

Middle East Quarterly

SPRING 2012

VOLUME 19, NUMBER 2

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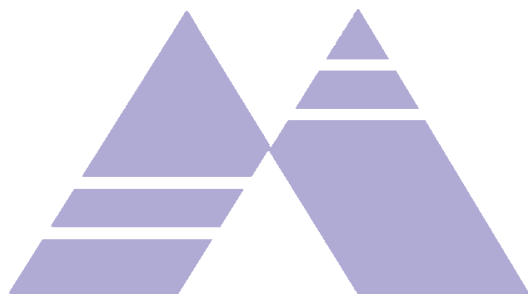
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Are Jihadists Crazy?

by Teri Blumenfeld

Muslims who kill in the name of their religion frequently evade punishment in Western courts by pleading insanity or mental incompetence. Jurors, judges, and forensic psychiatrists are prone to accept the claim that some form of mental incapacity, not religious belief, accounts for “homegrown” jihadist terrorism in North America and Europe.

This state of affairs results from the failure by prosecutors to frame acts of jihadist violence as expressions of faith. This failure to prosecute jihadists vigorously stems from several sources: a deep-rooted, Western reluctance to impugn religion; a cult of political correctness; and culturally naive wishful thinking. Viewing jihadists as crazy offers a comfortable conceit that ignores the stark reality that disaffected but sane Muslims are seduced by an ideology that espouses violent hatred of Western civilization.

LONE WOLF JIHADISTS

Jihadism is a supremacist ideology that seeks to bring about the establishment of a global Islamic state and the application of Islamic law, the Shari‘a. It relies both on political efforts and on acts of violence against “infidels.” According to terrorism specialist Steve Emerson’s review of Justice Department statistics,¹ radical Islamists account for more than 80 percent of all terrorist convictions in the United States since the 9/11 attacks.²

In the past, most jihadist violence was carried out by organized terror networks. Today, however, the most effective means of striking the United States is to convert and radicalize U.S. citizens and residents into carrying out terrorist attacks on their own. So-called “lone wolf” jihadists are typically radicalized through local Islamic institutions and the Internet (chat rooms, blogs, social networking sites, etc.) where religious teaching, propaganda videos, and bomb-

making directions are disseminated widely. Some go abroad for further instruction; others simply download a “how-to” manual.

Perhaps the most influential source of contemporary jihadist indoctrination was the late Anwar al-Awlaki, a U.S. citizen whose sermons have been directly linked to more than a dozen terrorist plots.³ His message, which lives on in cyberspace, is simple:

We will implement the rule of Allah on earth by the tip of the sword. We need men who are willing to go all the way and not hold back anything from Allah. The religion of Allah cannot be given victory by part-time service. This is not a weekend religion. The contract is to sell our souls to Allah. The compensation is paradise.⁴

While the lone wolf jihadist usually acts alone from an operational standpoint, he is part

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1 “Statistics on Unsealed International Terrorism and Terrorism-Related Convictions,” U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., accessed Jan. 5, 2012.

2 “Islamists Dominate DOJ’s List of Terror Prosecutions,” *Investigative Project News*, Mar. 9, 2011.

3 *The New York Times*, Oct. 10, 2011.

4 “In the Name of Allah,” *TheReligionofPeace.com*, accessed Jan. 5, 2012.

of a well-defined, Internet-based pack whose killings are often meticulously premeditated. He may plan the attacks on his own, but he does so with the instruction, support, and direction of a greater community of radicalized Islamists—and with the tacit approval of a significant percentage of Muslims (well over ten percent by most estimates)⁵ who admire Islamic terrorists. The Internet enables lone wolf jihadists to acquire the “networks of support and ideologies of validation”⁶ that fuel their transformation into killers. The November 2009 massacre at Fort Hood by U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, which left thirteen people dead and twenty-nine wounded, was apparently inspired by the defendant’s correspondence with Awlaki. Los Angeles-born al-Qaeda propagandist Adam Gadahn, known to

have a powerful influence on converts, later stated:

The mujahid brother Nidal Hasan has shown us what one righteous Muslim with an assault rifle can do for his religion and brothers in faith and has reminded us of how much pride and joy a single act of

resistance and courage can instill in the hearts of Muslims everywhere.⁷

In this, Hasan and his co-jihadists have succeeded, judging from the multitude of home-grown attacks on American soil that were foiled in 2011. Two American converts to Islam, Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif and Walli Mujahidh, were charged with “conspiracy to murder officers and agents of the United States.” Marine reservist Yonathan Melaku was indicted on charges of firing weapons at the Pentagon and other mili-

tary sites in northern Virginia.⁸ Army private Nasser Abdo was in the final stages of preparing another attack at Fort Hood when he was arrested.⁹ Emerson Begolly was arrested for posting bomb-making instructions on the Internet and attacking federal agents while his house was being searched.¹⁰ Khalid Aldawsari, a Saudi chemical engineering student, was arrested on charges of researching targets for attack, including the home of former president George W. Bush, and attempting to build a bomb.¹¹ Rezwan Ferdaus nearly succeeded in his plot to bomb the Pentagon and Capitol building.¹²

LEGAL INSANITY AND MENTAL INCOMPETENCE

There are two ways that a defendant who has undeniably killed or maimed someone without provocation can avoid prison—either win a verdict of not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI) or be continuously judged mentally incompetent to stand trial, both of which have the practical effect of landing him in a psychiatric facility. Psychiatric facilities have obvious advantages over prison; besides the day-to-day relative comfort, psychiatric facilities offer the defendant the opportunity for periodic appeal to assess his sanity. In the case of Omeed Aziz Popal, who ran down sixteen pedestrians in San Francisco, he is entitled to a release hearing every two years. Popal seems to prefer life at a psychiatric facility: When he was transferred to Fremont prison pending separate charges for the murder of a local resident, he asked, “Is there any way possible I can go back to the Napa hospital.”¹³ Yusef DeJarnette, who wounded two people in separate shootings, has been living in a psychiatric facility since he was deemed not guilty by reason of insanity. At a hearing,

The Internet enables lone wolf jihadists to acquire support that fuels their transformation into killers.

5 Daniel Pipes, “Counting Islamists,” DanielPipes.org, Oct. 8, 2008; *Arutz Sheva* (Beit El and Petah Tikva), Sept. 12, 2011; *al-Arabiya* (Dubai), Sept. 12, 2011.

6 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), chap. 1.

7 *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), Oct. 19, 2010.

8 WTOP FM (Washington, D.C.), July 25, 2011.

9 *ABC News*, July 29, 2011.

10 *Fox News*, Aug. 2, 2011.

11 FBI news release, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., Feb. 24, 2011; *Fox News*, Feb. 25, 2011.

12 *ABC News*, Sept. 29, 2011.

13 *Oakland (Calif.) Tribune*, Sept. 1, 2006.

Northcoast Behavioral Healthcare recommended DeJarnette be placed in a group home: “If he is released, the judge would be able to monitor him and set the conditions of his freedom.”¹⁴ Patrick Gott, a student of Islam whose actions briefly evoked fears of terrorism eight months after the 9/11 attacks, remains in state custody at the Feliciana Forensic Facility at Jackson. Doctors evaluate him regularly, and should they ever declare him sane and no longer a danger to himself and others, the law allows a judge to release him. Whether the jihadist appeals periodically to determine if he has recovered his “sanity” and hence tries for release, or the insanity plea results in superior living conditions, the salient issue is that jihadists are perceived as insane rather than driven by religious obligation in both the case law and in public perception. This misperception is self-perpetuating because as jihadists continue to be labeled insane, there is consequently a lack of preventive action as a result of misidentification of the actual motive.

A diminished capacity or “partial insanity” defense can be used to argue that the defendant’s mental condition at the time of the crime merits a less serious charge or reduced sentence though it does not constitute grounds for acquittal. Hammad Samana in 2008 plotted to attack U.S. military, Israeli, and Jewish facilities in California. The lone Muslim-born member of his cell, his sentence was shorter than his three fellow cell members because he had a smaller role in the plot and suffered from mental health issues.¹⁵ Samana was declared unfit to stand trial and placed in psychiatric care. He was eventually sentenced to seventy months in 2009 but received less than half the sentence of the other cell members because of his mental condition. “In light of Samana’s mental health issues at the time of the offense, such a disparity is warranted and justified,” Judge Carney said.¹⁶ Nadim Haque was declared not guilty of murder because he suffered from an abnormal condition

of the mind. He was found guilty of manslaughter instead of murder because he acted “while under the influence of extreme anger... The theory behind these defenses was that Haque’s traditional Muslim Indian upbringing, immigrant experience, and psychological condition strongly influenced his perception.”¹⁷

Although definitions of legal insanity vary from country to country (and, in the United States, from state to state), virtually all require that a person be unable to distinguish between legal right and wrong. Under U.S. federal law, an insanity defense requires that “at the time of the commission of the acts constituting the offense, the defendant, as a result of a severe mental disease or defect, was unable to appreciate the nature and quality or the wrongfulness of his acts.”¹⁸ Under federal legislation passed after John Hinckley, Jr.’s acquittal for shooting President Ronald Reagan, the burden of proof lies on the defense, which must show “clear and convincing” evidence of insanity. Hinckley enjoys unsupervised weekend furloughs as a result of his status hearings.¹⁹ The living conditions within the facility’s pleasant grounds are eminently more desirable than a life in prison. As Hinckley described in a *Penthouse* magazine interview shortly after his arrival, on a typical day at St. Elizabeth’s [Hospital]: “I see a therapist, answer mail, play my guitar, listen to music, play pool, watch television, eat lousy food, and take delicious medication.”²⁰

According to the U.S. Supreme Court, a defendant is competent to stand trial if he has “suf-

The insanity defense is employed in less than one percent of felony murder cases in the United States.

14 *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), Dec. 5, 2008.

15 *YNet News* (Tel Aviv), Mar. 6, 2009.

16 *The Orange County Register* (Santa Ana), Aug. 17, 2009.

17 *State v. Nadim Haque*, Maine Supreme Judicial Court, Portland, Feb. 16, 1999.

18 U.S. Code - Title 18: Crimes and Criminal Procedure, Sec. 17. Insanity Defense.

19 “Biography: John Hinckley, Jr.,” *American Experience*, Public Broadcasting Service, accessed Jan. 10, 2012.

20 “John Hinckley at St. Elizabeth Hospital: Still Seeking His Freedom,” University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, accessed Jan. 10, 2012.

INSANITY DEFENSES BY JIHADISTS

Jihadists have repeatedly won acquittals even when there is substantial evidence of ideological motivation.

ficient present ability to consult with his lawyer with a reasonable degree of rational understanding” and a “rational as well as factual understanding of the proceedings against him.”²¹ Such determinations are made by court-appointed psychiatrists, not by juries.

While the late Supreme Court justice Benjamin N. Cardozo famously maintained that someone who sincerely believes that God instructed him to kill is ipso facto suffering from an insane delusion,²² this so-called “deific decree” standard is not widely accepted. Although a case can be made that “someone who genuinely believes he has heard God’s voice command him to kill another... lacks the ability to reason about the moral quality of his action,”²³ this does not imply that

he is unaware of its illegality or its consequences. Absent compelling corroborating evidence of schizophrenia or other severe hallucinatory disorders, claiming to have received divine or other supernatural instructions is not ordinarily sufficient to convince a jury to acquit.

It is also important to bear in mind that the horrific nature of a crime alone is not sufficient evidence of a “severe mental disease or defect” (otherwise, cannibalistic killer Jeffrey Dahmer would have been acquitted). Because of these constrictions, the insanity defense is employed in less than one percent of felony murder cases in the United States and is successful in only a quarter of those.²⁴

While there is little reason to believe that recognized terror group operatives are any less maladjusted than lone wolves, insanity defenses by the former are rare (and rarely succeed). This may be due to the political component ascribed to an acknowledged terror group member, whose actions can be understood as political in nature. Recognized terror groups are generally considered to be in political rather than religious conflict with the West, and there is, therefore, a disassociation when this “war” is waged by a lone “soldier of God.” Thus, it is the solitary Muslim extremist taking it upon himself to carry out God’s will who tends to strike Western jurors, judges, and even forensic psychiatrists as crazy.

Most jihadists are too committed to their creed to plead insanity as this would be a rejection of the teachings that led them to commit murder. Zacarias Moussaoui, the convicted terrorist linked to the September 11 attacks, testified that he “rejects his court-appointed defense team’s theory that he is mentally ill.” Asked if he was crazy, Moussaoui said, “Thank God, I am not.”²⁵ Mohammed Bouyeri, Theo Van Gogh’s murderer, said at his trial in the Netherlands, “What moved me to do what I did was purely my faith. Islam compels me to cut off the head of anyone who insults Allah and the Prophet.”²⁶ Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad warned: “Brace yourselves, because the war with Muslims has just begun. Consider me only a first drop-let of the blood that will follow me.” The 31-year-old Pakistani immigrant justified his plot in the name of Islam, saying that “the Koran gives us the right to defend, and that’s all I’m doing.”²⁷

Defense attorneys are eager to magnify any history of mental illness, no matter how tenuous, in seeking to gain acquittals, avoid trial, or win reduced sentences for their jihadist clients.

21 *Dusky v. United States*, 362 U.S. 402, United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, St. Louis, no. 504, misc., Apr. 18, 1960.

22 Ralph Slovenko, *Psychiatry in Law/Law in Psychiatry* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 191; “Terrorism Trials and the Constitutionality of the Religious Insanity Defense,” Prawfsblawg blog (Fla.), Jan. 6, 2010.

23 Morris B. Hoffman and Stephen J. Morse, “The Insanity Defense Goes Back on Trial,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 2006.

24 “Insanity Defense FAQs,” *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, accessed Jan. 5, 2011.

25 CNN, Apr. 14, 2006.

26 “In the Name of Allah,” *TheReligionofPeace.com*, accessed Jan. 5, 2012.

27 *The New York Post*, Oct. 6, 2010.

They will cite mental instability,²⁸ depression,²⁹ lack of medication,³⁰ post-traumatic stress disorder, hearing voices,³¹ and delusions of persecution³² to name a few.

Not guilty by reason of insanity: Although jihadists who plead insanity may have some history of mental illness, or at least a host of relatives testifying to it, this alone is not sufficient evidence of innocence. Even when a radical Islamist who goes on a murderous rampage happens to be a diagnosed schizophrenic, it does not necessarily follow that he was legally insane in commission of the act—it could be that his ideology drove him to it even if his illness initially facilitated the underlying radicalization.

In principle, evidence of jihadist indoctrination should render an insanity plea untenable because it puts forth a compelling, presumed motive that the defense is obliged to disprove with “clear and convincing” evidence. This is very difficult to do even if the defendant has a history of mental illness. A crack addict with schizophrenia who kills someone in the course of a robbery will have a hard time disproving that crack addiction was the motivational driver unless the prosecution omits or downplays the fact that the defendant is a crack addict.

In practice, jihadists have repeatedly fared well³³ and won acquittals even when there is substantial evidence of ideological motivation.

- In 2002, Nabil Ouldeddine was found not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI)

28 *Le Journal de Montréal*, June 14, 2007; “Montreal Muslim Who Killed His Ex-Muslim Brother: All Those Who Are Not Muslims Are Satan,” Jihad Watch, trans., June 14, 2007.

29 “Minneapolis Carjacker Mentally Ill, Suffers from Depression and Hasn’t Being Taking His Medication,” Jihad Watch, Feb. 1, 2007.

30 Daniel Pipes, “More Incidents of Denying Islamist Terrorism,” DanielPipes.org, updated Aug. 7, 2009.

31 *The Times Picayune* (New Orleans), May 20, 2005.

32 *Local London*, Apr. 8, 2005; *Air Force Times*, May 20, 2005; *Free Republic* (Fresno), July 11, 2005; *CBS News*, Feb. 11, 2009.

33 “Insanity Defense FAQs,” Public Broadcasting Service, accessed Jan. 16, 2012.



The absurdity of the current approach to jihadist trials can be seen in the case of Carlos Bledsoe. On trial for killing U.S. Army recruiter William Long, Bledsoe complained of undue pressure to plead insanity: “I wasn’t insane or post-traumatic.” The killing was “justified according to Islamic laws and the Islamic religion,” Bledsoe wrote.

for stabbing an Orthodox Jew twenty times on a London bus. Although he later told psychiatrists that the voice of a woman named Jennifer commanded him to kill, the reason he gave to the police officers who arrested him was far more prosaic: “Israel are [*sic*] the murderers. They kill women and children, so I stabbed him.”³⁴

- In 2003, Yusef DeJarnette was found NGRI for wounding two people in a series of random shootings from his bicycle in Shaker Heights, Ohio. In his home, police found writings conveying his hatred of white people, a poster of Osama bin Laden, and books about making gun silencers. He was clear-headed enough to avoid capture until police traced the bullets back to him.³⁵

34 *The Guardian* (London), Sept. 18, 2002.

35 *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), Dec. 3, 2003.

- In 2008, Omeed Aziz Popal was found NGRI for injuring sixteen pedestrians with his SUV in a long rampage that ended outside the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco. Mike Mahoney, the police inspector who investigated the case, scoffed at the acquittal: “He knew exactly what he did. He told me exactly what he did.”³⁶

- In 2005, Muslim convert Patrick Gott was found NGRI for opening fire inside a New Orleans airport, killing one woman. Gott, who carried a Qur’an and chanted “Allah!” during the shooting, later told police he was enraged when someone made fun of his turban.³⁷ Although the defense produced evidence of severe mental illness, their argument that this illness led him to commit the crime was

weak. Two forensic psychiatrists testified only that “it is more likely than not” that Gott was “psychotic, delusionally paranoid, and experiencing auditory hallucinations at the time of the shooting,”³⁸ hardly meeting the burden of

proof normally required of the defense.

The insanity defense is not always allowed by judges. In 2009, Muzzammil S. “Mo” Hassan beheaded his wife after she filed for divorce. He later claimed that he was emotionally “out of control” when he killed her. He requested and underwent psychiatric examination, but the judge in the case ruled that his lawyers could not use an insanity defense due to the delay by the defense in presenting their case.³⁹

The Fort Hood killer’s civilian defense law-

yer, John P. Galligan, initially said that an insanity defense was under consideration although it was never clear whether Hasan himself was willing to make such a plea.⁴⁰ However, Galligan backed off after a three-member military mental-health panel evaluated Hasan and details of his methodical preparations in the months before the massacre came to light. “That much planning implies he had a clear understanding of his actions and he understood the consequences,” said Anthony Ng, former president of the American Association of Emergency Psychiatry. “It’s possible to be mentally ill [and] still be held liable for your actions if you’re aware of the consequences.”⁴¹

Incompetent to stand trial: Winning a ruling of incompetence to stand trial has the same practical result as an NGRI verdict—the defendant is confined to a psychiatric facility. The facts of the case are not relevant—the defendant’s mental state at the time of evaluation is at issue.

- In 2009, Hammad Samana was declared unfit to stand trial on charges of plotting to attack U.S. military, Israeli, and Jewish facilities in California. He is now in psychiatric care.⁴²

- In 2010, a Paris court ruled for the second time that Adel Amastaibou is a paranoid schizophrenic and unfit to stand trial for sadistically stabbing his neighbor to death in 2003.⁴³ “I have killed my Jew. I will go to paradise,” Amastaibou declared to police after the murder.⁴⁴

Diminished capacity defenses: Diminished capacity or responsibility defenses are typically used to cast doubt on whether the defendant acted with premeditation and intent to kill. Such

The insanity plea strategy does not appear to work as well if the defendant is uncooperative.

36 *The San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug. 1, 2008.

37 Associated Press, May 23, 2002.

38 *The Times Picayune*, May 20, 2005.

39 *The Buffalo News*, Sept. 19, 2009, Aug. 13, 2010.

40 *The New York Times*, July 20, 2011.

41 *Medscape News*, Nov. 5, 2010.

42 Agence France-Presse, Mar. 9, 2009.

43 *YNet News* (Tel Aviv), Jan. 5, 2010.

44 *The Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 21, 2010; Mark Steyn, “Needing to wake up, West just closes its eyes,” *The Chicago Sun-Times*, Feb. 26, 2006.

defenses can result in conviction on lesser charges.

- In October 2010, a judge sentenced Hosam Smadi to twenty-four years in prison for attempting to blow up a downtown Dallas skyscraper—less than the thirty years allowable under his plea agreement with prosecutors—after hearing defense testimony that he suffered from schizophrenia.⁴⁵

- In 2007, Bosnian war veteran Asim Cejanovic attempted to smuggle a bag filled with explosives into the U.S. embassy in Vienna. Under interrogation, he fingered Mehmed Djudjic, who had long-standing ties to Wahhabi, jihadist circles in Bosnia, for giving him the backpack.⁴⁶ On the first day of his trial, Cejvanovic declared that he had important information about Wahhabi extremists that he wished to “offer” the United States.⁴⁷ However, taking note of Cejvanovic’s psychiatric treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder, the judge ruled that there was insufficient evidence to convict him of plotting to bomb anyone as his frequent telephone and e-mail contact with the embassy prior to the incident was “not a typical strategy for somebody who tries to enter the U.S. embassy to detonate a bomb.”⁴⁸ The court sentenced him to fifteen months in prison for illegal possession of explosives.

45 “Failed Dallas Bomber Is Latest in a Long Line of Jihadists Claiming Mental Illness While on Trial,” Jihad Watch, Oct. 20, 2010.

46 Anes Alic, “Investigation into Backgrounds of Bosnians Involved in Vienna Plot,” *Terrorism Focus* (Jamestown Foundation, Washington, D.C.), Oct. 12, 2007.

47 “Vienna Court Sees No Terrorism Plot against U.S. Embassy,” U.S. Embassy, Vienna, Apr. 9, 2008, released by Wikileaks, Aug. 30, 2011.

48 Ibid.

Photo will not display.

A deep-rooted, Western reluctance to impugn religion may be behind the aversion of prosecutors to raise ideology in the trials of jihadists. In 2006, Mohammed Reza Taheri-Azar cited the Qur'an as the reason he drove an SUV into a crowd of people at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Such admissions should make an insanity plea untenable.

- In 2008, Khalid Alzghoul brutally beat nine people with a hammer at a Vancouver gay-pride march while screaming, “This is judgment day!”⁴⁹ After his history of mental illness was raised in court, Alzghoul was acquitted of hate-crime charges and sentenced to two and half years in jail for simple assault.

- In 2005, Jordanian-born Ali Warrayat drove his car into a Home Depot, blasting Arabic music with a Qur'an and a Palestinian flag in the trunk, hoping to set fire to the flammable goods department. After a court-appointed doctor diagnosed Warrayat with schizophrenia, he was sentenced to just five years in prison.⁵⁰

The insanity plea strategy does not appear to work as well if the defendant is uncooperative. In 2006, Mohammed Reza Taheri-Azar said

49 *Xtra!* (Vancouver), Nov. 19, 2009.

50 *The Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), Oct. 24, 2006.

that the Qur'an gave him permission to drive a jeep into a crowd of people at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, injuring nine, so as "to punish the U.S. government, the enemy of my brothers and sisters in religion."⁵¹ Taheri-Azar's lawyer pleaded for leniency on the grounds that "a severe mental illness" affected his actions,⁵² but the defendant's lack of remorse led the judge to give him the maximum possible sentence.

OVERZEALOUS DEFENSE, UNDER- ZEALOUS PROSECUTION

Although each of the above legal strategies hinges on different judicial actors (juries, forensic psychiatrists, and judges, respectively), all three have proven successful for jihadist defendants. So much so, in fact, that jihadists have a legitimate gripe about the U.S. judicial system—they are coming under undue pressure from public defenders to plead insanity.

This was evident in the case of Carlos

Bledsoe, a convert to Islam who now calls himself Abdulhakim Muhammad.⁵³ Bledsoe opened fire on a military recruiting station in Arkansas, killing one soldier and wounding another. After his capture, he promptly confessed to carrying out what he called a "jihadi operation" and later offered to plead guilty to

sense" for a mentally competent defendant to plead guilty to capital murder charges.⁵⁴ Interestingly, he was not ruled mentally unfit to stand trial—he was considered legally competent except for his desire to claim responsibility for murder in the name of God. Bledsoe's lawyers decided to mount an insanity defense over his objections and called to the witness stand forensic psychiatrist Shawn Agharkar, who testified that the defendant suffered from delusions of grandeur and persecution.⁵⁵

Bledsoe protested vehemently, insisting that the shooting was an act of war and claiming loyalty to al-Qaeda. "I wasn't insane or post-traumatic, nor was I forced to do this act," Bledsoe wrote to the judge, adding that it was "justified according to Islamic laws and the Islamic religion."⁵⁶ While Bledsoe was ultimately allowed to plead guilty in exchange for prosecutors dropping their demand for the death penalty, the spectacle of a defendant being forced to disown his ideological convictions and mount an insanity defense is striking.

While the proclivity of lawyers for jihadists to mount mental-illness defenses is troubling, this in itself is not the problem. Criminal defendants are entitled to a vigorous defense under U.S. law, and this is exactly what their lawyers have striven to do. More troubling is why lawyers are succeeding. There is little particularly new or imaginative about their arguments—they have been effective because jihadists have not been subjected to spirited prosecution as a recognized group of offenders.

Time and again, prosecutors have failed to position jihadist defendants within a larger community of like-minded extremists carrying out similar acts around the world even though defendants frequently affirm their jihadist motivations during their attacks (particularly with the trademark phrase "Allahu Akbar!" or "God is great!"), upon arrest, while incarcerated, or in the course of court proceedings. In addition, they often have Islamist indoctrination material in their

Aggressive prosecution of jihadists is at odds with how some Washington policymakers choose to frame the Islamist threat.

murder charges.

Astonishingly, his lawyers refused his request, and the judge ruled that he was not mentally competent to make the decision himself. Legal pundits explained that it would not "make

51 *The News and Observer* (Raleigh), Mar. 16, 2006.

52 *Ibid.*, Mar. 6, 2007.

53 *The Huffington Post* (New York), July 25, 2011.

54 *The New York Times*, Jan. 22, 2010.

55 Associated Press, July 22, 2011.

56 *The New York Times*, Jan. 22, 2010.

on-line presence or among their possessions. These identifying elements constitute the characteristics of the syndrome.

The two trials of Naveed Haq underscore how important this can be to the jury's verdict. In July 2006, Haq gunned down six people at the offices of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, killing one. In prison telephone calls to relatives, he later said he was "proud" of the murderous rampage, calling himself "a soldier of Islam" and "a martyr" who is "going to go to heaven."⁵⁷ When Haq's lawyers put forth an insanity defense in his first trial, prosecutors chose not to present the recorded calls as evidence, apparently fearing that they would make Haq sound crazy and support the insanity plea. The jury deadlocked, and a mistrial was declared. However, when this evidence was presented in his second trial, Haq was convicted.⁵⁸ When jurors are informed of the context in which a jihadist attack is perpetrated, they are more likely to reject an insanity plea. "The jury held that holding extremist views does not make you insane, but it does make you dangerous," victim Carol Goldman stated at a news conference after the verdict.⁵⁹

PUBLIC MISPERCEPTIONS

Deprived of relevant information about the acquired radicalization and virtual socialization underlying jihadism, jurors and judges alike are more prone to accept insanity pleas. The brutality of these crimes and the pursuit of heavenly rewards that motivate them seem crazy. Who in his right mind would kill people indiscriminately? Juries are rarely asked to consider whether the behavior they are evaluating fits a pattern exhibited by thousands of others in the same on-line community. Likewise, prosecutors and judges are reluctant to dwell on the religious

beliefs of defendants. The First Amendment protects the free exercise of religion and implies that courts are not allowed to consider whether a person's religious beliefs are false.⁶⁰ However, the architects of the U.S. Constitution likely never envisioned that religion would one day be used by an identifiable segment of a population to attack Americans. While aggressive prosecution of jihadists can hardly be considered a threat to the free exercise of religion, it, nevertheless, is at odds with how some policymakers in Washington choose publicly to frame the Islamist threat.

In its zeal to avoid the appearance of impugning Islam, the Obama administration adopted a new national security policy, two years in the making, which uses the general term "violent extremists" to avoid emphasis on the threat posed by radical Islam.⁶¹ The Department of Homeland Security's secretary Janet Napolitano replaced "terrorism" with "man-caused" disasters⁶² while the administration's national security strategy replaced the term "Islamic terrorism" with "violent extremism."⁶³ In May 2010, Attorney General Eric Holder's acrobatic refusal to concede during a congressional hearing that radical Islam might be a factor fueling homegrown terrorism became a minor YouTube hit.⁶⁴

This reframing is reflective of a broader trend in the mainstream media. The official guidelines of the American Society of Professional Journalists recommend "avoid[ing] using word combinations such as 'Islamic terrorist' or 'Muslim ex-

Law enforcement, hampered by fear of profiling, publicly maintains that religion is incidental to crime.

57 "Crazy for Jihad," *The Washington Times*, Dec. 17, 2009.

58 Ibid.

59 United Press International, Dec. 16, 2009.

60 First Amendment, U.S. Constitution.

61 "Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," White House, Washington D.C., Aug. 2011.

62 *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), Mar. 16, 2009.

63 Stuart Gottlieb, "War on Terror: Obama Softened the Language But Hardened Muslim Hearts," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 14, 2010.

64 Eric Holder, testimony before the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, Washington, D.C., May 13, 2010.



In February 2009, Muzzammil Hassan, CEO of Bridges TV, intended as a media outlet for moderate Muslims, beheaded his wife who had filed for divorce. His claim of being emotionally “out of control” when he killed her was dismissed by the judge. As Anthony Ng, former president of the American Association of Emergency Psychiatry wrote, “It’s possible to be mentally ill [and] still be held liable for your actions if you’re aware of the consequences.”

a *Christian Science Monitor* staff writer, the “only apparent connection between Abdo and Hasan is that they are both Muslim-Americans who served in the U.S. army.”⁶⁸ This attitude makes it ever more challenging to identify cases.

Such commentaries display a strong subtext of wishful thinking. No one wants to believe that any sane Muslim serving in the U.S. army was radicalized through on-line socialization with al-Qaeda into massacring his comrades. Many refuse to accept that “a true American, [who] plays football, helps his grandmother and mows the lawns of his neighbors,” as Bledsoe was described by his lawyer,⁶⁹ could radicalize to the point of murdering U.S. service-

men without being crazy.

tremist” and suggest defining “jihad” as the desire “to exert oneself for the good of Islam and to better oneself.”⁶⁵ The effect of such guidelines is to scrub public discussion of the jihadist threat. Fearful of reinforcing the “Muslim terrorist” stereotype, reporters often minimize the religious component of violent actions by Muslims and ignore evidence of Islamist indoctrination. This was particularly evident after the Fort Hood massacre. “I cringe that he’s a Muslim... I think he’s probably just a nut case,” *Newsweek*’s Evan Thomas said of Hasan.⁶⁶ Joe Klein of *Time* magazine decried attempts to argue that the massacre “was somehow a direct consequence of his Islamic beliefs.”⁶⁷ In the words of Warren Richey,

men without being crazy.

Law enforcement, hampered by bad policies and fear of profiling, assumes (or at least publicly maintains) that religion is incidental to crime. As a Seattle FBI agent explains, “Ideology is less important than action... it does not matter if it is Christian identity or radical Islam. We have to focus on these guys committing crimes.”⁷⁰ Of course, Christian extremists are not carrying out terror attacks the world over. Despite concerns about antiabortion violence by Christian fundamentalists in the United States, such attacks accounted for only nine deaths since 1970 (all of the perpetrators were convicted; none pled insanity).⁷¹ In contrast, it is estimated

65 “Guidelines for Countering Racial, Ethnic and Religious Profiling,” Society of Professional Journalists, Indianapolis, Oct. 6, 2001.

66 Charles Krauthammer, “Medicalizing Mass Murder,” *The Washington Post*, Nov. 13, 2009.

67 Joe Klein, “Bigoted Religious Extremists,” *Time Magazine*, Nov. 7, 2009.

68 *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 29, 2011.

69 CNN, June 5, 2009.

70 *The Seattle Times*, June 25, 2011.

71 Associated Press, May 31, 2009; Global Terrorism Database, University of Maryland, College Park, Md., accessed Jan. 16, 2012.

that 51,319 people have died at the hands of Islamic terrorists in the past seven and a half years alone, and more than 84,323 have been injured.⁷²

Unfortunately, juries are not asked to consider whether the behavior they are evaluating fits a pattern exhibited by thousands of others in the same worldwide community. Only when the jihadist is a member of a known terror group will this commonality be recognized and the insanity defense rejected since it is perceived as a hostile, political act rather than an expression of religious belief.

Whether stemming from ignorance, political correctness, or wishful thinking, these misperceptions effectively efface a critical element of investigating and punishing crime—motivation. If law enforcement intends to ignore the motivation, commonalities, and shared characteristics of jihadist attacks, it cannot possibly hope to prevent them. If jurors are not informed of such things, they cannot deliver impartial justice.

CONCLUSION

Michael Leiter, National Counterterrorism Center director, has bemoaned al-Qaeda propaganda “designed to inspire like-minded individuals to conduct attacks in their home countries,”⁷³ but this begs the question of what made them “like-minded” in the first place. The vast majority of those who answer this call are not crazy; they are radicalized.

Melvin Bledsoe shed a great deal of light on the indoctrination of his son Carlos in recent testimony before the House Homeland Security

Committee.⁷⁴ Carlos converted to Islam and changed his name after going off to college in Nashville (hardly a hotbed of terrorism) and frequenting local mosques in the fall of 2003. On visits home, he tried to convert members of his family, even tearing down Martin Luther King’s picture from the wall. In 2005, his family visited him, only to find that he had dropped out of school and turned his dog loose in the woods, claiming that the animal was considered impure under Islamic law.⁷⁵

Bledsoe blamed his son’s radicalization on Muslim groups in Nashville that converted him and facilitated his travel abroad, as well as the culture of political correctness that allows Islamists to organize freely so long as they abide by the letter of the law. “Fear of stepping on a special minority population’s toes, even as a segment of that population wants to stamp out America and everything we stand for,”⁷⁶ is what radicalized Carlos, he testified. It is this fear that drives the misguided efforts of media and politicians to rationalize jihadist acts as born of insanity.

U.S. policymakers’ strenuous efforts to deny that radical Islam is a driver of jihadist violence have served only to compromise the American people’s right to thorough investigation and vigorous prosecution of those who threaten their security. As homegrown terror plots continue to proliferate in the years ahead, law enforcement must be trained to recognize the telltale signs of jihadist radicalization and freely report their findings to the public while prosecutors must not shy away from putting the belief systems fueling the violence on trial. The legal definition of insanity should be changed to exclude more explicitly those who are indoctrinated to believe that God wants them to murder innocent men, women, and children.



72 Total numbers obtained from Worldwide Incidents Tracking System (WITS), National Counterterrorism Center, Washington, D.C., for the period Jan. 1, 2004–Sept. 30, 2011, accessed Jan. 16, 2012; “Islamic Terror on American Soil,” *TheReligionofPeace.com*, accessed Jan. 7, 2012.

73 Dan Lungren, “A Matter of Congressional Oversight,” U.S. House, Washington, D.C., Mar. 10, 2011.

74 Melvin Bledsoe, testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., Mar. 10, 2011.

75 Ibid.

76 *The New York Daily News*, Mar. 13, 2011.

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Free Markets Can Transform the Middle East

by Daniel Doron

As the high hopes for a brave new Middle East fade rapidly, Western policymakers must recognize that promoting market economics and its inevitable cultural changes are far more critical to the region's well-being than encouraging free elections or resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition to producing material prosperity, diffusing power, and curbing tyranny, economic freedom promotes social, cultural, and religious changes conducive to democracy and tolerance. It enhances personal responsibility and social involvement and instills good work habits and accountability. It builds a civil society with a stake in peace. If there is to be any hope of lasting peace and stability in the Middle East, nothing less will do.

BACKGROUND

Traditional Muslim monarchs and revolutionary military officers differed in the particulars of governance, but all established nearly total (if often indirect) government domination of the economy. Economic opportunities were seen as privileges to be dispensed by the ruler, not by the invisible hand of the market. In more "modern" Arab states, such as Egypt, bloated public sectors and inefficient welfare policies created quiescent constituencies. Bureaucratic red tape and selectively enforced regulations stymied entrepreneurship, but they added value politically for the ruler by ensuring that administrative connections were necessary to accumulate wealth and power. No dictator wanted properly functioning credit markets, a dynamic educational system, or foreign investment if it meant that his control over his subjects would be weakened. Although the human

rights abuses of Arab regimes are legendary, cooptation was no less important than coercion in dissuading citizens from attempting regime changes, peacefully or by force.

Historically, future "Third World" leaders became enamored with radical Fabian socialism in the post-World War II era as were many Western elites. Upon coming to power in their home countries, these leaders nationalized the means of production, creating government-dominated, politicized economies with huge concentrations of political and economic power in the hands of the rulers, the bureaucracy, and a few well-connected oligarchs. This killed competition and efficiency and increased nepotism, waste, and corruption. It also led to intensified political strife with an ever increasing struggle over government handouts.

In Egypt, for example, when the young officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser seized power in 1952 from King Farouk, they looked for a Third World model to emulate and chose socialism. Egypt's economy quickly deteriorated, and the state became dysfunctional. Heavy taxation and overwhelming bureaucratic interference decimated the Egyptian middle class that had been in the forefront of commerce and entrepreneurship, of mod-

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eration and tolerance. This reached critical dimensions after Egyptian Jews and most foreigners, English, French, and Italians, who had been the backbone of Egyptian entrepreneurship, were expelled.

In many Arab states, huge amounts of foreign aid were channeled through the ruling classes who stole much of it. Competition for government handouts radicalized and fragmented politics, often making them violent and corrupt. The legal system became discriminatory and ineffectual, so that citizens lost respect for government and the law.

As the middle class declined, so did civil society. The ruling class could no longer rely on support from a more stable and usually less radical middle class and its mediating institutions. It had to face an increasingly restive “street,” composed of students and their hangers-on, the unemployables, who were full of grievances and frustration and tempted by the siren songs of various radical groups. The young were constantly incited to riot, and they often did so on Friday after their prayers at the mosques where they were riled up by radical imams, many of them members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The intellectual class and its organizations, such as the academic, media,

writers’ and lawyers’ associations became captive to radicals, too. They became dominated by jingoists, communists, socialists, or Islamists, who were far more extreme than their Western counterparts because the Arab world lacked a classic, liberal tradition that could mitigate radicalism.

The wealth gap between the ruling classes, their cronies, and most of the population widened into a deep chasm. The dysfunctional state failed to adequately provide even the most elementary services. The blessings inherited from colonial rule—law and order, respect for property rights, functioning health and educational services, networks of commerce—also fell apart with time. The discontent and opposition, bred by dysfunctional governments, were suppressed by ever growing security services—witness the re-

cent carnage in Syria, Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen.

Lack of economic growth and increased impoverishment also required growing reliance on welfare systems, which in turn became a constant drain on governments’ budgets. Governments resorted to more and more deficit spending, generating high inflation. Higher prices further impoverished the poor and provoked an intensifying cycle of frustrations and rage as the regimes could not afford the punishing costs and political divisions a welfare state exacts. Socialism turned out to be an unmitigated disaster for the Arabs.

According to the U.N.’s 2009 *Arab Human Development Report*, Arab countries are less industrialized today than they were in 1970.¹ This combination of oversized governments and underperforming economies was sustainable only through the infusion of vast oil revenues and foreign aid from great powers attracted to the region’s enormous strategic value. Vast income from oil and plentiful foreign aid gave Arab states little incentive to support the growth of vibrant private sectors, whatever the cost to their constituents. Economic reform very often served to tilt the playing field, not level it. Beneath a veneer of propriety, the economic liberalization launched by Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak was a mechanism to enrich his clan and cronies and for ensuring the succession of his son, Gamal. Privatized assets were sold to cronies by way of rubber stamp loans from state-controlled financial markets and banks.

Likewise, Arab dictatorships exploited the Israeli-Palestinian dispute to legitimize their severe curtailment of civil liberties and justify their massive military budgets, which devoured resources that could have been better used to promote economic growth. Incessant anti-Zionist indoctrination and ugly anti-Semitic calumnies also served to deflect public anger away from their repressive governments and provide an outlet for citizens to safely blow off steam, yet ultimately failed to blind the Arabs to their own economic and social misery.

Some impediments to representative government in the Arab world, however, are no less cul-

In many Arab states, huge amounts of foreign aid were channeled through the ruling classes who stole much of it.

1 *Arab Human Development Report 2009* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2009). p. 103.

tural than political. Islamic strictures concerning divine sovereignty, women's rights, and other religions are inimical to democracy as are traditional, patriarchal social norms prevalent in Arab society. However, the democratization of Indonesia, the world's most populous majority Muslim country, suggests that Islam is not necessarily an insurmountable barrier to gradual political freedom. Indonesian democracy evolved in the wake of growing economic prosperity, generated mostly by a large Chinese Buddhist minority. This mollified the country's conflict ridden politics and helped produce a peace-oriented civil society. Islam may not entirely rule out democratic evolution, but it certainly makes economic growth and prosperity all the more essential.

THE YOUTH BULGE

While the precise causes of the 2011 uprisings are a matter of some debate, demography played a major role. Two to three decades ago, a rapid reduction in child-mortality rates outpaced the decline in birth rates, creating a demographic bubble that makes today's young adults the Arab equivalent of American baby boomers. About 60 percent of the population in the Arab world is below the age of thirty,² nearly double the figure for the Group of Seven developed industrial countries.³

A youth bulge can promote growth and prosperity. According to the World Bank, large youth populations create "a demographic window of opportunity in which economies can benefit from a majority of individuals entering their productive peak, while the share of the population that is very young and elderly still remains fairly small."⁴



Chronically under- or unemployed 20 to 30-somethings are fueling social and political upheaval across the Middle East. The youth unemployment rate is 24 percent in the Middle East compared to a world average of 13 percent. Most youth are too educated to consider working in manual labor, so they remain dependent on their parents.

However, as Americans came to realize in the 1960s, a disproportionately large population of young adults can cause civil unrest since even a growing economy cannot easily accommodate too large a cohort of youngsters. Diminishing opportunities for satisfactory employment often cause growing disaffection among the young. Researchers have found a strong correlation between large youth populations and civil conflict. According to one study, countries where youths aged fifteen to twenty-nine made up at least 40 percent of the adult population were more than twice as likely to experience a major domestic conflict as other countries.⁵ If the economy is unable to provide a minimal threshold of employment for them, some form of unrest is nearly inevitable.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The Arab uprisings erupted amid record high levels of unemployment in the region, particularly

4 *Youth—An Undervalued Asset: Towards a New Agenda in the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, Sept. 2007), p. i.

5 Richard P. Cincotta, Robert Engelman and Daniele Anastasion, *The Security Demographic: Population and Civil Conflict after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Population Action International, 2003).

2 *The New York Times*, Mar. 18, 2011.

3 *Ibid.*, Feb. 3, 2011.

**Social alienation,
sexual frustration,
and idleness make
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by Islamists.**

for young adults. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the youth unemployment rate is 24 percent in the Middle East and 30 percent in the Arab states of North Africa, against a world average of 13 percent.⁶ This is an outgrowth of deep structural problems, not a temporary spike due to economic downturns. Despite the fact that many Arab countries experienced an

economic boom from 2003 to 2008, this barely put a dent in the unemployment rate.

Consequently, many Arab men are unemployed or underemployed well into their mid-thirties. This forces them to put off marriage as they cannot afford housing and the obligatory dowry

traditionally paid to the bride.⁷ The financial burden on young men is compounded by their traditional duty to support their parents and siblings in extended families, by hyper-urbanization, soaring real estate prices, and the fact that so few women enter the work force. According to the ILO, the Middle East and North Africa have the world's lowest female employment-to-population rate, at 19 percent and 21 percent, against an international average of 49 percent.⁸

Growing unemployment is preventing a generation of youth from maturing with dignity. Most are too educated to consider working in manual labor, so they remain dependent on their parents. "Youth are marginalized from an opportunity to graduate into adulthood and to become independent, self-respecting human beings who are just able to do the normal things in life, like getting married and having a home," explained Soraya Salti, regional director of the Amman-based non-governmental organization Injaz al-Arab, in a 2009 interview.⁹

Because marriage is the only legitimate outlet for sexual gratification in Arab Muslim societies (with few exceptions, the sexes are strictly separated), the humiliation of joblessness is compounded by intense sexual frustration. "In the Muslim world, casual sex, Western-style, doesn't exist," notes historian Bernard Lewis. "If a young man wants sex, there are only two possibilities—marriage and the brothel. You have these vast numbers of young men growing up without the money either for the brothel or the bride-price, with raging sexual desire."¹⁰

The inferior status and mistreatment of women, their lack of education and limited contact with the outside world, the practice of polygamy, which allows men to easily divorce their wives and have four wives and additional concubines, cannot make for happy relationships between married couples. So even when an Arab man finally gets married, this does not secure contentment or happiness. This situation has grave consequences for society and the body politics.

The combination of social alienation, sexual frustration, and idleness makes Arab youth extraordinarily susceptible to political mobilization, especially by Islamists (who can at least offer sexual gratification in the afterlife) but also by various private armies and terrorist groups. Waging war can be an attractive outlet for frustrations of all kinds.

COMMUNICATIONS

Popular demonstrations and labor strikes erupted occasionally in the past in the Arab states, especially Egypt. Though Mubarak was intent on preserving his family's grip on power, he tolerated such displays of discontent because the relatively secular and educated activists had little support from, or even contact with, the more traditional masses. Cracking down with force from time to time when the opposition—especially Islamist groups—breached certain red lines and adding

6 *Global Employment Trends 2011* (Geneva: International Labor Office, 2011), p. 62.

7 Hoda Rashad, Magued Osman, and Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi, "Marriage in the Arab World," The Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C., 2005.

8 *Global Employment Trends 2011*, pp. 63-4, 66.

9 "Extended Interview: Soraya Salti," *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, June 23, 2009.

10 David Horowitz, interview with Bernard Lewis, "A Mass Expression of Outrage against Injustice," *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 25, 2011.

palliative concessions as needed were usually sufficient to thwart serious political challenges. In 2011, however, the demonstrators exhibited an unusual fearlessness in the face of government reprisals, first in Tunisia, then across the Arab world.

Technology played a major role in the Arab uprisings. Al-Jazeera's television coverage of the Tunisian uprising that followed the "martyrdom" of Muhammad Bouazizi, the street vendor who set himself on fire sparking the upheavals, had a riveting effect on Arab youth. Atypically, various groups from cosmopolitan feminists to radical Islamists and doctrinaire socialists began organizing around a united set of demands, often employing the same slogans. The rapid spread of cell phones in recent years enabled protestors everywhere to film and publicize abuses. While news of the late Syrian president Hafez Assad's brutal 1982 mass murder in Hama took weeks to reach regional and international media outlets, video footage of the same regime shooting protestors in 2011 spread across the globe within hours. With fellow Arabs and the outside world transfixed by televised images of unspeakable brutality, activists quickly came to understand that their rulers could no longer retaliate with impunity.

ISLAMISTS

The fact that these agitated youngsters confined themselves initially to nonviolent methods raised many hopes in the West that the collapse of Arab dictatorships would trigger peaceful transitions to democracy. However, the liberal activists who played the lead role in organizing the uprisings have since been marginalized. Though their bravery inspired the masses to rise up, the masses were soon embracing more traditional saviors.

All of the major Arab uprisings have bolstered the position of Islamists. In Tunisia, Islamists won roughly 40 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections following the overthrow of Ben Ali. In Morocco, where the monarchy defused unrest by introducing political reforms, the Islamist Justice and Development Party won a plurality of parliamentary seats and captured the post of prime minister. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood and more radical Salafi Islamists won over two-thirds of the

seats in parliament. Abdelhakim Belhadj, chairman of the Tripoli Military Council, is head of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. The Syrian National Council opposed to President Bashar al-Assad is dominated by Islamists. All of them have been welcomed by Western officials despite the Islamists' long-standing bitter animosity to the West and its values and their open declarations that they would like to rid their countries of any Western influence.

EGYPT AS BELLWETHER

Egypt, the most populous and culturally influential Arab country, is both a harbinger and catalyst of regional political trends. One of the few Arab states with a cohesive national identity and a civil society of sorts, the overthrow of Mubarak should have been an ideal setting for the Arab world's first successful transition to democracy. Instead, it may well prove to be a cautionary tale about the obstacles to democratization likely to surface if and when other Arab regimes fall.

As in Tunisia and Libya, the breakdown of Egypt's regime was facilitated by a split in the ruling elite. Though nominally a democratic republic, real power in Egypt was shared by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the National Democratic Party of President Mubarak and his cronies.

Mubarak's so-called economic liberalization initiatives greatly strained his relations with the military, which opposed a hereditary presidential succession. Moreover, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi and most other senior Egyptian military leaders were trained in Soviet military academies during the reign of President Gamal Abdel Nasser when Egypt was a loyal client of the USSR. They have a fundamentally statist view of government and little affinity for free markets and the private sector. The military controls a sprawling conglomerate of commercial enterprises estimated

Televised images of regime brutality showed activists that their rulers could no longer retaliate with impunity.

to comprise at least 10 percent of the economy, dominating industry and tourism in particular. These quasi-governmental companies paid no taxes under Mubarak, and their operations were not subject to parliamentary oversight, enabling senior military officers to amass enormous personal fortunes and build loyal patronage networks. The generals would have opposed any liberalization, but Mubarak's reforms were particularly intolerable as they were empowering a rival, civilian elite beholden to the president's family.

This is partly why SCAF ultimately abandoned Mubarak—first by refusing to suppress the demonstrations that erupted in January 2011, then by conspiring to remove him and green-lighting his trial for murder. The revolution in Tahrir Square simply reestablished the military as the sole authority in Egypt, albeit ostensibly for a transitional period.

SCAF has been primarily concerned with preserving the institutional autonomy of the armed forces and the vast personal holdings of current and retired senior officers. Toward this end, it quickly came to an understanding with the political force on track to win the most seats in transitional elections—the Muslim Brotherhood. Ominously, it consented to a transitional election timetable that benefited well-organized Islamists, who had been slow to embrace the uprising against Mubarak, over the embryonic political parties of secular, liberal activists who spearheaded the demonstrations. The latter reflected the basic weakness and fragmentation of Egypt's putative civil society.

Thousands who objected to SCAF's counterrevolution were arrested or beaten. "The army did not stand by the people's side, not even once during this revolution... it was protecting its own interests," wrote Egyptian blogger Maikel Nabil Sanad in March 2011.¹¹ For his pains, the army threw him in jail with a 3-year sentence. The Egyptian public has grown less responsive to protests by liberal opponents of the regime. "They still take to city squares, but the race for power has moved

beyond them," the *Los Angeles Times* observed.¹²

For all of its apparent might and widespread respect in Egypt, the military will not prove to be a reliable bulwark against Islamization. Indeed, insofar as its stewardship of Egypt is allaying Western fears of an Islamist takeover, it may prove to be an enabler.

The military is far from being the cohesive, stable institution that many Westerners imagine. Senior officers are split by inter-branch rivalries and bureaucratic infighting. Many in the mid-level officer corps deeply resent the corruption and incompetence of senior military leaders.¹³ Because of universal conscription, the rank and file of the army is comparable in socioeconomic status and outlook to the masses of Egyptians who voted for the Brotherhood. Lower ranks tend to sympathize with the Islamists, which was evident when they assassinated Sadat for making peace with Israel and attempted several times to assassinate Mubarak.

However, the relationship between SCAF and the Brotherhood plays out, the new government is sure to exacerbate the malfunction of the country's economy. In June 2011, Egypt's military rulers rejected a \$3 billion emergency loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the grounds that the conditions—mostly pro-market reforms—violated Egyptian sovereignty. On this, they have found strong support from the Brotherhood. "There is no objection to borrowing, but it must be without conditions... [and] in accordance with national priorities," declared Ashraf Badr al-Din, head of the Brotherhood's economic policy committee, ahead of resumed talks with the IMF in January 2012.¹⁴ Instead, the transitional government has increased public wages, extended subsidies on food and energy, and taken myriad other populist measures that reflect statist thinking.

The government will encounter little public opposition to its domination of economic affairs as the corruption and duplicity of Mubarak and his cronies produced an enduring public backlash

11 Maikel Nabil Sanad, "The army and the people wasn't [sic] ever one hand," Sanad blog, Mar. 7, 2011.

12 *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 30, 2011.

13 "Academics See the Military in Decline, but Retaining Strong Influence," U.S. Embassy, Cairo, diplomatic cable, Sept. 23, 2008, in *The Guardian* (London), Feb. 3, 2011.

14 Reuters, Jan. 13, 2012.

against economic liberalization. “Every party, from the Muslim Brotherhood to self-described liberals, puts the need for ‘social justice’ atop its list of economic priorities. Privatization and liberalization are dirty words,” observed Matthew Kaminski of *The Wall Street Journal*. “A series of strikes... demanded not just better pay, but the nationalization of industry,”¹⁵ which is bound to cause economic decline. Many protestors want handouts from the state, not economic freedom. This was evident at a protest outside the Ministry of Petroleum led by unemployed engineering graduate students. “We have a ministry that’s supposed to employ them and they [sic] don’t,” one activist explained to MSNBC.¹⁶ Indeed, in the past, many university graduates were assured a government job, making the notorious Egyptian bureaucracy even more intractable and wasteful. The government will exploit such sentiments to solidify its control over the economy, under the guise of fighting corruption and social injustice.

The new regime may prove unable to alleviate the immediate economic conditions fueling civil unrest. Growing lawlessness, intercommunal strife such as increasing attacks on the Christian Copts, and labor unrest have devastated the tourism industry—a chief source of employment and income in Egypt—and scared away foreign investment. The Egyptian economy grew at just 1.2 percent in 2011, down from 5.1 percent in 2010.¹⁷ Egypt has seen its currency depreciate to its lowest value in seven years, despite spending billions of dollars from its foreign reserves to prop it up.

Even if the government manages to stabilize the country, the socioeconomic malaise that brought down one of the Arab world’s most stable regimes will likely remain or get worse, ensuring future cycles of civil unrest. The most likely sce-



Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi (left), who heads Egypt’s Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, did not support the protestors of Tahrir Square out of a feeling of solidarity with those craving greater liberty. Tantawi threw President Mubarak “under the bus” because economic liberalization policies that the latter initiated would have transferred massive portions of the economy away from the generals to a new elite composed of the president’s son Gamal and his cronies.

nario, then, is that whichever political coalition captures power in the transitional elections will be inclined to defend that power in much the same way as previous regimes. With the strong showing of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party and Salafis in the 2011 parliamentary elections, few doubt that Islamists will take a “by all means necessary” approach to fending off challengers. They have all the time in the world to ease the military back into the barracks.

If the Brotherhood has its way, social and cultural values inimical to democracy will become more entrenched in Egypt. Even such “moderates” as former mufti of Egypt Nasr Farid and lawyer Montasser al-Zayat have called for the establishment of a Saudi-style “Committee for Promotion of Virtue,” or morality police, charged with punishing violations of Shari’a (Islamic law).¹⁸

¹⁵ Matthew Kaminski, “Searching for Hayek in Cairo,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 22, 2011.

¹⁶ MSNBC, Mar. 1, 2011.

¹⁷ *The Washington Post*, Dec. 14, 2011.

¹⁸ *Egypt.com*, Jan. 7, 2012; *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo), Jan. 13, 2012.

As is the modern tradition in Arab politics, Egypt's new regime will likely resort to distraction through foreign adventurism. Though conscious of the need to maintain the flow of U.S. military and economic aid as long as possible, the Brotherhood is eager to raise the anti-Zionist banner whenever practical. On his first appearance in Tahrir Square after returning from exile, the spiritual head of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sheikh Yousef Qaradawi, called for the "liberation" of Jerusalem, a code phrase for the destruction of Israel. The post-rebellion Egyptian government has already begun a closer rapprochement with Hamas, sparking fears that Egypt may one day rejoin the battle against Israel. This harkens back to Nasser but also to Mubarak, who benefitted from billions in foreign, mostly U.S., aid while fomenting a culture of anti-Semitism, using Hamas as a weapon to gradually bleed Israel, and winking at massive smuggling of weapons from Iran through the Egyptian-controlled Sinai into the Gaza strip.

CONCLUSION

Western policymakers must refocus their attention on combating the root causes of Arab authoritarianism: Holding free elections in the region is less important than the advent of market economies. Free enterprise not only empowers citizens vis-à-vis the government but also facilitates crucial cultural, social, religious, and psychological changes conducive to democracy. Moreover, sustained economic growth and prosperity is the only proven method of bringing about true reconciliation between hated enemies (just look at Europe in the latter half of the twentieth century).

The collapse of autocratic regimes in the Arab world will not necessarily promote economic freedom. "There will be many pressures to maintain corrupt, anti-market practices, and those who hold monopolies and other economic advantages will seek to keep them," warns Elliott Abrams, a deputy national security advisor under the Bush administration.¹⁹ Abrams and others have argued that the

provision of foreign aid and free trade agreements to Arab regimes must be conditioned on the dismantling of state control over economic affairs, but it remains to be seen whether this will lead these governments to renounce destructive state control of economic activity.

Though the oil-rich Persian Gulf monarchies may temporarily weather the storm, albeit at great cost to their future evolution (one can anticipate a very difficult succession period in Saudi Arabia), it appears unlikely that Egypt and other resource-poor Arab countries will be able to absorb enough of their unemployed youth to ward off even worse social unrest in the years ahead. In countries that are fragmented by ethno-sectarian divisions, such as Yemen and Syria, violent conflict appears inevitable.

The 2011 Arab uprisings may thus turn out to be the opening salvo in a long period of political turmoil and violence. "From the Prophet Muhammad to the Ottomans, the story of Islam has been the story of the rise and fall of an often-astonishing imperial aggressiveness and, no less important, of never quiescent imperial dreams and repeated fantasies of revenge and restoration," wrote historian Efraim Karsh. "These fantasies gained rapid momentum during the last phases of the Ottoman Empire, culminating in its disastrous decision to enter World War I on the losing side, as well as in the creation of an imperialist dream that would survive the Ottoman era to haunt Islamic and Middle Eastern politics into the 21st century."²⁰

One can expect such issues as the vainglorious dream of the restoration of a worldwide caliphate, the still tribal underpinnings of Arab society, its autocratic family structure, the miserable status of women and children, and more generally the attitude toward "the other" (or *dhimmis*) in Muslim societies, to create great upheavals and even violent eruptions. They will most likely resemble the prolonged wars of religion that Europe experienced for centuries.

Free markets can mitigate much of these conflicts.



19 Elliott Abrams, "FTAs for Tunisia and Egypt," Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., Oct. 17, 2011.

20 Efraim Karsh, "Islam's Imperial Dreams," *Commentary*, Apr. 2006, pp. 37-41.

The Syrian Uprising

Syria's Struggling

Civil Society

by Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio

Authoritarian regimes have traditionally been disinclined to accept any political or social opposition and have been hostile to the development of an independent civil society that could form a counterweight to state power.

Article 8 of the Syrian constitution established the Baath party, which has prevented any independent parties from emerging since the 1963 military coup that brought it to power as “the leading party in the state and society.”¹ Yet despite this systematic repression, there has been a sustained effort by a small group of intellectuals and critics over the past decade to transform the country’s political system and make it more open and accountable.

While these activists did not ignite the uprising that has shaken Syria since March 2011, their courageous defiance of Bashar al-Assad’s regime has given them high standing among many Syrians. They may yet play a significant role in shaping Syria’s future.

COMMITMENT TO FREEDOM

Bashar al-Assad’s assumption of the presidency in July 2000 gave rise to a brief period of unprecedented easing of state repression known as the “Damascus Spring” whereby dozens of discussion forums and associations were created, all calling for political liberalization and democratic openness.

This sector of Syrian civil society came to

light with the “Declaration of the 99,” signed by numerous intellectuals including Burhan Ghalyoun, Sadeq al-Azm, Michel Kilo, Abdul Rahman Munif, Adonis and Haidar Haidar, who demanded: 1) an end to the state of emergency and martial law applied in Syria since 1963; 2) a public pardon to all political detainees and those who are pursued for their political ideas and permission for all deportees and exiled citizens to return; 3) a rule of law that will recognize freedom of assembly, of the press, and of expression; 4) freedom in public life from the laws, constraints, and various forms of surveillance, allowing citizens to express their various interests within a framework of social harmony and peaceful [economic] com-

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¹ Syrian constitution, Mar. 13, 1973; al-Jazeera TV (Doha), July 25, 2011.

petition and enable all to participate in the development and prosperity of the country.²

On January 1, 2001, a group of Syrian lawyers demanded a complete reform of the constitution, the lifting of emergency laws, and the concession of full civil liberties. Shortly thereafter, a group of activists published the founding charter of their civil society committee—bet-

ter known as the “Declaration of the 1,000.”³ The following day, the Jamal Atassi Forum for Democratic Dialogue was established with the participation of communists, Nasserites, socialists and Baathist critics of the regime, and on March 7, authorization was given to create independent orga-

nizations for the defense of human rights as well as cultural and social associations made up of moderate Muslims. This group included the Islamic Studies Center, headed by Muhammad Habash, a progressive scholar opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood, who served as a parliament member. By July 3, 2001, the Human Rights Association of Syria had been established with lawyer Haitham al-Malih as president.

In just a few months, two hundred discussion clubs and forums were created. Reacting to the proliferation of spaces where the future of Syria was being freely debated, the regime pushed back, fearful it might lose its monopoly on power. Invoking a need to maintain national unity in the face of external threats, beginning in September 2001, the regime arrested deputies Riad Saif and Mamoun al-Homsî, economist Arif Dalila, lawyer Anwar al-Bunni, and Atassi Forum spokesman Habib Issa, followed in short order by Kamal al-Labwani and Haitham al-Malih.⁴ All were sentenced to between three and twelve

years in jail on charges of “weakening national sentiment” and “inciting sectarian strife.” Other important figures were forbidden to leave the country including Radwan Ziyade, director of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies, and Suhair Atassi, director of the Jamal Atassi Forum.

In an open challenge to the regime, prominent figures persisted in the demand for reform. The Damascus declaration stated that the “establishment of a democratic national regime is the basic approach to the plan for change and political reform. It must be peaceful, gradual, founded on accord, and based on dialogue and recognition of the other.” This declaration also called on the government to “abolish all forms of exclusion in public life by suspending the emergency law; and abolish martial law and extraordinary courts, and all relevant laws, including Law 49 for the year 1980 [which made membership in the Muslim Brotherhood a capital offense]; release all political prisoners; [allow] the safe and honorable return of all those wanted and those who have been voluntarily or involuntarily exiled with legal guarantees; and end all forms of political persecution by settling grievances and turning a new leaf in the history of the country.”⁵

The declaration was the result of efforts made by journalist Michel Kilo to unify the main political forces, including the banned Muslim Brotherhood. Kilo had met with the group’s leader, Ali Sadreddine Bayanouni, in Morocco where they agreed on a program based on nonviolence, democracy, opposition unity, and political change. A further public attack on the regime, the Beirut-Damascus declaration, which called on the Syrian regime to recognize Lebanon’s independence, establish full diplomatic relations and demarcate the joint border, led to a second wave of arrests during which Kilo and Bunni were imprisoned.⁶ With this example, the regime tried to put a stop to its opponents’ efforts and to ensure that their demands did not awaken Syrian society from its political lethargy.

Most Syrian dissidents saw the Arab uprisings as the opportunity to introduce major changes inside the country.

2 “Statement by 99 Syrian Intellectuals,” *al-Hayat*, Sept. 27, 2000.

3 Gary C. Gambill, “Dark Days Ahead for Syria’s Liberal Reformers,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Feb. 2001.

4 *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002 - Syria*, Human Rights Watch, New York, Jan. 17, 2002.

5 Damascus declaration, Oct. 16, 2005.

6 *The Syria Monitor* (Center for Liberty in the Middle East, Washington, D.C.), May 13, 2007.

THE PEOPLE'S REVOLT

One of the dissidents' foremost weaknesses was their inability to get their message out due to draconian restrictions on the freedom of gathering and expression. In a 2005 interview, noted activist Kamal al-Labwani provided an accurate, indeed prophetic, prognosis of the current situation when he cautioned that

there is no politically mobilized street. When that happens, everything will change. Today, the opposition is purely symbolic, and this sort of opposition is incapable of uniting because it is based on personalities, on the capability of single individuals to confront the authorities... Society is watching, and when the masses begin to move, they will move behind those who represent them... So right now, we are reserving space in that arena so that when the day comes that people move to the street—either because of foreign or their internal pressures—we will be ready.⁷

The fall of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Husni Mubarak in Egypt, along with the upheavals in Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain, had a contagious effect across the Arab world. Most Syrian dissidents saw the uprisings as the long-awaited opportunity to introduce major changes inside the country. In an article in the Lebanese newspaper *as-Safir*, the prominent Syrian dissident Michel Kilo argued, "We are entering a new historical stage based on the primacy of citizenship, freedom, justice, equality, secularism, and the rights of men and citizens."⁸ After spending five years in prison, Anwar al-Bunni stated that "an event like this only happens once every 200



For a brief moment in 2000 and 2001, it looked as if there might be a "Damascus Spring" with the investiture of Bashar al-Assad and his British-born first lady. But all signs of openness were soon quashed by the repressive measures first perfected by Bashar's father and Syria's long-time ruler, Hafez.

years, and it is clearly going to bring about a radical change."⁹

On March 10, former parliamentarian Mamoun al-Homsy appealed to the Syrian people: "After fifty years of tyranny and oppression, we are beginning to see the sunlight of freedom approach."¹⁰ He openly accused the regime of resorting to repression, corruption, and sectarian division to remain in power. On March 15, after a first unsuccessful attempt, an anonymous Facebook group, The Syrian Revolution 2011, called for a second day of rage, which led to a mass demonstration against the regime to demand democratic openness.¹¹

Despite these appeals, few in Syria expected Assad to follow the path taken by Ben Ali and

7 Joe Pace, interview with Kamal al-Labwani, posted on *Syria Comment* blog by Joshua Landis, Sept. 2, 2005.

8 *As-Safir* (Beirut), Apr. 16, 2011.

9 "Veteran Activist's Demands Reflect New Syria," Amnesty International, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2011.

10 YouTube, Mar. 10, 2011.

11 "The Syrian Revolution 2011," Facebook, accessed Dec. 27, 2011.



While the turmoil that roils Syria today was not sparked by the efforts of the intelligentsia, long-time critics such as Michel Kilo and Anwar al-Bunni are, at the very least, the spiritual fathers of the current crop of demonstrators.

Mubarak and abdicate power. Rather, it was hoped that the new regional developments would force the regime to abandon its stubborn resistance to change and, in the face of pressure from the street, introduce reforms. As the more politicized elements in Syrian society had been decimated by successive waves of repression, there was little attempt at the outset to mobilize the masses, reasoning that they had little power to affect such change. Thus, the outbreak of popular rage surprised everyone. Suhair al-Atassi, who was in hiding at the time, recently said,

We have been subjected to suppression and murder for merely calling for freedom, democracy, general freedoms, the release of all prisoners of conscience, an end to the state of emergency, and the return of all political exiles. At the time, we said that any suppression would cause the volcano to erupt... we knew that we were working slowly but surely toward freedom, but we didn't dream of a revolution like this breaking out. It was the Syrian youth who made this dream a reality.¹²

The revolt began in the southern city of Dar'a and then gradually and progressively spread

across almost the entire country. The demonstrations, which at first mobilized a few thousand people at best, began to enjoy great prestige. In Bunni's words:

In the past, only a few of us dared to call for freedom and human rights. We used to feel isolated, as the majority of people avoided us for fear of retribution from the authorities. After my release, I have realized that my demands became the demands of the entire Syrian people.¹³

Initially, important sectors of the population demanded limited reforms, but Assad's brutal repression raised the bar. Appearing before parliament on March 30, 2011, the president made it clear that any reforms would not come about as a result of popular pressure and that the process of political liberalization would not be hurried. Some members of the intelligentsia believed that the regime would not be able to introduce reforms without collapsing:

We all know that the authorities lie and they won't permit anyone to speak out because the regime is corrupt and dictatorial, and corruption and dictatorship fundamentally contradict transparency and freedom of opinion because the first opinion that anyone would express would be opposition to the regime's corruption and tyranny and the crimes it has committed. And then they'll face arrest, interrogation, and a trial. They say, we'll enact a party law; we'll implement reform, but these are all lies because these authorities are incapable of it.¹⁴

Michel Kilo added,

Syria today is experiencing an existential crisis related to the distribution of wealth, social justice, freedom, and political participation, and this is not going to be resolved with repression. The police should be arresting killers,

12 *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), July 16, 2011.

13 "Veteran Activist's Demands Reflect New Syria," July 26, 2011.

14 Pace, interview with Labwani, Sept. 2, 2005.

thieves, and smugglers, but not hungry people with nothing to put in their mouths.¹⁵

As the uprising spread, the Syrian regime blamed the violence on armed radical elements seeking to destabilize the country. Assad told parliament that Syria was facing a conspiracy intended to provoke a sectarian war between Sunnis and Alawites.¹⁶ The regime tried to use this tactic to play for time in the midst of a rebellion that had taken it by surprise as well as to justify the high number of civilians killed by the security services and pro-government armed groups. Repression has intensified in the ensuing months and spread to most of the cities, but the security forces have failed to suppress the popular uprising. Faced with the success of the demonstrations, the Syrian regime was forced to back down in July and adopt a series of cosmetic reforms to try to quell the unrest, including the initiation of a national dialogue.¹⁷ The rebels roundly declared these measures insufficient and designed merely to buy the Assad regime more time.

As the unrest has continued, most activists have come to believe that the protest wave has transformed into a revolution that will bring about the fall of the regime. From her hiding place in July 2011, Suhair al-Atassi gave an apt description of the spirit of the demonstrations:

It's a revolution... triggered by the Syrian people seeking to stand up and say that they are citizens and not subjects, and that Syria belongs to all its citizens and not just the Assad family. This is a revolution of the youth who are demanding freedom and are being confronted with violence and murder... Today Syria is witnessing a battle for freedom by unarmed civilians urging the ouster of a regime that has utilized methods of brutal and inhumane suppression. They have brutally attacked and killed the protesters whilst the demonstrators have nothing but their words to defend them.¹⁸

AN OPPOSITION DIVIDED

As a result of fifty years of repressive measures, it is not surprising that the recent uprising has been an ensemble movement with contributions from different players. The economist and commentator Omar Dahi has identified five clearly differentiated groups taking part in the unrest: traditional opposition parties (socialists, Nasserites, and communists); dissident intellectuals; the youth movement, including the leaders of the Local Coordination Committees (LCC), which has driven the revolution and was joined by other sectors of society; a disorganized cohort of conservative Muslims; and armed Salafist groups who represent a minority.¹⁹

The Syrian regime blamed the violence on armed radical elements to justify the high number of civilians killed.

Most of these groups (with the exception of the Salafi elements) agreed about the need to avoid violence, reject sectarianism, and prevent foreign intervention. On August 29, 2011, the LCC stated,

While we understand the motivation to take up arms or call for military intervention, we specifically reject this position as we find it unacceptable politically, nationally, and ethically. Militarizing the revolution would minimize popular support and participation in the revolution. Moreover, militarization would undermine the gravity of the humanitarian catastrophe involved in a confrontation with the regime. Militarization would put the revolution in an arena where the regime has a distinct advantage and would erode the moral superiority that has characterized the revolution since its beginning.²⁰

Initially, opposition figures urged the creation

15 *Al-Akhbar* (Cairo), Aug. 9, 2011.

16 *Voice of America*, Mar. 30, 2011.

17 *The Guardian* (London), June 27, 2011.

18 *Asharq al-Awsat*, July 16, 2011.

19 Omar Dahi, "A Syrian Drama: A Taxonomy of a Revolution," posted on *Syria Comment* blog by Joshua Landis, Aug. 13, 2011.

20 "Statement to the Syrian People," Local Coordination Committees in Syria (LCC), Aug. 29, 2011.

of a new social pact between the rulers and the ruled, rejecting the use of violence to force Assad from power. Bunni, for example, advocated “a peaceful solution to all the problems” while Kilo urged “a new national contract for a peaceful and negotiated end to the crisis” arguing that “a bloody conflict must be prevented given that exacerbating the sectarian tensions could lead to chaos.”²¹ At the beginning of August, Kilo warned, “There are some who have chosen to take up arms against the regime, but they only represent a minority of the demonstrators. But if the authorities persist in using violence, then they will become a majority.”²²

At first, national dialogue was also defended, but as the uprising has advanced and the repression intensified, most of the intelligentsia has come to reject this option. In March, the intellectual Burhan Ghalyoun, later named president of the National Transition Council, warned that

to get out of the crisis, the whole crisis, the

use of weapons must be rejected and political logic must be accepted... The logic of negotiation and political dialogue requires credibility and the recognition of the other.²³

He cautioned, however, that such an attitude seemed lacking in Assad, who continued “to dream about formal reforms within the existing regime, a regime with only one

ruler, one party, and one authority.”²⁴

Confronted with external and internal pressure, the regime indicated its readiness for a national dialogue, authorizing a historic meeting with opposition members in Damascus on June 27. Some members of the protest movement, notably

Kilo, Louai Hussein, and Hassan Abbas, chose to participate, yet most signatories to the 2005 Damascus declaration boycotted the meeting and contested the participants’ right to speak on behalf of the demonstrators. While Hussein contended that the main goal of the meeting was “to organize a safe, peaceful transition from tyranny to freedom,”²⁵ Bunni argued that it would be exploited by the regime and used “to cover up the arrests, murders, and tortures that continue to take place on a daily basis.”²⁶

Then on July 9 and 10, the regime sponsored yet another national dialogue meeting, which was boycotted by almost all opposition leaders. “While the regime is meeting—and that is what today was—there are funerals in other cities, and people continue to be killed and arrested,” commented Razan Zeitouneh, a lawyer and prominent LCC member.²⁷ Syrian Human Rights Association president Malih, likewise, declined the invitation, saying

Whoever attends such a dialogue with a regime that commits these crimes is a traitor to the people. After 200 martyrs, 1,500 missing persons, and 15,000 refugees, what is there to talk about? How can you have a dialogue with a person who is holding you at gunpoint?²⁸

The meeting was attended by two hundred delegates, most of them intellectuals and politicians with close ties to the regime, and was presented as a steppingstone to a transition to democracy. Vice President Farouk al-Shara opened the meeting with the expressed hope that “it will lead to... the transformation of Syria into a pluralistic, democratic state where its citizens are equal.”²⁹ In a surprising development, the final statement exceeded expectations by raising the issue of releasing all political prisoners, including those arrested since the uprising began (with the exception of those involved in crimes). It also ar-

The widening gap between Ankara and Damascus means the end of Turkey’s “zero problems with neighbors” policy.

21 *As-Safir*, Apr. 16, 2011.

22 *Al-Akhbar*, Aug. 9, 2011.

23 Al-Jazeera TV, Mar. 28, 2011.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*, June 27, 2011.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *The Guardian*, July 10, 2011.

28 *Asharq al-Awsat*, July 13, 2011.

29 *Al-Watan* (Kuwait), July 8, 2011.

gued that “dialogue is the only way to end the crisis in Syria” and strongly rejected any foreign interference under the pretext of defending human rights.³⁰ Furthermore, it called for deeper reforms and stronger efforts to combat corruption and requested the amendment of the constitution to make it commensurate with the rule of law, a multiparty system, and democracy.

Most Syrian activists agreed that the offer to engage in dialogue came too late and that the regime had lost all credibility. In the words of Suhair Atassi,

It has been contaminated by the blood of our people! How could we accept this [national dialogue]? It came too late! This is not to mention the lack of trust between the people and the regime. The best example of this was the arrests of the artists and intellectuals who decided to take to the streets in solidarity with the legitimate demands for greater freedoms in Syria. The Syrian regime was merely trying to buy time with this national dialogue... The Syrian opposition is united, which can be seen in its joint decision to boycott the so-called dialogue with the authorities that have been killing and suppressing the people.³¹

In their statement, the LCC dismissed the meeting’s results on the grounds that

Syrians who have already been killed and tortured by the thousands will not accept any proposals or arrangements that leave Bashar Assad, the intelligence service, and the death squads in control of their lives.³²

As the uprising intensified and the dissi-



“Damascus Spring” soon turned into a winter of discontent as critics of the regime such as activist Kamal Labwani (left) were imprisoned or exiled.

ents’ demands grew, the need to form a transition government, given the possible collapse of the regime, was considered. As early as April 2011, Kilo had requested the formation of “a government of national unity,” and by mid-July, Malih had gone still further, calling for a shadow government made up of “independent experts” that would unify the opposition movements and prepare for the post-Assad era.³³

FOREIGN INTERVENTION?

The Turkish government has followed the unfolding Syrian crisis with deep concern. In the earliest phases of the uprising, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu advised the regime to end the repression and democratize the country. Assad ignored this “friendly advice,” generating a profound unease in Ankara, which was heightened by the arrival of thousands of refugees fleeing the besieged Syrian town of Jisr Shughour.³⁴

30 Syrian Arab News Agency (Damascus), July 12, 2011.

31 *Asharq al-Awsat*, July 16, 2011.

32 Declaration, Local Coordination Committees in Syria (LCC), Sept. 7, 2011.

33 *As-Safir*, Apr. 26, 2011; *al-Bayan* (Dubai), July 11, 2011.

34 *BBC News*, June 8, 2011.

The possibility of a full-fledged civil war troubles Ankara, which believes that the intensification of violence would significantly increase the influx of refugees into its territory. In an interview with the Qatar newspaper *ash-Sharq*, Erdoğan stressed the importance of the ties between the two countries:

For Turkey, Syria is not just another coun-

try, it's a neighbor with which we share a 910-kilometer-long border... and with which we have shared interests that cannot be ignored... We know very well that stability there is part of our national security, and we are afraid that the situation will lead to the outbreak of a civil war between Alawites and Sunnis.³⁵

Militarization of the uprising would likely be exploited by the regime to present itself as the guarantor of internal stability.

The widening gap between Ankara and Damascus also means the end of Davutoğlu's "zero problems with neighbors" policy.³⁶ The premise of this policy was that by way of increasing its international clout, Turkey had to maintain the best possible relationships with neighboring countries and diversify its alliances. This required that Ankara turn its attention back to the Middle East, a region that had formed an integral part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries, thus filling a long-standing vacuum that no Arab regime had been able to fill.

The Turkish government thus warned Damascus that trade relations between the two countries, which amount to around \$2.5 billion annually, could be endangered.³⁷ It also hosted various opposition group meetings inside Turkey with the goal of creating a road map for a post-Assad era. In mid-July, Istanbul hosted the National Salvation Conference, which elected Malih

as its president. During the meeting, Malih rejected any dialogue with the regime: "The Syrian regime has declared war on its people, who will not go back home until the regime has fallen."³⁸ The final statement from the meeting called for the formation of a shadow government, but not before the fall of the regime, and expressed its will to reach "a unified approach" between the opposition and the young demonstrators.

In a subsequent meeting, held in Istanbul on August 23, 2011, the Syrian opposition agreed to create a National Transition Council (NTC) comprised of opposition members both inside and outside the country and presided over by Burhan Ghalyoun, a Syrian academic residing in France.³⁹ Despite their differences, the intensity of the repression had brought opposition members together. Basma Qadmani, their spokesperson, told the media that "the NTC represents the major forces: political parties and independent figures who symbolize the Syrian opposition." The names of Syria-based NTC members were kept secret to prevent reprisals.

In September, this group was renamed the Syrian National Council (SNC). It included members of the Damascus declaration, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the Local Coordination Committees, the Syrian Revolution General Commission, Kurdish factions, tribal leaders, and independent figures. One of the first decisions of SNC was to approve a national consensus charter that defined the principles of the Syrian revolution:

- 1) Affirming that the Syrian revolution is a revolution for freedom and dignity;
- 2) Maintaining the peaceful nature of the revolution;
- 3) Affirming national unity and rejecting any call for sectarianism or monopolizing of the revolution;
- 4) Recognizing Syria is for all Syrians on an equal footing;

35 *Ash-Sharq* (Doha), Sept. 13, 2011.

36 See Svante E. Cornell, "What Drives Turkish-Foreign-Policy?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2012, pp. 13-24.

37 *The National* (Abu Dhabi), Aug. 11, 2011.

38 France 24 TV (Paris), July 19, 2011.

39 Associated Press, Oct. 3, 2011.

5) Rejecting foreign military intervention.⁴⁰

While the opposition members initially rejected any foreign intervention, voices favoring this eventuality began to emerge, albeit still in the minority. During the Istanbul conference, Malih urged the U.N. to put an end to the bloodshed through political and diplomatic pressure but soundly rejected any military intervention.⁴¹ Earlier, Kilo had also declared his desire “to see an exclusively Syrian solution... reached based on a broad, complete national understanding.”⁴²

Yet given the worsening situation, the opposition has begun to consider different scenarios to bring the dictatorship to an end. Some favor following the Libyan example where the uprising combined with foreign military intervention to bring about the collapse of the regime: Ashraf al-Miqdad, signer to the Damascus declaration living in Australia, told *Asharq al-Awsat* that

the Syrian regime will never stop the repression and murders, meaning that there are only two options: foreign intervention or arming the revolutionaries... International military intervention has become the only possible solution. The other alternative would be to divide the army, which would avoid having to arm the people.⁴³

Although these voices still represent a minority, they reflect the growing desperation of the Syrian opposition, which believes that the uprising may lose its muscle if none of the objectives are reached soon. On July 29, 2011, a group of defectors formed the Syrian Free Army (SFA).⁴⁴ By mid October, there were an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 defectors especially active in the north and central regions. In the last months of the year,

40 National Consensus Charter, Syrian National Council, Sept. 15, 2011; Steven Heydemann, “Syria’s Opposition,” United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., Sept. 20, 2011.

41 France 24 TV, July 19, 2011.

42 *Al-Arab al-Yawm* (Amman), June 18, 2011.

43 *Asharq al-Awsat*, Sept. 6, 2011.

44 YouTube, July 29, 2011.

Photo will not display.

Syrian refugees, fleeing the country for Turkey, arrive at a camp in Yayladagi village, Hatay, Turkey. While refugees from the fighting continue to pour across the border into Turkey, the question of Ankara’s intervention in the affairs of its southern neighbor has divided opponents of the Assad regime.

SFA began launching some operations against the Syrian army.⁴⁵

The LCC has tried to nip this debate in the bud, stating in a communiqué, “While we understand the motivation to take up arms or call for military intervention, we specifically reject this position as we find it unacceptable politically, nationally, and ethically.”⁴⁶ At least for now, then, it seems that a Libya-style intervention is being rejected. The communiqué stressed

The method by which the regime is overthrown is an indication of what Syria will be like in the post-regime era. If we maintain our peaceful demonstrations, which include our cities, towns, and villages, and our men, women, and children, the possibility of democracy in our country is much greater. If an armed confrontation or international military intervention be-

45 *The New York Times*, Nov. 17, 2011.

46 “Statement to the Syrian People,” Local Coordination Committees in Syria, Aug. 29, 2011.

comes a reality, it will be virtually impossible to establish a legitimate foundation for a proud future Syria.⁴⁷

Malih concurred, “Any foreign intervention would destroy Syria, just like what has happened in Libya... the revolution in Syria will prevail, and the regime will be brought down by peaceful means.” He added that “the revolutionaries will not fall into the trap” of militarizing the uprising.⁴⁸

An eventual militarization could have devastating effects and would likely be exploited by

the regime to present itself as the guarantor of internal stability and to regain some of the territory lost to the rebels. The possibility of an outbreak of civil war could have unforeseeable effects on Syria’s neighbors since it shares borders with Israel, Lebanon, Turkey,

Iraq, and Jordan. As Arab League secretary general Nabil al-Arabi recently said, “Syria is not Libya... Syria plays a central role in the region, and what happens there has a direct impact on Lebanon and Iraq.”⁴⁹

An outbreak of civil war could have unforeseeable effects on Syria’s neighbors.

CONCLUSION

Although the influence of opposition intellectuals in Syria remains limited, there is little doubt that the Assad regime considers their demands for the release of political prisoners, suspension of the state of emergency, and an end to the single-party system a declaration of war. This further underscores the regime’s tenuous grip on power as none of the members of this small opposition

group can count on a broad social base or hail from Syrian families boasting great wealth or long lines of politicians with the notable exception of Suhair Atassi, scion to a prominent political family that has produced three heads of state.

Given the absence of freedom of expression and the regime’s absolute control of the media, the intelligentsia has not been able to inculcate its message to the Syrian “street” or to mobilize it, a task that now falls entirely to the Local Coordination Committees. Some are further hampered by their past: A good portion of their members are Nasserites, communists, or socialists, affiliations that are in decline and lack any significant popular backing. Support for secularism also weakens their influence among the more traditional or devout segments of Syrian society.

Internal divisions and lack of coordination have also taken their toll. Some of the leading figures differ over core issues such as whether it is possible to have a dialogue with the regime; what the proper relationship with foreign powers should be; what form a transitional government should take, and how it should rule. These differences have been apparent over the last few months.

These structural deficiencies notwithstanding, the opinions of these intellectuals are followed by an important segment of the demonstrators, who hold the struggle by these thinkers against the regime in great esteem. Indeed, this group of intellectuals and critics is solidly represented in both the Committee for National Salvation and the Syrian National Council spearheading the uprising. Perhaps this uncertain situation is best summed up in Malih’s words:

The opposition and the Syrian intellectuals did not create the revolution. The revolution is the work of the youth. Now they need political support, and we want to be by their sides in this revolution.⁵⁰

47 Ibid.

48 *Asharq al-Awsat*, Sept. 11, 2011.

49 *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), Sept. 7, 2011.

50 *Asharq al-Awsat*, July 13, 2011.



The Syrian Uprising

The Muslim

Brotherhood Reborn

by Yvette Talhamy

As Syrian president Bashar al-Assad struggles to contend with a massive popular uprising, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) is poised to dominate whatever coalition of forces manages to unseat the Baathist regime. Though in many ways the Brotherhood's official political platform is a model of Islamist moderation and tolerance, it is less a window into the group's thinking than a reflection of its political tactics. Unlike its parent organization, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which often kept its ideological opponents at arm's length, the SMB has repeatedly forged alliances with secular dissident groups even as it secretly tried to negotiate a deal with the Assad regime to allow its return from exile. Since the moderation of its political platform over the past two decades has clearly been intended to facilitate this triangulation, it does not tell us much about the ultimate intentions of the Syrian Brotherhood.

THE BROTHERHOOD'S BACKGROUND

The SMB was established in 1945-46 by Mustafa as-Sibai as a branch of Hassan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Though favoring the establishment of an Islamic state in Syria,¹ it participated in parliamentary elections after the country gained independence in 1946 (winning 4 seats in 1947, 3 seats in 1949, 5 seats

in 1954, and 10 seats in 1961) and even had ministers in two governments.²

When the secular, nationalist Baath party took power in 1963, it quickly moved to weaken the SMB and the urban, Sunni merchant class that supported the movement. The group was outlawed in 1964, and its leader Isam al-Attar was exiled. That same year, a revolt led by the SMB erupted in the city of Hama and was quelled by force.³ During the 1970s, relations between the SMB and President Hafez Assad (r. 1970-2000) deteriorated into large-scale violence.

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1 Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "The Islamic Movement in Syria: Sectarian Conflict and Urban Rebellion in an Authoritarian-Populist Regime," in Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, ed., *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 151.

2 Hanna Batatu, "Syria's Muslim Brethren," *MERIP Reports*, Nov.-Dec. 1982, p. 17.

3 Hinnebusch, "The Islamic Movement in Syria," p. 157.

Although the Brotherhood's opposition to Baathist rule was expressed ideologically in polite company, there was a deep sectarian undercurrent, as the Assad regime was dominated by Alawites, a schismatic Islamic sect viewed as heretical by religious Sunnis. Armed elements of the SMB assassinated government officials and carried out bombings of government buildings, Baath party offices, and other targets associated with the regime.⁴ In 1979, the SMB carried out a massacre of eighty-three unarmed Alawite cadets at an artillery school in Aleppo. In June 1980, it is said to have made an assassination attempt against

The Brotherhood renounced violence, implicitly recognizing the legitimacy of Bashar's rule.

the president, who allegedly retaliated by ordering hundreds of captured SMB prisoners gunned down in their cells. Although the SMB has always maintained that it had no connection to underground, armed factions responsible for

violence,⁵ few take the claim seriously.

In 1980, the Assad regime issued Law No. 49, making membership in or association with the SMB a crime punishable by death.⁶ In December 1980, the SMB issued a manifesto that included a detailed program for the future Islamic state in Syria.⁷ It continued to work clandestinely in predominantly Sunni, urban centers outside of Damascus, particularly in the city of Hama, and it was there that the Assad regime is reported to have notoriously massacred tens of thousands of people in February 1982, effectively bringing armed resistance to a halt.⁸

The SMB was no longer able to work openly inside Syria, and its leadership was dispersed in exile. As its influence in the country diminished, SMB leaders increasingly sought alliances with secular opponents of the Assad regime.

ALLIANCES AND TRIANGULATION

Shortly after the Hama massacre, the SMB began working to forge a united opposition front with secular dissidents. In March 1982, it joined with the pro-Iraqi wing of the Baath party and other militant, secular opposition groups to form the National Alliance for the Liberation of Syria.⁹ This alliance called for a constitutional, multi-party democracy with Shari'a (Islamic law) as the basis of legislation.¹⁰ In 1990, the SMB and a broader array of opposition groups met in Paris and formed the National Front for the Salvation of Syria with similar declared objectives.

With the election of Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni as general supervisor in 1996, the Brotherhood began secret negotiations with the government, which for its part felt more secure in offering greater accommodation of religious groups after its suppression of the Islamist uprising of the early 1980s.¹¹ After the ascension of Bashar al-Assad, the regime released several hundred Brotherhood members from prison.¹² Some SMB figures were allowed to return to Syria (most notably Bayanouni's brother, Abu al-Fatih), and the regime also allowed the publication and sale of some previously blacklisted books by SMB founder and ideologue Mustafa as-Sibai.

After these gestures, the SMB began to rapidly shift its political platform. It firmly renounced violence, implicitly recognizing the le-

4 Batatu, "Syria's Muslim Brethren," p. 20.

5 "Al-Mashru as-Siyasi li-Suriya al-Mustaqbal," The Arab Orient Center for Strategic and Civilization Studies (London), Dec. 19, 2004.

6 R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 109.

7 Umar F. Abd-Allah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1983), pp. 201-67.

8 Middle East Watch, *Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Assad Regime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 17-21.

9 Thomas Collelo, ed., *Syria: A Country Study* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1987).

10 "Syria: National Alliance for the Liberation of Syria (1980-1990)," Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, SYR32163.E, June 1, 1999.

11 Eyal Zisser, "Hafiz al-Asad Discovers Islam," *Middle East Quarterly*, Mar. 1999, pp. 49-56.

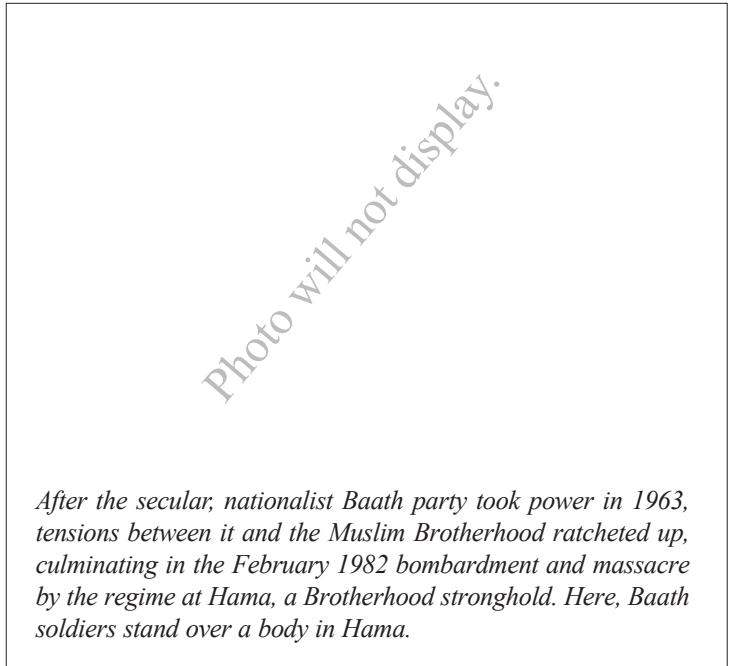
12 "Syria Profile," *BBC News*, accessed Dec. 21, 2011.

gitimacy of Assad's rule.¹³ However, Assad refused to grant Bayanouni's three core demands: the release of all SMB members from prison, permission for all exiles to return home, and a lifting of the government's ban on the Brotherhood.

Meanwhile, the SMB continued its outreach to other opposition groups. In August 2002, it met with several opposition factions in London and issued what was known as the National Pact in Syria. This pact further refined the SMB's new vision of citizenship, rule of law, democracy, pluralism, equality, and nonviolence.¹⁴

In December 2004, the SMB published a program for the creation of a modern civil state under the title, "The Political Project for the Future Syria."¹⁵ It is characterized by the rule of law, pluralism, civil society, and the peaceful alternation of political power. The SMB emphasized that it was undergoing a process of self-revitalization through reconsidering the past, the present, and the future.¹⁶

Islam is enshrined as "a code of conduct for the devout Muslim," a "civilizational identity" for all Syrians, the official religion of the country, and the highest source of legal authority, yet such liberal principles as democracy, pluralism, and tolerance were also affirmed.¹⁷ The SMB also called for the acknowledgment of



other principles such as coexistence, human rights, and nonviolence.

Ironically, as Syrian society was growing more deeply religious (as seen in the far greater prevalence of veiling today compared to twenty years ago), the Brotherhood was growing more outwardly secular. Some staunch secularists saw this transformation as a ruse. Wafa Sultan, a psychiatrist and Syrian expatriate residing in the United States, published a June 2005 article on the reformist *Annaqed* website cautioning liberal opponents of the Syrian regime about the SMB's ostensible embrace of pluralism and democracy:

Do they have the courage to openly declare their new beliefs and apologize for their past so that we won't need to dig up their past? They are calling [now] for a pluralistic, democratic society ruled by the principles of justice and equality. On what basis are they going to build this society?... Have they changed their fundamental beliefs? Why don't they give an answer to this question?... They used to commit crimes [and then] escape to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Jordan [in order to find] a safe haven, and now they are planning to re-

13 Sami Moubayed, "No Room for Political Islam in Syria," *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), May 10, 2010.

14 "Al-Mithaq al-Watani fi Suriya," Syrian Human Rights Committee, London, Feb. 11, 2004.

15 "Al-Mashru as-Siyasi li-Suriya al-Mustaqbal," Dec. 19, 2004.

16 Najib Ghabbian, "Syria's Muslim Brothers: Where to Next?" *The Daily Star* (Beirut), Sept. 17, 2010.

17 "Al-Mashru as-Siyasi li-Suriya al-Mustaqbal," Dec. 19, 2004.

turn from these safe havens to the scene of their crimes to participate in building a democratic, pluralistic society based on justice and equality?!¹⁸

The Brotherhood had close relations with Turkey's AKP, which then enjoyed warm ties with Assad.

Although Sultan is no friend of the Assad regime, her views on the SMB correspond with those held by many in the Syrian government.

In October 2005, the SMB joined five secular opposition parties and independent political figures in signing the Damascus declaration.¹⁹

While emphasizing the role of Islam as the “ideology of the majority” and “prominent cultural component in the life of the nation and the people,” the declaration called for the “establishment of a democratic national regime.” Moreover, reflecting the sensibilities of dissidents inside Syria who fear being arrested, the declaration pointedly called for a reform process that was “peaceful, gradual, founded on accord, and based on dialogue and recognition of the other”²⁰—that is to say, led by the regime.

THE NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT

A few months later in March 2006, the SMB aligned itself with former vice president Abd al-Halim Khaddam, one of the most powerful figures in the Assad regime until his defection in late 2005. In Brussels, Khaddam and Bayanouni joined a host of less illustrious Syrian exiles in establishing the National Salvation Front (NSF). Unlike the signers of the Damascus declaration,

NSF members explicitly called for regime change, albeit through peaceful means.²¹

The SMB alliance with Khaddam was deeply unpopular among the movement’s rank and file and was roundly criticized by prominent Damascus declaration signatories. Riyad al-Turk lambasted Khaddam for his involvement in crimes committed by the Assad regime and warned that this alliance would cause internal disputes within the opposition. Some exiled opposition figures, such as Farid al-Ghadri, also objected.²²

Bayanouni brushed aside the complaints in a June 2006 interview:

We are members of the [Damascus] declaration and members of the NSF, and we asserted that membership in the NSF does not conflict with membership in other alliances or fronts... We are now in the midst of a peaceful opposition to bring about democratic change in the country, and we are willing to partner with all the national groups.²³

But Bayanouni’s commitment to the NSF was uneven. As the front was called into being, the SMB issued “an appeal to the free of the world to abolish Law No. 49,”²⁴ the implication being that it was still willing to return amicably to Syria in exchange for a full amnesty and legalization of its activities. During the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, when Syria and Hezbollah were winning plaudits in the Arab world, Bayanouni announced that the SMB had decided to freeze its activities against the regime temporarily.²⁵ A year later, however, he was back to calling on Assad to step down and threatening to launch a campaign of demonstrations and civil disobedience.²⁶

18 “Syrian Expatriate Asks: Who Are the Muslim Brotherhood Trying to Fool?” The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Washington, D.C., Aug. 3, 2005.

19 *Middle East Transparent*, Oct. 16, 2005; Damascus declaration, Oct. 16, 2005.

20 Damascus declaration, Oct. 16, 2005.

21 “Conference Final Statement: Founding Conference for the National Salvation Front for Syria,” *Free Syria* (London), June 5, 2006.

22 *Elaph* (London), Mar. 19, 2006.

23 “Bayanouni interview (6/7),” *The Syria Monitor*, Center for Liberty in the Middle East, Washington, D.C., June 8, 2006.

24 “An Appeal to the free of the world to abolish rule 49/1980 that legalizes crime,” *Free Syria*, Apr. 22, 2006.

25 “News Round-Up (8/29-9/1),” *The Syria Monitor*, Sept. 28, 2006.

26 Reuters, Mar. 16, 2007.

Bayanouni seems to have believed that the SMB's alliance with Khaddam, who has long-standing ties to the Saudis and the family of the late Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri, would open up channels with Washington and facilitate defections from the Syrian regime. He claimed that there was pervasive dissatisfaction among the military and intelligence forces and that these forces would move against the regime if they had international support. "When there is a favorable international position sympathetic to the Syrian people, they will arise and move," he said.²⁷

In his efforts to appeal for Western sympathy, Bayanouni went so far as to say that Islamist movements in the Arab world should be willing to accept the election of a woman or a Christian as president.²⁸

However, the NSF failed to deliver. The alliance with Khaddam damaged the SMB's credibility in the eyes of many Syrians, and for very little return. By the fall of 2008, it was clear that Western and Arab governments were committed to reengaging the Assad regime.

In the wake of Israel's military campaign in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip during the winter of 2008-09, Bayanouni began to triangulate yet again. As in 2006, the SMB announced that it would suspend its opposition activities against the Syrian regime, which sponsored Hamas—the Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. In April, the SMB formally withdrew from the NSF, and Khaddam accused the group of seeking a rapprochement with Damascus and meeting with agents of the regime.²⁹ A statement on the withdrawal of the Brotherhood by the remaining members of the NSF general sec-



The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has openly declared its support for the current protests but has denied responsibility for organizing them. The demonstrations, they claim, are not led by the SMB but by the newly formed Syrian National Council, which proposes to unite all opposition groups including SMB members.

retariat was thick with suspicion:

The MB suspension of their opposition activities against the regime has nothing to do with the Palestinian cause... why, after long years of conflict, has the MB elected to stand by the Palestinian people today? And has the Syrian regime already liberated the Golan and are its armies about to finish the job of the liberation of Palestine?!... The NSF believes that the worst form of weakness and inability is ceasing opposition activities and aligning one's position with the regime, the same regime that murdered and killed scores of MB members and thousands of other Syrian citizens.³⁰

For his part, Bayanouni accused Khaddam of adopting an opinion similar to that of Israel regarding the war in Gaza and cited this as the reason for the SMB's withdrawal from the NSF.³¹

27 Ibid.

28 "Al-Bayanouni lays the foundations of the modern concept of citizenship among the Muslim Brotherhood," *Free Syria*, Nov. 1, 2007.

29 *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), Apr. 5, 2009.

30 "Statement by the General Secretariat of the National Salvation Front in Syria: On the Withdrawal of the Muslim Brotherhood from the National Salvation Front!" *Free Syria*, Apr. 11, 2009.

31 *Al-Intiqad* (Beirut), June 6, 2008.

Photo will not display.

In 2004, the Brotherhood sought to rebrand itself with the publication of The Political Project for the Future Syria. While claiming to support liberal principles of democracy, pluralism, and tolerance, the Brotherhood states that Islam would remain enshrined as “a code of conduct for the devout Muslim” and the highest source of legal authority in Syria.

The SMB waited for the regime to reward its about-face. In a November 2009 interview, Bayanouni stressed that the group’s suspension of opposition activity was conditional upon a positive response from the regime. “There were several general positive promises made by the regime to some mediators, which we welcome, but we still wait for actions. Until now, nothing has changed, and this shows that the problem is with the regime, not us,” he said.³²

In July 2010, the General Council of the SMB gathered in Istanbul and elected Muhammad Riad al-Shaqfa to succeed Bayanouni as supervisor general.³³ Many expected Shaqfa to take a less compromising position toward Assad as he was from Hama and had played an active role in the SMB insurrection before leaving Syria in the late 1970s.³⁴ His deputy, Muhammad Farouq Tayfor, is also from Hama and also took part in

armed struggle during the 1970s.³⁵ A month after being elected, however, the new general supervisor affirmed that the SMB would continue to suspend opposition activities against the Syrian regime.³⁶

After Shaqfa’s election, Muhammad Said Hawwa, son of the former SMB leader Said Hawwa (d. 1989), wrote a letter to the Brotherhood outlining a “road map” to rebuild its relations with the regime. He argued that in order to end this historical crisis, the SMB must “handle the consequences of its historical, political, philosophical, and military mistakes” and “the leaders who were involved in the past historical mistakes should give up all their posts since they led

the SMB into the dark tunnel.” He stressed that the SMB should accept the regime’s offer to allow the return of some individuals without blood on their hands. Given the present political situation and the declining influence of the SMB, it should not expect more. Hawwa also noted that certain Muslim Brotherhood leaders demanded the impossible and attempted to impose their own conditions as if they were the victors. Instead, they should accept the regime’s offers as a starting point for negotiations between the two and later on expand them to include more SMB demands.³⁷

This view was endorsed by Kamal al-Halbawi, a London-based Muslim scholar and former SMB spokesman, who wrote an article in

32 “Bi-Wduh,” al-Hiwar TV (London), Nov. 15, 2009.

33 “Muhammad Riyad ash-Shaqfa,” www.IkhwanWiki.com, Feb. 20, 2011.

34 Al-Arabiya News Channel (Dubai), Sept. 8, 2010.

35 “Ikhwan Suriya... Shaqfah Muraqiban Aman Khalafan li-l-Bayanouni,” Islam on-Line, Aug. 2, 2010.

36 “Muhammad Riyad lil-Sharq al-Awsat: ‘Mawjudun fi Aghlab al-Duwal al-Arabiya wa-l-Natadakhil fi-l-sha’n al-Dakhili wa-Natawasal abr al-Internet,’” Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Syria, Aug. 8, 2010.

37 “Najl al-Rahil Sa’id Hawa Yaqtarih Kharitat Tariq baynaha Hal al-Jama’a wa-l-Awda ila al-Bidaya,” Syrian Observatory Human Rights (London), Aug. 10, 2010.

al-Quds al-Arabi calling on the new SMB leadership to work toward ending its historic dispute with the Assad regime. He urged the SMB to go back to working within Syrian social institutions, rather than letting new generations bear the brunt of a feud in which they had no part.³⁸

A more significant influence on Shaqfa's thinking was the SMB's increasingly close relations with Turkey's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), which also enjoyed warm ties with Assad. According to Shaqfa, there were several mediation attempts between them and the Syrian regime, but they all failed due to the regime's refusal to fully lift restrictions on the SMB. "Bashar is softer than his father, and he talks to mediators... but he always says 'now we are busy,'" remarked Shaqfa. "We would like the Turkish government to intervene to solve the problems," he said in October 2010.³⁹ In a November 2010 interview, Shaqfa said that the SMB was even willing to stop calling itself the Muslim Brotherhood if allowed to go back "home" and if the regime met its long-standing conditions.⁴⁰

A GAME CHANGER

The proliferation of popular protests across the Arab world during 2011 changed much. When initial calls for demonstrations in Syria in February fell flat, the SMB remained cautious in its statements about the regime. By March, however, the contagion had hit Syria with a vengeance, and its streets swelled with citizens calling for freedom and democracy. The regime accused the SMB of collaboration with Western countries in steering these demonstrations and fomenting armed attacks against the security forces.⁴¹

Though the SMB openly declared its support for the protests, it denied responsibility for

organizing them. The demonstrations "are not led by the SMB or any other party or group," said Shaqfa.⁴² "We are supporters, not creators. The voice of the street is a spokesperson for itself," explained SMB spokesman Zuhair Salim.⁴³ The SMB might have been willing to reconcile with Assad had the Syrian president been willing to abolish Law No. 49 and lift other restrictions on the movement's activities, but no such concessions were forthcoming. "If I go back to Syria, I could be arrested," Shaqfa complained in June.⁴⁴ Worldwide support for the uprisings and Assad's recalcitrance led the SMB to fall back on its old demand for the toppling of the regime. Although Salim said that the Brotherhood "would consider dialogue with

the Assad government, under certain conditions, if the violence against protesters were to stop,"⁴⁵ he was surely aware that the Syrian president could not end the repression without inviting a tsunami of mass mobilization against the regime.

Shaqfa has been far more concerned with shoring up the SMB's primacy over other opposition factions. When the Syrian opposition held a four-day conference in Turkey at the end of May, SMB delegates "made sure their presence was noted by arriving late for the opening ceremony, noisily chanting 'God is great,'" noted *The Washington Post*.⁴⁶ However, it is not such displays of religiosity that lead many secular opposition leaders to distrust the Brotherhood but its long history of mercurial political shifts over the past three decades. "Those thirty years destroyed their organization, and they lost their legitimacy because they changed positions so

The Brotherhood's history of mercurial political shifts has led many secular opposition leaders to distrust the group.

38 "Al-Hilbawi yadu ila Fak al-Ishtibak bayn jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin wa-l-Nizam fi Suriya," Syrian Observatory Human Rights, Aug. 15, 2010.

39 *BBC Arabic*, Oct. 27, 2010.

40 *Ash-Sharq* (Doha), Nov. 16, 2010.

41 *The Wall Street Journal* (New York), May 17, 2011; *FrontLine* (Chennai, India), Dec. 17-30, 2011.

42 *Al-Rai* (Kuwait City), May 29, 2011.

43 *The Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2011.

44 France 24 TV (Paris), June 11, 2011.

45 *The Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2011.

46 *The Washington Post*, June 2, 2011.

much without explanation over the past five years,” said Burhan Ghalioun, a prominent dissident and scholar at the Sorbonne in Paris.⁴⁷

In October 2011, a Syrian National Council, comprising seven opposition factions including the SMB, was formed in Istanbul. Elected as council leader, Ghalioun reassured *The Wall Street Journal* that there was no real chance of an Islamist takeover since the SMB’s thirty-year-

long exile had deprived it of a solid domestic base.⁴⁸ The SMB, however, was more upbeat. “I believe that the Assad regime will collapse within the next few months... the regime’s days are over,” Shaqfa prophesied, stressing that the SMB was sufficiently rooted in Syria as to make this long-cherished dream a reality.⁴⁹ Whether this prediction will come to pass remains to be seen.



47 *The Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2011.

48 Ibid., Dec. 2, 2011.

49 *Asharq al-Awsat*, Dec. 5, 2011.

Yes, We Have No Bananas

Bananas are forbidden for women, says Islamic sheikh.

CAIRO—An Islamic cleric residing in Europe said that women should not be close to bananas or cucumbers, in order to avoid any “sexual thoughts.”

The unnamed sheikh, who was featured in an article on *el-Senousa* news, was quoted saying that if women wish to eat these food items, a third party, preferably a male related to them such as their a father or husband, should cut the items into small pieces and serve.

He said that these fruits and vegetables “resemble the male penis” and hence could arouse women or “make them think of sex.” He also added carrots and zucchini to the list of forbidden foods for women.

The sheikh was asked how to “control” women when they are out shopping for groceries and if holding these items at the market would be bad for them. The cleric answered saying this matter is between them and God.

Answering another question about what to do if women in the family like these foods, the sheikh advised the interviewer to take the food and cut it for them in a hidden place so they cannot see it.

The opinion has stirred a storm of irony and denouncement among Muslims online, with hundreds of comments mocking the cleric.

One reader said that these religious “leaders” give Islam “a bad name,” and another commentator said that [the cleric] is a “retarded” person, and he must quit his post immediately.

Others called him a seeker of fame, but no official responses from renowned Islamic scholars have been published on the statements.

Ha'aretz, Dec. 6, 2011.

The Syrian Uprising

Turkish-Syrian Relations Go Downhill

by Damla Aras

As Syria sinks deeper and deeper into the throes of civil war, the decade-long honeymoon between Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) and Bashar al-Assad's regime has all but ended. Fearing the possible spread of the revolt to Turkish territory, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu cold-shouldered their hitherto feted ally, openly siding with the rebels. They sheltered thousands of refugees fleeing government repression, including scores of military defectors, conferred with opposition leaders, and even threatened military intervention should the regime continue its brutal crackdown.¹ In August, Erdoğan warned that "we reached the end of our patience";² three months later, he lauded the "massacred" rebels as "martyrs," prophesying that "the Syrian nation will reap the results of its glorious resistance."³ As President Assad ignores these admonitions, has Turkey reached the limits of "soft power" and will it revert to the instruments of hard power to find stability on its southern border?

FROM COERCION TO NORMALIZATION

Historically, Turkey's strategy toward Syria was based on instruments of hard power, an approach that was, in part, shaped by Syria's sponsorship of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the early 1980s. In a bid to end Damascus's support for the armed separatist organization with which Ankara had battled for decades, the government executed coercive strategies against Syria on four separate occasions during the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1987, Prime Minister Turgut Özal decided to use Turkey's control of the headwaters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers as a bargaining chip against Syria. In return for securing its share of regional water resources, Damascus would be forced to stop backing the PKK. But this ploy failed, and Syria carried on supporting the group. In 1992, another coercion attempt failed when Ankara did not follow up its threats of retaliation for Syria's harboring of the PKK. The pressure eventually resulted in a short-lived accord in which Damascus agreed to clear the Helwe training camp of PKK militants. Yet, Turkish decision-makers failed to take further actions when, in 1993,

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1 *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), Aug. 13, 2011.

2 AKP website (Ankara), Aug. 6, 2011; *BBC News*, Aug. 6, 2011.

3 *Haber50* (Istanbul), Nov. 1, 2011.

Syria permitted the PKK to open a center where 1,000 militants were trained.⁴ In 1996, a third attempt was also unsuccessful as Turkey had to halt its saber-rattling against Syria due to the unexpected eruption of a crisis with Greece over the Aegean island of Kardak.⁵

The turning point in relations came with Ankara's final attempt in October 1998, which was backed by Washington and facilitated by Tehran and Cairo. This time the Turkish leaders made clear that they would use force against Damascus in the event of non-compliance. During the inauguration of the National Assembly, President

Süleyman Demirel underlined Ankara's right to retaliate against Syria due to its support for terrorist activities; Chief of Staff Gen. Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu stated there was an "undeclared war between Turkey and Syria," and Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz subsequently announced that "the military was waiting for the order."⁶ Ankara also initi-

ated a diplomatic offensive and military campaign to back up its threats and make them more credible, inviting television crews to the Syrian border to film the mobilization of Turkish armed forces for war (which was actually a preparation for the ongoing NATO "Dynamic 98" maneuvers in

Iskenderun).⁷ Furthermore, Ankara announced that it was going to hold an independent maneuver at the Syrian border on November 7-9 with the aim of intimidating Damascus. It also declared that Reliant Mermaid II exercises would be held with the participation of Israel, the United States, and Jordan in October 1998.⁸ (The exercise was later postponed as a gesture to Syria when PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was forced to leave the country.) Finally, as part of its diplomatic offensive to put pressure on Damascus, Ankara benefitted from Washington's strong backing. It also benefitted from the psychological impact on Damascus of close Turkish-Israeli relations and the shuttle diplomacy of Syria's friends Egypt and Iran between Ankara and Damascus.⁹ As a result, unlike previous efforts, the Turks' strategy succeeded this time. Ankara and Damascus signed the Adana accord, which declared the PKK a terrorist organization and stated that its camps in the Bekaa Valley would be closed, and Öcalan would never again be permitted to enter Syria. It also established a mechanism to monitor Syria's compliance with the agreement.¹⁰

Perhaps the most important consequence of the 1998 crisis, along with the defeat of the PKK, was the normalization of Turkish-Syrian ties. With the cessation of Syrian support for the PKK and Öcalan's extradition to Turkey from Kenya, the two countries could develop a more conciliatory relationship. Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer's participation in Syrian president Hafez al-Assad's funeral on June 10, 2000, contributed notably to a warming of relation between Damascus and Ankara.¹¹ Following Hafez's death in June 2000, Ankara welcomed Bashar's presidency, especially his interest in developing political and economic relations with Turkey. It was expected that as a young ophthalmologist who had worked in the United Kingdom, Bashar would introduce

Ankara hoped to benefit from Damascus's ties with other Arab countries to increase its share in the Middle East market.

4 Nihat Ali Özcan, *PKK Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntem* (Ankara: ASAM, 1999), pp. 246-52.

5 Author interviews with Gündüz Aktan, former deputy undersecretary, Jan. 4, 2006; Atilla Ateş, former commander of land forces, Feb. 24, 2006; Mehmet Ali Bayar, former advisor to President Süleyman Demirel, Feb. 22, 2006; Süleyman Demirel, former president, Dec. 31, 2005; Cenk Duatpe, former ambassador to Syria, May 18, 2007; Korkmaz Haktanır, former Foreign Ministry undersecretary, Feb. 21, 2006; Rıza Küçükkoğlu, former commander in second of the 7th army corps in Diyarbakır, Jan. 4, 2006; Faruk Loğoğlu, former deputy undersecretary, May 25, 2007; Onur Öymen, former permanent representative to NATO in Brussels, Mar. 26, 2007; İsmet Sezgin, former interior and later defense minister, Feb. 20, 2006; Necati Utan, former spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Feb. 20, 2006; Yaşar Yakış, former ambassador to Egypt, Dec. 1, 2006; Mesut Yılmaz, former prime minister, Feb. 22, 2006.

6 *The New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1998; *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), Oct. 3, 1998.

7 *Hürriyet*, Oct. 1, Oct. 3, 1998.

8 *Radikal*, Oct. 4, 1998.

9 Author interviews with Mark Parris, U.S. ambassador to Turkey, Oct. 6, 2006; Marc Grossman, U.S. undersecretary of state, Oct. 20, 2006; Harun Kazaz, *The Turkish Daily News* (Ankara), Oct. 4, 1998.

10 *Hürriyet*, Oct. 21, 1998.

11 *The Turkish Daily News*, June 13, 18, 2000.

wide ranging political reforms. Initially this seemed to be the case as manifested in the so-called "Damascus Spring," in Bashar's initiatives to revive the economy, and his efforts to end Syria's isolation and improve its relations with the international community.¹²

Consequently, not only did diplomatic relations improve, but the Syrian government went a step further, taking strict precautions and eagerly cracking down on the PKK. Damascus closed the organization's camps within Syria itself, shut down its radio transmission lines, banned its demonstrations, barred PKK sympathizers from running in local and national elections, curbed distribution of PKK publications in Syria, ended anti-Turkey news and editorial lines in the state media, prevented border infiltrations, turned over PKK members with Turkish citizenship to Ankara, and accepted the immigration of 1,500 Kurds with Syrian citizenship from northern Iraq to Syria on condition that they not participate in PKK activities. In addition, Syria held several broad military operations against the PKK, acting both alone and in cooperation with Turkey, imprisoning the militants or surrendering them to Turkey.¹³

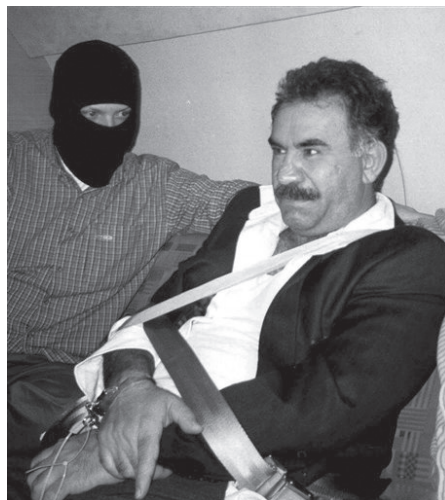
As a result of this demonstration of goodwill, Ankara established close ties with Damascus in several fields. In the realm of defense and the military, Gen. Aytaç Yalman, appointed in September 2000 as commander of gendarmerie to coordinate communication and consultation between the two countries, organized nine meetings on security and cooperation between October 1998 and January 2002.¹⁴ Further, the two countries signed a security protocol in September 2001 and a training and cooperation framework agreement in June 2002.¹⁵

12 Sonoko Sunayama, "Bashar al-Asad's Syria: Will the Son Shine?" *Mediterranean Politics*, Summer 2001, p. 127; Eyal Zisser, "Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?" *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2005, pp. 117-8, 122; Eyal Zisser, "Does Bashar al-Assad Rule Syria?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2003., pp. 16, 19, 20-1; Eyal Zisser, "What Does the Future Hold for Syria?" *MERIA*, June 2006, p. 98.

13 *Milliyet* (Istanbul), July 4, 2003, Dec. 28, 2004, May 17, 2005, Aug. 17, 2005; *The Turkish Daily News*, Apr. 5, 2007.

14 Confidential source.

15 NTV (Istanbul), June 9, 2002.



Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Öcalan sits guarded aboard an aircraft en route to Turkey following his arrest by Turkish special forces in Nairobi, Kenya, February 15, 1999. Turkey and Syria have had a lengthy and fraught relationship due, in part, to Damascus's tacit support for the terrorist and separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). A turning point came in 1998 when Syria, under compulsion, cut its ties with the group and forced Öcalan to leave the country.

In April 2009, they held joint military maneuvers.¹⁶

Ankara also viewed strengthening economic ties with Damascus as a key element to creating interdependence between the two states, viewing the integration of the Syrian economy into the broader global economy through Turkey as a potentially profitable opportunity. According to some Turkish decision-makers, Syria was, in a sense, Turkey's hinterland, and its economy could become a natural part of the Turkish economy.¹⁷ Both countries could thus benefit from each other's markets and act as bridges for one

16 *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 28, 2010; *Time*, May 26, 2011.

17 Author interview with a high ranking Turkish Foreign Ministry official, June 13, 2006.

another to enter world markets. Thus Ankara hoped to benefit from Damascus's close ties with other Arab countries to increase its share in the larger Middle Eastern market; it was willing to open its borders as much as Syria would allow in order to accommodate cross-border trade and to create a free-trade zone, going so far as to eliminate customs restrictions.¹⁸ For this purpose, serious steps

were taken when Turkey and Syria signed the free trade agreement in which both sides agreed to reduce customs taxes gradually until they would finally disappear.¹⁹

It was hoped that this greater integration would encourage Damascus to support a politically and economically stable Turkey and allow Ankara to enter the lucrative Syrian

and Middle Eastern markets.²⁰ These expectations began to produce results when the head of the Trade Chamber of Damascus, Rateb Shallah, declared that Turkish companies could benefit from Syrian free trade agreements with its neighbors by establishing joint investments with Syrian companies and sending their products to other Arab countries with zero customs levied.²¹

Ankara's disagreement with Washington over Damascus resulted in a deterioration in U.S.-Turkish relations.

THE AKP'S "SOFT POWER" STRATEGY

While the Turkish governments of the 1990s put serious efforts into improving relations with Syria, it was the Justice and Development Party, which came to power in 2002, that truly capitalized on the new opportunities. The AKP leadership envisioned a prominent role for Turkey within

the greater Middle East context. In order to actualize this vision, AKP leaders decided to adopt the instruments of soft power—finance and trade, culture, ethnic and religious kinship, diplomatic activities²²—while the coercive tools of hard power took a backseat.

The AKP's use of soft power was epitomized by Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's motto of "zero problems with the neighbors." This maintained that owing to its unique geostrategic position as a "central country" in the midst of Afro-Eurasia, Turkey enjoyed strategic depth that would allow it, through close relations with its immediate neighbors, to become a major regional and even a global actor.²³ The AKP's success in building close relations with Syria and other Middle East countries was to rest on its understanding of these economic and political instruments and their full utilization.

The AKP sought to utilize its historical and religious ties with the Levant as a soft power tool. According to its worldview, Turkey possessed a special responsibility toward the regions that it believed had thrived under Ottoman rule. In addition, as products of an Islamic political movement, AKP theorists viewed Turkey as a role model for the countries in the area, striving to revive what they perceived as the justice, fairness, and economic prosperity of the Ottoman era. This self-image also helps fulfill the expectations of AKP's constituents, sensitive to developments in the Middle East and viewing themselves as a key part of the Islamic world. This psychology was manifested when Erdoğan asserted during a December 2004 Damascus visit that he could not differentiate between the shining faces of Turks and Syrians and would thus call them his brothers, rather than his friends.²⁴ Similarly during another speech, he addressed the Arab countries "not only as friends, but, at the same time, brothers."²⁵ Some

18 Ibid.

19 *Milliyet*, Dec. 22, 2004.

20 See Damla Aras and Mustafa Aydin, "Political Conditionality of Economic Relations between Paternalist States: Turkey's Interaction with Iran, Iraq and Syria," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Winter/Spring, 2005, pp. 21-43.

21 NTV, June 20, 2001.

22 Joseph Nye, Jr., "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, no. 2, 2004, p. 256; idem, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, Autumn 1990, pp. 154, 156, 167.

23 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001); Kemal Kirisci and Nilgun Kaptanoglu, "The Politics of Trade and Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Sept. 2011, p. 711.

24 *Aksiyon* (Istanbul), Dec. 27, 2004.

25 *The Turkish Daily News*, June 9, 2006.

have dubbed this approach “neo-Ottomanism.”²⁶

The AKP’s efforts to increase Turkish influence in the Middle East found unexpected support in the Turkish cinema and music industries. At least forty Turkish soap operas have been broadcast in the Arab world in the last decade.²⁷ Turkish music, movies, and other television series have become instant hits in Arab societies; the finale of the Turkish TV series *Noor* was watched by approximately twenty-one million Arab viewers in 2009.²⁸ One explanation of such popularity could be that Turkish films and videos provide an alternative, grassroots view of how predominantly Muslim societies can live, illustrating increased societal freedoms—especially in the case of Turkish women—and higher living standards, thanks to the Turkish liberalized economy.²⁹

Following the lead of the previous government, the AKP emphasized the improvement of bilateral trade relations. In October 2009, the Strategic Cooperation Council, composed of ministers of the two countries, met in the Syrian city of Aleppo and the Turkish town of Gaziantep in a bid to improve bilateral relations in all fields.³⁰ The AKP’s vision of expanding its influence through strong trade relations with Syria was wholeheartedly supported by an army of umbrella organizations comprising Turkish investors, businessmen, and company officials. The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s As-

Photo will not display.

Turkish political and business leaders have viewed Syria as a prime economic opportunity since the 1990s, anticipating that Damascus would be the gate through which Turkey could expand its clout into the Arab world. Syrian president Bashar al-Assad (center, pointing) is seen here on a tour of a Turkish shipyard led by Ankara’s transport minister Binali Yildirim (right).

sociation, the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association, the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists, the Turkish Exporters Assembly, the Foreign Economic Relations Board, the International Transporters Association, and the Turkish Contractors Association, as well as smaller, local business associations such as the Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce, Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce, and Istanbul Chamber of Commerce had been actively involved in expanding their businesses in Syria.³¹ This led to a significant increase in Turkish-Syrian trade volume, from \$824.1 million in 2003 to \$1.84 billion in 2010.³² The two countries had hoped to reach \$5 billion by 2012. In 2011 alone, Turkish companies invested a total of \$223 million in the Syrian metal, food, cement, and open sea fishing industries. In addition, there was a considerable increase in the number of Syrian tourists visiting Turkey, from 154,000 in 2003 to 500,000 in 2010³³ while the termination of visa

26 See, for example, *Hürriyet*, Aug. 28, 2011; Omer Taspinar, “Turkey’s Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism And Kemalism,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., Sept. 2008.

27 Bobby Gosh, “Erdogan’s Moment,” *Time Magazine*, Nov. 28, 2011.

28 Ibid.

29 Nurcin Yildiz, “Mehmet Muhenned Olunca,” *Usak Stratejik Gündem* (Ankara), Apr. 14, 2010.

30 Turkish Foreign Ministry, Ankara, Oct. 13, 2009.

31 Kirisci and Kaptanoglu, “The Politics of Trade and Turkish Foreign Policy.”

32 “Turkey-Syria Economic and Trade Relations,” Turkish Foreign Ministry, Ankara, accessed Dec. 23, 2011.

33 *Today’s Zaman* (Istanbul), Oct. 3, 2011.

requirements for visits shorter than ninety days undoubtedly played a role in the success of both tourism and trade.

As a result of these efforts, the AKP government appeared to have enhanced Turkish prestige throughout the Middle East as evidenced by Bashar al-Assad's reported request that Ankara help mediate Syrian-Israeli covert talks³⁴ while Israeli minister of transportation and deputy prime minister Shaul Mofaz confirmed that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had sent a secret message to Syria through Turkey in June 2007. The Olmert government had reportedly asked Damascus to take some constructive steps toward peace in return for Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights.³⁵ By the same token, when Hezbollah abducted two Israeli soldiers in July 2006, Erdoğan sent Davutoğlu to Damascus at Olmert and President George Bush's request to ask that Assad use his influence on Hezbollah.³⁶ For his part, Lebanese prime minister Fuad Siniora turned to Ankara for help to convince Damascus and Tehran to abandon their politically destabilizing

strategies toward Lebanon.³⁷ Although these efforts apparently came to naught, the fact that they were undertaken at all indicates a role for Turkey hitherto not contemplated within the Middle East's various conflicts.

Another strong indication of Ankara's shifting policies was its open disagreement with Washington's approach toward

Damascus, which resulted in a visible deterioration in U.S.-Turkish relations. This was perhaps most notable after the 2003 invasion of Iraq when Ankara's strategic interests coincided with Damascus's—and Tehran's—on a number of issues.

All three states considered the possible partition of Iraq and the formation of a Kurdish state in its northern part a grave danger, fearing the domino effects of such a development on their own Kurdish populations. Syria, for example, had been concerned about its Kurdish population after the Kurds in Qamishli rose up against Damascus in March 2004 to protest violations of their human and political rights.³⁸ In the ensuing years, the AKP government challenged Washington's tougher stance and mistrust of Damascus and argued that rather than exclude the Assad regime, U.S. administrations should support limited reforms in Syria.³⁹ It argued that Washington's concerns about Syria—including its weapons of mass destruction programs, sluggish democratic reforms, support for Hezbollah, Hamas, and anti-coalition forces in Iraq, its meddling in Lebanese politics, and its acting as an Iranian agent in the Arab world—could only be resolved through dialogue.⁴⁰

To this end, Ankara warmed its relations with Damascus in a number of ways. In July 2004, Erdoğan met with Syrian prime minister Najji Otri while refusing to meet Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert who visited Ankara on the same day.⁴¹ In April 2005, President Sezer refused to cancel his trip to Syria while Lebanon was in the midst of its short-lived Cedar Revolution, instead taking the risk of being at loggerheads with the West.⁴² Turkey's relations with what had been its most important ally, the United States, were strained yet again when Washington criticized Ankara for harming the international efforts to force Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, so much so that the Bush administration called Ankara's policy "unacceptable."⁴³ This, however, did not deter Erdoğan from being at Assad's elbow in August 2008 when the latter met French president Nicho-

Turkey desires to see the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood come to power or share power with Assad's Alawite regime.

34 *Ha'aretz*, Jan. 16, 2007.

35 *Milliyet* (Istanbul), June 10, 2007.

36 *Ibid.*, July 6, 12, 2006; *The Turkish Daily News*, July 5, 2006; *Bugün* (Istanbul), July 4, 2006.

37 *The Turkish Daily News*, Jan. 4, 2007.

38 *Milliyet*, June 10, 2005, Feb. 1, 2007; Eyal Zisser, "Bashar under Pressure: Potential Implications of the Qamishli Riots," *Tel Aviv Notes*, Mar. 22, 2004, p. 2; Zisser, "Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?" p. 119; *al-Ahram* (Cairo), Apr. 8-14, 2004.

39 *Milliyet*, June 11, 2005.

40 *Ibid.*, June 9, 2005; *The New York Times*, Jan. 24, 2007.

41 *Hürriyet*, July 13, 2004; *Yeni Şafak* (Istanbul), July 14, 2004; *Ha'aretz*, July 16, 2004.

42 *Hürriyet*, Apr. 9, 2005.

43 *Milliyet*, May 12, 2005, June 9, 2005, Jan. 27, 2006.

las Sarkozy and Qatari Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani in Damascus to discuss the peace process with Israel.⁴⁴

Ties between Turkey and Syria were further consolidated through Erdoğan's personal friendship with Assad, whose 2004 visit to Ankara was the first for a Syrian president in sixty-eight years. This was followed by the Assad family's one week holiday at a Turkish resort in Bodrum where the Erdoğan family met the Assads at the airport and had a lunch with them before traveling to their hotel together.⁴⁵ The first ladies, Emine Erdoğan and Asma Assad, campaigned together for an endangered species, the bald ibis, while Emine Erdoğan visited Syria as Asma Assad's guest to talk about Turkey.⁴⁶

The future of Turkish-Syrian relations seemed extremely rosy until the outbreak of the Arab upheavals in early 2011.

BACK TO SQUARE ONE?

Despite the many successes of the AKP's "soft power" approach, it was not able to sustain the influence on the Syrian regime it had expected, especially when it mattered most—during a time of unrest.

With the rise of Syrian resistance to the Assad regime, beginning in March 2011, the Turkish-Syrian rapport began to deteriorate. The AKP government initially believed that its influence on and close ties with the Assad regime would exert a moderating impact on its behavior. After several attempts to stop Assad's brutality, including a lengthy meeting between him and Davutoğlu in August 2011, Ankara realized that the Syrian government was unwilling to resolve the problems through reforms and would continue to use force against its citizens. Hence Erdoğan's November 2011 endorsement of the rebels⁴⁷ and President Abdullah Gül's proclamation that "our

trust [for the Syrian government] has vanished."⁴⁸

While Erdoğan and Assad's friendship has seemingly come to an end, Ankara's relations with Washington are becoming more closely aligned. The Turkish prime minister has been in regular contact with the administration since the start of the Syrian uprising, discussing the unrest personally with President Barack Obama.⁴⁹ In late September 2011, the two leaders declared publicly that they were in agreement on pressuring Syria.⁵⁰ While Ankara initially dragged its feet on imposing sanctions against Damascus (as Washington and Brussels have), it appears now to be preparing to make similar moves. During a recent interview with the *Financial Times*, Davutoğlu revealed that Ankara was preparing targeted sanctions against Damascus, which might include a buffer zone on Syrian territory.⁵¹

Ankara's support for Syrian opposition groups is one of the clearest signs of its break with Damascus. To this end, the Turkish government built several tent camps in Antakya, a city in southeastern Anatolia bordering Syria, to host eight thousand Syrian refugees fleeing their government's violent crackdown. One of the camps hosts defecting military officials. Modest in number (some seventy people although the Syrian opposition claims that hundreds of defectors fled to Turkey),⁵² they call themselves the "Free Syrian Army" and have been gearing to toppling the Syrian government. Their camp is protected by Turkish soldiers while their commander Col. Riad Asaad travels with a Turkish official. Part of the Syrian National Council (SNC), an umbrella resistance group formed in Istanbul

A Sunni resurgence in Syria could stymie Tehran's ideological and political expansion in the Middle East.

44 Sami Moubayed, "Turkish-Syrian Relations: The Erdogan Legacy," *SETA Policy Brief*, Oct. 2008, p. 7.

45 *Today's Zaman*, Aug. 7, 2008; Gosh, "Erdogan's Moment"; *Vatan* (Istanbul), Aug. 5, 2008.

46 *The Jerusalem Post*, Aug. 1, 2010; *Hürriyet*, May 13, 2005.

47 *The New York Times*, Nov. 22, 2011.

48 *Milliyet*, Aug. 29, 2011.

49 AKP official website, Aug. 11, 2011; *Hürriyet*, June 22, 2011.

50 Reuters, Sept. 20, 2011.

51 *Financial Times* (London), Nov. 1, 2011; *Today's Zaman*, Nov. 6, 2011; *The Telegraph* (London), Nov. 29, 2011.

52 Reuters, June 11, 2011.



President Obama (left) and Prime Minister Erdoğan greet each other at a summit in Cannes, November 3, 2011, signaling a thawing of relations between the two nations, especially in response to the Syrian regime's bloody repression of its citizens.

in early October 2011, these Syrian rebels seem to have found a welcoming haven in Turkey. They have already met with Davutoğlu, and in the coming weeks, their tent camp will host Erdoğan. Turkish officials describe their help as purely humanitarian,⁵³ and Asaad has confirmed that the SNC possesses no weapons and does not conduct armed training in the camp, contrary to the claims of a recent *New York Times* article.⁵⁴

The shift in the AKP government's approach toward Damascus stems from a number of reasons, one being Turkey's desire to see the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) come to power, or at least share power with Assad's Alawite regime. According to an Agence France-Presse report, during foreign minister Davutoğlu's lengthy talk with Assad in November, the former suggested Ankara would support Assad if the SMB, an outgrowth of the country's majority Sunni community, was given four major ministries. He also asked

Assad to approve the SMB's return to Syria, after decades of exile. Reportedly, Assad rejected the idea on the grounds that the Brotherhood, as an Islamist party, was incompatible with Syria's secular character. Although the Turkish Foreign Ministry denied the story, a Turkish official did state that the ministry had warned the Syrian government to share power and make reforms.⁵⁵

While Davutoğlu's proposal to Assad has yet to be substantiated, the AKP government's approval—if not support—of the SMB is undeniable. In April 2011, the Brotherhood held a conference in Istanbul where it denounced the Assad regime. In June, members signed a declaration in Turkey, along with other opposition groups, which called for "freedom of belief, expression, and practice of religion under a civil state."⁵⁶ Indeed, SMB leader Muhammad Riad al-Shaqfa declared that Syrians would accept military intervention by Turkey, rather than the West, for protection from Assad's security forces.⁵⁷

In addition to sharing a similar philosophy, a government ruled by a Sunni Islamist movement in Syria could help the AKP government consolidate its influence and power in the Middle East and North Africa in the coming years. In that sense, it was a positive development for the Turkish government when four Muslim Brotherhood members and six independent Islamists were selected among the nineteen members of the General Secretariat whose names were published by the Syrian revolutionary committee.⁵⁸ Ankara's growing influence in the region was demonstrated during Erdoğan's September visits to Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Despite criticism of his intervention by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leaders, the AKP has emerged as a role model and mentor for political Islamist movements as exemplified by Tunisia's Annahda party's official adoption of AKP's line of thinking.⁵⁹

53 *The New York Times*, Dec. 8, 2011; *al-Ahram Weekly*, Nov. 17-23, 2011.

54 Ty McCormick, "Turkey Mulls Buffer Zone on Syrian Border," *Foreign Policy*, June 17, 2011; *Today's Zaman*, Oct. 2, 2011; Anadolu News Agency (Ankara), Oct. 18, 2011; *The New York Times*, Oct. 27, 2011; *Milliyet*, Nov. 7, 2011.

55 Agence France-Presse, Sept. 29, 2011.

56 Piotr Zalewski, "Islamic Evolution," *Foreign Policy*, Aug. 11, 2011.

57 Reuters, Nov. 17, 2011.

58 Barry Rubin, "Obama Administration Does It Again! Empowers Largely Islamist Leadership for Syrian Revolution," GLORIA Center, Herzliya, Oct. 22, 2011.

59 Gosh, "Erdoğan's Moment."

A Sunni resurgence in Syria could also stymie Tehran's ideological and political expansion in the Middle East, dubbed the "Shiite Crescent" by Jordan's King Abdullah II in 2003.⁶⁰ Iran, Syria, and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah represent the most visible members of that group, but unrest in Bahrain and Tehran's growing influence on the Shiite-dominated government of Iraq have made Sunni leaders in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, and Qatar anxious.⁶¹ Thus, in the event of the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power in Syria, Turkey as its patron could gain leverage against its long-time rival Iran.

The signs of strained Turkish-Iranian relations were already manifest in September 2011 when Ankara agreed to install new NATO radar systems to detect missiles launched from Iran,⁶² a step roundly criticized by Tehran. In the same vein, the recent declaration by SMB leader Shafqa of his willingness to adopt the Turkish governance system, rather than the Iranian model, is another demonstration of the ongoing competition between the two states over regional leadership.⁶³

The AKP government also learned from its slow start in the Libya case. Like Syria, Libya has been a lucrative market for Turkey. Turkish companies secured \$15 billion worth of construction contracts from Tripoli. The volume of trade between the two countries was \$9.8 billion in 2010, and Turkish companies initiated 160 investment projects.⁶⁴ Like his relationship with Assad, Erdoğan also had a close friendship with Libya's ousted dictator Mu'ammār al-Qaddafi: The Turkish prime minister was invited as an honorary participant in the 2010 Arab summit in Sert thanks to Qaddafi and received the Qaddafi International Prize for Human Rights for his "distinguished ser-

vice to humanity" in November 2010.⁶⁵ Consequently, when NATO's involvement in the Libyan crisis began in March 2011, the AKP government dragged its feet. It was not until May that Erdoğan called on Qaddafi to step down.⁶⁶ In all likelihood, realizing that the dictator's days were numbered, Ankara finally decided to back the NATO air campaign: It sent six vessels to support the naval blockade against Qaddafi's forces, sent a ship to evacuate Turkish civilians from Misrata, and began supporting the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC). Further, following British prime minister David Cameron and French president Nicholas Sarkozy who backed the NTC from the beginning of the uprising, Erdoğan visited Libya to win the heart of the new government to which Ankara provided \$300 million in cash, loans, and other aid.⁶⁷

Unlike the Libyan debacle, this time the Turkish government appears to be anticipating the toppling of the Assad regime.

Consequently, Ankara has started to prepare for the next phase of relations with a new Syrian leadership to protect the future of its investments in Syria as well as to establish a strong relationship with a possible Syrian government upon which it can expand its influence. Having said that, when the uprisings in Syria started, Erdoğan at first continued to support Assad, calling him "a good friend who was loved by his people."⁶⁸ There were even some rumors, strongly denied by Turkish officials,⁶⁹ that the first defector from the Syrian army, Hussein Harmoush, was expelled from Turkey and surrendered to the Syrian officials. However, unlike the Libyan case, this time, Ankara shifted its position quickly.

A Syrian civil war could mean instability for Turkey with an influx of refugees and the revival of the PKK threat.

60 Edward Luttwak, "Revenge of the Sunnis," *Foreign Policy*, Dec. 7, 2011.

61 Jacquelyn K. Davis and Charles M. Perry, "Rethinking the War on Terror: Developing a Strategy to Counter Extremist Ideologies," The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis and Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Washington, D.C., Mar. 2007.

62 Gosh, "Erdoğan's Moment."

63 Bloomberg News Service (New York), Nov. 28, 2011.

64 "Arab Awakening Boosts Turkey's Confidence," *IISS Strategic Comments*, The International Institute For Strategic Studies, London, Oct. 2011, pp. 1-3; "Turkey's Position on the Libyan Revolution," The Doha Institute, Mar. 21, 2011.

65 *Today's Zaman*, Dec. 1, 2010.

66 *Al-Ahram*, May 19-25, 2011.

67 Al-Arabiya News Channel (Dubai), Sept. 16, 2011; "Arab Awakening Boosts Turkey's Confidence," *IISS Strategic Comments*, pp. 1-3.

68 *Al-Ahram*, May 19-25, 2011.

69 *Today's Zaman*, Sept. 16, 2011.

Perhaps the most significant reason for this policy shift is Ankara's concern over news that the Assad regime has rekindled its relationship with the Kurds granting some citizenship⁷⁰ and giving them more cultural rights—opening Kurdish schools, organizing meetings, and allowing them access to the country from Iraq—in return for their support for Damascus. There are claims that the Syrian government has once again been in contact with the PKK in an effort to find new allies inside Syria and possibly as retaliation against Ankara. There have also been rumors that Syrian support was behind the PKK's recent attacks that cost twenty-four Turkish soldiers' lives.⁷¹ Although no precise evidence against Syria was produced, Davutoğlu explicitly warned Damascus, "Recalling the past, [Syria] should not even think of playing the PKK card. Everybody will see where such an act would lead,"⁷² clearly referring to the 1998 crisis when the two countries came to the brink of war.

CONCLUSION

The tools of "soft power" have clear limits, especially when dealing with a nondemocratic state. Dependency created through trade, diplomacy, religious kinship, historical ties, or cultural similarities mean little when the destiny of a state depends on the whims of a dictator who feels threatened. Given the ruthless realpolitik of the Middle East, it is naive to believe that the tools of soft power can foster a meaningful change in such a setting. The problem with Turkey's "zero problem with neighbors" mantra was that it was tested against an authoritarian regime. Equally important, its aim was to better the relations with the regime rather than aiming at the population. None of the integral elements of an open, democratic society upon which the notion of "soft power" rests exist in this context. Consequently, Ankara

could expect that its "zero problem" strategy would not influence the decision-making of other authoritarian regimes such as Iran.

From a pragmatic point of view, Ankara has to make sure that the Assad regime is toppled and a new government in Syria is established. Simply in terms of Turkish domestic politics, a protracted Syrian civil war means increasing instability with a mass influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey and the possible revival of the PKK threat from across the Syrian border. Even if Damascus does not intend to use the PKK against Turkey, the PKK may attempt to take advantage of the unstable environment and a potential power vacuum in Syria to resume attacks on Turkey. PKK attacks launched from northern Iraq in the 1990s resulted in more than twenty Turkish cross-border operations,⁷³ and such efforts from Syria could easily trigger a similar reaction.

Ankara has openly sided with the SNC to reap the future material and ideological benefits of support for the movement. If its calculus works, Ankara may be one step closer to its neo-Ottoman aspirations, helping to spearhead predominantly Sunni, political Islamic movements in the Middle East and North Africa. This could, in turn, cause a negative reaction among those who consider Turkey a rival for the leadership of the Middle East such as the Saudi rulers.

Against this backdrop, it may well be that Ankara's decade-long, improving relations with Tehran have come to an end. Turkey's support of the Syrian rebels explicitly threatens Iran's expanding power in the region and its ideological sphere of influence. Turkey may thus increase its cooperation with the West against Iran while Tehran might also start using the PKK as leverage against Ankara.

After a 10-year honeymoon, Turkish-Syrian relations are back to square one. So long as the Assad regime continues to hunker down and massacre its citizenry, it seems that Ankara's stability, peaceful relations, and strong economic ties with Damascus will only be possible through the use of hard power instruments.



70 *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 8, 2011.

71 NTV, Oct. 19, 2011.

72 *Today's Zaman*, Oct. 30, 2011; Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Turkey Is Afraid Syria Will Target Its Kurdish Achilles' Heels," *Terrorism Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation, Washington, D.C.) Nov. 11, 2011.

73 Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (London: Hurst 2003), pp. 312–42.

Can Afghanistan Be Rescued?

by Wahabuddin Ra'ees

U.S. president Barack Obama entered office with a bold plan to combat Afghanistan's escalating insurgency, empower its government, encourage a political resolution of the conflict, and secure the cooperation of neighboring Pakistan—all in time for U.S. troops to withdraw by the end of 2014.

This new Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak) policy has yet to deliver on its promise. While the U.S. military surge swept insurgents out of their southeastern strongholds, the rebels have responded with terror attacks and assassinations reaching into the heart of Kabul. Washington has accelerated its training of Afghan security forces, but most U.S. aid still circumvents the central government, weakening its authority. With a political settlement nowhere in sight and Pakistani support for armed extremists unabated, Washington's options for preventing a Taliban takeover have narrowed.

BACKGROUND

Until the September 11, 2001 terror attacks left nearly 3,000 Americans dead, Afghanistan was not a high priority for U.S. policymakers. After aiding the Afghan mujahideen in their struggle to expel Soviet occupation forces in the 1980s, Washington disengaged from the country in the 1990s, effectively outsourcing it to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The Taliban, a militant Afghan, Islamist group, captured Kabul in 1996 and set about establishing a brutally repressive theocracy. The governments of Iran, Russia, and India supported the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, which held on to northeastern Afghanistan.¹

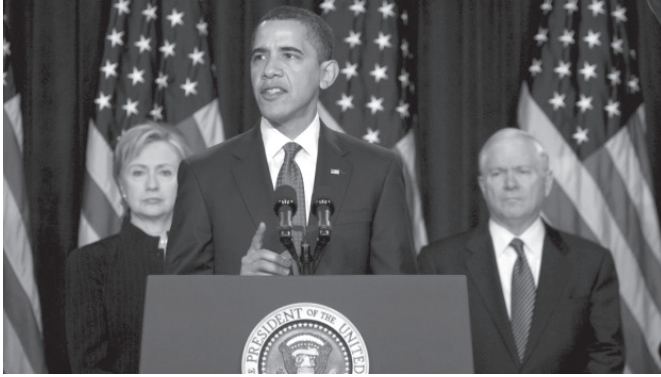
Though fueled by competing regional ambitions, the war was fought largely along ethnic lines. The Taliban was dominated by Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan (42 percent of the population) and the second largest in Pakistan while the Northern Alliance was dominated by Tajiks (27 percent), Uzbeks, (9 percent), and various smaller minorities.² Even as Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network began concentrating the main focus of its activities in Afghanistan in the late 1990s, Washington refused to aid the Northern Alliance, relying instead on Islamabad to address U.S. concerns.

After 9/11, a U.S.-led international coalition joined forces with the Northern Alliance to

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1 Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (London: Viking Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 3-4, 11, 20.

2 "Country Profile: Afghanistan," Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, Washington, D.C., Aug. 2008.



In response to the slow rate of progress in Afghanistan, as well as to domestic political concerns, President Obama (center), here with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (left) and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, announced a new AfPak policy in March 2009. While pledging “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future,” he also promised a troop drawdown beginning in July 2011, with a complete withdrawal by 2014.

overthrow the Taliban. President George W. Bush resolved not only to deprive al-Qaeda of a safe haven in Afghanistan but also to establish a liberal, democratic state that would serve as a model for the Islamic world. In addition, Afghanistan was seen as an ideal strategic platform to combat terrorist threats emanating from the region and to keep a watchful eye on influence from Russia, Iran, and Pakistan. A stable Afghanistan was expected to resume its traditional role as an interregional trade corridor, providing access to Central Asian markets and energy resources.³ Washington treated any and all who violently resisted the government of President Hamid Karzai as one and the same enemy.

The Bush administration’s ambitious goals in Afghanistan were greatly under-resourced. The training and deployment of Afghan security forces was soon outstripped by the grow-

ing power of the Taliban and other Islamist groups in remote areas of Pakistan, now the epicenter of global jihadist terror. This compelled the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to fight a counterinsurgency campaign with little input from the Afghan people, many of whom came to believe they were being deprived of control over their own destiny.

Despite a steady increase in the size of the ISAF, by 2009, the Taliban had established shadow governments in most provinces with officials collecting taxes, conscripting young men into the Taliban army, and holding trials to punish criminals and re-

A NEW ACPAK POLICY

In a March 2009 speech, President Obama announced a new AfPak policy with a narrow focus: “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future.” Further declaring Afghanistan to be not just a U.S. problem but “an international security challenge of the highest order,” the president pledged to work multilaterally with international institutions, U.S. European allies, and Afghanistan’s neighbors.⁵

Although publicly framed as a counterterrorism strategy, the new AfPak policy represented a classic counterinsurgency strategy viewing

3 Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp. 24-31; “Afghanistan: Are We Losing the Peace?” Independent Task Force Report, Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society, Washington, D.C., June 2003, p. 7.

4 *The Washington Post*, Dec. 8, 2009.

5 Barack Obama, remarks on a strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, White House, Washington, D.C., Mar. 27, 2009.

nation-building and democratization as prerequisites to military success. Claiming that Afghanistan was “denied the resources that it demands because of the war in Iraq,” Obama greatly boosted U.S. troop deployments in Afghanistan and increased military and economic aid. Confident that the U.S. military would achieve its objectives in eighteen months, he pledged to begin withdrawing troops in July 2011 and complete the hand-over of security to Afghan military and police forces in 2014.

While committed to defeating the uncompromising core of the Taliban with force, Washington was now eager to promote a political settlement and prepared to offer “carrots” to those willing to give up the fight. Obama emphasized that the process must be spearheaded by the Afghan people and their government without foreign interference.

The president recognized that the Taliban and its militant allies were primarily based not in Afghanistan but in remote areas of the Pakistani frontier, which he called “the most dangerous place in the world.”⁶ Pakistan would get increased military and economic assistance in return for restraining its Afghan proxies.

THE MILITARY SURGE

Shortly after taking office, Obama began increasing the U.S. military deployment in Afghanistan with the aim of reversing Taliban gains and strengthening the capacity of Kabul’s own security forces to take over the fight. In February 2009, he ordered 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan. In March 2009, he ordered the dispatch of 4,000 additional troops to accelerate the training of Afghan security forces. After internal policy reviews concluded that the ISAF was not strong enough to stabilize the country and win the war, in December 2009, the president announced that he was sending some 30,000 more U.S. troops.⁷ By early 2011, the ISAF had

reached a peak strength of 150,000 troops, two-thirds of them Americans.

The surge succeeded in clearing Taliban forces from areas of Afghanistan where they had grown strong, particularly the provinces of Kandahar and Helmand, and in establishing at least nominal government authority there. However, this came at the expense of inflaming popular resentment toward the ISAF in the affected local communities.

The broader purpose of the surge was to draw insurgents to the negotiating table and win Pakistani acceptance of the status quo. Yet by setting a fixed deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops without affirming any strategic commitment to Afghanistan after 2014, the administration gave rejectionists an incentive to wait out the storm rather than compromise. Political necessity led Obama to proceed on schedule with his commitment to begin pulling out troops in June 2011, further reinforcing the Taliban’s reported unofficial slogan, “Americans have the watches; we have the time.”⁸

The Bush administration’s ambitious goals in Afghanistan were greatly under-resourced.

THE POLITICAL SURGE

Even as U.S.-led coalition forces took the fight to the Taliban, the Obama administration worked to encourage dialogue with insurgent leaders willing to renounce violence. Though collectively referenced as “the Taliban” in many Western media reports, there are three distinct Pashtun networks leading the Afghan insurgency, all of which have sanctuaries and training facilities in Pakistan. None have been placed on the U.S. State Department’s official list of foreign terrorist organizations as this would imply Islamabad’s designation as a sponsor of terrorism and potentially discourage it from reaching an accommodation with Karzai.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Barack Obama, “The Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York, Dec. 1, 2009.

⁸ *NBC News*, MSNBC, May 23, 2007.



In February 2009, President Obama ordered 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan and continued to augment those numbers to a peak strength of 150,000 coalition troops, two-thirds of them American, by early 2011. The surge has succeeded in clearing Taliban forces from Kandahar and Helmand provinces.

- The Taliban, led by Mullah Omar and the Shura council in Quetta.

- The Haqqani network, led by former mujahideen leader Jalaluddin Haqqani and his sons, based in North Waziristan. The network has maintained close ties to the Taliban since the latter's capture of Kabul in 1996 but often operates independently. Both groups have officially maintained that no negotiations can take place until all foreign troops leave Afghanistan.

- Hizb-e-Islami, led by ex-mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Hekmatyar ran afoul of the Taliban in the 1990s and moved to Iran but joined forces with Mullah Omar after U.S.-led forces entered Afghanistan in 2001. He is less beholden to Omar than the Haqqanis and more amenable to compromise. Indeed, a splinter group of Hizb-e-Islami sympathetic to Hekmatyar is represented in the Afghan parliament and holds a seat in Karzai's cabinet.

Reconciliation efforts by Karzai fall into three distinct tracks. The first is a long-running

attempt to co-opt individual Taliban members, often through financial inducements. By the time Obama came into office, more than 6,000 Taliban members had already defected, including at least nineteen former officials of the 1996-2001 Taliban regime, most notably former foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil and former ambassador to Pakistan Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef.⁹ While some of these defectors helped build local tribal support for the government, most were no longer active in the Taliban after 2001 and have since been officially disavowed.

A parallel effort was made to peel away the Haqqani network and Hizb-e-Islami from Mullah Omar. Efforts by Karzai and Washington to woo the Haqqanis date back to at least 2004¹⁰ while back channel overtures to Hekmatyar were underway in 2008. Both have been offered political spoils (high-level cabinet seats, local governorships, and the like) in exchange for pulling their fighters out of the insurgent camp, but neither has accepted.¹¹

The third track—still in its infancy when Obama entered office—comprises efforts to reconcile with Omar himself, which would effectively end the insurgency altogether. Officially, the Taliban maintains that it will not negotiate until all foreign troops have left Afghanistan while Karzai maintains that the Taliban must accept Afghanistan's constitution. Unofficially, both Karzai and Omar have signaled the willingness to compromise on their bottom line positions.¹²

In 2008, exploratory contacts between emissaries of Karzai and Omar were held in Saudi Arabia.¹³ In January 2010, Karzai set up a National Council for Peace, headed by former presi-

9 *The Washington Post*, July 5, 2007; *The New York Times*, Mar. 11, 2009.

10 *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), May 5, 2004.

11 *The Washington Post*, Nov. 5, 2008.

12 *YNet News* (Tel Aviv), Dec. 3, 2009; *Pakistan Today* (Lahore), Aug. 6, 2011.

13 *NBC News*, MSNBC, Oct. 6, 2008; Reuters, Feb. 2, 2010.

dent Burhanuddin Rabbani, charged with brokering a political compromise. The choice of Rabbani—a Tajik who fiercely resisted the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan in the 1990s—to take charge of outreach to mainly Pashtun insurgents was intended to placate Karzai’s non-Pashtun coalition partners from the Northern Alliance, who fear that he or Washington will cut a deal with the Taliban at their expense.¹⁴

Karzai’s greatest difficulty in reaching out to the Taliban is that he is not in a position to deliver what it wants. Most high value Taliban detainees are held in U.S. detention facilities outside the control of the Afghan government. Mullah Omar is also said to be eager to see the removal of Taliban leaders from the list of the U.N.’s al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee as a confidence-building measure, but Karzai has no control over this.

As Karzai sought to reach an accommodation with the Taliban, U.S. and European officials initiated their own contacts. The U.N. special representative in Afghanistan, Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, met with regional commanders from the Quetta Shura in Dubai in January 2010.¹⁵ Mid-ranking State Department and CIA officials reportedly held two secret meetings with emissaries of Mullah Omar, including his relative Tayyab Agha, in the winter of 2010-11 and May 2011.¹⁶ There were also reports that some U.S. officials met with representatives of the Haqqani network.¹⁷

Karzai was angered by the Obama administration’s back channel talks with the Taliban, which he saw as undercutting the authority of his government. In June 2011, the Afghan president leaked details of the contacts to the media, forcing Agha (who had apparently not informed the Pakistanis of his outreach) to break off the talks and go into hiding.¹⁸ How-

ever, while lack of coordination between Kabul and Washington probably undermined their reconciliation initiatives, it soon became evident that Islamabad constitutes the main obstacle to a breakthrough.

PAKISTAN

President Obama came to office with no illusions about the Pakistani government’s continuing sponsorship of insurgent forces in Afghanistan.¹⁹ Just months earlier, Washington intercepted communications indicating that officers of Pakistan’s Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) were behind the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul.²⁰ Although some U.S. congressmen and analysts began publicly accusing Pakistan of collaborating with the Taliban and al-Qaeda,²¹ administration officials held back. There was a widespread recognition in Washington that victory in Afghanistan would ultimately depend on coaxing Islamabad into curtailing militant Islamist networks operating on its territory.

Toward this end, Washington greatly increased military and economic assistance to Pakistan, the latter tripling to \$1.5 billion annually.²² The new aid was intended to develop the economy of remote areas where militant groups operate and to encourage the Pakistani government to curtail them (indeed, the enabling legislation nominally requires it).²³

The Northern Alliance fears that Karzai or Washington will cut a deal with the Taliban at their expense.

14 Max Boot, “Karzai’s Risky Moves with India,” *Commentary*, Oct. 6, 2011; Ahmad Majidyar, “Afghan President Karzai Suspends Taliban Talks,” AEI Center for Defense Studies, Washington, D.C., Oct. 6, 2011.

15 *The Guardian* (London), Jan. 28, 2010.

16 *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), May 24, 2011.

17 Associated Press, Aug. 29, 2011.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 17-30; idem, *Descent into Chaos*, p. 9.

20 *The New York Times*, Sept. 22, 2011.

21 *Ibid.*, July 25, 2010.

22 *The Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 2011; “Aid to Pakistan by the Numbers,” Center for Global Development, Washington D.C., accessed Dec. 13, 2011.

23 *The Economic Times* (Mumbai), Nov. 18, 2011.

Bypassing the central Afghan government does little to avoid corruption and misuse of power and resources.

In the meantime, the Obama administration was prepared to act unilaterally against terrorist threats in Pakistan. The number of U.S. drone attacks on targets in the country increased dramatically, from 33 in 2008

to 118 in 2010.²⁴ In May 2011, a Jalalabad-based U.S. strike force raided bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, killing the al-Qaeda leader.²⁵ The Pakistani authorities were not notified beforehand as the close proximity of bin Laden's residence to the prestigious Kakul military

academy strongly suggested official collusion in hiding him.

However, the Pakistani government has little incentive either to stop militant groups from organizing and training on Pakistani soil or to accept an Afghan political settlement that will strengthen the central government in Kabul. Indeed, Islamabad has not only refused to encourage compromise but has reportedly pressured moderate Taliban leaders not to pursue a political accommodation with Karzai. According to Eide, the arrests of the Taliban military commander, Abdul Ghani Baradar, and a dozen or so other senior Taliban figures by the Pakistani authorities in early 2010 brought an end to his contacts.²⁶

The spring and summer of 2011 witnessed a wave of spectacular attacks in Kabul and assassinations of high profile government officials, mostly by the Haqqani network. In June, the Haqqani network carried out an assault on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul that left eleven civilians and two Afghan policemen dead.²⁷ In September, it carried out a truck bomb-

ing of a NATO outpost south of Kabul that killed five coalition soldiers and wounded seventy-seven; it also staged a raid on the U.S. embassy in Kabul that killed more than a dozen people. According to U.S. officials, the embassy attackers were in cell phone contact with suspected ISI operatives.²⁸

Later that month, Karzai's hopes of a national reconciliation were shattered when a suicide bomber posing as a Taliban envoy assassinated High Peace Council chairman Rabbani. The Pakistanis are "using terrorism as a tool against Afghanistan," the president warned afterward.²⁹ After the killing of Rabbani, Karzai announced that he was calling off peace talks to focus instead on bringing Pakistan to the negotiating table. "The Taliban will not be able to move a finger without Pakistani support," he explained before embarking on a two-day visit to India where he signed major security and development agreements.³⁰

The Obama administration has continued to ratchet up pressure on Islamabad. "The United States will never tolerate a safe haven for those who aim to kill us," the president warned in June 2011.³¹ The following month the administration decided to suspend or cancel about a third of the more than \$1.5 billion in annual security assistance it provides to Pakistan.³² Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and CIA chief David Petraeus have met with their Pakistani counterparts to press for Islamabad to change course.³³ On September 22, Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described the Haqqani network as "a veritable arm" of Pakistan's ISI,³⁴ an unprecedented official acknowledgement of its direct role in killing U.S. soldiers. Nevertheless, it ap-

24 "The Year of the Drone," New American Foundation, Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative, Washington, D.C., Nov. 16, 2011.

25 *The New York Times*, May 1, 2011.

26 *The Guardian*, Mar. 18, 2010.

27 *The Long War Journal* (Washington, D.C.), Sept. 3, 2011.

28 *The New York Times*, Sept. 22, 24, 2011.

29 *Ibid.*, Oct. 3, 2011.

30 Al-Jazeera TV (Doha), Oct. 8, 2011.

31 Barack Obama, "The Way Forward in Afghanistan," White House, Washington, D.C., June 22, 2011.

32 *The New York Times*, Sept. 22, 2011.

33 Reuters, Sept. 22, 2011.

34 *The New York Times*, Sept. 22, 2011.

pears unlikely that Islamabad will yield to Washington's demands.

THE AID SURGE

Washington provided Afghanistan with \$51.8 billion in aid from 2002 to 2010. Roughly 56 percent of this went to the training and equipping of Afghan forces while the remainder was allocated to economic, humanitarian, governance, and counter-narcotics programs.³⁵

Because of Afghanistan's devastation during the preceding decades of war and repressive Taliban rule, most nonmilitary aid has been allocated to building civil infrastructure and providing basic services, rather than developing the productive capacity of the Afghan economy. The rationale is that building roads, clinics, and schools has the short-term effect of winning hearts and minds. Though international aid has unquestionably improved the lives of many Afghans, the assumption that this alone can erode support for the Taliban was unfounded. "What we've found is that it is generally not the case that a lack of schools or roads drives conflict," Rajiv Shah, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) administrator, said in January 2011.³⁶

"Too much aid seeks to achieve rapid material results without sufficiently promoting local ownership, sustainable poverty reduction, or longer-term capacity building," according to Oxfam, a leading aid and development charity.³⁷

35 Curt Tarnoff, "Afghanistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance," Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., Aug. 12, 2010, p. 12.

36 Rajiv Shah, "Insights," *USAID Frontlines*, Dec. 2010/Jan. 2011.

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In January 2010, Afghan president Hamid Karzai (seated, third from right) set up a National Council for Peace, headed by former president and Tajik leader Burhanuddin Rabbani, to consider outreach to the Taliban. Peace talks were shelved after the September 2011 assassination of Rabbani by a suicide bomber posing as a Taliban envoy.

For example, the international community has neglected Afghanistan's agricultural sector. Of the \$4.4 billion spent by USAID from 2002 to 2006, just 5 percent was allocated to agriculture-related projects. This figure fell to 4 percent in 2007 and 2008.³⁸ Industry has been virtually ignored. Recent geological surveys have found that Afghanistan has extraordinarily rich mineral deposits (particularly iron, copper, cobalt, gold, and lithium) estimated to be worth up to \$3 trillion,³⁹ but they have barely been exploited.

To make matters worse, the large majority of U.S. and international aid has been "off-budget" in that it goes directly to foreign contractors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and provincial reconstruction teams, not the government. While this has provided "more financial and programmatic control to the donor,"

37 "Ten Point Plan to Change Course in Afghanistan," Oxfam, Washington, D.C., Jan. 31, 2009.

38 "Nourishing Afghanistan's Agricultural Sector," The Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., May 26, 2009.

39 *The New York Times*, June 13, 2010.



The increasing boldness and lethality of the Haqqani network can be illustrated by the June 2011 assault on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul that left eleven civilians and two Afghan policemen dead and the September raid on the U.S. embassy in Kabul that killed more than a dozen people.

a Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff report later concluded, it has also served to “weaken the ability of the Afghan state to control resources.”⁴⁰ In effect, donors have created a parallel administration that is more involved in the lives of many ordinary Afghans than the actual government,⁴¹ greatly undermining Karzai’s authority and fueling the perception among Afghans that decisions for their country are being made by others.

The Senate report also found that off-budget funding has weakened the state by siphoning away skilled manpower:

The Afghan government finds it nearly impossible to retain competent workers when foreign governments, aid agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private companies offer them inflated salaries and benefits... sometimes 10 to 20 times the amount of base

government salaries, to perform jobs within Afghan Government institutions.⁴²

For similar reasons, Karzai has crusaded against the heavy reliance of foreign NGOs and governments on private security contractors, saying that it is “preventing the growth and the development of the Afghan security forces.”⁴³

Proponents of bypassing the government typically point to rampant corruption in Afghanistan, which was ranked the third most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International in 2010.⁴⁴ Obama has pressed Karzai to stamp out graft to little avail. In the summer of 2011, “a grim, unpublicized as-

essment” by U.S. officials concluded that no substantive action was being taken by Karzai to prosecute corruption.⁴⁵

However, much of the corruption in Afghanistan derives from patronage networks that were entrenched as a result of U.S. collusion with the Northern Alliance in 2001-02. While Karzai has his own patronage network, so, too, do a number of Tajik and Uzbek warlords, particularly in the security forces (it is estimated that around two-thirds of the army’s battalion commanders are Tajik). This has a far more corrosive impact on public perceptions than the president’s excesses. According to Selig S. Harrison, “The psychological cement that holds the disparate Taliban factions together is opposition to Tajik dominance in Kabul,”⁴⁶ something that the Afghan president can do little about.

40 “Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan,” Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Washington, D.C., June 8, 2011, pp. 18-9.

41 Milan Vaishnav, “Afghanistan: The Chimera of the ‘Light Footprint,’” in Robert C. Orr, ed., *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004), p. 251.

42 “Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan,” p. 22.

43 *The New York Times*, Aug. 23, 2010.

44 Corruption Perception Index 2010 Results, Transparency International, Berlin, accessed Dec. 13, 2011.

45 Associated Press, Oct. 11, 2011.

46 Selig S. Harrison, “Afghanistan’s Tyranny of the Minority,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 16, 2009.

Bypassing the central government does little to avoid corruption and misuse of power and resources. On the contrary, a 2010 U.N. study found that corruption is highest in rural areas and lowest in big cities where the government is strong.⁴⁷ Foreign contractors and NGOs have been known to pay off local warlords and insurgents to ensure safe passage in remote areas.⁴⁸

Intelligence consultant Joshua Foust has argued that channeling more aid through the government is “better for the long-term health of Afghanistan, even if it contributes to aggregate corruption.”⁴⁹ As Alex de Waal of the Social Science Research Council has shown, patronage systems can be a force for stability and conflict management in states with weak formal governing institutions as they facilitate “elite buy-ins.”⁵⁰ Patronage is deeply rooted in Afghanistan where people have long expected political leaders to distribute fruits of power to their relatives and followers. According to the above-mentioned U.N. study, 38 percent of Afghans believe it is legitimate for a government official to ask for a “present,” and 42 percent think nepotism is acceptable.⁵¹ When official institutions are distrusted, argues de Waal, patronage can be the most reliable way of resolving disputes and dispensing resources.⁵²

The common mantra that combating corruption is “as important a priority as actually fighting insurgents”⁵³ must, therefore, be qualified. Reducing corruption without undermining political stability requires a long process of institutional reform.⁵⁴ Still, some progress has been made in the areas of public financial management in Afghanistan.⁵⁵

The Obama administration may have begun to recognize that aid should be allocated and distributed primarily with an eye toward strengthening the Afghan state, not circumventing it. The percentage of U.S. aid that is on-budget has risen steadily from 21 percent in fiscal year (FY) 2009 to 35 percent in FY 2010 and 37-45 percent in FY 2011.⁵⁶ At the July 2010 Kabul conference, the United States and other international donors agreed to channel 50 percent of aid through the government.⁵⁷

IMPLICATIONS

Unless Washington manages to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough with Islamabad, a negotiated end to the insurgency in Afghanistan is highly unlikely. Without a political settlement, few expect that the Afghan government will be capable of maintaining control of the country on its own for the foreseeable future. Even if it could, the cost of sustaining the projected size of the Afghan military and police forces in 2014 is estimated to run between \$6 billion and \$8 billion.⁵⁸

Although the Obama administration has publicly maintained that it has no interest in “permanent bases” in Afghanistan, it has held several rounds of talks with Afghan officials to hammer out a strategic partnership agreement providing for the indefinite deployment of 20,000 to 30,000 U.S. troops after 2014.⁵⁹ However, progress has stalled over a host of Afghan demands. Karzai wants the agreement to have the

Unless Washington achieves a diplomatic breakthrough with Islamabad, a negotiated end to the Afghan insurgency is unlikely.

47 *Spiegel Online* (Hamburg), Jan. 19, 2010.

48 *The Washington Post*, Dec. 17, 2009, Oct. 8, 2010.

49 Joshua Foust, “Actually, Karzai Is Right about PRTs,” *Foreign Policy*, Feb. 8, 2011.

50 Alex de Waal, “Fixing the Political Market Place: How Can We Make Peace without Functioning State Institutions?” *The Chr. Michelsen Lecture*, 2009, Bergen, Nor., Jan. 20, 2010.

51 *Spiegel Online*, Jan. 19, 2010.

52 De Waal, “Fixing the Political Market Place.”

53 *The Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 2010.

54 Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp. LIV, 171-218, 403.

55 “New ARTF Grant,” *The World Bank*, Washington, D.C., Aug. 9, 2011.

56 “Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan,” p. 19. 57 *BBC News*, July 20, 2010.

58 “Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan,” p. 25.

59 *The Telegraph* (London), May 10, 2011; *The Fiscal Times* (New York), Oct. 20, 2011.

legal force and stipulations of a treaty between two sovereign states. For example, he insists that the U.S. military must relinquish detention facilities it operates and refrain from carrying out raids on neighboring states from Afghan territory.⁶⁰

Kabul needs a long-term, strategic partnership with Washington to blunt intervention by predatory neighbors.

While Kabul needs a long-term, strategic partnership with Washington if it is to have any hope of blunting intervention by predatory neighbors, Karzai has resisted U.S. pressure to abandon his demand for full recognition of Afghan sovereignty. In a country that prides itself on having been the “graveyard of

empires,” accepting the permanent presence of

foreign troops on Afghan soil without explicit sovereignty guarantees would be a major political liability for Karzai and doom his efforts to draw popular support away from the Taliban. The Afghan president has found it politically necessary to denounce ISAF forces from time to time, particularly in the wake of civilian casualties from NATO airstrikes.⁶¹

If the Obama administration wants to succeed in Afghanistan, it must focus on consolidating the powers of the central Kabul government and disrupting efforts by foreign powers to weaken and destabilize it. If Afghans are given the opportunity to peacefully resolve their differences free of outside interference, they will. None of the ethnic groups in the country have strong separatist ambitions and all have a rich, if episodic, history of uniting together in the face of common perils. However, true dialogue cannot succeed until Afghan sovereignty is restored.



60 Aryn Baker, “For the U.S. to Leave Afghanistan, It Has to Be Ready to Stay,” *Time Magazine*, Sept. 13, 2011.

61 *The New York Times*, June 19, 2011.

Egyptian Women’s Liberation?

Vigilante gangs of ultra-conservative Salafi men have been harassing shop owners and female customers in rural towns around Egypt for “indecent behavior,” according to reports in the Egyptian news media. But when they burst into a beauty salon in the Nile delta town of Benha this week and ordered the women inside to stop what they were doing or face physical punishment, the women struck back, whipping them with their own canes before kicking them out to the street in front of an astonished crowd of onlookers.

Modeling themselves after Saudi Arabia’s morality police as a “Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice,” the young men raided clothing and other retail shops around the Qalubiya province over New Year’s weekend declaring they were there to enforce Islamic law, according to the *Tahrir News*. Shop owners were told they could no longer sell “indecent” clothing, barbers could no longer shave men’s beards, and that all retail businesses should expect regular and surprise inspections to check for compliance.

But when the women in a Benha beauty salon stood up to the young Salafi enforcers, they found support on the streets as well as online, with one amused reader suggesting that women should be deputized to protect the revolution’s democratic values. Last month thousands of women marched in Tahrir Square in outrage over the clubbing and sexual humiliation of female demonstrators, like the notorious beating and stripping of “the blue bra girl” in December, whose videoed assault made headlines around the world.

In one of the first public apologies ever issued by the military, generals from the ruling council acknowledged the incident and apologized even before the Dec. 17 march had ended. ... [Later,] a civilian court banned the military’s use of “virginity tests” to shame and humiliate female demonstrators.

Bikya Masr (Cairo), Jan. 8, 2012

The Piety Premium of Islamic Bonds

by Theodore Reuben Ellis

Traditionally, the Islamic states have had to reach out to Western capital markets to obtain funding for major projects. Islam's prohibition on the collection of interest (*riba*) made it difficult to find buyers within the Muslim world for debt securities issued by sovereign nations, even predominately Muslim ones. In recent years, however, the invention of a financial instrument widely called *sukuk*—a kind of bond structured so as to be acceptable under Islam—has enabled governments of Islamic nations to tap into an entirely new capital market. Muslim investors, buoyed by the rise in the price of oil, have devoured the new sovereign issues of *sukuk*, developed and marketed by the governments of Muslim-majority nations.

Islamic governments did not, however, abandon conventional bond issues with the emergence of *sukuk*, which are still a small fraction of debt issues in the Middle East. In the past ten years, several governments have issued both *sukuk* and conventional bonds within a year of one another. These bonds have behaved very differently on secondary markets.

Though they cannot be paid traditional interest, investors in *sukuk* still expect to be compensated for the money they lend sovereign borrowers. The traditional measure of return on a bond is its “yield,” roughly put, the amount the borrower gets paid back annually relative to the market price of the bond. Traditional financial models expect yield to rise with the riskiness of an investment. The yields on *sukuk* and conventional bonds, however, have behaved quite differently from one another—even when the issuer is the same government. In some cases, the behavior of *sukuk* yields has seemingly defied principles of mainstream finance theory. The forces driving this disparity need to be considered in order to understand how and why Islamic nations structure their borrowing as they do.

To do so, evidence for a difference between the investment bases for the two types of bonds must be examined. If present trends continue, parallel capital market infrastructures could emerge in Islamic markets.

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There are some fifty to 260 sheikhs worldwide who have the recognized expertise necessary to approve sukuk bond issues. Dependence on such a small group of Islamic scholars, like those seen here, increases risk as bonds deemed conforming to Shari'a may turn out to be non-compliant. A crisis in confidence could threaten the entire Islamic finance industry.

Appreciating what drives investment decisions in Islamic capital markets is critical not only to those who participate in financial markets but to all parties affected by capital markets' self-sufficiency in Middle Eastern economies.

ISLAM'S BAN ON INTEREST

Shari'a, the changing body of Islamic law intended as a system for governing all facets of life, has long proscribed the charging of interest as it is typically construed. The restriction is based on passages such as the following, from the Qur'an:

And whatever you lay out as usury, so that it may increase in the property of men, it shall not increase with God; and whatever you give in charity, desiring God's pleasure—it is these [persons] that shall get manifold.¹

Shari'a's limitations on financial transactions extend beyond the mere charging of interest on loans. Generally speaking, Shari'a does not allow for investors to make money from money. Accordingly, strict adherence to Islamic principles of finance frowns upon both interest-bearing loans themselves and the secondary markets that emerge to profit off them.

Yet Shari'a law is not without an appreciation for the time value of money. Most Islamic scholars allow for goods to be sold on credit (*nasi'a*) at a higher price than they would be sold for with cash upon delivery,² a practice similar to many forms of Western consumer credit. The Hadith, the oral records of the teachings and actions of Muhammad, even point to a seventh-century version of futures contracts (*salam*) whereby farm-

ers were paid gold in advance for wheat to be delivered at the harvest.³

Islam's prohibition on the collection of interest but acceptance of the time value of money has been explained in terms of "certainty." Islam accepts that the lender is forgoing the opportunity to engage in profitable transactions with his own capital while it is being used by another. He is, therefore, entitled to reimbursement for missed opportunities. However, since these opportunities are, in theory, unknowable beforehand due to the uncertainty of business, it is deemed wrong to determine interest payments in advance in the form of a contract guaranteeing a particular interest rate. Payment for foregone opportunities must be made after the fact on the basis of actual return on the borrowed

1 Qur. 30:39.

2 Frank E. Vogel and Samuel L. Hayes, *Islamic Law and Finance* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1998), p. 78.

3 Ibid., pp. 75-6.

capital and can never be made legally binding. By the standards of modern Western finance and from the creditor's perspective, this is not a favorable structuring of loans. Such an arrangement is known as an "unsecured loan" because the lender has no recourse should the borrower decide not to repay the loan. Moreover, the lender has nothing to gain should the borrower's investment turn out to be more profitable than expected. In practice, Islamic lending becomes, as analysts Iqbal and Mirakhor write, "a charitable act without any expectation of monetary benefit."⁴

The Qur'an's distinction between gains from loan interest and the ordinary profits merchants make from shrewd bargaining might seem arbitrary. After all, both are monetary gains made without any "tangible" production. Indeed, the Qur'an makes the contrast by fiat and not by any explicit philosophy of economics: "They say: 'Trade is just like usury,' but God has permitted trade and forbidden usury."⁵

It is no coincidence then, that Islam's modern methods for lending appear so similar to an ordinary business joint-venture. By structuring debt in such a way that it resembles trade, modern Islamic finance has found ways of creating an instrument previously impossible under Shari'a, namely, the Islamic *sukuk* bond.

STRUCTURING ISLAMIC BONDS

Although there are traditionally hundreds of ways loans can be made acceptable in Islamic society, only a handful of different structures are used in modern global *sukuk* issues. The predominant forms of *sukuk* are known as *mudaraba*, *musharaka*, and *ijara*. *Mudaraba*, usually used to finance specific capital-improvement projects, is a structure in which the lender is considered a part-owner in whatever investment is being made.

Coupon payments on the loan are drawn from the profits of the venture according to a ratio agreed upon when the contract is drawn. Should the venture fail, the borrower is not responsible for reimbursing the lender regardless of its solvency as an institution.

The *mudaraba* agreement thus carries a great deal of risk for lenders. *Mudarabas* were the first kinds of *sukuk* issued in recent history, usually used to finance municipal improvement projects with the investment of local lenders. Furthermore, under *mudaraba* arrangements, there is no expectation that the lender provide any managerial help.⁶

Musharaka arrangements are structured just like *mudaraba* bonds with the exception that the lender is expected to take a role in the daily management of whatever venture is receiving the funds. *Musharaka* partnerships are increasingly rare in modern Islamic finance because they require a great deal of manpower investment on the part of banks. Even *mudaraba* loans make up only 5 percent of the assets of most Islamic banks.⁷ (In fact, some 80 percent of Islamic banks are typically involved in still another loan type called *murabaha* which is extraordinarily controversial within the Islamic banking community because it is virtually identical to an interest-bearing loan.)

The structure of choice for sovereign state *sukuk* issues is *ijara*. Under this arrangement, the borrower (a sovereign state in this case) sells tangible assets at a price agreed upon by contract to a "special purpose entity" (SPE). This SPE in turn issues *sukuk* bonds in an amount exactly equal to the purchase price of the as-

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4 Zamir Iqbal and Abbas Mirakhor, *An Introduction to Islamic Finance* (Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 2007), pp. 61-2.

5 Qur. 2:275.

6 Vogel and Hayes, *Islamic Law and Finance*, pp. 138-45.

7 Ibid., pp. 140-1.

THE GLOBAL SUKUK MARKETPLACE

sets. The SPE then leases the assets back to the state at an amount equivalent to the coupon payments of the *sukuk*. At the maturity of the *sukuk*, the SPE sells the assets back to the sovereign state at a price agreed on beforehand. At this point the SPE dissolves and the *ijara* contract is concluded.⁸

For example, one particular Pakistani *sukuk* is issued by an SPE called the Pakistani International Sukuk Company Ltd. and not the Pakistani government itself. The *sukuk* securitization is backed by the 250-mile Islamabad-Lahore motorway, also known as M-2 within Pakistan. This highway was “sold” to the SPE for \$600,000,000 in January 2005 with an agreed *ijara*, or lease-payment, of 5.6 percent on the face value of the bonds with a maturity of five years.⁹

Thus, *sukuk* bond issues are backed by real assets to which all bondholders can claim partial ownership. According to Islamic law, the *sukuk* issuer cannot guarantee the return of principal or interest payments without turning the agreement into an ordinary interest-bearing loan. The money that bondholders receive must be considered lease payments on the underlying assets and, presumably, reported as such for purposes of taxation.

Hence, owners of the Pa-

kistani *sukuk* backed by the M-2 road must in theory consider their returns on the bond as payments derived from tolls on the motorway. Financial services providers who sell their clients *sukuk* have an obligation to inform them of where their returns are coming from. In theory, the borrower can legally stop making coupon payments on a *sukuk* if the underlying asset is not profitable (for example, if drivers stop using the M-2) even if the borrower has other sources of income (such as oil revenues).

The sovereign *sukuk* introduced a new class of investors to government debt financing quite different from the one that had previously bought sovereign debt. While conventional investors have certainly participated in sovereign *sukuk* issues, Islamic investors and institutions are by far the predominant players. Indeed, according to the Islamic banking unit of the London-based HSBC, the global banking concern that managed Pakistan’s 2005 *sukuk* issue, 47 percent of demand for that bond came from the Middle East, 31 percent from Asia, and 22 percent from Europe.¹⁰

Calculating the size of the *sukuk* market has been notoriously difficult due to the lack of a central regulatory body or even a standardized definition of what constitutes *sukuk*. The most widely cited source, the Islamic Research and Training Institute, puts the size of the entire Islamic finance industry at between \$700 billion and \$1 trillion dollars with an annualized growth rate of 63 percent in 2005.¹¹ The Islamic Finance Information Service estimated the size of total *sukuk* issuance in 2007 at \$47 billion, an increase of 73 percent over the previous year.¹² The total value of active *sukuk* worldwide was most recently put at \$120 billion by the First International Conference for Islamic Sukuk in Bahrain on March 18, 2008.¹³

These numbers might be even larger were it not for a critical sticking point. The main bottleneck in the creation of new Islamic bonds has been a shortage of scholarly boards to approve the bonds. In fact, only somewhere between fifty and 260 sheikhs worldwide have the recognized expertise necessary to approve *sukuk* bond issues. Within this group, about a dozen take on

The total value of active *sukuk* worldwide was put at \$120 billion in 2008.

8 Richard, Kristel, “A Closer Look at Ijara Sukuk,” *Banker Middle East*, Feb. 2005, no. 57.

9 *Khaleej Times* (Dubai), Jan. 23, 2005.

10 AMEinfo.com (Dubai), Mar. 17, 2005.

11 “Islamic Financial Services Industry Development: Ten-year Framework and Strategies,” Islamic Research and Training Institute, Jeddah, and Islamic Financial Services Board, Kuala Lumpur, May 2007.

12 *Financial Times* (London), Feb. 7, 2008.

13 *Gulf Daily News* (Dubai), Mar. 19, 2008.

the vast majority of bond approvals. The *Financial Times* quotes Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo at investment firm Shari'a Capital as saying that "to sell products into the market, to give them credibility, you go to the tried-and-true guys whom everybody knows." Investment banks have spent millions of dollars seeking the *fatwas* (religious edicts) of this small group of Shari'a experts.¹⁴

Such a small band of preferred Shari'a scholars and the millions of dollars at stake give all the indications of an emerging moral hazard problem within the *sukuk* industry. In fact, since the recent financial crisis, there have been a few cases of *sukuk* being retroactively declared noncompliant. For example, in 2009, the Shari'a Committee of the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Institutions tightened its standards for Shari'a compliance after a number of semipublic *sukuk* issued by Dubai were found noncompliant.¹⁵

There is concern that should *sukuk* bonds regularly be found religiously unacceptable after issuance, investors who demand Shari'a compliance might pull out not only from the affected bond but from *sukuk* bonds in general. A crisis in confidence could threaten the entire Islamic finance industry. The theological research that Shari'a boards do for a particular *sukuk* issue is entirely out of sight for the average investor. Thus, the failure of a single bond could threaten the credibility of the entire approval industry.

It is not known how widespread this fear of a crisis in confidence is within the Islamic investment community. Any perceived risk of such a crisis would probably reduce the trading price of such bonds vis-à-vis bonds that do not con-



A surging demand for major public works projects in many Islamic countries spurred the invention of sukuk bonds, structured to be acceptable according to Shari'a. A sukuk issued by the Pakistani International Sukuk Company is securitized, in part, by tolls collected on the 250-mile-long M2 highway between Lahore and Islamabad, seen here.

tain that risk. All other things being equal, one would expect investors to demand additional return from *sukuk* bonds over conventional bonds issued by the same sovereign authority due to the potential risk of a crisis in Shari'a compliance. Surprisingly, and contrary to what mainstream risk-return models would suggest, there is little evidence that *sukuk* investors demand a premium for this risk, at least thus far.

One additional potential risk of the current system for judging *sukuk* compliance with Shari'a is that religious regulatory bodies could use their power for political ends—perhaps by implicitly threatening to declare noncompliance on the bonds of sovereign nations that support unpopular geopolitical positions. Another area of broad uncertainty is whether religious authorities will declare Islamic banking activities (presumably including *sukuk*) subject to *zakat*, a kind of tax Islamic governments have historically imposed on wealthy Muslims to fund charitable activities.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Financial Times*, Nov. 19, 2007.

¹⁵ *The New York Times*, Nov. 30, 2009.

¹⁶ *Emirates Business* (Dubai), Sept. 3, 2009.

UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

Conventional bonds and *sukuk* issued by the same country are extremely similar except for the underlying religiously-informed technical structure. What factors then determine the yield spread, (i.e., the difference in bond yields), sometimes a substantial one, between the two? Normally, riskier bonds have higher yields. Yet,

The intrinsic structure of *sukuk* puts them at greater risk of default.

with *sukuk*, the situation is reversed: *Sukuk*, which are inherently riskier, often have lower yields than comparable conventional bonds. This fact alone indicates there is more to the *sukuk*-conventional bond spread than risk of default.

While the yields of Islamic and conventional bonds issued by the same country might differ at any given time for maturity-based reasons, it is worthwhile to compare the way market valuations of Islamic and conventional bonds change relative to one another over time. That is, looking at how the spread between valuations of *sukuk* and regular bonds has varied over time can shed insight into what determines the relative pricing of the two.

Of course, fluctuations in the likelihood of default of conventional and *sukuk* bonds are one clear explanation for the changes in the difference in bond yields between the two. After all, bond returns themselves are highly dependent on the risk of default. While the credit worthiness of the entity behind the bonds is identical (the sovereign nation issuing the bonds), there are two factors that could contribute to a disparity in default risk.

First, the intrinsic structure of *sukuk* puts them at greater risk of default. An *ijara* form of *sukuk*, backed in theory by only the operating income of a subset of the government's total assets is most likely riskier than one tied to the entirety of the government's assets. Should the specific assets linked to that bond produce insufficient income during the allotted period, the

borrowing government could in theory withhold payments, despite having plenty of other profitable assets. The fact that the sovereign *sukuk* examined for this study have in practice issued fixed coupons rather than coupons based on the actual returns of the underlying trust assets suggests sovereign issuers wish to eliminate (or at least hide) this source of potential risk. Sovereign entities seem committed to making their *sukuk* appear as dependable and steady in cash flow as their conventional bonds.

With the possible exception of the troubled, quasi-public Dubai *sukuk* mentioned above, there have been no sovereign *sukuk* defaults to date. Like conventional bonds, private sector defaults on *sukuk* are relatively common. Sovereign defaults should presumably be rarer because the government can raise money through taxation or, particularly in oil-rich Middle Eastern states, licensing of resource exploitation rights. However, specific provisions in the *sukuk* bond issues shield sovereign governments from having to repay creditors should the underlying assets not provide adequate funds to pay the agreed lease. For example, the offering for Qatar Global Sukuk's 2003 issue includes the following protection for Doha:

Proceeds of the Trust Assets are the sole source of payments on the Certificates. The Certificates do not represent an interest in or obligation of any of the Issuer, the Trustee, the Government ... or any of their affiliates. ... If, following distribution of the proceeds of the Trust Assets, there remains a shortfall in payments due under the Certificates, subject to Condition 12, no holder of Certificates will have any claim against the Issuer, the Trustee, the Government.¹⁷

According to these terms, bondholders not only lack a means of recourse should the sovereign issuer decide not to pay its lease but also lack the ability to take control of the underlying assets (which they technically own due to the structure of the "special purpose entity") and

17 "Qatar Global Sukuk: Offering Circular," HSBC Bank, London, Oct. 2003, p. 12.

Table 1: Sukuk and Conventional Bonds to be Compared

<i>Bond</i>	<i>Maturity</i>	<i>Offering Size (USD Millions)</i>	<i>S&P Rating</i>
Pakistan			
2005 Sukuk	5	600	B+
2004 Conventional	5	500	B+
Malaysia			
2002 Sukuk	5	600	A-
2001 Conventional	10	1,750	A-
Qatar			
2003 Sukuk	7	700	A+
1999 Conventional	10	1,000	A+

Sources: Richard Kristel, et al, *Standard & Poor's Ratings Direct: A Closer Look at Ijara Sukuk* (New York, Standard & Poor's, 2005); Datastream, Thomson Reuters, New York.

liquidate them or use them to more remunerative ends. Sometimes the assets the government sells to SPEs are not ones that could easily produce immediate operating income even if bondholders could take control of the assets themselves. The *sukuk* from which the above passage is drawn, for example, is backed by a parcel of undeveloped land. The government's guarantee to make timely and complete payments on *sukuk* is thus for all intensive purposes merely implied.

GAUGING THE "PIETY PREMIUM"

For the purpose of this study, sovereign conventional and *sukuk* bonds from three predominantly Muslim countries were compared (see Table 1) and the following hypothesis was tested: Do changes in certain macro factors—those economic variables, like gross domestic product or inflation, that affect the broader national and global economies and not just a particular investment—have a different effect on the yields of *sukuk* than the conventional bonds issued by the same country?

The macro factors selected were not chosen haphazardly: They correspond to possible differences between how conventional investors and *sukuk* investors view market shifts (See "Methodology" Table 3 for a summary of ex-

planatory variables). Moreover, in some cases changes in macro risk factors would affect the default risk premium—i.e., the amount an investor expects to be compensated for taking on additional risk—between the bonds, and these situations were also examined and tested.

Overall, the results (Table 2, page 68) support the hypothesis that *sukuk* markets behave differently from conventional bond markets in the same country by virtue of varying sensitivities to external macro factors. Each macro factor (for example, the risk-free interest rate: r_t^{free}) is tested for its significance in determining the *sukuk*-conventional yield spread. The first number (for example, 0.865 for the risk-free interest rate on the Pakistani bonds) indicates what effect an increase of one will have on the yield spread. In other words, a 1 percent increase in the risk-free interest rate is predicted to correspond with a 0.865 increase in the spread between *sukuk* and conventional bonds.

The number beneath each value is its "t-statistic." This number is simply a measure of how "significant" or strong the result was. Strong results have a single asterisk next to them, indicating at least 95 percent confidence the result did not happen because of chance. Very strong results have two asterisks, indicating at least 99 percent confidence the result did not occur because of chance. Those values without asterisks were found not to be significant in pre-

Table 2: Determinants of Sukuk to Conventional Bond Credit Spread

	Pakistan	Malaysia	Qatar
Intercept	-0.213	-4.902**	-7.71**
r_t^{free}	-0.16	-11.18	-19.51
	0.865**	0.7888**	0.113**
$\ln(oil_t)$	24.67	22.83	3.51
	-0.635*	1.175**	1.444**
$development_t$	-2.01	13.54	16.57
	-1.483 x 10 ^{-3**}	1.822 x 10 ^{-3**}	3.362 x 10 ^{-3**}
$politics_t$	-2.91	4.82	12.4
	-0.737*	-0.835**	-0.02
$islam_t$	-2.03	-8.68	-1.28
	8.027 x 10 ^{-3*}	-6.656 x 10 ^{-3**}	-8.406 x 10 ^{-3**}
$equity_t^i$	6.75	-12.01	-16.19
	-6.918 x 10 ^{-3**}	5.82 x 10 ⁻⁵	4.792 x 10 ^{-3**}
spx_t	-8.62	0.12	18.93
	-7.01 x 10 ^{-3**}	4.69 x 10 ^{-3**}	7.281 x 10 ^{-3**}
VIX_t	-6.28	9.63	17.69
	-9.47 x 10 ⁻³	-0.036**	-0.028**
$bonds_t$	-1.41	-7.68	-7.74
	-0.039	7.706 x 10 ⁻³	-0.012
	-1.1	0.86	-0.76
Adjusted r ²	0.649	0.953	0.926
Root MSE	0.458	0.292	0.274
N	803	1283	1140

Notes:

- 1) Associated t-statistics reported beneath coefficient values.
- 2) Single asterisk (*) indicates significance at the two-tailed 5 percent significance level ($p < .05$), double (**) asterisks denotes significance at the two-tailed 1 percent significance level ($p < .01$), for the null hypothesis that the given coefficient equals zero.
- 3) See Table 3, page 72, for summary of explanatory variables.

dicting the yield spread between *sukuk* and conventional bonds.

A wide range of highly significant t-statistics across entities suggests that the credit spread between these types of bonds fluctuates predictably according to movements in the explanatory variables. There were also indications that the model as a whole predicted a large share of the variation in the *sukuk*-conventional yield spread. In the cases of Malaysia and Qatar, adjusted r^2 values (the higher the r^2 the greater share of the variation has been accounted for by the model. An r^2 of .05 means 5 percent has been explained; an r^2 of .99 means 99 percent has been explained) of the multiple regressions

when combining all the explanatory macro factors together were extraordinarily high (Malaysia: 0.953, Qatar: 0.926). Pakistan also had an impressive, but slightly lower adjusted r^2 of 0.649.

What the results reveal are that a few macro factors can explain a great deal of the fluctuation in yield spread between sovereign *sukuk* and conventional bonds. The macro factors that had the most significance across all three countries examined were the risk-free interest rate (r_t^{free}), the price of oil ($\ln oil_t$), developing world stock markets ($development_t$), growth in other Shari'a-compliant industry ($islam_t$), and the Standard & Poor's 500 index (spx_t). Changes in each of these variables affected the spread between

conventional and sukuk bonds.

What this means is that investors in *sukuk* are either more or less sensitive to these particular macro variables than the conventional investor. There are logical reasons why investors in Islamic bonds might be more sensitive to these variables than conventional investors. The general finding is that *sukuk* investors reacted with more passivity to changes in macro factors than conventional investors—as if their investment in *sukuk* was fixed and not determined by changes in the outside economy.

The first and most striking difference in investor behavior between *sukuk* and conventional bonds is in the reaction of the market to changes in the risk-free interest rate (r_t^{free}). The risk-free interest rate is defined here as the yield on 10-year U.S. Treasury bonds, widely considered in financial markets to be one of the safest and most liquid investments available. Investors in the conventional sovereign bonds reacted to changes in the risk-free interest rate as would be expected: That is, as the risk-free rate went up, the yield on the conventional bonds issued by Islamic nations went up in tandem to match. Strangely, however, the *sukuk* market remained relatively stable at the same time.

The trend could be an indication that while a rosier global economic picture—rising risk-free interest rates normally correspond with a growing economy—encouraged investors to increase investments to sovereign bonds, it did not encourage them to increase investment in *sukuk* where they would be taking on unnecessary risk of default due to the problematic religious element of the bonds. *Sukuk* investors were not as influenced by changes in the risk-free rate because investing in U.S. treasury bonds is not permissible under Shari‘a.

Investors’ reactions to changes in oil prices were highly surprising. The model suggests that conventional bond investors reacted to increasing oil prices by buying bonds from oil producing nations and selling those from oil importing nations. This is consistent with the idea that a government awash in oil revenues will be more capable of paying its debts. *Sukuk* buyers’ purchases of Islamic bonds did not offset the movements of conventional bond traders in these in-

stances. *Sukuk* investors did not react to changes in the price of oil as dramatically. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that many *sukuk* investors are more likely to have economic ties to the petroleum industry and, consequently, would have more investable funds as oil prices rise.

Growth in developing world economies (*development_t*) was associated with increasing demand for conventional bonds in Malaysia and Qatar. As the index rose, signaling greater health in emerging markets, conventional investors felt more comfortable investing in the debt of these countries, bringing down the yields of sovereign issues. The opposite effect was found in Pakistan, probably due to country-specific factors: Pakistan’s political instability over the period, including terrorism in the autonomous regions and the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007, made it an undesirable place to invest relative to other booming, emerging markets. Pakistan’s history of leadership upheavals raised fears that the country could default on its debt should the government topple. Thus, while emerging markets as a whole grew, investors chose safer havens for their funds than Pakistan and fled its debt, raising yields. *Sukuk* investors, investing mainly for a “piety premium” rather than for fundamental changes in the underlying economy, stayed put; consequently, the difference in yield between the two types of bonds shrank.

The calculated coefficients on *politics_t* (value of index measuring the amount of political instability in the Middle East region) and *VIX_t* (implied volatility of stock markets), showed a weaker and less consistent impact across the bonds examined. The results suggest that conventional bond investors react more aggressively to adverse changes in the perceived riskiness of markets. As the political instability index rose, yields on emerging-market debt shot up

Sukuk investors react as if their investment was fixed and not determined by changes in the outside economy.



Qur. 2:275: "They say: 'Trade is just like usury,' but God has permitted trade and forbidden usury." Islam's injunctions against the charging of interest have traditionally hampered the growth of financial markets in the Muslim world. New financial instruments that have received the blessing of religious leaders skirt this prohibition and have contributed to a burgeoning market in these products.

without a concomitant rise in *sukuk* yields. Thus, *sukuk* investors appear less sensitive to increasing volatility, perhaps because they have fewer alternative low-risk investments. Also, the relative illiquidity of the *sukuk* market could contribute to a sense that rising volatility in other markets would not affect a market where there is altogether less turnover.

The effects of the changes in the developed world economy as measured by the Standard & Poor's 500 index reinforce what was found with the risk-free interest rate. That is, *sukuk* investors were more passive about changes in the S&P 500 index. Again, this is probably a function of the fact that *sukuk* investors were less likely to be invested in the S&P 500 in the first place for religious and geographic reasons.

CONCLUSION

It seems likely then that the differing investor bases of the two kinds of bonds are at the root of the differences in bond yield between *sukuk* and conventional bonds issued by the

same country. The two bond markets are essentially isolated from one another due to the *sukuk*'s religious underpinnings. Consequently, different expectations about changes in returns stemming from systematic risk would create a spread between their yields.

It would appear that the *sukuk* market is a mostly passive one. While conventional bond yield fluctuations can usually be explained by the logical responses of the conventional bond market to changes in macroeconomic risk, *sukuk* markets evidence little variation in *sukuk* returns as a result of macro risk. Thus, conventional markets react to adverse or positive news in equity, oil, or risk-free interest rates as would be expected with

emerging-market debt securities but *sukuk* investors mostly ignored these movements.

This could be a result of the importance of the "piety premium" to *sukuk* investors: The unseen utility benefit of holding a Shari'a-compatible bond for Muslim investors is not sensitive to changes in macroeconomic risk. Alternatively, the passivity could be a function of a lack of alternative assets for *sukuk* investors. Whereas conventional bond investors can easily move to risk-free or less risky assets, *sukuk* investors have far fewer options.

The relative passivity of investors in *sukuk* suggests that they are not as responsive to conventional financial signals. These results are consistent with the notion that *sukuk* investors are in general less sensitive to changes in the conventional business markets. For example, while conventional investors increased exposure to debt in developing markets like Pakistan and Malaysia as their economies grew, *sukuk* investors kept exposures constant.

Sukuk research is still in its very infancy. Future research will be greatly aided by the accumulation of new data and issuance of even

more sovereign *sukuk*. While perfect matches of *sukuk* and conventional bonds from the same country are currently impossible, the present analysis, nonetheless, was able to show the peculiar nature of the relationship between the two markets. Only time will tell if the strange

behavior of the Islamic bond yield spread is a consequence of an immature sovereign *sukuk* market or a permanent feature of the different sensitivities to systematic risk of the two markets.



Methodology

All *sukuk* and conventional bonds included in the study are sovereign-issued, quoted daily except for weekends and major holidays. The periods vary by bond pairing with the earliest starting in June of 2002 and some continuing until mid-February 2008. All bonds are U.S.-dollar denominated, which eliminates potential foreign exchange rate effects on yield spreads.

Analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the standard ordinary least squares estimators (OLS) were used to build the multiple regressions where the credit spread, CS_i^t , of bond-pairing i in time t is the dependent variable, and nine explanatory variables related to theoretical determinants of credit spread are included as regressors.

The Arbitrage Pricing Theory (APT) was used as the starting point for security valuation. Simply put, the essence of APT is that in market equilibrium no arbitrage profits can be made (because in efficient markets, traders will eliminate riskless profits immediately). Analysts Stephen Ross and Richard Roll show that a consequence of this assumption is that “asset returns can only come from increasing exposure to market risks. Every equilibrium will be characterized by a linear relationship between each asset’s expected return and its return’s response amplitudes, or loadings, on the common factors.”¹ These “common factors” are the common components of all assets considered in a multifactor model of security pricing. They are typically construed as sources of macro risk. The “factor loadings” are the coefficients on the factors indicating the sensitivity of a particular asset to sources of macro risk. Here, the APT model

is chosen over its alternative, the capital asset pricing model (CAPM), primarily because CAPM requires all investors to hold identical market portfolios.² This assumption conflicts with two of the key areas of exploration of this study: (1) Muslim investors are more likely to buy *sukuk* than non-Muslim investors, and (2) *sukuk* investors, on the whole, have fundamentally different market sensitivities than ordinary investors.

Figuring out where factor weightings are substantially different between the two yields will be the key to unlocking what determines the credit spread. Hence, the choice of explanatory variables (see below) will be guided by the search for variables that are weighted differently between the two bond types. The net effect of the difference between two factor loadings (i.e. $b_{k,sukuk} - b_{k,conv}$) for any given explanatory variable will set that variable’s effect on credit spread.

Note that CS_i^t is the yield premium of *sukuk* over conventional bonds. Unlike spread comparisons between risky assets and risk-free assets, the credit spread between *sukuk* and conventional bonds can take on both positive and negative values (indeed, all four series studied have credit spreads that turn negative at some point, if not much of the time).

A number of different variables representing changes in macroeconomic states both domestically and internationally are studied to explain fluctuations in the *sukuk* and conventional bond spread. For every series i , a set of nine explanatory variables are used in the multiple regression estimated as such:

$$CS_i^t = \beta_0^i + \beta_1^i r^{fret} + \beta_2^i \ln(oil_t) + \beta_3^i development_t + \beta_4^i politics_t + \beta_5^i islam_t + \beta_6^i equity_t + \beta_7^i spx_t + \beta_8^i VIX_t + \beta_9^i bonds_t + u_i^t$$

1 Richard Roll and Stephen Ross, “An Empirical Investigation of the Theory of Arbitrage Pricing,” *Journal of Finance*, Dec. 1980, p. 1074.

2 Zvi Bodie, Alex Kane, and Alan J. Marcus, *Investments*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2008), pp. 342-3.

Descriptions of the regressors can be found in summary in Table 3. The above regression is run three separate times for each entity i using the OLS estimators for the beta values.

A subset of the data from January 19, 2005, to May 25, 2007, is drawn from three of the entities. This time segment is chosen because it is the lengthiest period during which the six bonds included overlap. This panel data set has 613 observations for each of the three entities. The following fixed effects regression model with entity fixed effects a_i is estimated:

$$CS_i^j = \alpha_i + \beta_1^j r_t^{free} + \beta_2^j \ln(oil_t) + \beta_3^j development_t + \beta_4^j politics_i + \beta_5^j islam_t + \beta_6^j equity_i^j + \beta_7^j spx_t + \beta_8^j VIX_t + \beta_9^j bonds_t + u_i^j$$

Where a_i is the entity fixed effect and $E(u_i | X_{i1} \dots X_{in}, a_i) = 0$ and u_i^j is a term for all other unexplained variation in the regression. The entity-fixed effect is included to account for country-specific omitted variables that vary across countries but not over time. As earlier, the coefficients are estimated using OLS.

Table 3: Summary of Explanatory Variables

Explanatory Variable	Description
r_t^{free}	The risk-free rate of return; defined as yield on 10-year US Treasury bonds
$\ln(oil_t)$	OPEC Reference Basket value in \$/bbl
$development_t$	Return on MSCI Emerging Markets Index
$politics_i$	Value of index measuring the amount of political instability in the Middle East region
$islam_t$	Return on the Dow Jones Islamic Market Index
$equity_i^j$	Return on the major stock market index of the country that issued series i
spx_t	Return on the S&P 500
VIX_t	Implied volatility of stock markets, as indicated by options activity on the Chicago Board Options Exchange
$bonds_t$	Return on the Lehman Brothers Middle East Sovereign Bond Index

Multi-Million Boy

A Saudi man put up his son for sale on Facebook for a whopping \$20 million (Dh73.4m) to beat poverty.

According to *al-Sharq* newspaper, Saud bin Nasser al-Shahry took the extreme step when all doors closed on him. His business of collecting debts and settling disputes had to be shut down following a court ruling, which stated it was not a legal firm, he alleged.

Thereafter, he approached the Labor Office for monthly financial assistance. He alleged that he was refused aid because he was above 35 years—the age limit of receiving ministry help.

Therefore, he decided to sell his child to offer “a decent life to his mother and sister rather than living in poverty,” the report added.

His only condition for the “sale” is to know the city where the buyer resides.

He is willing to take the matter to court to complete the “sale procedures,” the paper added.

Emirates247.com, Jan. 3, 2012

Gary Sick, Discredited but Honored

by Emanuele Ottolenghi

The so-called “October Surprise” plot that briefly enthralled the American public twenty years ago is one of the most influential political conspiracy theories in U.S. history. As the story goes, fearful that the release of fifty-two American hostages in Iran before the November 1980 presidential election would secure President Carter a second term in office, the campaign of Republican candidate Ronald Reagan agreed to funnel weapons to the Islamic Republic in exchange for a delay in the hostage release until after the vote.

First floated by Lyndon Larouche and his followers shortly after Reagan’s landslide victory,¹ the conspiracy theory remained obscure until the Iran-Contra scandal suddenly gave the idea of such collusion an aura of plausibility. Since the Iranians clearly had it in their power to have an impact on the 1980 election, it was not unreasonable to surmise that they would have sought to leverage this influence. Those who loathe the political right in the United States found it difficult to accept that the Iranians held off on releasing the hostages until after Reagan’s inauguration without some form of quid pro quo.

The first to lend gravitas and mainstream credibility to allegations of a delay-for-arms deal was Gary Sick, a member of the National Security Council under Carter and his chief advisor on Iran. Now at Columbia University, Sick had written a well-received book on the 1979 Iranian revolution and ensuing hostage crisis, *All Fall Down: America’s Tragic Encounter with Iran*.² In an April 1991 *New York Times* op-ed, Sick wrote that “hundreds of interviews in the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East” with mostly anonymous sources had led him to conclude that “individuals associated with the Reagan-Bush campaign of 1980 met secretly with Iranian officials to delay the release of the American hostages.”³ Later that year, he published his findings in *October Surprise: America’s Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan*,⁴ an account that combined a heavily footnoted script with sensationalist revelations about political corruption and treason.

One man’s accusations have not had such a sweeping impact on public perceptions since the McCarthy era. With all of the major television networks covering the story

1 Daniel Pipes, “The ‘October Surprise’ Theory,” in *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2003), vol. 2, pp. 547-50.

2 Random House, 1985.

3 Gary Sick, “The Election Story of the Decade,” *The New York Times*, Apr. 15, 1991.

4 Random House, 1991.

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incessantly, a January 1992 poll showed that 55 percent of Americans believed the allegations.⁵

With the United States still reeling from the Iran-Contra affair, Sick's accusations triggered a string of devastating journalistic critiques⁶ and two congressional inquiries that definitively discredited the October Surprise conspiracy theory.⁷ However, while Sen. Joseph McCarthy was de-

stroyed by his irresponsible allegations, *The October Surprise* made Sick a star. Today he is a much sought-after commentator on Iran and Middle Eastern affairs with frequent appearances on CNN and C-Span, columns in *The Daily Beast*⁸ and *Foreign Policy*,⁹ and a solid scholarly standing

Sick carried forth this ruse not as an honest mistake but in a willful dereliction of professional ethics.

at Columbia—despite having published no subsequent books.

This success is indicative of how lucrative stridently politicized pseudo-research on the Middle East can be. While many of his liberal compatriots have come to acknowledge that the specific allegations he put forth in *October Surprise* are unfounded, most are unwilling to discard either their lingering suspicions that some form of delay-for-arms deal was made or find significant fault in Sick himself. If he got it wrong, the consensus appears to be, it was an honest mistake.

5 Ted Goertzel, "Belief in Conspiracy Theories," *Political Psychology*, 15 (1994): 733.

6 See, in particular, Steven Emerson and Jesse Furman, "The Conspiracy That Wasn't," *The New Republic*, Nov. 18, 1991; John Barry, "Making of a Myth," *Newsweek*, Nov. 11, 1991.

7 The "October Surprise" *Allegations and the Circumstances Surrounding the Release of the American Hostages Held in Iran*, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992); *Joint Report of the Task Force to Investigate Certain Allegations Concerning the Holding of American Hostages by Iran in 1980*, Committee on the Whole House on the State of the Union (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993).

8 Gary Sick, "The Decade's First Revolution?" *The Daily Beast*, Jan. 2, 2010.

9 Gary Sick, "The Worst of Both Worlds," *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 29, 2011.

IN SEARCH OF MEHDI

However, a close examination of one glaring misstep by Sick—largely unnoticed until now only because his book was discredited on other grounds—raises new questions about this verdict. Much of his argument rests on testimony he obtained from Ari Ben-Menashe, an Israeli who claimed to have been a top Mossad agent deeply involved in Iranian affairs. Central to his story is Mehdi Kashani, whom Ben-Menashe placed both in Israel in early 1980 as an emissary of the Islamic Republic looking for an arms deal, and in Madrid and Paris during the spring, summer, and fall of that year as a member of the Iranian teams involved in the alleged meetings with the Reagan campaign.

As it turns out, the Mehdi Kashani described by Ben-Menashe in his conversations with Sick and in his 1992 memoir *Profits of War*,¹⁰ does not exist. He is a phantom with a life story that casually blends public domain biographical information of two very different, real-life individuals with similar names—Mehdi Kashani, a government official involved in arms procurement, and Seyed Ahmed Kashani, scion to a prominent religious family and himself an Islamist politician—into a single, unlikely narrative. Ben-Menashe's descriptions of the fictional Kashani—his activities, his Iranian regime connections, and his whereabouts—suggest that he was not sufficiently familiar with either of the real life inspirations for his character, or with Iran in general, to detect his mistake. That Sick—by all accounts an intelligent, seasoned observer of the country—carried forth this ruse was not an honest mistake but a willful dereliction of professional ethics.

Ben-Menashe was a latecomer among self-declared participants in the October Surprise conspiracy, claiming involvement only after he was arrested in 1989 for attempting to sell U.S.-built military transport aircraft to an undercover U.S. customs agent posing as an Iranian emissary.¹¹

10 Sheridan Square Press, 1992.

11 "Investigatory Powers Authorization," U.S. Senate, *Congressional Record*, Nov. 22, 1991, p. S17643.

(an early telltale sign that he was not very well connected). He was acquitted of the charges after testifying that he had the secret approval of both the U.S. and Israeli governments and then began approaching anyone who would listen with an elaborate, self-glorifying account of international intrigue and realpolitik that grew “more richly detailed with each telling.”¹²

Ben-Menashe claims to have been a Mossad agent posing as a student in Tehran during the late 1970s. There, according to Sick, he “became acquainted with a number of student leaders on the campus, most notably Ahmed Kashani, a young student who was a teaching assistant in a university seminar” whom he identifies as a son of the late Iranian cleric Ayatollah Abolqasem Kashani. Ahmed was “a man with a famous name, whose family retained some political power and had its own network of influence.”¹³

Ben-Menashe told Sick that Ahmed Kashani always used the first name “Mehdi” in their dealings,¹⁴ and he casually substitutes this nickname when writing in *Profits of War* of “Sayeed Mehdi Kashani, the son of Ayatollah Abol Qassem Kashani, who at the time was an opposition Shiite leader living in the holy city of Qom.”¹⁵ He also claimed that Kashani came to Israel in early 1980 to negotiate an arms deal, which led to the delivery of tires for Iranian F-4 fighter aircraft. According to Ben-Menashe, Kashani’s father “was now a member of the ruling Supreme Council,”¹⁶ ostensibly explaining why a former teaching assistant was suddenly a jet-setting arms broker for Iran’s ruling mullahs.

According to Ben-Menashe, Kashani was present at all four rounds of talks allegedly held between the Reagan campaign (including cam-

The 1986-87 Iran-Contra affair helped fuel the tale of an “October Surprise.” Although subsequently discredited by congressional inquiries and journalistic critiques, the myth that Ronald Reagan’s 1980 presidential campaign had made a secret deal with Iranian hostage-takers persists.

paign chief William J. Casey, who would later become the head of the CIA, and possibly George H. W. Bush) and the Iranians—two in Madrid in May and July 1980 and one in Paris (which Ben-Menashe claims to have attended) the following October.¹⁷

Ben-Menashe’s testimony should have raised red flags for someone with Sick’s knowledge of Iran. To begin, Ben-Menashe highlights Kashani’s lineage as proof of his standing with the new Iranian regime, a detail that Sick took to

12 Barry, “Making of a Myth.”

13 Gary Sick, *The October Surprise: America’s Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Times Books, 1992), p. 70.

14 Ibid.

15 Ari Ben-Menashe, *Profits of War: Inside the Secret U.S.-Israeli Arms Network* (New York: Sheridan Square Publications, 1992), chap. 3.

16 Ibid., chap. 4.

17 Ibid., chap. 4 and 5.

Photo will not display.

Gary Sick's deeply flawed 1991 book, October Surprise, was largely responsible for cementing the public's belief that the Reagan team had connived with Iranian hostage-takers in order to help him defeat Jimmy Carter in the 1980 presidential race. Sick has gone on to a lucrative career, both as a media pundit and as an adjunct professor at Columbia University.

be true: "Kashani's father, Ayatollah Abol Qassem Kashani, was now a member of the ruling Supreme Council." However, the ayatollah died in 1962¹⁸—long before the revolution or the late monarchical era when Ben-Menashe placed him as "an opposition Shiite leader."

Nor for that matter does Ben-Menashe's description of the circumstances of his friendship with Kashani hold water. For one thing, it is unlikely that the real Mehdi Kashani, born in 1943, would have been a student contemporary of Ben-Menashe in 1978 when, at thirty-five, the Iranian might already have been in the midst of his professional career. For another, it is inconceivable that Seyed Ahmed Kashani, son of the late prominent ayatollah with a powerful network of influence to rely upon, would be employed as a lowly

teaching assistant at the age of thirty-one. If anything, had he been at a university, he would have been a professor, or an otherwise accomplished professional had he been pursuing a different career. Indeed, two years after his supposed campus meeting with Ben-Menashe, Kashani was already a member of parliament.¹⁹

Moreover, given his lineage and radical political leanings, it is very unlikely that Seyed Ahmed Kashani would have been willing to broker arms deals with the United States and Israel and virtually inconceivable that he would have been allowed to play such a role. As a member of parliament from 1980 to 1986, he was an outspoken left-wing, Islamist radical and critic of the government.²⁰ His brother Mahmoud was even more of a problem as a presidential candidate.²¹

The Kashani brothers were very much in step with the politics of their father, a firebrand radical who combined Iranian nationalism with radical Islam and hatred of Israel.²² Both were close to Mehdi Hashemi, a prominent figure in the more revolutionary wing of the clerical establishment actively involved in promoting the export of the revolution. Hashemi's radicalism made him vehemently opposed to any deal with Washington and put him on a collision course with those in the regime who recognized the need for U.S. weaponry to ensure that Iran did not lose the war against Iraq. Indeed, it was Hashemi who was behind the November 1986 leak to the Lebanese newspaper *al-Shira* that revealed the Iran-Contra affair to the world, for which he was imprisoned, tortured, humiliated in a televised confession, and finally executed.²³ As part of the same crackdown, Seyed Ahmed Kashani was arrested in late 1986 on charges of conspiring against the state and spent more than

19 See Kashani's biographical details on the Iranian parliament's website, "Sayed Ahmed Mustafa Kashani."

20 David Menashri, "Iran," in Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaked, eds., *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, (Vol. 9) 1984-1985 (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle East and African Studies, 1987), p. 456, fn. 7.

21 Bahman Bakhtiari, *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), p. 137.

22 Milani, *Eminent Persians*, vol. 1, p. 344.

23 *The New York Times*, Sept. 29, 1987.

18 Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), vol. 2, p. 343.

two years in prison.²⁴ This is not the profile of a secret emissary to the “Great Satan.”

NO DUE DILIGENCE

Sick acknowledged that there are “dozens of lapses” and “scores of dangling loose ends” in his elaboration of the October Surprise conspiracy.²⁵ He specifically cautions the reader about Ben-Menashe, “a colorful individual, full of extraordinary tales . . . [who] cannot be used as a sole source. Everything he says must be independently corroborated.”²⁶

However, Sick failed to perform such due diligence. The corroboration that apparently led him to put faith in Ben-Menashe’s testimony was retroactive. Media reports in the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal indicated that an Iranian by the name of Mehdi Kashani was running many of the Islamic Republic’s arms procurement efforts in Europe.²⁷ Kashani’s conduit for arms purchases was Asco Malta, a Maltese subsidiary of a Belgian company run by retired Israeli military officer Avraham Shavit. Houshang Lavi, another self-declared participant in the October Surprise conspiracy, supposedly acted as mediator for some of these transactions.²⁸

In 1992, Mehdi Kashani was arrested in Madrid on charges of running an illegal weapons procurement ring for Iran. He was described in the local media as “a civil engineer and colonel in the Khomeinist army,” who had been living in Spain since 1984 and in London before that. He headed a Madrid-based company, Aerofalcon, which he used to procure military technology for Iran.²⁹ Local reports of his arrest linked Kashani to the Iran-Contra affair.³⁰ Somehow, he got free and, a few months later, resurfaced in Germany.³¹

Since then, Mehdi Kashani has continued to periodically capture the attention of the media. In 1995, a *New York Times* exposé placed him in Germany where he had partnered with another former Iranian government official to run a small airport, which was apparently used for smuggling weapons. Once exposed, the pair sold the airport and disappeared—but resurfaced three years later in Ireland when an Irish construction company they were both involved in went bankrupt.³² Soon after, Kashani became the chief operating officer of an Iranian company with Irish connections, which was producing an all-in-one computer, printer, and telephone system.³³ He appears to be living now in Tehran.

There is ample evidence to establish that the real Mehdi Kashani procured weapons for the Iranian regime during the 1980s and dealt with retired Israeli officials involved in the arms trade, making him a plausible participant in the October Surprise conspiracy. However, he bears little resemblance to the man Ben-Menashe purports to know intimately. He was not the scion of a prominent clerical family. Having lived in Spain continuously after 1984, he clearly was not the radical firebrand jailed by the Iranian government in 1986-89. Having worked as an oil ministry official in London prior to that, he could not also have been a sitting member of parliament from 1980-86.

Ben-Menashe’s claim that he and Kashani were close friends and partners in the arms trade is not only wholly unsubstantiated but so poorly contrived as to undermine fatally Ben-Menashe’s relevance and credibility as a source. In his book, Ben-Menashe spends some time discussing (in-

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24 *The Straits Times* (Singapore), Nov. 10, 1986.

25 Sick, *The October Surprise*, p. 7.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 230-1.

27 Serge Dumont, “Les secrets du dossier,” *Le Vif/L'Express* (Roeselare, Belg.), Jan. 30-Feb. 5, 1987, pp. 8-11; *idem*, “Asco-Malte: le contrat iranien,” *Le Vif/L'Express*, Feb. 6-12, 1987, pp. 8-11.

28 Sick, *The October Surprise*, p. 220.

29 *El Diario* (Madrid), Mar. 13, 1992.

30 *ABC Hemeroteca* (Madrid), Mar. 13, 1992.

31 *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), Nov. 15, 1993; Rudolf Lambrecht and Leo Mueller, “A Center for Arms Dealers?” *The Hamburg Stern*, Dec. 8, 1994.

32 *The Sunday Business Post* (Dublin), July 5, 1998.

33 Mehdi Kashani, interview, *Tehran Times*, Aug. 22, 2005.

accurately) the revelation of Iran-Contra in the Lebanese press in November 1986 but not one word on the role, let alone the imprisonment, of Ahmed Kashani. Had Ahmed and Mehdi Kashani been the same person, as Ben-Menashe told Sick, and had Kashani been such an important player in the secret arms dealings Ben-Menashe supposedly conducted throughout the 1980s, then why should he suddenly disappear without men-

A U.S. House task force concluded that Ben-Menashe's testimony was "wholly lacking of any credibility."

tion as he does in Ben-Menashe's book? Had Kashani been such a close friend, why would Ben-Menashe offer not one word of sympathy for his lamentable fate? Could it be that Ben-Menashe had, in fact, no idea about the entire Hashemi affair and also never actually knew much

about Seyed Ahmed Kashani?

A Mossad agent with a special expertise on Iran would not be so appallingly unfamiliar with the late Ayatollah Kashani, one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century Iranian political history, whose militant political activism greatly inspired the young Ruhollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic's founding father.³⁴ Ben-Menashe's account of the October Surprise conspiracy is not merely a "tangled yarn," as *Time* magazine put it,³⁵ but a remarkably inept one at that.

The truth is that Ben-Menashe was not a participant in some grand conspiracy who later played fast and loose with the facts to suit his own agenda but rather a thoroughly unreliable witness. Although *Profits of War* is probably more embellished than the version of events he recounted to Sick (he was now trying to capitalize on his newfound fame and sell books), it is an amusing tribute to ignorance of Iran. In describing how Kashani was able to easily pass through customs at Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion International Air-

port with a Philippine passport, he explains that Ayatollah Abol Qassem Kashani "had been a close friend of Ferdinand Marcos."³⁶ Ben-Menashe's ignorance of the fact that the ayatollah was dead by the time Marcos came to power pales in comparison to his naive imagining that a radical Shiite cleric could have had either the desire or opportunity to strike up a friendship with a right-wing, pro-U.S. dictator on the other side of the world.

Could Sick have simply failed to pick up on this, leading him to put undue faith in the latter's testimony so long as it was consistent with what he thought he knew?³⁷ Perhaps, but the inconsistencies between Ben-Menashe's fictional account of "Mehdi" Kashani and the actual lives of these two persons are so glaring that a competent Iran expert should have spotted them quickly and discarded Ben-Menashe's testimony altogether.

Sick acknowledges in a footnote that "there is some confusion of names between Ahmed and Mehdi Kashani,"³⁸ suggesting that he may have noticed discrepancies while continuing to imply in the main text that these two disparate people were one and the same person and that this person played a role in the chain of events leading to the October Surprise. This is typical of Sick's ambiguous assertions that can be read in more than one way. He writes, for example, that collusion between the Reagan campaign and Tehran in 1980 "may well have been the first act in a drama that was ultimately to conclude with the Iran-Contra affair."³⁹ Beyond the inherent ambiguity of using a phrase like "may well," it is not clear whether Sick is saying that the collusion "may well" have happened, or that it happened and "may well" have been the first act.

THE TEFLON PUNDIT

After the publication of *October Surprise*, Ben-Menashe and the handful of other sources who led Sick down the rabbit hole were quickly

34 Milani, *Eminent Persians*, vol. 1, p. 345; Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 68-9.

35 "Spinner of Tangled Yarns," *Time*, Oct. 28, 1991.

36 Ben-Menashe, *Profits of War*, chap. 4.

37 Sick, *The October Surprise*, p. 6.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 292, fn. 24.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

discredited. In January 1993, the House October Surprise Task Force concluded that Ben-Menashe's testimony was "wholly lacking of any credibility"⁴⁰ and found "no evidence to corroborate Ben-Menashe's allegations regarding Mehdi Kashani's contacts with the Israeli government." Citing evidence obtained from the Israeli government, the task force found that he was a relatively low-ranking employee of Israel's Ministry of Defense who "was never sent to Iran"⁴¹ and that Mehdi Kashani never visited Israel prior to 1985.

Ben-Menashe appears to have invented the whole story to cover his back after coming under indictment, and one lie led to another. While his powers of persuasion conned many Western reporters into giving credence to his claims, Ben-Menashe likely had no real connections to any of the characters in his story. He has since moved on to peddle other tales to the gullible, spinning himself as a renegade Israeli James Bond who, *inter alia*, planted the homing device that led Israeli warplanes to Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 and turned down an offer to become head of the Mossad.⁴²

One might have expected these findings to be a devastating blow to Sick. Prior to the release of the task force report (but after reportedly accepting \$300,000 for the movie rights to *October Surprise*), Sick himself told *Entertainment Weekly*, "I've really put my professional career on the line with this book."⁴³ Others of lesser notability who took the leap certainly suffered professional consequences. "Ari [Ben-Menashe] has put five or six dozen journalists from all over the world through roughly the same paces," wrote Craig Unger, one of many who initially bought into the October Surprise conspiracy. "Listen to him, trust him, print his story verbatim—then sit round and watch your career go up in flames."⁴⁴

In contrast, Sick's career has flourished, despite the fact that, unlike Unger, he refused to repent for sending Congress and the mainstream media on a frenzied wild goose chase (from which he personally profited). While acknowledging in a January 1993 op-ed that there was no "straight-forward arms-for-hostages deal in 1980," he insisted that the task force report "does not lay... to rest" claims that the Reagan campaign conspired to negotiate such a deal.⁴⁵

Indeed, while most of those who rallied behind Sick have stopped trumpeting his claims, few have been willing to fully disavow them. Asked in an interview in 2011 whether he still be-

Few of those who rallied behind Sick have been willing to fully disavow his claims.

lieves the October Surprise allegations, Jimmy Carter replied, "I don't know the facts... I've read Gary Sick's book and talked to him. I don't really know."⁴⁶ While acknowledging that Sick's specific allegations were proven false, political historian Kevin Phillips has, nevertheless, written that the Reagan campaign "probably" cut a deal to delay the release of the hostages.⁴⁷ Historians Stephen Ambrose and Douglas Brinkley have even gone a step further by taking this conspiracy theory for granted.⁴⁸

That such a blatant lie can last for so long against all available evidence is a sad testament to the corrupting effects of Middle Eastern studies on American public discourse about the region.



40 *Joint Report of the Task Force to Investigate Certain Allegations Concerning the Holding of American Hostages by Iran in 1980* [October Surprise Task Force] (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), p. 7.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

42 "Investigatory Powers Authorization," p. S17643.

43 *Entertainment Weekly* (New York and Los Angeles), Jan. 24, 1992.

44 Craig Unger, "The Trouble with Ari," *The Village Voice* (New York), July 1992.

45 Gary Sick, "Last Word on the October Surprise?" *The New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1993.

46 Brian Till, "Jimmy Carter: As a Nation We're Bad at Making Tough Decisions," *The Atlantic*, May 16, 2011.

47 Kevin Phillips, *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 278–90.

48 Stephen Ambrose and Douglas Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 301. On Apr. 3, 2004, Brinkley acknowledged that "the October Surprise statement in *Rise to Globalism* is unprovable/incorrect" and promised that "it will be fixed in the next edition due out in early 2005." The next edition was published in 2011, and the offending passage remained in situ. See, Daniel Pipes, "Further on the 'October Surprise' Conspiracy Theory," DanielPipes.org, updated Sept. 6, 2011.

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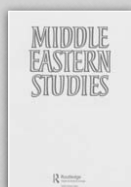
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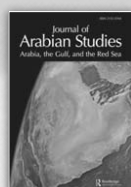
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Regime Change in Iran?

by Brendan Daly

There is every reason to believe that the Islamic Republic's days are numbered. The current government, lorded over by the religious supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, and his Guardian Council of aging mullahs, who can overrule any policy change by the pseudo-elected president, seem wildly out of touch with the general populace. Not only are the youth of Iran—some 70 percent of whom are under the age of thirty—chaffing under the “guardianship of the Islamic jurists” (*velayet-e-faqih*)—but so is the economy, due to sanctions imposed by the West in response to the regime's insistence on pursuing its nuclear program.¹ Inflation has long been out of control and trade and tourism a tiny fraction of what it could be, and yet the establishment has on the whole shown little interest in sacrificing militant, revolutionary principles for economic, and indeed, political expediency. Can this approach be sustained in view of the tightening economic noose around Tehran, and at what cost?

BACKGROUND

The replacement of a relentlessly Islamist regime—emerging as it is in competition with Turkey as the primary regional superpower—with a liberal, secular, democratic government that will eschew domestic repression and international subversion is certainly attractive.² And it is not unprecedented, for Iran long struggled for constitutional and democratic rule. The constitutional revolution of 1905 was the first of its kind in the Middle East. Even the 1979 revolution, customarily referred to as the “Islamic Revolution,” was in fact, initially, the result of a confluence of agitators: republican, nationalist,

Marxist, and Islamist. But in the months and years following the flight of the shah and Khomeini's triumphant return, the ayatollah wrest control from the liberals and progressives, and through a brutal campaign of street violence, assassination, intimidation, and expert propaganda, crushed any opposition to his totalitarian ideology.³

Any visitor who spends significant time in the country will find ample justification for the Iranians' reputation for open-mindedness, artistry, intellectualism, and an almost fanatical reverence for culture. The most popular poet in Iran is Hafez, a national hero who is more readily quoted by most Iranians than the Qur'an. His poetry is full of wine-soaked revelry, unrequited

Brendan Daly is a journalist with extensive experience in the Middle East and conflict and post-conflict zones.

1 *BBC News*, Nov. 8, 2011.

2 Melik Kaylan, “How a Regime Change in Iran Would Transform the World,” *Forbes*, July 24, 2010.

3 Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2008), chap. 6.

The regime's political structure provides veto powers against any attempt at systemic, democratic change from within.

and requited love, and a palpable hatred of religious hypocrisy and austerity.

Indeed, even after decades of repressive Islamist rule, Iran is still full of apparent contradictions. It is run by a highly moralistic, puritanical clergy, yet cannabis and heroin are more freely available than in most Western countries;⁴ a country where producing music with a lone female voice is illegal, yet relatively early-term abortion is not;⁵ where most people are constantly on guard against expressing true political opinions, yet one will find an old woman who will loudly shout “Long live the shah!”; where nepotism reigns at almost every level of society, and wealth and power go hand in hand, yet many of its most powerful political figures were three decades ago “riding donkeys in the provinces” as one Tehran resident put it.⁶

Advocates of the Islamic Republic's imminent demise point to the small semi-nationalist, Zoroastrian revival burgeoning among the youth of Iran. The Faravahar, the symbol of the religion, is a common sight on key-rings and hanging from rearview mirrors. For some it simply represents Iran and its past glory. But for others, it is a real spiritual alternative to Islam. As Ali-Reza, a construction worker in his fifties from south Tehran told me: “My grandparents were Zoroastrian, but my parents were forced to convert. ... We are still Zoroastrian in our hearts, but in Islam, if you change your religion, they kill you,” he adds, followed by several expletives.

But one must be careful not to get carried away with this narrative. For every Zoroastrian revivalist, for every youth in north Tehran who spits at a passing bearded militiaman; for every exile who speaks in glowing terms of the shah; for every student in Shiraz who visits the bathroom with the words “I need to say hello to our President (Ahmadinejad)” — it is hard to escape the conclu-

sion while travelling around the country that those who demand nothing less than the total abolition of the Islamic Republic are in a clear minority. Still, it is a minority that history and demographics would suggest is steadily growing.

**WHY NO
“IRANIAN SPRING”?**

With the ostensibly pro-democratic upheavals in the Arab world in 2011, many were asking why there were no equivalent mass protests in Iran. In fact, in the earliest days of the Arab uprisings, Tehran witnessed a series of sizeable demonstrations. Two protesters, Sane Jaleh and Mohammed Mokhtari, were killed on February 14-15, 2011. Amazingly, the state-run media tried to claim that they were in fact pro-government activists and that they were killed by either anti-regime terrorists or supporters of Green Movement leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi—a quite ludicrous notion that was conclusively refuted by interviews carried out with the men's friends and family.⁷

However, the bulk of the Iranian population did not back these February-April protests. Even among north Tehran's educated middle-class, the stronghold of the opposition movement, the prevailing feeling since the failed 2009 anti-government “Green Movement” demonstrations is one of cynicism and despair. Shokoufeh, 27, is an artist and veteran of antigovernment activity. When I asked her in March 2011 of her estimated time-frame for the collapse of the regime, she said,

Twenty, thirty years. If we all protest now, and don't give up, they will kill thousands of us. They don't care. They have all the power, all the guns, and they consider us traitors.

4 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 18, 2005.

5 BBC News, Apr. 12, 2005.

6 Author interview, Mar. 2011.

7 *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 17, 2011; *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, Tehran Bureau, Feb. 16, 2011.

They will kill as many of us as they want; they will win easily.

There is a hard-line element of the Iranian population, estimated at anywhere between 10 to 25 percent, that is willing to die and kill for the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, this militant minority has a monopoly on political and military power. The genius of the Islamic Republic is that for every state and civic institution—parliament, judiciary, military—there is a parallel, unaccountable religious body to either mirror it or police it. The on-the-ground authority of the paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and Basij militia exceeds that of the official Iranian military and police respectively.⁸

In short, the regime is strong and dynamic. Its byzantine political structure provides fundamental veto powers to any attempt at systemic, democratic change from within, and its sophisticated security and military apparatus dwarfs anything that could conceivably be mustered by the opposition. And there is no indication that the supreme leader and his circle of ayatollahs have any intention of “giving up one iota”⁹ of control over the reins of power. Indeed, just the opposite is true.

AHMADINEJAD DOWN, AYATOLLAHS RISING

In 2009, Ayatollah Khamene’i took the unprecedented step of publicly backing incumbent



Iran’s supreme leader and the governing Guardian Council of aging mullahs will not soon relinquish power either to the general populace or even to the officials they helped get “elected.” In fact, the country seems to be trending in the opposite direction with more and more clerical control.

president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s election victory against the reformist opposition and its claims of electoral fraud, declaring the victory a “divine assessment.”¹⁰ Several days later, as protests continued to escalate, the supreme leader appeared to backtrack somewhat, announcing that he had ordered the Guardian Council to investigate the claims of fraud—who, of course, denied the claims.¹¹

Virtually all serious commentators have alleged some degree of fraud in the elections. The accusations came not only from every opposition candidate but from numerous non-government clerics and from foreign journalists.¹² Some results, such as Mousavi’s loss in his own home province of East Azerbaijan, were too hard for many to swallow.¹³ But to what extent Ahmadinejad’s victory reflected, or failed

⁸ Harold Rhode, “How Iran’s Rulers Think about the Nuclear Program,” *Hudson New York*, Dec. 15, 2011.

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran, Tehran, Oct. 9, 2011.

¹⁰ *Time Magazine*, June 15, 2009.

¹¹ Press TV (Tehran), June 29, 2009.

¹² See, for example, Agence France-Presse, July 7, 2009; Reuters, June 13, 2009.

¹³ *Ynet News* (Tel Aviv), June 13, 2009.



Tensions between the mullahs and the West are ratcheting up. The downing of a U.S. spy drone was both a feather in the cap for the ayatollahs and a warning that Washington and its allies may soon seek to exert even greater pressure on the Islamic Republic.

to reflect, the majority's genuine preference has been hotly debated. Polls conducted by Western organizations both before and after the June 2009 elections, showed anywhere between a 12 percent to 39 percent¹⁴ margin in favor of Ahmadinejad. However, such polls are themselves subject to a myriad of weaknesses, not least self-censorship.

Still, the Guardian Council's alliance with the president turned out to be ephemeral. Ahmadinejad and his circle have never been true orthodox conservatives. Instead, he is a part of a "religious nationalist" current within the broader conservative milieu. Ayatollah Khomeini was famous for his anti-nationalism: "Those who say that we want nationality, they are standing against Islam... We have no use for the nationalists. ... Islam is against nationality."¹⁵ In a Machiavellian twist, the president is now being derided as a "deviant" by the conservative estab-

lishment, accusing him and his inner circle of having messianic aspirations¹⁶ and of trying to usurp the supreme leader and the *velayet-e-faqih*.

Ahmadinejad's closest friend and confidant Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, whose daughter is married to the president's son, is particularly loathed by the orthodox conservatives and has even been jeered at by hardliners in the streets. It was the general opinion, both within and outside Iran, that Ahmadinejad was grooming Mashaei to be his successor (the presidency has a two-term limit).¹⁷ This

now seems impossible. When Ahmadinejad caused outrage by appointing Mashaei as first vice president (one of twelve VPs), Khamene'i quickly ordered Mashaei to resign from the cabinet, forcing Ahmadinejad to appoint him his chief of staff instead.¹⁸ After being relentlessly slandered in the conservative state-run press, Mashaei has now been implicated in the largest corruption scandal in the republic's history—as have several of Ahmadinejad's other close associates.¹⁹

The antipathy does not end there. On November 21, 2011, Ahmadinejad's top media advisor and chief of the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Ali Akbar Javanfekar, was arrested and handcuffed by security services in his own office. Reportedly, only a personal telephone call from the president secured Javanfekar's release.²⁰

14 "Iran: Public Opinion on Foreign, Nuclear and Domestic Issues," International Peace Institute, New York, Dec. 8, 2010; "Iranian Opinion on Current Issues," WorldPublicOpinion.org, Washington, D.C., Sept. 19, 2009.

15 *Mehregan Magazine* (Washington, D.C.), Spring and Summer 2003, p. 16.

16 Mohebat Ahdiyyih, "Ahmadinejad and the Mahdi," *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2008, pp. 27-36.

17 *The Guardian* (London), Apr. 21, 2011.

18 Reza Molavi and K. Luisa Gandolfo, "Who Rules Iran?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2010, pp. 61-8.

19 *Newsweek*, Nov. 21, 2011.

20 *The New York Times*, Nov. 22, 2011.

In the ultimate affront to what semblance of democracy the country has, in mid-October, the supreme leader casually remarked that the position of a popularly-elected president may be abolished “someday in the distant future” and replaced with a prime minister appointed by the parliament.²¹

These events mark a high point in Khamene’i’s involvement in politics from which he is traditionally supposed to be aloof. With Mousavi under indefinite house arrest,²² and Ahmadinejad’s faction despised if not decisively discredited in the eyes of the Guardian Council, it is hard to imagine what kind of reformist candidate might be allowed to run—let alone succeed—in the upcoming 2013 presidential elections.

REGIME CHANGE AND THE PITFALLS OF INTERVENTION

It has been a busy few months in Washington-Tehran diplomacy. First there was the FBI’s revelation of a plot by Iranian nationals to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States (and possibly bomb the Saudi and Israeli embassies),²³ followed by a damning International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report²⁴ and Washington’s promise of increased sanctions,²⁵ then by the downing of a U.S. spy drone,²⁶ and now, according to some reports, by placing the Revolutionary Guards “on a war footing” in anticipation of further escalation.²⁷

Keeping all these recent developments in mind, it is easy to understand why the rhetoric

Photo will not display.

Iran remains a land of startling contradictions. Despite theocratic control over so much of daily life, cannabis and heroin usage is epidemic, and the drugs are more freely available in the Islamic Republic than in most Western countries.

in favor of regime change and confrontation has escalated in the United States. At a recent Republican Party presidential debate, Newt Gingrich argued that not only was regime change in Iran possible but that it could be accomplished within a year.²⁸ Indeed, some of the Republican presidential candidates seem to have been trying to outdo each other in their willingness to use the “military option” to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

The problem with this kind of posturing, and any possible campaigns of solidarity with the opposition, is the strengthening of the regime’s already dominant “siege-mentality”—thereby forfeiting more credibility, in a domestic political sense, to the hard-line conservatives. The success of the elites running the Islamic Republic depends heavily on their ability to assume the moral high-ground for their domestic audience—regardless of how twisted their moral compass might seem to outside observers. Events like the seizure of the U.S. drone or presi-

21 *insideIRAN* (New York), Nov. 1, 2011.

22 Amnesty International, London, Sept. 29, 2011.

23 *ABC News*, Oct. 11, 2011; al-Jazeera TV (Doha), Nov. 19, 2011.

24 *Voice of America News*, Nov. 10, 2011.

25 *BBC News*, Dec. 1, 2011.

26 *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), Dec. 14, 2011.

27 *The Daily Telegraph* (London), Dec. 5, 2011.

28 *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 24, 2011.

dential candidates hinting at invasion are huge propaganda coups for the regime.

In the words of the pro-Western, antigovernment Parisa, a 28-year-old teacher from Shiraz: "I hate the government, but I hate more that [John] McCain would come over here and attack our country... Also, it would be a disaster. It would make Iraq look like nothing."

THE WAITING GAME

Some argue that sanctions have the same effect of rallying the Iranian people behind the regime, but conversations with Iranians have not borne this out. Whether an Iranian is likely to place the blame for the sanctions on Ahmadinejad's hostile statements or U.S. and European hawkishness tends to depend on their preexisting political views. It is true that sanctions cannot do much to hinder the activities of the likes of the Qods Force, the external Iranian

intelligence agency, or the "millionaire mullahs,"²⁹ but their loosening or tightening can be an invaluable pressure card against the regime.

For all the ayatollahs' political maneuverings, there is no doubt about the regime's "protracted crisis of legitimacy"³⁰ since the 1990s. So much so that, in sharp contrast to the Islamist surge elsewhere, Iran may be the world's only sizeable Muslim-majority nation where Islamism is on the decline. Whether this makes the regime's collapse both inevitable and unpredictable, as suggested by Carnegie Endowment scholar Karim Sadjadpour, remains to be seen.³¹ For now, all eyes are on the 2013 elections.



29 Paul Klebnikov, "Millionaire Mullahs," *Forbes*, July 21, 2003.

30 Danny Postel, "The Specter Haunting Iran," *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, Tehran, Feb. 21, 2010.

31 Paul R. Pillar, "Inevitable and Unpredictable Regime Change in Iran," *The National Interest*, May 14, 2011.

Saudi Sex Drive

A report given to a high-level advisory group in Saudi Arabia claims that allowing women in the kingdom to drive could encourage premarital sex, a rights activist said Saturday. The ultraconservative stance suggests increasing pressure on King Abdullah to retain the kingdom's male-only driving rules despite international criticism.

Rights activist Waleed Abu Alkhair said the document by a well-known academic was sent to the all-male Shura Council, which advises the monarchy. The report by Kamal Subhi claims that allowing women to drive will threaten the country's traditions of virgin brides, he said.

Saudi women have staged several protests defying the driving ban. The king has already promised some reforms, including allowing women to vote in municipal elections in 2015. But social media sites were flooded with speculation that Saudi's traditional-minded clerics and others will fight hard against social changes suggested by the 87-year-old Abdullah.

Saudi's ruling family, which oversees Islam's holiest sites, draws its legitimacy from the backing of the kingdom's religious establishment, which follows a strict brand of Islam known as Wahhabism. While Abdullah has pushed for some changes on women's rights, he is cautious not to push too hard against the clerics.

In October, Saudi Arabia named a new heir to the throne, Prince Nayef, who is a former interior minister and considered to hold traditionalist views although he had led crackdowns against suspected Islamic extremists. His selection appeared to embolden the ultraconservative clerics to challenge any sweeping social reforms.

Ha'artez, Dec. 3, 2011

Brief Reviews

The Arab Lobby: The Invisible Alliance That Undermines America's Interests in the Middle East. By Mitchell Bard. New York: Harper, 2010. 432 pp. \$27.99 (\$14.99, paper).

An "Israel lobby" in the United States has been the subject of at least eight books in recent years with the 2007 *Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*¹ by Harvard's Stephen Walt and the University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer perhaps best known. Reminiscent in part of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and other examples of anti-Semitism, these books argue that Western, and especially U.S., foreign policy is at the mercy of this small but super-powerful lobby. While some, like Abraham Foxman and Alan Dershowitz, have attacked these works by exposing manipulated facts (and in some cases outright lies), Bard, executive director of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, offers another, and perhaps more effective, approach.

Bard turns the tables on the conspiracy theorists and compellingly dissects the arguably more powerful Arab lobby. He demonstrates convincingly that an Arab lobby exists and is comprised of two main clusters. Members of the first group are agents of the oil exporting states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), especially Saudi Arabia. They have powerful allies in the United States in the form of multinational oil companies and exporters of defense industrial goods, alongside Arabists within the State Department.

The second group is composed of ethnic lobbies of Arab and Muslim-Americans, in alliance with non-evangelical Christian groups and the campus-based academic left. The first group is interested mainly in energy policy and the

geopolitics of the Persian Gulf region, and, in the case of the GCC, the export of Salafist versions of Islam; the second group is focused mainly on the Palestinian question.

In contradistinction to pro-Israel groups, the Arab lobby does not exist primarily to foster close relations between the United States and the Arab world. More of its energy is expended on vilifying and opposing Israel and striving to weaken the alliance between Jerusalem and Washington. While the Arab lobby has lots of money, it garners little support from the American people.

Despite repeated exertions, Americans of Arab origin have not rushed to join in a crusade against Israel. More than half of all Arab Americans come from Lebanese and Syrian Christian backgrounds, and many remember the damage done to their coreligionists by extremist Arab nationalist and Muslim groups in their home countries. While the major successes of the Arab lobby have not, up until now, been on the Palestinian question, it has not been completely ineffective. In areas such as energy policy, arms exports, and the spread of Islam, there have been notable successes.

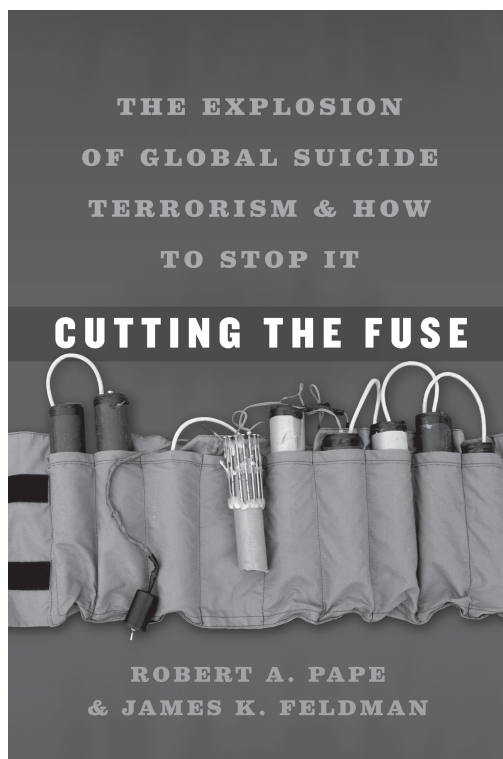
Bard presents data never before assembled on all the elements of the Arab lobby. He leaves no doubt that, measured by level of effort, if not results, the Arab lobby is equal, or superior to, anything done by the friends of Israel.

Steven Rosen
Washington Project

Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It. By Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. 349 pp. \$30.

Ever since the attacks of 9/11, Western scholars have struggled to understand what

1 Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.



motivates suicide terrorists to take their own lives in paroxysms of violence against civilians. In *Cutting the Fuse*, University of Chicago political scientist Pape and Feldman, formerly of the Air Force Institute of Technology, analyze new data, extending Pape's earlier research on suicide terrorism in *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*.² This enhanced data set now includes the universe of suicide attacks from 1980 to 2009. According to the authors, the original argument is robust and still stands.

Pape originally claimed that occupation is the taproot of suicide terrorism. In the new book, the authors emphasize that since 2006, use of this tactic has spiked in Afghanistan and Pakistan following U.S. interventions. Although the Afghan case supports Pape's thesis, the notion that Pakistan is occupied makes one wonder about the authors' grip on reality. Consequently, it is unclear why suicide attacks there have spiked

in recent years. More broadly, the explicit rejection of a religious explanation in favor of a secular, strategic logic does not hold, as Max Boot has convincingly demonstrated in *The Weekly Standard*.³

The nature of this supposed strategic logic is also murkier here than in the first book. No longer does Pape claim that people turn to suicide terrorism because of its effectiveness in coercing government concessions. Rather, he and his coauthor acknowledge terrorism's political limitations: Groups such as al-Qaeda stand no chance of achieving their expansive demands to establish a caliphate.

This tension throughout the book raises unresolved questions about the motives of suicide terrorists. Why would an al-Qaeda member blow himself up to achieve nothing tangible politically? And how is such costly behavior strategic in the absence of attaining any meaningful political concessions? To square the circle, Pape and Feldman downplay government concessions as the foremost objective of suicide terrorists, emphasizing instead their hatred toward occupiers and the desire to make them suffer, perhaps as an end in itself.

Such defensive, ad hoc shifts in reasoning and logic on the part of Pape and Feldman point to evidence of a degenerating research effort.

Max Abrahms
Johns Hopkins University

Egypt: A Short History. By Robert L. Tignor. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. 363 pp. \$29.95.

Appearing just before the uprising that overthrew Hosni Mubarak, *Egypt: A Short History* offers a timely reminder of the wild vicissitudes and mass upheavals which have been integral to Egypt's history.

Tignor, emeritus history professor at Princeton University, begins 5,000 years ago with Egypt's Old Kingdom and ends with the last year

2 Random House, 2005.

3 Max Boot, "Suicide by Bomb," *The Weekly Standard*, Aug 1, 2011.

of Mubarak's reign. The overview of Egypt's many different epochs—pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Christian, medieval Islamic, European imperialist, pan-Arab—offers a look at the totality of Egypt's history.

Because of this, otherwise important epochs receive a few pages of bare bone summary; likewise, the book follows traditional narratives and offers few unique insights or controversial interpretations. Worse, Tignor's history is marred by apologetics for Islam: suggesting that in the decades preceding Pope Urban's 1095 call for the Crusades, "Christians [under Muslim rule] no longer lived in danger of their lives or their livelihoods," is demonstrably false, as evinced by the Turkish advance into Anatolia following the Battle of Manzikert (1071) and the Egyptian Fatimid caliph's persecution of Christians and desecration of the Church of the Sepulcher.

The book offers no footnotes, even for the many quotes, which frustrates the specialist. In contrast, the general reader, for whom the book is mainly geared, will benefit from the fast-paced, readable narrative.

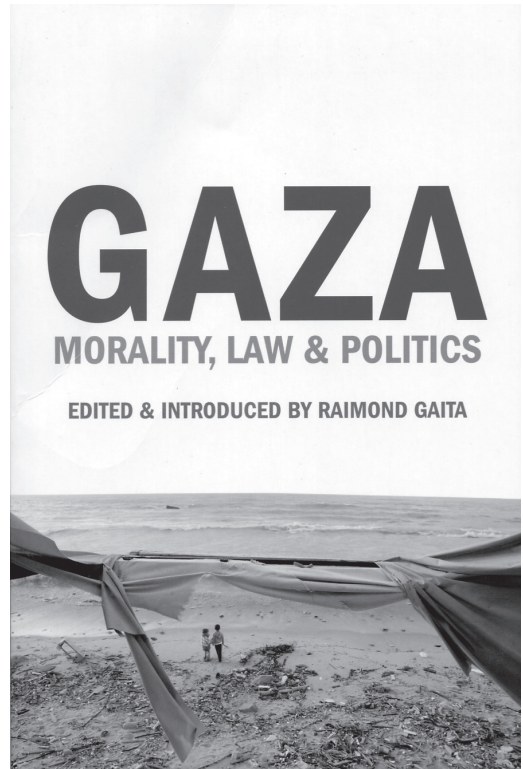
One comes away from this broad sweep with the insight that no civilization endures forever. Egypt experienced nearly three millennia of the pharaonic, nearly one millennium of the Greco-Roman, and 500 years of the Christian, so why assume that Arabic/Muslim civilization, now 1,400 years old, is the final and ultimate destiny of Egypt?

Raymond Ibrahim

Gaza: Morality, Law and Politics. Edited by Raimond Gaita. Crawley, Aus.: UWA Publishing, 2010. 222 pp. \$29.95.

After years of indiscriminate rocket attacks, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip in late 2008 and early 2009. While Israel made its case for self-defense, the United Nations established a fact-finding mission in April 2009 to investigate alleged violations of international law. The flawed report, issued under the auspices of South African jurist Richard Goldstone, accused Israel of war crimes and possible crimes against humanity.

Gaita, professor of philosophy at Austra-



lian Catholic University and professor of moral philosophy at King's College London, assembles the generally feeble and rambling thoughts of seven academics (none Middle East specialists) on this incident. With some exceptions, the scholars express disdain for Israel's actions and treat the Goldstone report as gospel.

Gaita himself argues stridently that the "case against Israel is serious and strong. Too many reports from reliable sources concur." Geoffrey Brahm Levey of the University of New South Wales argues that both Hamas and Israel should "be hauled before the International Criminal Court to answer the charges." He calls Jerusalem's actions "state terror" and alleges that Israeli "indifference" to civilian life "may have been deliberate."

It might be too much to hope that Gaita, Levey, and the other contributors to this volume would now question their own judgment. Goldstone does. In April 2010, the jurist wrote in *The Washington Post* that he no longer believed Israel had intentionally targeted civilians in

Gaza.⁴ With one brief op-ed, Goldstone rendered half this book obsolete.

Another problem with *Gaza: Morality, Law and Politics* is its overuse of academic jargon. For example, Mark Baker of Monash University examines “Jewish and Palestinian nationalism from an ethnographic perspective” to “expose the way Israel and Palestine have come to function as cultural codes for a wider set of assumptions and attitudes whose roots lie in the structures of victim identities.” Then there is Hilary Charlesworthy, who applies feminist theories to the conflict claiming “it is possible to have the biological sex of a woman, but to adopt a masculine gender and vice versa . . . concepts of masculinity and femininity alter across time and cultures, but are typically defined as opposite to one another.” Such verbiage makes the book a tough slog.

To be sure, there are some insights to glean. The University of Melbourne’s Gerry Simpson penned a thoughtful essay and rightly notes that “Israelis kill Palestinian civilians because this is the only way to attack Palestinian fighters, and Palestinians kill Israeli civilians because this is the only way to attack the Israeli state.”

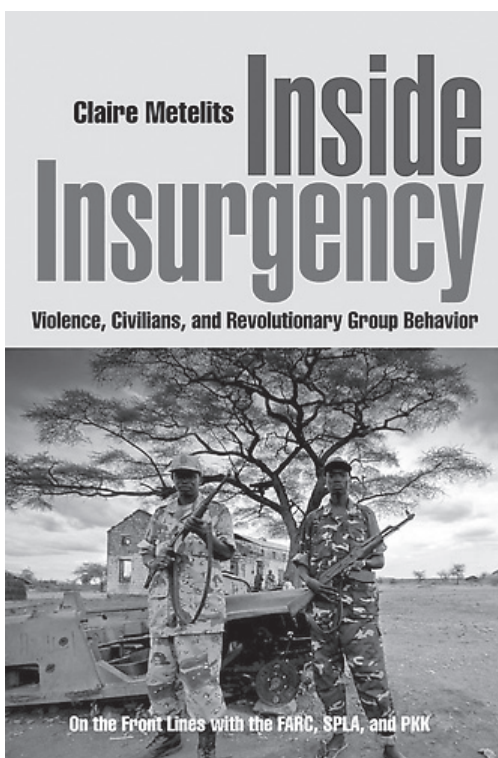
Unfortunately, such clear-eyed analysis is in the minority in this book, rendering it unworthy of scholarly attention.

Jonathan Schanzer
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Inside Insurgency: Violence, Civilians, and Revolutionary Group Behavior. By Claire Metelits. New York: New York University Press, 2010. 242 pp. \$70 (\$23, paper).

Inside Insurgency addresses a question important to both academics and policymakers: How does one explain the variation in the types and level of victimization of civilian populations by insurgent groups. Some groups brutalize the local population while others do not. Some insurgent groups attack civilians but only some of the time.

4 Richard Goldstone, “Reconsidering the Goldstone Report on Israel and War Crimes,” *The Washington Post*, Apr. 1, 2010.



Metelits, assistant professor of political science at Washington State University, has conducted extensive field research in Colombia, Iraq, Kenya, Sudan, and Turkey since 2001. Braving insurgent hot-spots, she interviewed more than a hundred insurgent leaders, military commanders, government officials, and civilians. Her research focuses on three insurgent groups in particular: the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). Although each organization has preyed on the local population, Metelits explores the variations in their victimization of civilians. The PKK targeted Turkish civilians for some time before moderating this practice. FARC evolved in the opposite way, from protecting Colombian civilians to killing, kidnapping, and extorting them. The SPLA’s trajectory was akin to that of FARC, committing widespread human-rights violations against the southern Sudanese people before winning over their allegiance.

Her explanation for this variation is intu-

itively plausible and well-argued. Metelits demonstrates empirically that the key explanatory variable is “active rivalry.” She writes: “When an insurgent group does not face competition over resources, the level of violence is low. In contrast, when an insurgent group faces competition—a threat to control of resources—the level of violence is likely to rise.” That is, when an insurgent group faces competition from either state or non-state entities over strategic resources essential to organizational survival (e.g. food, guns, or money), violence against civilian populations can be expected to increase. Accordingly then, insurgents can be viewed as “rational” actors who tend to harm the population in response to their own organizational concerns.

This scholarship dovetails with research on terrorist groups by Mia Bloom, Jonathan Schanzer, and others who have shown that terror groups’ violence against civilians is sometimes a function of inter-organizational squabbles rather than broader, ideological reasons. This observation has potential implications in the war on terrorism. Post-bin Laden, al-Qaeda affiliated groups are less unified than ever and may, therefore, ramp up their violence against civilians if the Metelits thesis can be generalized to this critical case.

Max Abrahms

Militarism and Israeli Society. Edited by Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010. 386 pp. \$70 (\$26.95, paper).

This volume is a perfect illustration of how far the tenured Left will go to suppress real diversity and balance in academic discourse while misrepresenting one-sided advocacy as scholarship. *Militarism and Israeli Society* is a collection of articles that were presented at a conference sponsored by Israel’s semi-Marxist Van Leer Institute and edited by two Hebrew University professors, Sheffer and Barak, noted for their vocal attacks on the Jewish state.

Alongside these ideological biases is a sloppy use of terminology at the heart of the book. For the writers, the terms “militaristic” and

Militarism and Israeli Society

Edited by Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak



“having a large army” are generally used interchangeably. Granted, Israel does have a sizable military, understandable in the face of the multiple threats it continually faces. But the absence of militarism (and the reality of civilian control over the Israeli military) was dramatically illustrated in recent months when Israeli civilian politicians repeatedly considered and then ruled out generals for the position of chief of staff.⁵

Israel’s army interacts with other parts of society in interesting ways. Military officers retire and often become politicians. Social networking is often based on one’s old army buddies. These would be interesting issues to analyze. But *Militarism and Israeli Society* has little interest in such things. With only a few exceptions, the writers in the volume simply bash Israel rather than examine it seriously.

Thus a chapter by Kobi Michael opines at

⁵ *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), Feb. 11, 2011; Reuters, Feb. 13, 2011.

length (and with painful polysyllabic inventions like “epistemic authority” or “Type A Discourse Space”) that civilian control over the Israeli military is weak without offering any evidence that this is true. Yoram Peri complains that the Israeli media is subservient to and coddles the army but never mentions the ideological Left’s hegemony over most news outlets. A shrill chapter denouncing Israel’s security barrier by Yuval Feinstein and Uri Ben-Eliezer dismisses the initiative as a “Method of a New War” by Israel against Palestinians; the authors never mention that the fence was built to keep out terrorists or that it was constructed as a civilian project to protect both Jewish and Arab citizens who were being blown up with tragic regularity. There has been debate as to how much the drop in terrorist atrocities in recent years was due to the partial completion of this fence. Perhaps the only chapters in the book not seeking to grind an ideological axe are the ones on Israel’s defense budget by Zalman F. Shiffer and one on the role of the religiously observant in the military by Stuart A. Cohen.

The word “analysis” may be the most overused term, showing up on almost every page of the book. Yet, there is virtually none to be found in this collection of rhetoric posing as scholarship.

Steven Plaut
University of Haifa

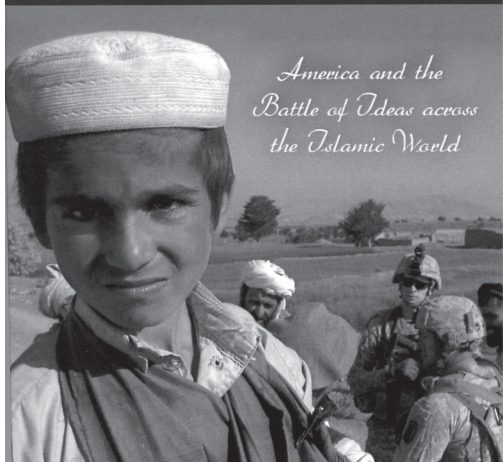
My Brother, My Enemy: America and the Battle of Ideas across the Islamic World. By Philip Smucker. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2010. 364 pp. \$26.

My Brother, My Enemy, being true to its namesake, takes a fraternal, even emotional, approach to understanding the conflict between the United States and the Muslim world, based on the author’s travels and interviews in the Middle East

While Smucker, a foreign journalist for publications including *U.S. News and World Report* and *Time*, appears sincere in his search for peaceful solutions, he is ultimately too ideologically driven for this book to have much value. All the classic leftist bromides appear here: The notion

PHILIP SMUCKER

MY BROTHER, MY ENEMY



of an “Islamofascist” movement is “a mirage, a false specter created out of our own fears”; with proper cooperation, Hamas might “morph into something far more peaceful in the future”; a two-state solution will not only solve the Arab-Israeli conflict, it will destroy al-Qaeda and radicalism; Fort Hood killer Nidal Hasan is misunderstood and was primarily motivated by a sense of moral outrage.

Smucker’s biases are sometimes more subtle: In a paragraph describing the worship of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Jerusalem, the last are portrayed straightforwardly while less-than-dignified depictions are reserved for Christian pilgrims “huffing and perspiring fanatically” and Jews who “bob up and down” at the Western Wall. The author’s apologies for Islam lead him amateurishly to quote and comment on the Qur’an and Islamic history, portraying, for instance, Muslim-dominated Spain in the medieval era as nearly as tolerant as modern-day America.

Smucker appears to be motivated by noble sentiments: “Indeed, my work on *My Brother, My Enemy* has reaffirmed a basic principle I al-

ways knew to be true: ‘Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the most high’ [Luke 6:35].” While such counsel may be noble for an individual’s conscience, it is disastrous as state policy.

In the end, Smucker’s “brotherly” advice is being preached to the wrong audience. Much of the Muslim world scoffs at the notion that the infidel is a “brother” and sees him only as a misguided enemy. Surely it is in greater need of such advice than the West.

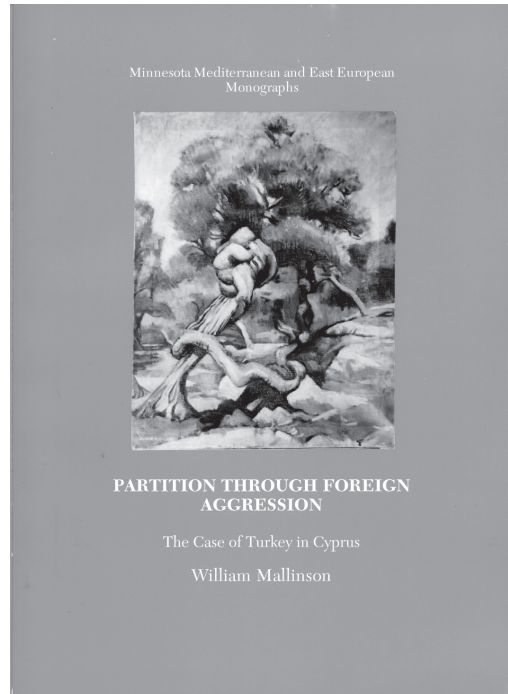
Raymond Ibrahim

Partition through Foreign Aggression. The Case of Turkey in Cyprus. By William Mallinson. Minnesota Mediterranean and East European Monographs. No. 20 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010). 126 pp. \$30, paper.

While Hesiod identified Cyprus as the first home of the goddess Aphrodite, the island has been inhabited by many who are not lovers. Already a bone of contention between ancient Greeks and Persians, later Venetians and Ottomans, Cyprus has maintained a strategic significance in the struggle between East and West, and therefore has attracted the attention of modern powers, such as Britain, the United States, and, of course, Greece and Turkey.

Mallinson, a former British diplomat now teaching history at a Greek university, has written a monograph lamenting the partition of Cyprus as a largely unjust and cynical machination of great power politics. At the same time, he acknowledges that the island is populated by two ethno-religious communities hardly in love with each other—Greeks and Turks—but then proceeds to ignore his own findings.

In an era where nationalism and religion still play an important role in international politics, it is foolhardy to assign blame simply to outsiders who have sought to dominate the isle. For example, the author suggests that Cyprus should be treated in a post-nationalist “European spirit,” allowing for a reunification that obfuscates the ethno-religious differences. While the jury is still out on the success of the European project, ignoring the political potency



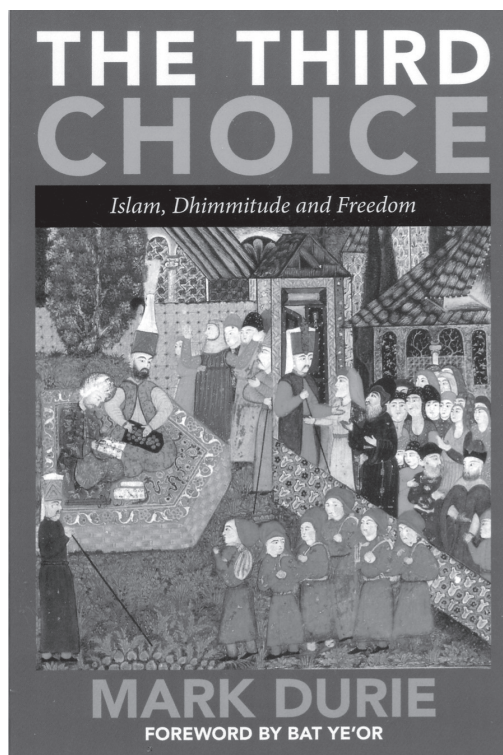
of these factors leads to a shallow understanding of politics everywhere, including Cyprus.

The disdain and aggressive tone throughout the monograph toward the realpolitik paradigm does not befit an academic work. Similarly, the contempt for social science theory is extremely problematic. The preaching tone, the simplistic insistence on legality in the international system (despite the fact that use of force is allowed by that system), an adoration of such a morally bankrupt institution as the U.N., and naive idealism turns the work into a polemical tirade rather than a respectable, intellectual exercise.

The author makes a far-reaching claim that partitions in international relations are ineffective and immoral. This particular crusade against partitions, advocating tacitly multi-ethnic states, lacks intellectual rigor and depth. The author could have marshaled better arguments had he read the rich literature on partitions.

Efraim Inbar

Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies
Bar-Ilan University



The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude, and Freedom. By Mark Durie. Melbourne, Aus.: Deror Books, 2010. 270 pp. \$38 (\$19.95 paper).

Durie, an Anglican pastor and an accomplished scholar of issues involving Christianity and Islam, has produced a reasoned, comprehensive, and well-written book that is particularly apt for readers lacking an extensive background in Islam.

His title comes from the three choices that the classic religious texts of Islam offer “peoples of the book”: Convert to Islam, perish by the sword, or accept a second-class status, which modern analysts call *dhimmitude*. This last choice renders Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians subject to heavy social, legal, and economic discrimination enforced by the ruling Muslims and implying a status of perpetual humiliation.

The book’s first half clarifies the theological underpinnings of *dhimmitude*. Durie debunks some myths about Islam, such as the idea that jihad does not mean war but rather spirituality. He discusses the concept of abrogation in the

Qur’an, used by Muslim exegetes to explain away seeming contradictions within the text. Durie shows how the more conciliatory verses of the Qur’an, quoted by contemporary Islamic apologists to underscore the peaceful nature of Islam, were written earlier in Muhammad’s career when his position was tenuous. However, the more militant, less-forgiving phrases that tradition claims were revealed to Muhammad in the winter of his life abrogate many of these earlier peace-oriented verses.

Durie gives many examples of *dhimmitude*, both historical and contemporary, which clarify the misery, fear, poverty, and degradation that framed the world of the pre-modern *dhimmi*. And what of *dhimmitude* today? Durie gives examples of Islamic-driven discriminatory practices in Muslim states. He also explores the self-inflicted behaviors in Western states, which mirror *dhimmitude*, that are driven by political correctness and fears of being labeled a bigot.

The Third Choice is a good first choice for those concerned about *dhimmitude* today.

Mark Silinsky

U.S. Department of the Army

A Vulcan’s Tale: How the Bush Administration Mismanaged the Reconstruction of Afghanistan. By Dov S. Zakheim. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011. 335 pp. \$32.95.

The oft-repeated maxim attributed to Gustave Flaubert, “God is in the details,” has a variant: “Governing is in the details,” as Zakheim’s memoir, a firsthand postmortem of the Bush administration’s Afghanistan and Iraq policies, makes clear. The volume provides an insider’s view not only on strategy but also on an underappreciated aspect of the history—the “practicalities of implementation.”

Zakheim was one of the first advisors in 1998 to join the Bush campaign’s foreign policy team, dubbed by Condoleezza Rice, the “Vulcans.” He joined other, better-known names including Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz, to help brief Bush on international issues and then moved on to the Department of Defense after the election.

The author demonstrates that problems

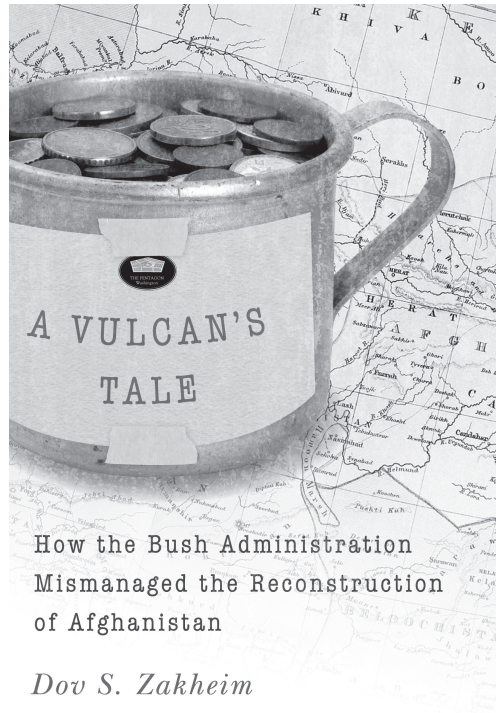
with postwar reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq resulted from factors incidental to the Bush administration's initial aversion to "nation-building." He stresses another crucial reason for the mismanaged reconstruction initiatives: mid-level bureaucratic disputes over appropriations between Congress, the Defense Department, and the Office of Management and Budget.

In his capacities as the Pentagon's comptroller, chief financial officer, and coordinator for Afghan civilian reconstruction, Zakheim negotiated with coalition partners to raise and disburse funds for the Afghanistan and Iraq missions. Describing these negotiations, Zakheim provides insights into the unfortunate realities of dealing with authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes. Notwithstanding the ostensible confluence of interest between these states and Washington, corruption, haggling, secrecy, double-talk, and false promises were a fact of life.

Zakheim illustrates the point with numbers. After the first Afghan donors' conference, for example, the government of Saudi Arabia pledged \$220 million but disbursed \$27 million; Kuwait disbursed \$2 million of its \$30 million pledge; and Qatar simply did not bother to follow up on its \$12 million pledge. Zakheim's failed 2003 negotiations with Syrian charge d'affaires, Imad Moustapha, over frozen Iraqi assets—the highest-level Pentagon talks with Syria in years—reveal the futility of the Bush administration's attempted rapprochement with Damascus.

Zakheim unintentionally reveals a major shortcoming in the White House's Afghanistan strategy: By repeatedly defending the Bush record vis-à-vis Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf, he highlights the administration's inability to recognize and deal with Pakistan's double-game of cooperating with Washington while inciting instability across its borders.

A Vulcan's Tale is weaker in its strategic analysis. Zakheim advances the oft-repeated charge that the "rush to war with Iraq" detracted



How the Bush Administration Mismanaged the Reconstruction of Afghanistan

Dov S. Zakheim

from the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Especially given his intimate involvement with the issue, Zakheim's discussion is simplistic and ultimately unconvincing, relying too much on anecdotes about administration officials' supposed inattention to Afghanistan. He downplays, for example, the fact that almost immediately after the start of the 2003 Iraq war, the Bush administration doubled funding for Afghanistan reconstruction and greatly increased the size of the country's national army and police.

Overall, Zakheim's memoir remains useful in explaining the impact that U.S. decisions after 9/11 had on subsequent outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Pratik Chougule
former State Department official



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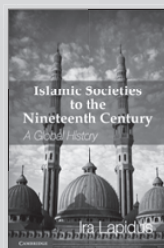
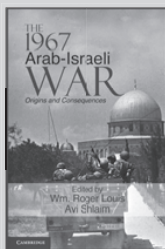
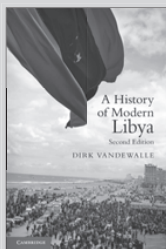
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