 'terrorist'. Nonetheless, the second critical lesson drawn is the need for capacity-building efforts to concentrate on wider

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<sup>28</sup> Emerson and Youngs (2008), op. cit.



sectors of society. This would allow Western actors to engage with Islamist actors even in those contexts that are viewed as most politically radical. Georgian and Ukrainian liberals, like Islamists in the Middle East, are not confined to the elites and the rank and file of parties, but are spread across different spheres, including NGOs, professional associations, charities, media, youth organisations and student groups. Hence, there is a need to tailor capacity-building and training activities to these actors as well. When applied to the Middle East this entails a shift of focus away from urban, Westernised and elite-based NGOs, which receive the bulk of Western funds and attention, and concentrating on Islamic and non-Islamic youth groups, student associations, charities and other welfare organisations. In so far as over three-quarters of civil society in the Middle East is service-based, any well-meaning policy of external engagement aimed at change and reform cannot ignore this sector. The Spanish precedent highlights the importance of including within the scope of civil society development, support for trade unions and professional associations, as key actors in any country's associational life.

Third, the experiences of Spain, Georgia and Ukraine (and to this one could also add countries such as Greece or Portugal as well as the Eastern European countries), while certainly distinct from the Middle East, could certainly be of substantial value to reform-minded opposition actors in the region, including Islamist movements. Thus, a lesson and suggestion in this respect would be that of organising meetings for representatives of Islamist political parties and civil society organisations in Europe to discuss, explore and learn from the experiences of former opposition groups in authoritarian states. Not only could this have a positive impact in terms of socialisation and learning, but it could also help build trust and understanding between Islamists and the West.

***Political pressure: A sine qua non for effective engagement***

Beyond the external engagement with opposition parties and civil society, Western policies played a role in the democratisation processes in Spain, Ukraine and Georgia by exerting credible pressure and conditionality on authoritarian regimes. Without pressure at the top, engagement with opposition actors alone is futile. In other words, engagement with opposition actors in authoritarian contexts must necessarily go hand in hand with conditional engagement and pressure on their regimes.

Opposition actors in Spain used their European links effectively to apply pressure on the regime. In 1962, a Congress of the European Movement in Munich drew up a declaration outlining the political conditions the European Community (EC) should demand before signing any agreement with Spain, a declaration that strengthened the anti-Franco lobby in Europe.<sup>29</sup> Earlier, in 1961, the SI had adopted these recommendations in order to exert pressure on foreign governments to stop cooperating with Franco. In 1966, the SI adopted a resolution that condemned the referendum on the Organic Law, which gave full powers to Franco and guaranteed the loyalty of state institutions to the regime. The SI also opposed Spain's membership in NATO, the Council of Europe and the European Economic Community (EEC). It vocally protested against the arrests of members of the socialist opposition and the death sentences passed during the dictatorship, attracting international attention to Spanish affairs. After Franco's death in 1975, the SI called for restoring full democracy in Spain, freeing all political prisoners, providing freedom of speech and association and freedom for all political parties and trade unions.<sup>30</sup>

Earlier, in Germany the SPD had opposed the entry of Spain into the EEC. In 1972, Chancellor Willy Brandt declared that there was no possibility of Spain entering the EEC, because only democratic countries could become members of the Community. In France, the General Confederation of Labour Workers' Force brought pressure on the French government to halt relations with Franco's regime.<sup>31</sup> The trade union movement was also active in mobilising pressure on the Spanish regime. In 1961, a delegation of the ICFTU met with members of the US administration in order to persuade them to change their policy towards Franco's regime and exercise pressure on the government. The ICFTU additionally put pressure on the regime by inducing local governments, national governments and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to protest against Franco's rule and its violation of labour rights. In the UK, the TUC adopted a resolution that opposed the establishment of NATO military bases in Spain and rejected Spain's entry into the alliance. The TUC

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<sup>29</sup> Pridham (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>31</sup> Anaya Ortuno (2002), *op. cit.*, pp. 22-40.

also adopted many resolutions supporting political prisoners and calling for their political amnesty. In 1963, the SDDC (Spanish Democrats' Defence Committee of the Labour Party) recommended to the British government that the latter launch a boycott on Spanish goods, discourage British tourists from visiting Spain and British firms from investing in Spain, and reject the deepening of ties between Spain and the EC. These recommendations held sway in particular during periods of Labour rule, when the UK stopped arms sales to Spain, froze collaboration with the Spanish government and opposed the resumption of negotiations between Spain and the EEC in 1976.

In the case of Georgia or Ukraine, external pressure was not as far-reaching as in Spain but it was nonetheless considerable. In 2003, prior to the elections in Georgia, former US Secretary of State James Baker met President Edward Shevardnadze and delivered a letter from President George W. Bush stressing the need for free and fair elections, and proposing a formula for the representation of different parties on the electoral commissions to ensure fair and transparent results. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank stated they would halt their projects in the country unless the government seriously revised its policies towards the opposition. Following the rigged elections, the US State Department declared that the results "do not accurately reflect the will of [the] Georgian people, but instead reflect massive fraud".<sup>32</sup> The OSCE and the Council of Europe also denounced the results.

In Ukraine, the Center for Strategic and International Studies organised a high-level delegation visit to Kiev - including senior, former US government officials Zbigniew Brzezinski, Robert Hunter and Thomas Pickering - warning that the presidential elections should be free and transparent, and making clear that the future of US-Ukrainian relations and Ukraine's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures depended on this.<sup>33</sup> The US's strategy was to keep the regime interested in the West, while underlining that the development of democracy and therefore free and fair elections were a cardinal objective of US-Ukrainian relations. The rigged elections were then unanimously denounced by all international

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<sup>32</sup> C.H. Fairbanks, Jr., "Georgia's Rose Revolution", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2004, pp. 115-116.

<sup>33</sup> Wallander (2005), op. cit., p. 1

organisations and observer missions. After the elections and during the Orange revolution, the West intervened through heavy mediation led by the presidents of Poland, Lithuania and EU High Representative Javier Solana. Also in Georgia, following the 2003 elections, Washington applied substantial pressure, with then Secretary of State Colin Powell strongly advising Shevardnadze to resign. Once Mikhail Saakashvili came to power, the US administration welcomed the new regime, declaring its support and assistance.<sup>34</sup>

Following from this, the final lesson is the need to exert significant pressure on the authoritarian regimes in which Islamists and other opposition actors operate. Elaborating Western policies of engagement becomes meaningful only if the West puts pressure, through positive or negative conditionality as well as dialogue, on incumbent regimes, just as it did in Spain, Georgia and Ukraine. Unless effective pressure is exerted in words as well as action, opposition actors – no matter how capable and well trained they may be – will remain unable to seize the political ground necessary to set in motion genuine change. Moreover, as long as the deafening silence of the West against the repression and violations committed against opposition activists persists, Islamists and Middle Eastern societies writ large will simply continue to view Western democracy talk as cheap.

## Conclusions

This chapter has deliberately downplayed the role of religion – intended as a fixed framework of belief and action – in mass Islamist movements, emphasising instead their nature as political subjects operating as opposition actors on the fringes of authoritarian state contexts. While acknowledging the concerns as well as the competing goals of Western actors in the region, which often downscale their commitment to democracy promotion, we have nonetheless taken this self-declared goal at face value. With these premises in mind, we have delved into an analysis of engagement with Islamist actors in the Middle East, setting out three possible objectives to be pursued through such a policy. We have then drawn from precedents of Western forms of engagement with European

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<sup>34</sup> Grey and Volkov (2003), *op. cit.*

opposition actors operating in authoritarian contexts, in the search for lessons to fulfil these objectives.

In drawing these lessons, we have acknowledged the importance of ideological and political affinity between European opposition actors and their backers in Western Europe and the US. And it is here that, to close the circle, we would like to reintroduce the role of religion. As noted above, a critical difference between our case studies and Islamist actors is the existence of peer groups in Europe and the US. Whereas Spanish socialists were ideologically tied to the Socialist International and trade union movement, and Ukrainian or Georgian liberals to their Western European and American NGO, governmental and foundation counterparts, the same cannot be said about Islamist actors. Their natural friends in Europe or the US would be either European Islamist groups, with little or no political power, or Christian democratic groups, with whom an effective alliance is hard to foresee principally because of the perceived divide generated by religion. It is thus here that the role of religion in politics is reaffirmed, by separating groups across Europe, the US and the Middle East. Notwithstanding the fundamentally different political, social and economic contexts in which they operate, these groups may actually share more similarities than we are prepared to acknowledge at first sight. Both espouse a liberal economic outlook coupled with political and social conservatism. By contrast, the differences that separate them are perhaps overestimated by the imagined divide created by religion. If these reservations are set aside, both the EU and the US, and most pointedly European and American civil society actors, can extract important lessons and best practices from other precedents in Europe's history to be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the critical case of political Islam.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS: DYNAMICS IN POLITICAL ISLAM AND CHALLENGES FOR EUROPEAN POLICIES

*MURIEL ASSEBURG*

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### *Current dynamics and trends in political Islam*

As the contributions to this volume illustrate, there is no single trend or tendency among Islamist actors in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) today. Rather, four major trends can be identified.

First, countries whose politics are dominated by the Arab-Israeli conflict have been facing challenges that stem from mainstream Islamists engaging in electoral politics while maintaining armed wings that engage in 'resistance' against Israel. Islamists in Lebanon (Hizbullah) and the Palestinian territories ( Hamas) have participated in elections, in parliament, and in government, and have, in principle, renounced violence in the domestic power play.<sup>1</sup> They have both, however, used weapons not only in the confrontation with Israel, but also in the fight against their domestic political opponents when they have seen their position threatened. In Lebanon, Hizbullah and its allies staged a show of force in May 2008 to institutionalise a power of veto on government decisions and safeguard the weapons of the 'resistance'. In the Palestinian territories, after having won elections in 2006, Hamas saw its efforts at governing undermined. It preempted being ousted from power by violently assuming control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. The results of the use of force differed substantially

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<sup>1</sup> For the religious underpinnings of Hamas's stances as well as the entrenchment of radical views owing to Israeli military campaigns, see the chapter by Khaled al-Hashimi, "Understanding Hamas's radicalisation" in the present volume.

for the two entities: Hizbullah's 2008 show of force unlocked the political blockade that had paralysed the country since late 2006. It led to the Doha compromise, which re-established a government of national unity with veto powers for the opposition and paved the way for elections in mid-2009. Hamas's 2007 violent takeover of the Gaza Strip led to a geopolitical split of the Palestinian Authority – where today we witness two competing, authoritarian political systems being consolidated in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

What has widely been viewed by Arab publics as successful steadfastness in confronting Israel has won the Islamist national liberation movements extensive popularity in the region. Their domestic experience has also suggested to many that armed struggle rather than electoral politics pays greater political dividends. Still, and in spite of the admiration that Hizbullah and Hamas arouse, they have not generated imitators.

Second, a new trend among Salafist actors has been noticed as some of them have abandoned their reluctance to engage in participatory politics. This is particularly remarkable as these Islamists traditionally have been preoccupied with emulating the 'righteous' or 'pious predecessors' (*al-salaf al-salih*) and have concentrated on fundamentals of faith as well as doctrinal purity. Yet in recent years, some Salafist groups (for example in Lebanon, Kuwait and Yemen) have overcome principled stances on restricting their activities to issues of faith and seeing their role mostly as one of 'guardians of pure Islam'. They have thus come not only to engage in the public sphere but also in elections and parliaments. As Omayma Abdel-Latif points out in her contribution, in Lebanon, some of these 'new Salafists' have also criticised confessionalism and taken a notable stance on dialogue with other political groups such as Hizbullah, hence breaking out of the pattern of sectarian politics.<sup>2</sup> Engagement in politics has also led to quite substantial revisions with regard to issues pertaining to political and religious thought – as Lebanese Salafists have, at least de facto, accepted the Lebanese state, the legitimacy of a non-Muslim president and confessional pluralism. A similar trend can be discerned among Kuwaiti Salafists, who have recognised the constitution and concepts such as sovereignty held by the people, as well as political pluralism. While these new Salafists represent a marginal trend in Lebanon at present, in the May

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<sup>2</sup> See the chapter in this volume by Omayma Abdel-Latif, "Trends in Salafism".

2008 parliamentary elections in Kuwait, Salafists captured record shares of the vote, thereby sidelining the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM or Hadas).

Third, the performance of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) stands as a major example of the successful ‘de-radicalisation’ of an Islamist party. As Senem Aydın Düzgit and Ruşen Çakır highlight, the AKP has evolved from a Welfare Party that had been committed to “reformist fundamentalism” to a party that pursues “strategic modernism”, and embraces pluralist democracy and a capitalist market economy.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, rather than pursuing an Islamic state through the democratic process, the AKP has undertaken fundamental reform in the field of democratisation and the stabilisation of the economy. It has entered into accession talks with the EU and used the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession to bolster its course of political reform. The pace of reform, however, has slowed considerably during the AKP’s second term in office. At the same time, significant sectors of Turkish society have been concerned about the AKP’s social politics, which have been perceived as encouraging the Islamisation of Turkish society (e.g. through its public sector recruitment policies) and undermining the secular order. The promotion of conservative social values by the AKP, backed by pious and conservative middle classes, holds strong potential for increased Islamisation. Meanwhile, forces in the administration and the military have been afraid of having their influence reduced further by way of reform – framing their interests as concerns about the AKP’s commitment to secularism and democracy.

Fourth and possibly most relevant in the MENA region, the so-called ‘moderate Islamists’ – i.e. those Islamists who have renounced violence as an instrument to achieve their domestic policy goals and who are ready to work from within the respective political system<sup>4</sup> – scored some impressive

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<sup>3</sup> See the chapter by Senem Aydın Düzgit and Ruşen Çakır, “Turkey: A sustainable case of de-radicalisation?” in the present volume.

<sup>4</sup> On this definition of moderate Islamists, see Muriel Asseburg, *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors: Conditions and Programmatic Change*, SWP Research Paper No. 4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, April 2007, p. 9. Thus, ‘moderate’ should not be understood as a value judgment about the Islamists’ political and social goals. It does not mean that these groups necessarily espouse values that would



early electoral successes. But in recent years, they have been unable to increase their representation in parliaments. In addition, they have been unable to translate their participation into meaningful influence on their countries' decision-making processes. As Robert Springborg argues, the entrenchment of authoritarianism and the increase in repression in the MENA region has weakened opposition actors, chiefly moderate Islamists.<sup>5</sup> This has been particularly evident in those countries that have allowed the Muslim Brotherhood or its offshoot organisations to contest elections, such as Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Yemen. In some cases (Morocco, Kuwait, Algeria and Yemen), the existence of Islamist political organisations that are more radical may also account for the weakening of the more established moderate Islamists, which have increasingly been viewed as having been co-opted and having lost their role as a clean alternative to the actors in power.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, in many countries of the MENA region Islamist groups and their followers have become frustrated and disillusioned with electoral and parliamentary politics, as they have realised how constrained is the impetus they can have in the façade democracies of the region. This realisation has had quite diverse effects on Islamist movements and their constituencies. Among them, we have witnessed highly controversial, programmatic debates in some movements, e.g. the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's debate on a draft platform.<sup>7</sup> But above all, we have seen an increase in political apathy or a turn towards non-political, more quietest

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correspond with a European understanding of democracy. Here – as with other forces in the region – we can find instead a broad spectrum of approaches ranging from the ideological to the more pragmatic, from the socially conservative to the more progressive.

<sup>5</sup> See the chapter by Robert Springborg, "Is the EU contributing to re-radicalisation?" in the present volume.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The draft espoused socially conservative provisions, such as neither women nor Copts would be eligible to run for the presidency and a religious oversight body was to be established. It aroused a very controversial debate within the Brotherhood as well as among scholars and journalists, and it was subsequently relegated to the backburner. See the contribution by Ibrahim El Houdaiby in this volume, "Trends in political Islam in Egypt".

forms of Islam among Arab publics, such as Sufism (which has been encouraged by some regimes), as well as a growing appeal of more fundamentalist Islamists.

Nevertheless, the lack of success in achieving any of their short- to medium-term objectives has not led moderate Islamists to turn away from participatory politics or to engage in violence.<sup>8</sup> Most organisations have accepted that their room for manoeuvre is small and they have adapted their strategies to avoid openly challenging incumbent regimes and rather strengthened their commitment to working from within the respective political system. As Springborg concludes, “In sum, the real challenge may not be the rise to power of radical Islamists or violence committed by them, but the perpetuation and even strengthening of authoritarian rule as a result of moderate Islamists becoming strategic partners of at least some elements of incumbent regimes”.<sup>9</sup>

### *EU policies and their effects*

In recent years, against the backdrop of Islamist terrorism on the one hand and election victories by moderate Islamists on the other, Europeans have become increasingly aware of the phenomenon of political Islam and of its diverse facets, as well as the need to develop policies for addressing the issue. In its 2004 position paper on a *Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, the EU acknowledged for the first time, if only implicitly, that moderate Islamists should no longer be excluded from measures aimed at democracy promotion.<sup>10</sup> A 2007 European Parliament resolution on reforms in the Arab World made this approach even more explicit, as it called on Europeans “to give visible political support to...those political organisations which promote democracy...including,

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<sup>8</sup> For recent trends among moderate Islamists, see also Ana Echagüe, “The radicalisation of moderate Islamist parties: Reality or chimera?” in the present volume.

<sup>9</sup> See Springborg, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> European Council, *Final Report on an EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, June 2004 (retrieved from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/Partnership%20Mediterranean%20and%20Middle%20East.pdf>).

where appropriate, secular actors and moderate Islamists".<sup>11</sup> In the 2005 strategy document on *Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism*, the EU stressed "the need to empower moderate voices by engaging with Muslim organisations and faith groups that reject the distorted version of Islam put forward by al-Qa'ida and others".<sup>12</sup>

In practice, however, European engagement with Islamists has lagged far behind these ambitions.<sup>13</sup> While some European governments have established specific divisions or task forces for dialogue with the Islamic world, these have often focused on religious and cultural issues rather than on politics. Such efforts have not succeeded in institutionalising channels of dialogue that would have helped to calm tensions in times of crisis, for instance during the uproar surrounding the Danish Muhammad cartoons. In addition, not only have debates on a common EU policy line as to with whom, how and when to engage not yielded results, but as Kristina Kausch details, for various reasons official representatives of European governments and the EU have also been very reluctant to establish regular contact and build relations with Islamist forces.<sup>14</sup> When exchanges have taken place, they have generally been informal, bilateral and low profile.

Europeans have established contacts with representatives of those Islamist parties that are legally recognised political actors with parliamentary representation, such as the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development, the Islamic Action Front, the Kuwaiti ICM and the Bahraini al-Wefaq. Yet they have been somewhat disinclined to establish such links – at least on an official level – with Islamists in countries that have regimes that discourage such contacts, e.g. in Algeria or Egypt. They have shunned official contacts in countries where Islamist parties are illegal, e.g. in Tunisia and Syria. Furthermore, even those forces with which Europeans are in contact have very rarely been supported by EU democracy promotion programmes or cooperation initiatives.

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<sup>11</sup> This document is quoted in Kristina Kausch, "Europe's engagement with moderate Islamists" in the present volume.

<sup>12</sup> Also quoted in Kausch, *supra*.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, European policies have also lagged behind US efforts at capacity and coalition building among opposition forces (including moderate Islamists) in some MENA countries, e.g. Yemen and Morocco.

<sup>14</sup> See Kausch, *op. cit.*

In the end, by not establishing and maintaining contacts with all relevant segments of society in the region and by not developing ties with moderate Islamist groups, Europeans have so far missed out on an opportunity to engage those groups that often form the most popular and best organised opposition. This has also meant that Europeans have had no instruments at their disposal to exert influence on debates within these movements or to work towards de-radicalisation. While Europeans have pushed for trade liberalisation and better governance, and engaged in civil society support, on the level of high politics they have closely collaborated with the MENA's authoritarian rulers and been reluctant to press for sustained political liberalisation or to address human rights issues. They have thus contributed little to making participatory politics more attractive for the region's opposition forces.

Finally yet importantly, European policies have been highly contradictory with regard to contact with those forces that have military wings, i.e. the Lebanese Hizbullah and the Palestinian Hamas. Europeans do not face any legal impediments to speaking to and cooperating with Hizbullah representatives (except for the Dutch, who designated Hizbullah a terrorist group in 2004), as the EU does not consider Hizbullah a terrorist organisation; yet some European governments still have been reluctant to engage in official high-level contact. Nonetheless, as a rule, they have maintained open lines of communication with the party. By contrast, such lines have been cut with Hamas, which was designated a terrorist organisation by the EU in 2003. After Hamas's landslide victory in the 2006 elections, the international community adopted the so-called 'Quartet criteria', which conditioned diplomatic contacts and cooperation with the Hamas-led government on Hamas renouncing the use of violence, recognising Israel's right to exist and accepting all previous agreements. In this regard, Europeans adopted a maximalist interpretation of what the designation of Hamas as a terrorist organisation was to mean: while they were not legally in a position to cooperate with Hamas financially and politically, it would not have been mandatory to adopt a policy of no contact as the EU did. Actually, through US influence, all Quartet members with the exception of Russia adopted an isolationist approach, and after Hamas's violent takeover of the Gaza Strip, backed the Israeli embargo – putting Gaza's population under massive pressure to change its political preferences by imposing measures of collective punishment. As Europeans have toed the US policy line, they have contributed to empowering the

hardliners in the movement, strengthening Hamas's alliance with Iran and entrenching the geopolitical split between the West Bank and Gaza.

Ultimately, the European stance on Hamas has not only contributed to the 're-radicalisation' of Hamas and seriously undermined European efforts at state building in the Palestinian territories, but it has also done enormous damage to the credibility of the EU as a democracy promoter in the whole region. In general, failure to resolve the region's conflicts, first and most importantly the Arab-Israeli conflict, has helped extremists thrive and mobilise around radical slogans.

### *Main challenges and policy recommendations*

To date, there is no consensus among European policy-makers about which Islamist groups to engage with, the purposes of such engagement or how. In their contribution, Nona Mikhelidze and Nathalie Tocci specify three good reasons for engaging with Islamists: to better understand an important political force as well as realities in the region, to support political openings, and to include relevant actors and potential spoilers in peace processes or efforts at conflict management.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, a *first* reason Europeans should engage with Islamists is to understand their thinking, priorities and agendas, as these forces are so relevant in their societies. Dialogue with Islamists would also help Europeans get an additional reading of realities in the Middle East – rather than just relying on the interpretations of those who think like they do or who speak in a manner to which they are accustomed. On top of that, dialogue should also be about building bridges. Europeans have a strong interest in reaching out and establishing channels of communication that diverge from the 'us vs. them' and 'the West against Islam' paradigms, not least because of geographical proximity and large Muslim minorities in some European states. Still, as Abdel-Latif points out, such dialogue will hardly be successful as long as one side dictates the agenda, rather than both sides meeting eye-to-eye.<sup>16</sup> Nor will it resonate widely if European dialogue activities are not broadened to include major segments of society.

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<sup>15</sup> See in the present volume the chapter by Nona Mikhelidze and Nathalie Tocci, "How can Europe engage with Islamist movements?"

<sup>16</sup> See Abdel-Latif, *op. cit.*

It is in the European interest not to condition dialogue on certain criteria, but instead to have open lines of communication with a broad spectrum of social and political forces.

A *second* reason Europeans should engage with Islamists as well as with other societal and political forces is to support political change in the region. This would mean working towards more participatory and less repressive systems, with a view to preventing political apathy and radicalism and preparing the regimes for 'soft landings', while avoiding revolutionary upheavals – with all the negative side effects they could entail for Europe. Political liberalisation or even democratisation cannot be achieved if the mainstream forces of political Islam – in many countries of the region the only well-organised and most popular opposition – are excluded from the political process.

If the European commitment to democracy is not mere lip service, Europeans should choose a three-dimensional approach. They should a) put pressure on incumbent regimes to abandon their repression of moderate Islamists and other peaceful opposition forces and grant all forces access to the political arena. They should b) aim at influencing the legal and political frameworks that regulate social and political participation in the MENA region. It is important not to set all one's hope on domestic reform actors, but to try to affect change directly as well, not least because it is the also conditions under which actors participate in the system that shape their agendas and priorities. As the Turkish example shows, competitive political systems with established democratic procedures tend to support trends among Islamists that favour procedural democratic reform and acceptance of important tenets of liberal democracy. This would imply using the political tools available, such as the political dialogue provided for in the Association Agreement of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as well as the Action Plans of the European Neighbourhood Policy, to address issues of governance along with human rights and civil liberties. Benchmarking, which to date has only been done in the areas of trade policy and economic reform, could likewise be implemented to affect human rights guarantees, to lift the states of emergency, to work towards liberal party and association laws, to install independent electoral commissions, and to grant freedom of opinion and assembly, etc. So far, we have not been able to see how much influence the EU and its member states

could have in this regard, as European policy-makers have not used their political and economic weight to boost change. Thus, rather than focus training and capacity building activities on civil society actors, Europeans should c) increase cooperation with political opposition forces – Islamist as well as non-Islamist. Obviously, such activities would not embrace actors who engage in or propagate the use of violence. But they should not necessarily be restricted to the most progressive Islamists. Europeans should avoid being perceived as trying to pick winners and instead encourage participation across the board.<sup>17</sup>

In this context, the EU should not simply be urging the earliest possible elections, but should rather push for legislation and political practice that would first allow for freedom of association and the formation of political parties. Where elections are held, Europe should signal in advance a clear interest in free and fair elections and offer to provide election observers. Even more importantly, of course, the EU should accept the outcome of such elections and refrain from undermining elected governments. As the Hamas case has shown, the international isolation of the 'Islamic Resistance Movement' has helped in no way to meet the challenges, but contributed a lot to making the situation worse. Again, dialogue with democratically elected governments should not be conditioned.

A *third* reason Europeans should engage with Islamists is to get militant forces such as the Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hizbullah on board for conflict management and to allow for inclusive peace processes. In these cases, it is evident that Europeans will also have to deal with forces that have not renounced violence or that figure on some terrorist list. Indeed, the more fragile the environment and the more influence such groups wield, the more Europeans should seek open lines of communication. If the EU seriously wants to contribute to regional stability and prevent further radicalisation, it needs to work towards settling the major conflicts in the region, above all the Arab-Israeli conflict, on which radical forces thrive. And it will not be successful in doing so as long as it follows a policy that isolates major forces with considerable spoiling power.

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<sup>17</sup> See Echagüe, op. cit.

Finally, Europeans should be aware that the idea of weakening or destroying the attractiveness of the 'Islamist model' by causing Islamist groups like Hamas to fail through isolation and pressure is unrealistic. Interventions that follow such a strategy contain the risk of a massive destabilisation, as they promote popular radicalisation and open the field for jihadist actors who are not tied to a national agenda and who are not open to negotiation or compromise.



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