

Current Trends in Islamist Ideology

VOLUME 13

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- UK ISLAMISTS AND THE ARAB UPRISINGS / *James Brandon & Raffaello Pantucci*
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HUDSON INSTITUTE
*Center on Islam, Democracy, and
the Future of the Muslim World*

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the Brotherhood's Rise

The Guardian of Pakistan's Shia

By Alex Vatanka

THE TOWN OF PARACHINAR, LOCATED IN A FAR-FLUNG CORNER OF WESTERN Pakistan, is fondly called by some Iranian Shiites “Little Iran.” The majority of the town’s residents are ethnic Pashtuns who belong to the Shia faith. It is also the capital of Kurram Agency, one of the seven tribal districts that make up the politically volatile Federally Administrated Tribal Areas. In recent years, Parachinar has effectively been under siege by Sunni militants. Since 2007, waves of sectarian violence have killed hundreds of Shia from Parachinar. In reaction to this, Parachinar has become a potent symbol of Shia suffering, and the plight of its Shia residents has become a rallying cry for elements of the Iranian regime.

The tragic state of affairs in Parachinar may be seen as a reflection of the mounting sectarian strife which has threatened in recent years to engulf the Pakistani nation. It may also be used as a yardstick to measure the willingness and ability of the Islamic Republic of Iran to protect Shia communities wherever they might be. After all, the Tehran regime is often looked upon as the global champion and guardian of the Shia. And historically, the Islamic Republic has actively supported Shiite militancy internationally, including in Pakistan.

Today, however, Tehran’s actions rarely match its most fervent rhetoric about the suffering of Pakistan’s Shia. Indeed, among the ranks of Pakistan’s Shia activists, many today are disappointed by what they perceive as the lack of Iranian pressure on Islamabad to take measures to protect the Shia of Parachinar and to crackdown on sectarian groups and ideologies. In Iran as well, there are analysts and even senior Shia clergy who have condemned what they deem to be Tehran’s weak stance toward anti-Shia

violence in Pakistan. As Shia-Sunni violence continues in Pakistan, Tehran's position will invariably be scrutinized from different corners since Iran is an influential regional actor with the capacity to either fuel or rein in sectarian tensions and violence in Pakistan and elsewhere in Asia.

Parachinar as a Symbol

IN EARLY DECEMBER 2011, PAKISTANI MEDIA REPORTED THAT OFFICIALS IN ISLAMABAD pledged a renewal in security operations against “non-local militants” in Parachinar. At a briefing at the National Assembly, government and intelligence officials informed lawmakers that some 1,100 people have been killed and hundreds of houses burnt in Parachinar since 2007. Meanwhile, the same government officials again promised to re-open the critical Thall-Parachinar road, a critical access point for the inhabitants of Parachinar whose town in effect came under siege with the road's closure. Only time will show if the Pakistani government is genuinely committed to and able to come to the aid of the Shia of Kurram Agency. Needless to say, Pakistan's Iranian critics are yet to be convinced.

In contrast to official Pakistani figures, Iran's state-run English-language Press TV reported the number of dead in Parachinar to stand at “over 4,000.” Moreover, Iranian media have also implicated the Pakistani government in the violence, claiming officials have a policy of looking the other way and ignoring the plight of the Shia in Kurram Agency.¹

As early as 2007, some of Iran's state-run media began to describe Parachinar as a “Second Gaza” and lamented the situation of the “500,000 inhabitants under siege.”² Grand Ayatollah Saafi Golpayegani, a prominent cleric in Iran's holy city of Qom, became an early advocate of the Shia of Parachinar. In late 2007, Golpayegani famously told his congregation that in Parachinar they “cut heads and limbs off the Shia and no one utters a word.” Without mentioning the Iranian regime explicitly, the ayatollah criticized Tehran's official silence and inaction following the siege of Parachinar. Iranians, Golpayegani said, “do not do as we should [in helping the Pakistani Shia] and we will have to answer to God.”³

The silence of Iran's officialdom with respect to the plight of Pakistan's Shia is conspicuous and openly criticized by the wider Iranian public. However, those who do criticize the Iranian government's inaction, such as Ayatollah Golpayegani, are only loosely tied to the clerical regime. Meanwhile, a review of two key government websites—the official site of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, and the Islamic

Republic News Agency, the outlet of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government—reveals almost no statements by Iranian political leaders about the situation of the Shia in Pakistan and the siege of Parachinar.⁴

In fact, both of these sites, along with many other state-controlled outlets in the Islamic Republic, mostly praise the current state of relations between Iran and Pakistan. In other words, those in charge of the Islamic Republic engage in a clear attempt to paint relations as healthy and to brush aside any factors that might complicate ties. Turning the case of Parachinar into a high-profile issue would undoubtedly agitate Tehran-Islamabad relations, not a scenario Iran would welcome given that it is already under a high degree of isolation on the regional and international stages.

Iran's silence about the situation in Parachinar is seen as peculiar by many observers in Tehran. In a damning assessment in December 2011, one semi-official outlet asked how the Foreign Ministry in Tehran could do nothing as the world witnessed the "continuation of the killing of a generation of Shia [in Parachinar]?"⁵ The assessment included the appraisal of Javad Mansouri, the former Iranian ambassador to Pakistan, who stated that unsuccessful attempts had been made to "come to the economic aid of the people of Parachinar," but that even in this more limited task the "[Iranian] authorities in Tehran did not comprehend the needs of [Shia in Parachinar] and did not cooperate [with Iran's diplomats in Pakistan]."⁶

The role of the Islamic Republic and Tehran's perception of Parachinar was quite different only a decade ago. In an interview with this author, Ali Akbar Omid-Mehr, a former senior Iranian diplomat to Pakistan, described Iran's earliest hopes for Parachinar as a "springboard" for Iranian influence into broader Pakistan. Omid-Mehr, who defected from the Iranian regime in the mid-1990s, pointed out that in 1986 Iran's then-Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had specifically issued a *fatwa* with instructions that the Shia of Pakistan needed to be helped by the Iranian state.⁷ In retrospect, this period from the early 1980s until the mid-1990s can be said to have been the zenith of the Islamic Republic's championing of Shia militancy in Pakistan. As such, present-day accusations about Iran's purported complacency follow a period when Tehran was verifiably engaged in supporting Pakistani Shia groups.

Ayatollah Khomeini's chief clerical representative in Pakistan from 1985, Syed Arif Hussain Al-Hussaini, was himself a native of the Parachinar region. In his assessment of sectarianism in Pakistan, Hassan Abbas points out that Al-Hussaini first met Khomeini when in exile in Najaf, Iraq in the 1970s and later followed him to Iran where he continued his religious studies in Qom.⁸ Abbas argues that Al-Hussaini represented a new crop of Pakistani Shia political activists who abandoned the traditionalist practices of the Shia community and embraced the revolutionary rhetoric of the Islamic Republic that came to power in 1979.⁹

Prior to his assassination by Sunni militants in 1988, Al-Hussaini openly spoke in Pakistan of the theocratic political system put in place in Iran by Khomeini and his followers serving as a “working model” for his Shia organization.¹⁰ As Maleeha Lodhi pointed out at the time, Al-Hussaini had a “militant political approach” to his activism, which at the time “brought him greater influence among a more assertive new generation of Shias [in Pakistan].”¹¹ It is, however, important to note that the militancy that Al-Hussaini embraced, and which resonated so well with segments of the Shia activists in Pakistan, occurred at a time of great sectarian tensions in the country.

Since coming to power in 1977, General Zia ul-Haq sought to Islamicize his country. However, many of Pakistan’s Shia political elite viewed Islamabad’s new policies as sectarian, and tantamount to “Sunnification” of Pakistan at the expense of the religious minorities. Al-Hussaini was cautious in choosing his words, but his anxieties about Sunni supremacy in Pakistan were crystal clear. Proclaiming “Let the Sunnis as well as the Shiites live in Pakistan, let the Ahle Hadith and Deobandi, all of them, live together,” he then mentioned the broken promises of the Zia government which Al-Hussaini accused of opportunism and stirring religious discrimination in the country at the time.¹²

In other words, it was arguably not merely the 1979 Iranian revolution that reenergized the Pakistani Shia, but that the regime change in Tehran in 1979 had come at an opportune moment when a Sunni resurgence in Pakistan compelled some Shia activists to look for external patrons.¹³ The Shia theocratic regime in Tehran certainly fit the role of a benefactor but, as Abbas aptly points out, even then there were major splits in the ranks of the Pakistani Shia activists about the impact of Iranian patronage.¹⁴ Such dilemmas about Iranian sponsorship still impact the thinking of Shia activists, and not just in Pakistan but also in places such as Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain.

In the end, Parachinar never became an effective springboard for Iranian ideological expansion into the rest of Pakistan, but Iran left its marks there. It opened up a cultural center (*khaney-e farhang*) in the town¹⁵ and, as Omid-Mehr explained, quickly helped the local Shia with materiel when some of the anti-Soviet Sunni mujahedeen based in Kurram Agency began to adopt a sectarian agenda.¹⁶ But not even the sum of such activities can amount to the description of Parachinar as a strategic conduit to the larger Pakistani Shia community.

In the meantime, from the mid-1990s, Iran’s revolutionary zeal temporarily subsided. Tehran began a policy of détente toward its neighbors under Presidents Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami. The exception was Afghanistan, a country in the midst of civil war where Iran had sided with Northern Afghan factions engaging in a fierce power struggle against Pakistani-backed Sunni Pashtun mujahedeen who subsequently coalesced under the Taliban banner. This *de facto* proxy

war between Iran and Pakistan on Afghan soil was arguably one of the main reasons behind Tehran's decision to cease its until-then patent support of Pakistani Shia organizations. Accordingly, Iran did not see itself as prepared to wage a two-pronged battle against the Pakistani state, and also feared Islamabad's retaliation.¹⁷

Khameneism in Pakistan

BY MOST ACCOUNTS, IRANIAN SPONSORSHIP OF SHIA MILITANT GROUPS IN PAKISTAN declined after the mid-1990s. That does not, however, mean that Iran's leaders chose to cut off ties with the Shiite political scene in Pakistan altogether. In fact, the Pakistani Shia today constitute one of the key target audiences for Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's political and religious messages. This is largely because of the prominent role of religion in the activities of a number of Shia organizations. Insofar as Pakistani Shia Islamist movements have looked for religious leadership, they have often looked to clergy outside Pakistan's borders, and especially to Iran. Furthermore, since 1979, Tehran's financial patronage for a host of Shia religious bodies has also been an important factor in making Iran a significant influence among Shia in Pakistan.

One of the most important players in this regard is the Imamia Students Organization Pakistan (ISO). The Shia activist group, founded in 1972, advertises itself as the "largest student organization in Pakistan" with a nationwide network of some 800 branches.¹⁸ ISO is very public and emphatic about the fact that it considers Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei as its spiritual guide. It sees its mission and role in Pakistan as no different from that of the Lebanese Hezbollah or Iran's Islamist Basij militia force. As such, it sees itself as a regional outpost for the Islamic Republic, and as a vanguard defending the Khomeinist concept of *velayat-e faqih*, or the rule of the supreme jurist.

In an interview in 2009, the then-ISO leader Syed Hassan Zaidi stated that the organization has a "supervisory council with 19 members" at the top of its institutional hierarchy and that the ISO leadership is directly linked to the office of Ayatollah Khamenei in Tehran. At the time, Zaidi suggested that ISO had a combined student membership of 18,000-20,000 male and 6,000 female members.¹⁹ Zaidi and his successor, Kumail Abbas, have both maintained that the ISO does not see Khamenei's leadership as limited to Iran's boundaries, and both consider the Iranian leader as the leader of all Muslims.²⁰

Khamenei's ties with the ISO do, in fact, run deep. In 1989, shortly after he became the Supreme Leader, Khamenei met a group of ISO activists in Tehran. In his speech,

which was intended to outline his vision for the future, and which is still available on his personal site,²¹ Khamenei revealed a great deal about the agenda that still lies at the core of Khamenei's worldview. He spoke of the need for unity in the ranks of the world's Muslims. In particular, he blamed the "imperialists" (the West) for undermining Muslim unity. In 1989, Khamenei said that "Imperialism and corrupt rulers, in the old and new ages, divided the Muslims and separated the houses [branches of Islam] and made them [Muslims] suspicious of each other." Fast-forward 23 years and the crux of Khamenei's message to the Shia of Pakistan has effectively remained the same. The supreme leader urges Muslim unity while remaining deeply anti-American and anti-West, as well as hostile to the status quo powers in the Greater Middle East including Saudi Arabia and other pro-US Arab states. If one examines Iran's overt religious outreach in Pakistan today, it appears that the bulk of the country's financial largess is spent on propagating such goals. In other words, Iran clearly has political objectives in Pakistan, but the way it seeks to further its agenda is primarily via religious-based assistance.

For example, Khamenei's official site displays requests by various Pakistani Shia bodies for Iranian funding for the construction of sites of worship.²² Khamenei clearly desires to claim leadership over Pakistani Shia but is reluctant to make his ambitions clear, as he surely anticipates an angry official Pakistani response.

Here, historical context is also imperative. It is well-known that Pakistani Shia have from days predating the Islamic Republic looked to the clerics of Qom for religious leadership. However, since Khamenei came to power the Shia religious linkages between Iran and Pakistan have noticeably shifted away from the *marjas* (the clerical sources of emulation) of Qom. Now, the linkages appear focused on garnering Pakistani acceptance of the Khomeinist concept of the *vilayat-e faqih*. Meanwhile, this process has also included a great deal of lionizing of Khamenei when Iranian efforts target the Shia of Pakistan.

The reason for this is basically twofold. First, at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, Tehran's hands were financially freed to propagate its ideals more vigorously internationally. Khamenei was selected as supreme leader soon after, in June 1989. Second, because Khamenei lacked religious qualifications and a spiritual following before he was selected as supreme leader, he opted to look beyond Iran's borders to establish his name as a *marja*. Because of the large size of the Shia population in Pakistan (some 20 per cent of the country's 173 million) and also because there are relatively few leading Shia religious figures in the country, it appears that Khamenei decided that Pakistan was fertile ground for his religious outreach.

The Iranian state has marketed Khamenei and the ideology of *vilayat-e faqih* in Pakistan both internally and externally. In addition to providing funds for Shia religious

causes in Pakistan,²³ Tehran also sponsors Shia religious students from the country to pursue studies in Iran. There are no precise figures for how many Pakistanis attend Iranian seminaries, but their presence is prominent, especially when compared with other nationalities.

Among Qom's myriad of religious institutions, one office frequently stands out as the Iranian regime's primary arm for outreach. The *Daftar-e Tabliqat-e Eslami-e Howzeh-e Elmiyeh-e Qom* (The Office of Islamic Propagation at Seminaries of Qom) is a coordinating agency that promotes itself as a bridge between the collective bodies of the seminaries in Qom and the regime officialdom.²⁴ Its mandate is primarily aimed at the domestic religious-political scene in Iran but it regularly engages in advancing Iranian interests and Islamic unity (on Iranian terms) internationally.

Pakistani religious students from the ISO feature strongly in the office's international activities. The office, for example, has hosted ISO students and also provided Shia theological students with instruction in the latest Islamic thoughts and practices in Iran.²⁵ Clearly, the *Daftar-e Tabliqat-e Eslami* is engaged in religious indoctrination, and the person and worldview of Ayatollah Khamenei lie at the heart of the office's outreach efforts.²⁶

Accordingly, many of Pakistan's Shia religious figures have become highly vocal and partisan supporters of Khamenei. For example, Syed Jawad Naqvi, a prominent activist preacher and the head of a recently-launched Shia seminary in Pakistan, idealizes the theocracy in the Islamic Republic of Iran and calls himself a devoted follower of Khamenei. He has additionally published articles as well as a book denouncing Iran's anti-clerical Green opposition movement.²⁷ Not surprisingly, Naqvi's seminary was reportedly established in part with financial support from the Iranian state.²⁸

Not only do Pakistan's pro-Iran Shia ulema come to Khamenei's defense when he faces his internal Iranian detractors, but they give much publicity and credence to his vision and role as a pan-regional Islamic leader.²⁹ In one of the most recent high-profile examples, the Pakistani Shia leader Syed Sajid Naqvi, leader of *Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan* (TJP), attended the "First International Islamic Awakening Conference" in Tehran in September 2011. Sajid Naqvi was quoted as saying that Khamenei's leadership is going to "transform" the region after the political upheaval and change in a number of Arab countries.³⁰ Such lavish praise of Khamenei surpasses even the statements of Iranian officials.³¹ Thanks to Iranian funding, this veneration of Khamenei has also become strongly visible in cyberspace. Today, dozens of Pakistani Shia Islamist websites are in operation and they actively engage in propagating the Iranian regime's messages and the teachings of Ayatollah Khamenei.³²

Violence and Regional Rivalry

CLEARLY, KHAMENEI HAS BOTH THE DESIRE AND THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES AT HIS disposal to cultivate his religious leadership and political influence among Pakistan's Shia population. Still, the supreme leader's appeal in Pakistan, and the appeal of Iran more generally, fundamentally depends on the political and security circumstances of Pakistan's Shia and the changing needs of the country's Shia population. Right now, Pakistan's Shia can in large numbers turn to Iran for support and patronage. And they appear especially inclined to do so now, as anti-Shia violence at the hands of radical Sunni *takfiri* groups continues unabated. In 2011 alone, hundreds of Shias were killed in sectarian violence across Pakistan.

As a result, while the Islamic Republic of Iran is careful not to act overtly as an agitator of the Shia in Pakistan, it does seek to capitalize on Pakistani Shia grievances. For example, Khamenei's public comments about Pakistani affairs are routinely peppered with condolences about Shia deaths at the hands of extremist Sunni groups such as Lashkar-e Jhangvi.³³ Invariably, Khamenei's statements make two central points: that Islamic sectarianism is essentially a foreign plot to divide the Muslim Nation, and that local authorities in Pakistan are either collaborators in such schemes or simply do not do enough to bring an end to violence among various Muslim sects.³⁴ Insofar as Tehran has been able to influence Pakistani Shia groups, these groups continue to act as broadcasters of the Iranian regime's ideas.

Khamenei's pronouncements on Pakistani affairs and other official Iranian statements are carefully drafted not to offend the authorities in Islamabad, but they also clearly suggest that the Pakistani state is complicit in sustaining the sectarian violence.³⁵ At times, members of the Pakistani security forces are bluntly charged with involvement in the killing of Shias, but Iranian state-run media and officials are careful not to be overly explicit when they point the finger in the direction of Pakistani state institutions.³⁶

Iran's outreach in Pakistan is partly based on its desire to confront what it deems to be Saudi encroachment and the further spread of anti-Shia activities of extremist Sunni groups inspired by Saudi Wahhabism. This Iranian-Saudi rivalry on Pakistani soil over influence is particularly palpable when Iranian information campaigns vividly lay the blame on Saudi ideology and policies for violence against Shias in Pakistan. Such messages, which are propagated via dozens of pro-Iran websites, essentially portray the violence against Shia as part of a Saudi-American master plan to weaken the Muslim Nation by fueling sectarianism in the ranks of Muslims.

Insofar as Tehran seeks to prevent diplomatic fallout with Pakistan, the Iranian

narrative does not depict Islamabad as being directly involved in fomenting sectarianism. Instead, the public vilification is reserved entirely for Iran's two archenemies—the United States and Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, a closer survey of Iranian opinion shows Tehran's deep suspicions of Pakistan, including fears that Islamabad may repeat its policies of the 1980s and 1990s and back extremist Sunni groups in pursuit of its geopolitical agenda. In the context of Iran-Pakistan relations, no other arena is more sensitive than Afghanistan, where Tehran and Islamabad already have a record of proxy conflict dating back to the era of Taliban-rule in that country.

Meanwhile, recent developments have been ominous. On December 6, 2011, a series of devastating attacks brought mayhem to the Afghan cities of Kabul, Mazar-i Sharif and Kandahar, killing 80 people in total. The targets of these attacks were Afghanistan's Shia minority. Even by the bloody standards of violence in Afghanistan, the incidents were particularly gruesome. The Pakistani sectarian group Lashkar-e Jhangvi quickly claimed responsibility for the attacks.³⁷ Lashkar-e Jhangvi is notoriously violent and anti-Shia with a stated aim of turning Pakistan into a Sunni-only state. It is listed by Pakistan as a terrorist group but suspicion remains that it continues to enjoy some support from and is a pawn in the hands of the Pakistani intelligence services. The attacks were clearly designed to fuel sectarian tensions among Afghanistan's diverse religious and ethnic groups. In the aftermath, fears of sectarian violence in Afghanistan quickly and invariably put the limelight on Shia-majority Iran and Sunni-majority Pakistan, the two powerful regional states.³⁸

Iran's official state media sought to downplay the sectarian nature of the attacks. For example, Tehran proceeded to paint the Western media's reaction to the killings as part of the broader agenda of fostering division among Muslims and justifying a Western military presence in Afghanistan by pointing to the continuation of deep insecurity in the country.³⁹ Behind such headlines, however, Iranian assessments are generally far less conspiratorial. They focus instead on the Pakistani government's historical record as a supporter of militant organizations such as Lashkar-e Jhangvi and Lashkar-e Taiba, and some speculate about whether Tehran will again find itself in a proxy conflict with Pakistan in Afghanistan.

By all accounts, a return to the Iran-Pakistan rivalry of the 1990s is hardly something which the Islamic Republic of Iran wants. This is above all due to the fact that Tehran is at the moment under unprecedented international isolation due to its nuclear program. Tehran would therefore have to be hard-pressed to choose to confront the Pakistani state, either in Afghanistan or by inciting Pakistan's Shia population against the Islamabad government. In fact, the hope in Tehran is that Islamabad could instead look more favorably toward Iran as Pakistan-U.S. relations remain poor and Islamabad seeks to augment its list of allies.

For the foreseeable future, Tehran will likely stick with the same policies toward Pakistan's Shia that have effectively been in place for the last decade. The Islamic Republic will continue to present itself as the ultimate champion of the Shia on the subcontinent, but it will do so carefully and in a targeted fashion aimed at maximizing ideological influence over ISO and other Pakistani Shia Islamist groups who subscribe to the principles of *velayat-e faqih*.

In the end, Tehran can disguise the international pursuit of its political objectives as religious outreach, but Iran's influence among Pakistan's Shia should not be exaggerated. Iran's clerical government and its religious practices are by no means acceptable or appealing to all the Shia of Pakistan. Moreover, because Tehran's actions do not match the rhetoric of some elements in the Islamic Republic, Pakistan's Shia are increasingly unlikely to view Iran as a reliable guardian or benefactor. Indeed, Tehran's reaction to the siege of Parachinar is a good example of the political cautiousness of Iran's clerical rulers, and of the fact that Iranian support for the Shia in Pakistan has become as much, if not more, a product of geopolitical calculation as it is of religious sympathy or Islamist ideology.

Despite this, Iran's outreach to the Shia of Pakistan has historically fluctuated as a function of sectarian relations inside Pakistan and of Tehran's overall relations with Islamabad. When sectarian tensions rise in Pakistan and Tehran-Islamabad relations are poor, Iran's support for the Pakistani Shia has historically been at its strongest. In the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, for example, when sectarian tensions and violence expanded in Pakistan, the Iranian regime became a strident supporter of the Shia and of militant Shiism. Now, given the deteriorating state of Shia-Sunni relations in Pakistan, and also given the fact that Iran's clerical establishment is under attack by "Shiite nationalists" at home, conditions may be ripe for Iran to take renewed interest in the plight of Pakistan's Shia once again.

NOTES

1. "Pakistanis slam Parachinar Shia killings," *Press TV*, April 26, 2011, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/176750.html>; "Parachinar: this is Karbala," *Iran Diplomatic*, December 4, 2011, <http://irdiplomatic.com/telex-8989.html>.
2. "Pakistan's Parachinar; the Second Gaza," *Tabnak*, February 2, 2009, <http://www.tabnak.ir/pages/?cid=35061>.
3. "The Second Gaza in Pakistan" *Tebyan*, December 30, 2008, http://www.tebyan.net/politics_social/news/world/2008/12/30/82194.html.

4. This was the case as of December 2011. See Islamic Republic News Agency at <http://irna.ir> and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's official site at <http://www.leader.ir>.
5. "Parachinar: this is Karbala."
6. "Parachinar: this is Karbala."
7. Interview with author on November 8, 2011.
8. Hassan Abbas, "Shiism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* (September 2010): 34.
9. At a convention by Shia activists in Tehrik-i-Nifaz-Fiqah-i-Jafria (TNFJ) in February 1984, Al-Hussaini had been elected the leader of this pan-Shia group. Al-Hussaini's pro-Iran orientation was therefore a key reason why a split subsequently occurred in the TNFJ and traditionalists left the organization. For more background, see Abbas: 32-35.
10. Maleeha Lodhi, "Pakistan's Shia Movement: An Interview with Arif Hussaini," *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 10, No. 2 (April 1988): 806-817.
11. Lodhi: 806.
12. Lodhi: 807-809.
13. For a discussion of Iran's fears in this context see Mariam Abou Zahab "The regional dimension of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan" (October 2000), <http://www.cerisciencespo.com/archive/octo00/artmaz.pdf>.
14. Abbas: 32-35.
15. As of late December 2011, the official website of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Islamabad did not mention the existence of a Khaney-e Farhang in Parachinar.
16. A Pakistani newspaper comment provides some background: "As the Afghan [anti-Soviet] war loosened its control over the areas, and as Sunnis took part in the war as mujahideen, and the Shias abstained, the administrative competence of the Pakistani officers in the Agency was eroded... Under General Zia, the trend to attack the Shia began in Parachinar in 1986, when the mujahideen felt hampered by the Turis [a Shia tribe] while marching into Afghanistan to fight the Soviet forces... It was in 1986 that General Zia allowed a "purge" of the Turi Shias in the divided city of Parachinar at the hands of the Sunni Afghan mujahideen in conjunction with the local Sunni population." "Sectarian War in Parachinar," *Daily Times*, November 19, 2007, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5c11%5c19%5cstory_19-11-2007_pg3_1.
17. For a discussion of Iran's fears in this context see Mariam Abou Zahab, "The regional dimension of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan." Abou Zahab estimated that Iran stopped financially supporting the Pakistani Shia in 1996 as it feared Islamabad's possible revenge.
18. See <http://www.isopakistan.org> for an official profile.
19. "The ISO is established around the basis of velayat-e faqih," *Islam Times*, May 9, 2009, <http://www.islamtimes.org/vdcj.mexfuqeitsfzu.html>.
20. "The ISO is established around the basis of velayat-e faqih."
21. "Statements to the people from around the country and a group of students from Pakistan's ISO," June 21, 1989, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2105>.
22. For one example, see "Request to use funding for the construction of a seminary in Pakistan," <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/sahifeh-content?id=14855>. Another document shows a request by Ayatollah Khomeini's representative in Quetta for funding from Qom. The letter complains about

- non-delivery of funds. See “Scholarship and construction costs for seminary in Quetta,” <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/sahifeh-content?id=13759>.
23. In his reporting for the BBC Persian Service, journalist Harun Najafizada put the number of Shia seminaries in Pakistan in the “tens,” and the number of Shia seminarians in Pakistan at around 15,000, supervised by about 4,000 clergymen. Najafizada’s findings also suggest that with a few exceptions, all the Shia seminaries in Pakistan are linked to the seminaries in Qom. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/world/2010/10/101015_150_pakistan_clerics.shtml.
24. “A glance at the Daftar-e Tabliqat-e Eslami-e Howzeh-e Elmiyeh-e Qom,” <http://www.dte.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=GeneralText&ID=172bedcb-8971-47a1-b5c6-b8d0f67dee82&LayoutID=cc7bc06b-e817-4670-a32b-fd3318c01640&CategoryID=65a964b1-c5cd-4557-8875-35e79bd77cab>.
25. “Imamia officials from Pakistan visit Daftar-e Tabliqat Eslami,” *Iranian Quran News Agency*, February 7, 2010, http://www.iqna.ir/qom/news_detail.php?ProdID=536816.
26. For an example of key points that Khamenei has continuously expressed toward Pakistani audiences, see “Remarks to a group of Pakistani Shia,” <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2551>. The two key points raised in this speech from 20 years ago are: Strengthen the unity among the Shia in Pakistan; and reach out to mainstream Sunni groups and stand firm against Wahhabi groups.
27. See “Book about the defeat of the Velvet Revolution in Iran in English language,” <http://www.hawzah.net/FA/NewsView.html?NewsID=81069>.
28. Syed Jawad Naqvi is also the head of the Center for Studies of Islamic Mission in Pakistan. A fluent Farsi speaker, Naqvi is a regular speaker at events in Iran such as the Imam Sadiq University in Tehran. For some of the opinions Naqvi has approved, visit <http://www.mashrabenaab.com>. There are references in some Iranian media to Naqvi as Pakistan’s “Hassan Nasrallah,” the fiery leader of Lebanese Hezbollah.
29. As an example of the kind of messages that Khamenei delivers to Pakistani Shia activists, see “Message to Seminar in Pakistan,” September 11, 1992, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2616>. In this message, the focus is on arguing for the need to push ahead with achieving unity among Muslims.
30. See “Pakistani Shiite cleric Allama Sajid Naqvi hails Imam Khamenei’s remarks on regional uprisings,” *AhlulBayt News Agency*, <http://www.abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&id=266215>. TJP is the pro-Iran offshoot of the TNFJ.
31. Other notable Iranian institutions engaged in reaching out to the Pakistani Shia include the Islamic Mazaheb University (<http://www.mazaheb.ac.ir>), “The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought” (<http://www.taghrib.com>) and Al-Mustafa Research Institute (<http://iri.miu.ac.ir/>). The latter is affiliated with Al-Mustafa University and publishes journals on regional studies. This institute studies the condition of Muslim societies and identifies their needs for missionary projects. For example, in September 2011, the institute hosted a conference on the condition of Shia seminaries in Pakistan and a number of Pakistani clerics and seminary students attended the event. The institute also has close relations with the Pakistani seminary Abu Talib. The institute also organizes workshops on ‘Strategies and

- the Future of the Islamic Revolution’ in which seminary students from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and some other regional states participate.
32. For example, see “The Followers of Velayat-e Faqih” website <http://qaidpic.mihanblog.com> and <http://shialeaders.mihanblog.com>.
 33. This speech by Khamenei in 1991 epitomizes Iran’s approach to Pakistani Shiites: “Comments at a meetings with Pakistani Shia,” <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2551>.
 34. For an example, see “The Leader’s condolences at the occasion of the death of [Shia] worshippers in Iraq and Pakistan,” March 3, 2004, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=127>.
 35. For example, see “The reactivation of the defunct Lashkar-e Jhangvi in Pakistan,” *Fars News*, May 22, 2010, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8903011205>.
 36. “The influence of Pakistani security forces in the assassination of Shias,” *Shia Voice*, January 24, 2012, <http://www.sedayeshia.com/showdata.aspx?dataid=7583>. In this official Iranian narrative, references to Pakistani state organs and security entities are almost always extremely vague. No organization is mentioned by name with the exceptions of militant groups such as Sipah-e Sahaba, Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan and Lashkar-e Jhangvi.
 37. See “Afghanistan’s President Says Death Toll From Shrine Blast Has Risen to at Least 80,” *Fox News.com*, December 11, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/12/11/afghanistans-president-says-death-toll-from-shrine-blast-has-risen-to-at-least/#ixzz1wZnljDmN>.
 38. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, a spokesperson for a group calling itself the “Afghanistan Lashkar-e Jhangvi” also took responsibility for the attacks. See “Interview with leader of Afghanistan Lashkar-e Jhangvi about Ashoura attacks,” *BBC Persian*, December 10, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2011/12/111209_110_afghan_lashkar_jhangvi_iv.shtml. The Afghan government denies such a group exists in Afghanistan.
 39. See “Western media’s opportunism and incidents at Ashoura in Afghanistan,” *Islamic Republic News Agency*, December 7, 2011, <http://irna.ir/News/30700599/> شہ وژ پ / نات س ن اغ فا 20% ر د 20% ا و ش ر ا ع 20% ت ص ر ف 20% ی ب ل ط 20% ی ہ ن اس ر 20% ی ہ 20% ی ب ر غ 20% زا 20% ا و ح 20% د و ر 20% ز و ر 20% ر د 20% ا و ش ر ا ع

UK Islamists and the Arab Uprisings

*By James Brandon and
Raffaello Pantucci*

THE FULL IMPACT OF THE CASCADE OF UPRISINGS THAT HAVE BECOME KNOWN as the “Arab Spring” is still unclear. Fighting between protesters and the Assad regime continues in Syria, while countries like Egypt, Libya and Tunisia are still defining the new order that will emerge from the upheavals of 2011. Key amongst those currently shaping this new Middle East are a substantial community of Islamists who have spent most of the past few decades in exile and residing in Europe. While much of their activity in Europe has been focused on political change in their home countries, few were untouched by their experiences living in the West. Indeed, many of these exiles consciously sought to use their time in Europe to engage with and advance their respective agendas among Western academic and political institutions, among the Western media, as well as among European Muslims.

The aim of this article is to provide an overview of how UK-based Islamists in particular have responded to the Arab Spring, and to assess how much, if at all, their long personal interactions with Western society have influenced their views and actions in the post-Arab Spring Middle East and North Africa. Given the large number and diversity of Islamists in the West in general and the UK in particular, this article will only focus on a few of the most prominent individuals in the UK. Despite the inherent limitations of such an overview (some important groups, such as the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, have been omitted from this paper), this study aims to help clarify and describe the often divergent ways in which Islamists, both those currently based in Europe and those newly returned to the Middle East, have so far reacted to the unfolding events of the Arab Spring.

An Evolving Islamist Scene

FOR THE LAST FIFTY YEARS, WESTERN EUROPE, AND TO A LESSER EXTENT THE UNITED States, have acted as havens for Islamists who were born elsewhere. Many of these non-native Islamists originally hailed from the Arab Muslim Brotherhood, its South Asian equivalent the Jamaat-e-Islami, as well as other organizations like the Turkish Milli Görüs and the supposedly pan-Islamic movement Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT). The first Islamists fleeing persecution arrived in the 1950s and early 1960s, primarily from Egypt after the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed and many of its key members forced into exile. Before long, these Brotherhood members began organizing themselves in exile to stir up revolution in their homelands. In 1962, one of the most prominent of these exiles, Said Ramadan, the son-in-law of the founder of the Brotherhood Hasan al-Banna, co-established the UK Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS).¹ While its stated intent today is to “represent” and “serve” the Muslim student population within the United Kingdom, FOSIS initially aimed to promote Islamism among foreign Muslim students in the UK who would then return to their home countries to spread Islamism there. The group also sought to reach out to potential Western-born allies such as Malcolm X.² In the U.S., Muslim Brotherhood activists established the Muslim Student Association for similar reasons.³ At about the same time, a group of middle-class South Asian students decided to establish the UK Islamic Mission (UKIM) out of study groups they used to hold in East London. By 1964 they were holding national conferences and inviting prominent South Asian Jamaat-e-Islami leaders to speak.⁴ These activities were bolstered in the 1970s when more Islamists arrived in the West, including especially from Bangladesh following the 1971 War of Independence. The 1980s brought a new wave of Islamist exiles, particularly from Syria, where in 1982 the Muslim Brotherhood tried and failed to overthrow the regime of Hafez al-Assad and was brutally suppressed. Yet more Islamists arrived in the West in the early to mid-1990s, including most notably leading figures from al-Nahda, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Tunisian wing, and from HT.

The result of these migrations to the West was clearly visible in the UK by the late 1990s, when London was home to the general secretaries of the Muslim Brotherhood branches of Iraq, Syria and Tunisia, as well as to hundreds of lower-level activists. In addition, from the early 1990s members of various jihadist movements also started to migrate to the West, and especially to the UK, as they lost their sanctuaries first in Pakistan and then in Sudan, while also being driven out of Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Each wave of new Islamist arrivals created new groups, both formal and informal. Some, like the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, the Algerian

Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and al-Qaeda, directly aimed at fostering violent revolution in their home countries; some, such as HT, aimed more at creating a global pan-Islamic political identity and movement; others, including some Muslim Brotherhood members and their South Asian counterparts, simply aimed to stop fellow Muslim immigrants in the West from losing their Islamic identity and to maintain their mostly moral support for the Islamist struggle back home. (It is important to keep in mind, however, that these Islamists arrived as but one part of much larger socio-economic Muslim migrations, and also that not all activists arriving from the Muslim world were Islamist. Indeed, a number of secular dissidents, from pro-democracy liberals to Communists, from feminists to gay activists, also established bases in London or Paris, from which they promoted reforms in their home countries as well as among Muslims in the West.)

In retrospect, by opening their borders both to such a wide variety of Islamist activists as well as to large numbers of Muslim economic migrants and refugees, Western governments were effectively turning their societies into large-scale, unplanned social science experiments. Islamist ideas and influence flowed into Europe, and particularly into poor, deprived and sometimes embittered Muslim communities. Some Islamists also saw this as an unprecedented opportunity to influence Western society from within through a process that Islamists describe as “dawa,” or missionary proselytization, but which critics have described as “Islamization.” Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for instance, speaking in the U.S. in 1994, famously told an audience at the Muslim Arab Youth Association that,

What remains, then, is to conquer Rome ... Islam will come back to Europe for the third time, after it was expelled from it twice... Conquest through Dawa [proselytizing] that is what we hope for. We will conquer Europe, we will conquer America! Not through sword but through Dawa.⁵

Such hardline visions of Islamists conquering the West are very much fantasies. However, other implications of the Islamist migration to the West became clear in the post-9/11 decade. Western governments (and again the UK in particular) belatedly realized that Islamist groups had turned some Muslim immigrant communities into havens for supremacist and totalitarian religious ideologies that were either explicitly or potentially violent. These Islamists also created new problems for the civil cohesion of Western societies by fostering a Muslim identity of victimhood, based on the dual narrative that non-Muslims are intrinsically anti-Muslim and that Western governments are consciously waging an open-ended “war on Islam.” This helped to

create environments conducive to the spread of al-Qaeda-style jihadist ideology; cognitive radicalization created greater possibilities for violent radicalization to occur. However, for most Islamist groups, such as the Brotherhood, this was only an accidental by-product of their two principal objectives: to foster the creation of “Islamic states” in Muslim-majority countries, and to encourage Muslims in the West to adopt their Islamist interpretations of Islam. Of course, while Islamist movements were often inspired to work towards these goals as part of a grand political strategy or sense of religious mission, Islamist activism in the West has also been deeply rooted in individual ambition and the desire for personal power and influence.

In the process of working toward these goals, however, Islamists were themselves evolving—sometimes in radical directions, sometimes in moderate ones—due to their experiences of living in the West. For instance, some Islamist exiles who arrived in the West with narrow quasi-nationalist objectives—such as toppling the Saudi monarchy, or overthrowing Colonel Qaddafi—were compelled to develop a more explicitly pan-Islamist agenda in order to reach out to the diverse populations of Muslims residing in the West. This dynamic seemed especially notable among pro-jihadist groups, compared to more political groups like Jamaat-e-Islami. As Dr. Mohammad al-Massari, the prominent Saudi dissident and acquaintance of Osama bin Laden who ran the Center for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (a UK group which lobbied vigorously for the overthrow of the al-Saud monarchy in Saudi Arabia), has said, “Any Islamic movement worth its salt has to become international.”⁶ (Dr. al-Massari himself began his career focused on fostering Islamist revolution in Saudi Arabia, but he increasingly used his perch in London to become involved in an ever-wider array of local and international Islamist groups and efforts.⁷)

While some exiled Islamists became more radical and internationalist in their approach, others began to embrace new, comparatively more moderate views as well as adopt new practices as a consequence of their experiences living in the West. For instance, women began to assume far more important and prominent roles in some UK-based Islamist movements, including in groups like HT and Muslim Brotherhood-influenced groups with strong activist presences at universities. (By contrast, the UK branches of isolationist and less political groups like Tablighi Jamaat still have virtually no public role for women.) Other Islamists, particularly those who sought to form tactical political alliances with non-Muslim groups, including Marxist groups like the Socialist Workers Party, began to tone down their rhetoric against non-Muslims and Western society, often for clear tactical reasons. Others, however, began to speak cogently about the importance of democracy and to pay perhaps more than lip service to the principles of equal rights and individual liberty. These changes within Islamism in the West, and the interplay between the contradictory impulses toward

both greater moderation and ideological radicalization, are worth looking at in detail, and particularly in relation to the role that many of these Islamists now play in the unfolding events of the Arab Spring.

The Exiles of Al-Nahda

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN THE MIDDLE EAST, CONTRARY TO MUCH OF ITS OWN propaganda and that of many of its critics, is composed of diverse and de-centralized movements whose factions and regional branches are often involved in bitter factional and personal disputes. (The historical tensions between the Syrian and Palestinian Muslim Brotherhoods are just one example of this.) Despite this, some common Brotherhood responses to the Arab uprisings of 2011 can be observed. After some initial hesitation, Brotherhood branches across the Middle East and in exile eventually came to welcome the Arab Spring. They asserted the need for “freedom” and “democracy” in the region while also moving to capitalize on emerging opportunities to advance their respective agendas.

Exiled elements of the Brotherhood residing in the West have had the most immediately visible political impact in Tunisia. Since the early 1990s, the majority of overt senior members and sympathizers of al-Nahda (the “Renaissance” or “Awakening” Party), the main Tunisian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, have lived in exile in Europe. Founded in 1981, al-Nahda was part of a wave of Islamist parties that enjoyed a surge in support in the wake of the Iranian revolution and challenged the secular leaderships of the Muslim world. In Tunisia, al-Nahda activists were persecuted with mass arrests in 1989, following an election in which some party affiliates ran as independents, and numerous subsequent incarcerations and bans on literature.⁸ Many of al-Nahda’s senior leaders relocated to London, including Rashid al-Ghannouchi, the top leader and founder of al-Nahda, who was granted asylum in the UK in 1993. Ghannouchi is today regarded as one of the most moderate of leading Arab Islamists. In a typical interview broadcast by the BBC in early 2012, Ghannouchi declared, “we don’t want a religious state because in this state a religious hierarchy would control the state and not the people.” He went on to say that he would prefer that people did not wear bikinis or drink alcohol, but that whether or not they did was their choice. Similarly, he stated that if Tunisians elected a Jewish leader, then that would be acceptable.⁹

It would be easy to ascribe Ghannouchi’s apparent moderation to the eighteen years that he spent in the UK. However, he says (and a careful review of his public statements largely confirms this) that his political ideas have not substantially changed since the early 1990s and that he has always held moderate political views. For instance, on the

issue of political pluralism, he told the *Financial Times* in 2011 that since “our founding statement on 5 June 1981, journalists have asked me: if the Tunisian people elected communists would you accept that? I [have] answered that if the Tunisian people do that then I would respect the will of the Tunisian people.”¹⁰ This position seems consistent with many of the other positions that Ghannouchi has taken. Indeed, despite occasional outbursts (notably on Israel), Ghannouchi was rarely as hardline as other Brotherhood members who fled from Egypt or Syria. As early as 1994, Ghannouchi told a *New York Times* journalist in London that he appreciated the West’s political freedoms: “we Islamists may have a lot of criticism of Western values, yet we are seeking refuge in such atheist countries because we appreciate the benefits of freedom and the value of democracy.”¹¹ Similarly in Arabic in his 1993 book “Public Liberties in an Islamic state” (*Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah Fid-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah*), he criticized Sudan’s Muslim Brotherhood-backed regime as illegitimate, accusing it of seeking to “pull people with chains to paradise.”¹² Although Ghannouchi’s views have yet to be fully tested by the temptations of power, it is clearly arguable that his modern views are simply an evolution of his early 1990s positions. His pro-democratic statements are also, of course, not unique to Western-based Islamists; a number of Islamists who remained in the Middle East hold similar views about democracy. However, even if Ghannouchi’s experience living in the West did not decisively influence his thought about political pluralism and related topics, his and other al-Nahda members’ time in the West has still been important to their movement’s overall development.

One important consequence of al-Nahda’s period of exile in the UK has been that its members were involved in a variety of pan-Brotherhood initiatives and networked extensively with other Islamist groups. For instance, Ghannouchi became involved with the European Council for Fatwa and Research,¹³ an important Brotherhood initiative led by Yusuf al-Qaradawi that has attempted to make the Brotherhood’s version of politicized Islam the default interpretation of the religion among European Muslims. Ghannouchi also developed close relationships with individual members of the Brotherhood—for example, he collaborated with Azzam Tamimi, the prominent Palestinian Brotherhood activist who produced a flattering biography of Ghannouchi for Oxford University Press.¹⁴ Despite his poor command of English, Ghannouchi also frequently interacted with young UK-born Muslims, including while he was speaker at FOSIS-organized events.¹⁵ It could be argued, therefore, that exile in the UK helped to expose Ghannouchi to pan-Islamist circles and other variants of Islamism more than had he remained in Tunisia. It also potentially broadened his intellectual outlook to encompass non-Arab countries such as Turkey, whose ruling Islamist-inspired Justice and Development Party (AKP) Ghannouchi today cites as a major influence.

Other prominent al-Nahda members also became involved in UK-focused Brother-

hood projects. For example, Said Ferjani, a close confidant of Ghannouchi who had followed him since his early days in Tunisia and came to the UK after being freed from prison on charges of being involved in a coup plotted by al-Nahda,¹⁶ became involved with the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), the Brotherhood's main UK front-group, where he served as Head of Policy, Media and Public Relations. This was a demanding and often hectic job that involved regular meetings with the media, a wide range of Muslim activists, as well as representatives of think tanks and officials from all levels of the UK government. It was through this experience in London that Ferjani became a resourceful and effective lobbyist; he notably sought, via the MAB, to benefit from and influence the British government's counter-radicalization Prevent strategy. Such experiences gave Ferjani inside knowledge of how the UK government bureaucracy functions and he became adept at lobbying and networking. In a notable success, for instance, Ferjani's networking and advocacy work led to the MAB becoming one of four Muslim organizations chosen to act as founders of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB), a UK government-funded body intended to address radicalization and poor governance in British mosques.¹⁷ Ferjani in 2008-2009 acted as the organization's chair and is currently the chair of its Self-Regulation and Standards Committee. He has repeatedly survived attempts by anti-extremism campaigners and politicians within the Conservative Party to have the MAB removed from MINAB.¹⁸ (One leading critic of the MAB's involvement in the MINAB, for instance, said it would be "fatal to the struggle against extremism were the allies of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood to regulate and ultimately control ... Britain's Islamic religious institutions."¹⁹) Sometimes Ferjani's work with the MAB took him abroad; this was in marked contrast to many Tunisia-based al-Nahda activists, who were often banned from travelling. This provided Ferjani and the UK-based exiles of al-Nahda with unprecedented opportunities to mix with Islamists from other countries, and to experience the realities of global politics. In May 2010, for instance, he visited Turkey on behalf of the group to lobby the AKP government to "veto Israel's possible accession into the OSCE," exposing him further to high-level politicking.²⁰

Ghannouchi's daughters, who became personally involved in the Brotherhood movement and in related political causes, also help to show how life in the West has impacted al-Nahda's organization and development. For example, his daughter Soumaya al-Ghannouchi became a prominent media figure while only in her twenties in the 2003-2005 UK protests against the Iraq War. These organized protests were often staged in conjunction with pan-Brotherhood groups such as the MAB as well as far-left organizations such as the Socialist Workers Party. Through this experience, al-Nahda activists like Ms. Ghannouchi acquired useful experience working in coalitions with other Islamist as well as non-Islamist movements. They were also exposed to a

range of non-Islamist ideas. Another daughter, Intissar Kherigi (who uses Ghannouchi's familial surname) also rose to prominence by helping organize "Islam Expo," a pan-Islamist event held in London in 2006 that brought together Islamist speakers (including her father) from around the world.²¹ Both daughters have also written extensively, particularly for *The Guardian* and the *al-Jazeera* website. While they do not argue for Islamist policies *per se*, a frequent theme of their polemical writing is opposing Western counter-terrorism strategies and foreign policy as hostile toward Muslims, often from a left-leaning perspective. For instance, Soumaya Ghannouchi accused Tony Blair of "secularized missionary absolutism" and of "constantly pointing the finger at Muslims."²² A third daughter, Yusra Ghannouchi, also engaged in activism and later became a spokeswoman for her father's party.²³

As the Tunisian revolution unfolded in December 2010, al-Nahda used all the tools, skills, knowledge and contacts that it acquired during exile in the West to good effect. From the first days of the uprising, Ghannouchi's daughters immediately used their contacts in the media and their existing public profiles to advance al-Nahda's agenda both overtly and surreptitiously. For example, on January 14, Intissar Kherigi was interviewed by the BBC World TV channel, where she was introduced only as a "Tunisian activist and a specialist in human rights in Tunisia;" her affiliation with al-Nahda was not mentioned. She then lambasted the interim Tunisian government as "completely discredited" and praised "the many opposition parties who are out there, some of whom are in exile, who have fought for democracy for a long time and who are willing to come forward and form a united government together"—a clear reference to her father's al-Nahda.²⁴ Later in 2011, Intissar Kherigi even testified before the British Parliament on the Arab Spring, opening her testimony by saying that "I am speaking as a British Tunisian, who has long been active in the struggle for human rights and democracy in Tunisia, and in a personal capacity."²⁵ While obscuring her affiliation to al-Nahda and posing as a neutral human rights activist, she then delivered her assessment of the Tunisian situation to parliament, being careful to allay Western concerns and describing Islamist parties innocuously as "faith-based political parties."

Aided by the media experience and skills that exiled activists acquired while living in the West, al-Nahda has continued its efforts to shape Western perceptions of the Arab uprisings since its return to Tunisia. For example, al-Nahda in Tunisia has clearly recognized, probably partly due to Soumaya's involvement in the Stop The War movement, that young, educated women were more effective and less threatening spokespeople for the movement than older male members. No doubt, involving younger women helped rebut long-standing criticisms that the group is misogynistic, male-dominated and regressive. In the 2011 Tunisian general election, al-Nahda embraced this approach in their campaign strategy (in which the entire Ghannouchi family was

heavily involved) by fielding Souad Abdel Rahim, a photogenic woman who didn't wear *hijab*, as a candidate in a prosperous area of Tunis and making her accessible to Western media organizations.²⁶ Similarly, al-Nahda's alliance with leftist groups in parliament arguably draws heavily on the lessons learnt from the MAB's alliance with far-left British groups.

Today, al-Nahda, as the largest political party in Tunisia, also draws heavily on the media and public relations experience that Said Ferjani gained in the UK as the MAB's public relations man and through his work with the UK government in MINAB. Ferjani is now al-Nahda's main contact for Western media in Tunisia. So far, this has given him prominent and mostly uncritical coverage in the Western media, for instance in a front-page *New York Times* story on Tunisia by Anthony Shadid in February 2012.²⁷ Similarly, Ferjani appeared on BBC Hardtalk, where he stated that he "disagreed with Sharia as a source of legislation" and said that his ideal system would include "what's best in the West, a democratic system and the heritage of Islam."²⁸ While Ferjani may well believe this, his skill in knowing how to clearly present Islamist principles to a Western audience is clearly invaluable to al-Nahda. His ability is particularly apparent when compared to al-Nahda's secretary-general, Hamadi Jbeli, a less-travelled man who remained in Tunisia under Ben Ali. In November 2011, Jbeli caused a major storm when he importunately announced that "the sixth caliphate" had begun.²⁹ In light of this, it appears that the experience and knowledge of the West that Ferjani and Ghannouchi's daughters acquired while in exile in London are one of the main reasons why al-Nahda's rise to power in Tunisia has caused less concern in the West than might otherwise be expected. Similarly, Soumaya al-Ghannouchi is one of her father's closest advisors, particularly on international issues, for instance accompanying him to the World Economic Forum in 2012.

But while al-Nahda has scored successes in Western political and media circles, the Ghannouchis and other exiles have to some degree struggled since returning to their home country of Tunisia. This may be the result of the perceived advantages these exiles enjoyed while abroad when compared to the rest of the movement. It is also due to their perceived nepotism. For example, the movement's rapid appointment of Soumaya Ghannouchi's husband, Rafik Abdesselem Bouchlaka (a former low-ranking employee at the al-Jazeera Centre for Studies in Qatar), to Tunisian foreign minister became a contentious issue within al-Nahda. Said Ferjani's daughter, the pro-al-Nahda London-based activist Kaouther Ferjani, wrote on her Twitter account, "im pro nahdha but even i know he wasnt best suited for the job, there were better candidates from within nahdha." She pointedly hash-tagged this as "#nomorenepotism."³¹ When asked about such criticism by *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Rashid al-Ghannouchi responded, "I believe that the questions raised about this are not appropriate, and such questions are

being raised from the door of political opposition.” Such curt responses help explain why Ghannouchi and his family have a reputation for being intolerant of criticism.³² They also show a lack of awareness that Tunisians might resent such nepotistic practices, particularly in light of Ben Ali’s similar practices, as well as evidence that Ghannouchi’s time in the UK has not instilled in him too much belief in meritocracy.

On March 26, 2012, al-Nahda announced that it opposed calls for the Tunisian constitution to make Sharia the source of all legislation. This raises the question of whether al-Nahda is still an “Islamist” movement or if it has now moved decisively in the direction of “post-Islamism” or secularism. Definitions aside (and bearing in mind that al-Nahda’s professed moderation and pragmatism have not yet been fully proven in the new Tunisia), it remains an open question as to whether Ghannouchi would have ultimately reached the same conclusion if he had not lived in the UK—not least because much of his criticism of traditional Islamism is informed by the examples of Iran, Sudan and other failed Islamist states. Indeed, it is worth noting that, unlike Ferjani and others, Ghannouchi himself does not speak English fluently, spent most of his time in the UK moving in exclusively Arab and Islamist circles, and had little contact with mainstream British society. But even if it is hard to argue that the movement’s core ideology has been decisively affected by the experiences of its former exiles, it seems clear that al-Nahda’s political skills and public relations capabilities have been immeasurably enhanced by the group’s time in exile. This does much to explain the group’s success in post-Ben Ali Tunisia—particularly against disorganized political rivals. Indeed, al-Nahda’s success has helped establish it as an international force as well. In June 2012, Ghannouchi headed to Cairo as part of an effort to help the Muslim Brotherhood broker a post-election political victory. It seems the Tunisian leader was welcomed as a political mediator in Egypt because of his influence and stature in the wider Islamic movement. At about the same time as this high-profile visit, rumors circulated in Tunis that Ghannouchi may soon step down from his position in al-Nahda in Tunisia to assume a global leadership role in the Brotherhood movement.³³

Egypt and the Palestinian Question

COMPARED TO BEN ALI’S TUNISIA, THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN HOSNI MUBARAK’S Egypt was able to operate relatively more openly, even though the regime severely restricted the Brotherhood’s rights and used periodic arrests, harassments and crack-downs to contain their political influence. One result was that the Egyptian Brotherhood had relatively little need for a comprehensive organization-in-exile. A notable

individual exception was Kemal Helbawy, a veteran Muslim Brotherhood member who joined the group in 1951 after seeing Hassan al-Banna give a public speech. In many respects the consummate Islamist-in-exile, Helbawy spent his time in exile (mostly in the UK) working for change in Egypt while simultaneously assisting pan-Islamist causes in the UK and internationally. For instance, Helbawy acted as the Brotherhood's main representative in Europe from the 1970s onwards, while also working with the Afghan Mujahidin in Pakistan in the 1980s and then in the mid-1990s co-founding the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the UK's main pan-ethnic Islamist group that includes large numbers of South Asian Jamaat-e-Islami followers. He also established the Arab-focused MAB after having already founded the Brotherhood's main British institutional headquarters, the Muslim Welfare House, in north London. Helbawy additionally helped develop the Brotherhood's presence in other European countries while collaborating with men like Youssef Nada in Switzerland and Ibrahim Zayat in Germany (whose daughter married one of Helbawy's sons). In addition to being enormously active in Europe, Helbawy remained connected to the Egyptian Islamist movement and in early February 2011 was still describing himself as a "senior member" of the Egyptian Brotherhood serving as one of the group's most public faces on Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya and other television channels.³⁴ For decades, therefore, Helbawy was in many respects the model Brotherhood loyalist and activist, someone who advocated for the group and strengthened it in Egypt, the UK and further afield.

Following the 2011 Arab uprisings, however, Helbawy returned to Egypt in April 2011 after almost 30 years in exile and, soon after, rebelled against the Egyptian Brotherhood's political party. Rather than supporting the Brotherhood's official front-group, the Freedom and Justice Party, he instead vocally sided with the party's breakaway progressive wing led by Abdel Moneim Aboul Fetouh, becoming ever more vocal ahead of the May 2012 first-round presidential elections. In an explosive interview on prime-time Egyptian television in early April 2012, he condemned the Brotherhood's decision to nominate Khairat al-Shater as the movement's candidate for president, declaring, "the current leadership wants to be in control of all the authorities in the country. They are hungry for power and their will to dominate is no different to that of the Mubarak regime."³⁵ Helbawy then crowned this performance by announcing his resignation from the Brotherhood on air and he has continued to attack the movement in subsequent interviews. This is a remarkable step for an individual who had served the group for over half a century.

In retrospect, the roots of this split between Helbawy and the Egyptian Brotherhood leadership are clear. Helbawy, an English literature graduate, had lived in the UK for many years, set up his own organizations and also interacted widely with Muslim and non-Muslim society. Like other Brotherhood members exiled to the West, various aspects

of British life including the openness of its democracy undeniably affected his outlook, and he became critical of many aspects of Egyptian society. In an interview in early 2010 he declared, “I have said a million times that a woman like [former Prime Minister Margaret] Thatcher is a hundred times better than any man” while also constantly denouncing Muslim societies for technological backwardness and resistance to new ideas.³⁶ In a similar vein, in 2008, Helbawy opposed the clause in the Brotherhood’s draft constitution preventing non-Muslims from becoming head of state. In 2010, he also condemned the Brotherhood’s decision to participate in that year’s fraudulent elections.³⁷ During the years when the Brotherhood was in opposition and in exile, such differences could be papered over and ignored. But in the post-Mubarak era, such open splits may have become increasingly unavoidable.

Helbawy’s example may be typical of the experience of other Islamist exiles who, after the Arab Spring, are now beginning to realize that they have grown apart from their own organizations. For a man like Helbawy who served the Brotherhood diligently for decades, this must be especially galling. Angered by what he sees as the Brotherhood’s selling out of Egypt’s revolutionaries in favor of political maneuvers and backdoor deals with the military, Helbawy has stated “I cannot stand in the ranks of people who turned their backs on the revolution.”³⁸ For secretive organizations like the Brotherhood, such angry former members are potential threats. “Helbawy knows all the Brotherhood’s secrets,” said one former jihadist in London. “And the Brotherhood know that once Helbawy starts talking, it is impossible to make him shut up.”³⁹ Returned exiles like Helbawy who are accustomed to pursuing their own quasi-independent policies in freer political environments may also present problems for the Brotherhood’s efforts to maintain their characteristic political regimentation and ideological coherence. In 2011, after Osama bin Laden’s death, Helbawy, then still a Brotherhood member embarrassed the group, by eulogizing the al-Qaeda leader, stating “I ask Allah to have mercy upon Osama bin Laden, to treat him generously, to enlighten his grave, and to make him join the prophets, the martyrs, and the good people.”⁴⁰ Similarly, since his open break with the Brotherhood, Helbawy has travelled to the Islamic Republic of Iran and praised the Iranian revolution, illustrating that he has not yet fully changed his stripes.⁴¹

Other Brotherhood Factions

IT IS IMPORTANT TOO TO LOOK AT EXILED BROTHERHOOD MEMBERS WHOSE HOME countries have been so far untouched by revolution. Thus far, for instance, a number of Palestinian Brotherhood members exiled in the West have been visibly invigorated

by the Arab uprisings. Azzam Tamimi, for example, the prominent Palestinian UK-based Brotherhood member, has stated,

The more Arab dictatorships that are replaced by genuine democracies, the closer Palestine will be to liberation. Democracies representing the will of the Arab peoples can only be anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian ... Whichever way one looks at it, the Arab revolutions are the best news the Palestinians have had for decades.⁴²

This line that Hamas's struggle will benefit from the Arab Spring has been increasingly touted not only by Brotherhood activists but also by a number of other Islamist organizations in the West. Indeed, it may signal a renewed focus on Israel and Palestine by Islamists in years to come. In March 2012 in the UK, for instance, FOSIS and a pro-Hamas group convened a joint event entitled "Arab Spring: Destination Palestine?" The event featured a number of long-time supporters of Hamas such as Azzam Tamimi and Ibrahim Hewitt, who argued that the Arab Spring would ultimately lead to the defeat of Israel.⁴³ Further afield, such sentiments have been echoed by Brotherhood ministers in Morocco,⁴⁴ and have also been fuelled by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood suggestions that the movement does not necessarily recognize Egypt's peace treaty with Israel.⁴⁵ At the same time, however, some existing political positions and coalitions have become complicated by the Arab uprisings. In early 2012, for example, Tamimi criticized his Western left-wing allies ("some of our leftist friends") for standing by Bashar al-Assad because they viewed Syria as "part of the resistance axis as opposed to the pro-American moderation axis."⁴⁶

In a similar fashion, other Brotherhood figures in the UK have also sought to use the Arab Spring to advance their own political agendas, even if this means abandoning old alliances and seeking new ones. For example, Anas al-Tikriti, one of the shrewdest UK-based Brotherhood activists and the son of the leader of Iraq's Muslim Brotherhood, has described how he himself has tried to encourage Western support for Islamists in the wake of the Arab uprisings:

I was asked at a recent meeting with some of Washington's wheelers and dealers about what the American government should do with the Islamic movements gaining prominence and claiming the lime-light across the Arab world, I answered simply: support them ... unless we encourage them and offer them an incentive, their own crop of hard-liners will have been proven right.⁴⁷

This is a new iteration of Tikriti's previous lobbying strategy, which has sought to persuade Western governments that they should fund Brotherhood groups as moderate alternatives to al-Qaeda. (Indeed, Tikriti along with other Brotherhood activists such as Helbawy actively pushed this policy in conjunction with a number of non-Muslim counterparts, including Robert Lambert, a former policeman who established the Muslim Contact Unit within the Metropolitan Police.) It seems that Tikriti and others like him regard the Arab Spring as a new opportunity to leverage themselves into positions of power and influence, and perhaps even to acquire new funds from Western sources, through arguing that Western support for the Brotherhood parties can undermine and moderate more extremist Islamist elements.

The Party of Liberation

THE UK BRANCH OF HIZB UT-TAHRIR (THE PARTY OF LIBERATION—HT) REACTED QUICKLY TO the opportunities presented by the Arab uprisings, despite having one of the smallest presences on the ground in the Middle East. After the first demonstrations began to erupt in Tunisia in December 2010, the group seems to have rapidly developed a comprehensive strategy of how to use the events to advance their narrative. Firstly, HT sought to claim that the Tunisian uprising was motivated by a general desire for “Islamic” rule. Secondly, they asserted that the popular uprisings were under threat from the West. Thirdly, the movement sought to take ownership of the uprisings. On January 15, 2011, HT's London office posted a grainy YouTube of a demonstration in Tunisia titled, “where the masses can clearly be heard calling for Islam and Khilafah.” In reality, the video was from a small and unrepresentative Salafi-led demonstration.⁴⁸ On January 29, 2011, HT activists attempted to take over an anti-Mubarak protest that was taking place outside the Egyptian embassy in London. Following a confrontation with non-Islamist Egyptians, HT was forced to hold their protest around the corner.⁴⁹ Later that same day, the group held a large town-hall meeting in central London under the banner “After Tunisia: The Future of the Muslim World.” Addressed by senior British-based HT leaders Imran Waheed and Taji Mustafa, and Tunisian Ons Chafi, the meeting participants condemned Western support of “cruel tyrants” like Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. While there was agreement with the broad assessment that the protests were due to “the relentless oppression by the regimes, the economic hardship faced by ordinary people due to the neglect by governments, and changes in means of communication had meant that people were rising up to remove the old regimes,” the HT speakers also concluded that “real change could only come under a Khilafa state, which could be independent of the West and which solved people's problems according to Islam.”⁵⁰ In the following weeks, HT's

activities followed a similar pattern of pronouncements on the “Islamic” nature of the uprisings, meetings and attempts to take over demonstrations, and movement activists appeared convinced that the arrival of their long-idealized Islamic State was imminent.

Soon, however, HT’s view of Middle East events became noticeably more negative. On February 11, the day that Mubarak resigned, HT leader Imran Waheed held a small “community meeting” in Bradford on the subject of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. According to an HT write-up of the event, “the speakers warned that Muslims must not be fooled by mere cosmetic changes in Egypt and the Muslim world while the corrupt *kufir* systems remain in place.”⁵¹ As the prospects for an imminently restored Khilafa have receded, HT has increasingly soured on the Middle East. The number of publicized conferences and protests focused on the Arab Spring decreased and they returned instead to a steady diet of small, often poorly attended, meetings whose focus was toppling the Pakistani government. By the middle of 2011 and the annual HT “London Khilafah Conference,” the group had fallen back on accusing the West of conspiring against Islam. They claimed that Western governments were not “giving up” on seeking to control Muslim-majority countries, and also that they were trying to “engineer the change” in Egypt and elsewhere. The subtext of these pronouncements was that the West was responsible for the non-appearance of the caliphate, rather than that HT’s message had been mostly rejected by the Arab masses. Meanwhile, HT spokesman Taji Mustafa condemned the lack of change in the Middle East, pointing to the fact that “Egypt is still supplying gas to the Zionist entity Israel.” He also complained that people ignored the alleged “voices” calling for “Khilafa.”⁵²

HT’s negative perspective on the Arab Spring was tied to its ideological conceit that anything short of a caliphate was “un-Islamic” and thus a failure, and that any form of voting was *haram*. As a result, in the Middle East itself, the group’s members effectively wrote themselves out of the script by boycotting elections in Tunisia and Egypt as “un-Islamic.” HT’s failure to benefit in any tangible way from the Arab Spring is in part a reflection of its western experience. A fringe movement in the Middle East, its supporters in the West had reacted to the society around them by dismissing everything, including especially western parliamentarianism, as “un-Islamic.” While this rejection of parliamentary democracy succeeded, for a time, in winning over some young British Muslims who felt rejected by the West, it failed to bring the group to power in Muslim-majority countries or achieve any real change in the UK. While many Islamist groups in the West adapted their ideology in light of changing circumstances and sharpened their tactics and political skills, HT’s time in the West has weakened the group by disconnecting it from changing realities in the Middle East, even as it gained some skill at mobilizing disenchanted youths in the UK. Perhaps most importantly, the group adopted an ideologically hostile position toward the West and its

ideas and institutions that prevented it from understanding how political realities in the Middle East had changed or learning anything from the western experience. In particular, HT believers failed to register or understand the growing grassroots Arab yearning for some form of democracy and the declining support for the idea of recreating the caliphate, which is seen increasingly as a fantasy and irrelevant, or to understand what potential merits of democracy might be. This ongoing clash between Islamist fantasy and Arab reality is well-illustrated by HT's latest stunt in March 2012: a call for countries to re-adopt gold as an everyday currency, a policy that could hardly be more removed from the daily realities of the Arab World.⁵³

The Extremists

ANJEM CHOUDHARY, A FORMER LEADER AND FOUNDING MEMBER (ALONGSIDE OMAR Bakri Mohammed) of al-Muhajiroun and its many descendant groups, is arguably the most prominent and publicly confrontational Islamist active in the UK. Choudhary and his followers' (now known as "Ummah United") initial reaction to the Arab uprisings was to take to the streets and join secular, Islamist and other groups in calling for the overthrow of regimes. Outside the Tunisian Embassy in January 2011, for example, Choudhary called for the overthrow of Ben Ali, Mubarak as well as Pakistan's President Zardari (a theme dear to the hearts of Britain's predominantly South Asian Muslim population), while also calling for the implementation of the Khilafa and Sharia in those countries.⁵⁴ By February, Choudhary, like HT, clearly felt like his extremist vision was succeeding in the Middle East, and he reported on CNN that "people are praying in the streets," and that having tried "nationalism" and "dictatorship," they were now "wanting to taste Islam." Choudhary then became uncharacteristically realistic when he admitted that it was likely that a "temporary solution [in North Africa] may be government with American support," but he remained convinced that over time "this will turn into Sharia."⁵⁵

Later in the year, however, Choudhary's harder line returned. In an open letter he urged Libyans to "implement the Khilafah" and declared that "Libya does not require democracy."⁵⁶ By the end of 2011, he changed his story yet gain. In an article offering what purported to be an "Islamic perspective" on the year's events, Choudhary highlighted the increasing importance of political Islam across North Africa, but acknowledged that some form of un-Islamic, "democratic regime may materialize in the short term." He continued to see the uprisings as an opening for Islamists "to culture the masses about the real long term workable alternative of Shariah law and the resumption of the Khilafah."⁵⁷ By March 2012, Choudhary and his followers demonstrated that

their core beliefs about a Western conspiracy against Islam had not changed with the release of a short video showing a meager-looking demonstration in London where a group of about six made speeches and handed out flyers on the events in Syria. At the root of the bloody crackdown in Syria, the protestors claimed, is the fact that “no Western regime is going to help the Syrian people, because they are in bed with the Syrian regime.”⁵⁸

Choudhary’s line is relatively moderate when compared to his mentor’s, Omar Bakri Mohammed. Bakri Mohammed claimed early on that the revolts were signs that the time had come for Islam to rise up. He called upon Egyptians to apprehend prisoners to exchange for people incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay or for the “Blind Sheikh” Omar Abdel Rahman. (The Egyptian MB candidate for president Mohammad Morsi has since said he would personally lobby for the release of the Blind Sheikh if he won office, showing Bakri Mohammed correctly recognized the potential political support that the issue could generate in Egypt. Since winning office, President Morsi has pledged to seek Rahman’s release from prison.⁵⁹) While Bakri Mohammed did initially warn that Western “crusaders” could still “stab the Muslims in the back,” he nevertheless predicted that with the start of the Arab Spring, “we are seeing the beginning of the end of the crusaders.”⁶⁰

A year later, Bakri Mohammed’s focus had shifted single-mindedly to his homeland Syria, and he called on the Syrian fighters to show no mercy to their enemies and to “eliminate them, mutilate them” and record it on video. Peaceful demonstrations had failed, and he said there was now a need to rise up and fight.⁶¹ Prior to this he gave an interview to the *Daily Telegraph* in which he denied that al-Qaeda had a presence in Syria (they were “enjoying themselves, have a break, have a kitkat,” he said, echoing a popular British marketing jingle⁶²), and stated that,

I am the first one to call for holy jihad in Syria and for now there is no al-Qaeda in Syria. If Syrians keep asking for “freedom, democracy”—try take it [sic], by all means enjoy it, even bring in Madonna and Michael Jackson. But if you want to call us, say ‘oh God help us,’ and your Muslim brothers will come. We will send you lions.⁶³

A month later, he went on Arabic television again to highlight that he had no connection to al-Qaeda, but that stories of their arrival in Syria were merely lies propagated by the Assad regime to scare foreigners. Unlike his acolyte Choudhary, who has at least maintained a somewhat coherent line of argument, Bakri Mohammed has repeatedly contradicted himself. According to Bakri Mohammed, al-Qaeda and other “salafi movements” had thus far not participated in the Arab uprisings and were in-

stead taking “a warrior’s rest [to] then gather the booty at the end.” However, he has also declared that, “the only winner in the Arab revolutions is Islamist forces like al-Qaeda, the Salafis, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Muslim Brotherhood.” As he put it, “the ultimate proof is that Islamists already came to power in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.” Despite contradicting himself, he has been clear about his desire to see the Arab Spring reach Syria and topple the Assad regime.

Abdullah al-Faisal, the formerly Britain-based Jamaican cleric known for his radically sectarian (*takfiri*) views, has shown little inclination to moderate or reassess his hardline ideology in light of the Arab uprisings. In July 2011, he ridiculed the West’s previous support for various Arab leaders who were now in trouble, and he highlighted how the West had done little to help them survive.⁶⁴ By October, he became obsessed that the West was conspiring to hijack the Arab revolts. In a blistering speech entitled “Empire Strikes Back,” he declared, “when there is a revolution in a Muslim country, they [the West] try to take it over,” and he pointed to Libya and Tunisia as two clear examples where the initial revolution was being subsumed by forces that he found unacceptable. In notes written emphatically in capital letters, Faisal declared “WE MUST IMPLEMENT SHARIAH IN LIBYA SO WE DON’T REPLACE 1 TAGHOOT [false deity] W/ ANOTHER TAGHOOT.”⁶⁵ Unlike Choudhary, who moderates his call for the implementation of Sharia in countries like Libya by framing it as a “suggestion” for the Libyans, Faisal bizarrely claimed that “THE FLAG OF KHILAFAH ARE HANGING FROM ALL THE BUILDINGS IN BENGHAZI”⁶⁶ and cited this as evidence that ordinary Libyans would never want “democracy.”⁶⁷ Three months later, Faisal’s argument against the purportedly democratic nature of the Arab uprisings had hardened even further, and he declared that “those who died in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt...if they died fighting for democracy, they died not being loved by Allah.”⁶⁸ By early 2012, Faisal—like other hardliners—appeared to have lost hope that the rebellions were bringing about new Islamic regimes in the Middle East. By the time Syria became the focus of international attention, he simply harped on the illegitimacy of the “Shia Alawite” Assad, claiming his downfall would precede the fall of the Iranian regime.⁶⁹ Like Choudhary’s acolytes, he saw the lack of “Islamic” progress in the Syrian revolt as evidence of a Western plot, and he dismissed the uprisings as illegitimate, stating that “the revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt were not Islamic revolutions, they were democratic revolutions.”⁷⁰

The Arab uprisings also seemed to accentuate factional conflicts among UK-based Arab Islamist extremists. Many, for example, who remained committed to their hardline agendas and who sought to ascribe an Islamic character to the uprisings began to criticize those former UK-based Islamist exiles who returned home to participate in the new secular party politics of the post-2011 era. For example, the aforementioned

Mohammed al-Massari appeared on Press TV on January 20, 2011 as the uprisings in Tunisia were beginning. He dismissed Rashid al-Ghannouchi's chances of accomplishing much once he went back to Tunisia, saying al-Nahda as an Islamic movement knows "how to fight but not how to govern." Al-Massari further dismissed the non-religious dimensions of the uprisings, asserting that "the claim the revolution has nothing to do with Islam is not true."⁷¹ By March, the Arab Spring had begun to reach Massari's home country of Saudi Arabia and he appeared once again on Press TV, predicting "thousands more" Islamic activists would soon turn up on the streets to protest against the monarchy.⁷² These new demonstrators never materialized, and a seemingly disillusioned Massari has since resumed his earlier activities as pan-Islamist preacher who produces occasional videos on Islamic law or the genealogy of hadiths and regularly posts to his revived Tajdeed.net website.

The UK-based Egyptian Islamists Yasser al-Sirri and Hani al-Sibai also both largely kept their own reactions to the Arab Spring focused on the situation in their home country. Early on, as events in Tahrir Square appeared headed toward a bloodbath, Yasser al-Sirri published a statement that read "to the Egyptian army, men of the armed forces: move and side with the people before it is too late." Hani al-Sibai's statements expressed anxiety about "the people's uprising being hijacked by a [radical] Islamist trend."⁷³ Nine months later, al-Sirri, who had once been detained for involvement with al-Qaeda, told *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* that "after the revolution in Egypt, the justifications for the presence of secret organizations in Egypt have ended" and added that "it is time for [political] action and there is no room for clandestine or armed action any more." Al-Sirri's call to engage in politics and his rejection of armed jihad as an instrument of political change may be seen as an important expression of a new pragmatism among some jihadist ideologues after the Arab Spring. Nonetheless, al-Sirri has continued to argue that the West and the U.S. in particular pose a threat to Muslim societies and that, in his opinion, the Western countries "are trying to nip the Arab Spring in the bud." This is clearly another indication that Islamist "pragmatism" and "moderation" have limits.⁷⁴ Indeed, al-Sirri's statement potentially provides a justification for future jihad—just as al-Sirri called for in February 2011, when he proposed that Egyptians sink some ships to block the Suez Canal. Ironically, al-Sirri proposed that action not because he thought the West was attempting to thwart the Arab uprisings, but because he complained that the West seemed to be ignoring them.⁷⁵ Others following a similar complex trajectory include Osama Rushdie, a formerly hardline Gama'a al-Islamiya member based in the UK, who has returned to Egypt and now supports Aboul Fetouh.⁷⁶

By and large, the older generation of extremists who arrived in Europe in the 1990s have, despite their pan-Islamist rhetoric, clearly retained a fixation on the respective

nations from which they fled. For the most part, they see the Arab Spring as a positive development, although they seem unsure what their role is in this new era and often seem to be struggling to interpret fast-moving events, sometimes adopting more moderate positions, sometimes reverting to comfortable anti-western and extremist tropes. However, when looking at younger extremists born in the UK like Choudhary and his acolytes or Abdullah al-Faisal, a different tendency emerges. In general, this group was initially enthusiastic about the Arab uprisings since they viewed them as realizations of their long-held calls for Islamic revolution across the Middle East. But when the Arab rebellions have turned to ballot boxes, this group has fallen back to their old anti-democratic positions, and they have increasingly embraced ever more tenuous, even implausible, positions. For them, the ongoing strife in Syria is a clear-cut example of how the West is conspiring against Muslim warriors who are fighting for the oppressed masses. They believe this despite the fact that strongest support for intervention comes from the West.⁷⁷

The Post-Islamists

ONE POTENTIALLY FAR-REACHING EFFECT OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS ON ISLAMISM IN Europe has been to further distinguish between unrepentant old-style doctrinaire Islamists, such as Azzam Tamimi or the extremist Omar Bakri Mohammed, and those exiles gradually embracing a less ideologically rigid, “post-Islamist” outlook. For the latter group, doctrinaire Islamism has become increasingly diluted by pragmatic considerations and influenced as well by a range of secular, liberal and democratic ideas, sometimes to the point of no longer being recognizably Islamist. This ideational journey has been arguably most pronounced among those Islamists whose high public profile has obliged them to engage extensively with Western thinkers, journalists and academics. In some instances, the events of the Arab Spring catalyzed and perhaps even accelerated this change of mind. A good example of this is Dilwar Hussain, a well-educated former prominent supporter of a number of Jamaat-e-Islami-derived groups who is now the president of the Brotherhood-founded Islamic Society of Britain. In January 2012, he wrote an article on the Islamists and the Arab Spring:

While some are hailing this [the Arab Spring] as a success of “Islamism,” I would like to suggest—perhaps counter-intuitively—that it is actually an indication of the demise of Islamism; at least old-style, traditional Islamism of the type that sought to create an “Islamic state,” an Islamic version of a Hobbesian Leviathan to govern society.

He added:

For decades now, some activists have looked to the Islamist movements for inspiration. But with the recent developments post-Arab Spring, the evolution of the AKP in Turkey, and the natural process of settlement, some are arguing that the stratification developing within the Islamist movements is just as important as the split between Islamists and non-Islamist Muslim activists. If the old slogans of “Islam is the solution” are being replaced with notions of “freedom and justice” ... what does that mean for Islamist-influenced movements and their agendas in the West?

He concluded that a

more open and embracing vision of who we are, and what Islam means to us will be realized [once] there is a shift towards a post-Islamist paradigm among activists in the West. But can this happen? I would argue that it must.⁷⁸

A similar progression toward a less doctrinaire and more pragmatic understanding of how Islam and politics intersect can be seen in the writings of another previously prominent member of British Islamist circles, a convert to Islam, Sarah Joseph. In response to the Arab uprisings, she wrote of her loss of faith in simplistic Islamist arguments:

I am no longer a Utopian. I once believed that we could create an ideal community or society, where justice reigned and people committed themselves to its maintenance because it was worth the sacrifice. However, life has shown me that this is unlikely, and idealized communities are probably not possible on this earth. Not even the Prophet’s community was filled with faultless individuals, all living in perfect harmony and peace.

It is possible, and perhaps even likely, that other Islamist activists will also come to realize that their idealistic conceptions of an “Islamic State” will not provide solutions to any of the social, political and economic woes facing Middle Eastern societies. Indeed, such a realization has led other UK-based Islamists even further down the path toward explicitly rejecting Islamism altogether. For instance, Inayat Bunglawala, who was formerly the main spokesman for the Muslim Council of Britain and

who was for many years one of the most prominent defenders of Islamism in the UK, wrote in January 2012 that,

When I was younger I was taught by many senior Muslim leaders in the UK and elsewhere that secularism was akin to atheism and that only a truly Islamic state which enforced the Shariah would provide the real answer to humanity's problems. Looking back, I just shake my head and can't believe I actually swallowed that argument for so long. It is just so embarrassing. By contrast, the Arab Spring has brought many welcome developments, particularly the fact the people in Egypt and Tunisia have now been able to freely elect their own leaders. One can only hope that the leaders of the Islamic-minded parties that have won those elections now look to best serve their people with honesty and humility. An "Islamic state" which does not respect the human rights of all its people including freedom of religion and gay rights would necessarily be an unjust state.⁷⁹

Bunglawala's statements are typical of how some high-profile Islamists have shifted some of their perspectives over time thanks to extensive debate and engagement with non-Islamists. This is an indication of how "critical engagement" with Islamists in the West can potentially be useful in challenging fundamental Islamist tenets and promoting greater ideological moderation. That said, as in the case of Helbawy, Bunglawala's political views have only partially moderated. On his blog, for example, he frequently obsesses over Jews and Israel, recently defended the winning image of Iran's 2006 Holocaust Cartoon competition,⁸⁰ blamed anti-Islamist campaigning on the conspiracies of "the pro-Israel lobby,"⁸¹ referred to the British ambassador to Tel Aviv as "our Jewish ambassador,"⁸² and so on.

Tariq Ramadan, likewise, remains a controversial figure for critics of Islamism. But it is notable that since the start of the uprisings, Muslim Brotherhood organizations both in the West and in the Middle East have almost ceased to mention or reference him. This likely has to do with Ramadan's willingness to be critical of the Muslim Brotherhood and its doctrinaire ideology. Ramadan has broadly aligned himself with a number of new Islamist trends which look to Turkey's AKP and to the so-called "Turkish model" in their efforts to create what they describe as a "democratic civil State."⁸³ Simultaneously, he has described the traditional Islamism of the Brotherhood not as divine, but as a political and man-made movement that represents an "ideological response which must be assessed in the light of the prevailing issues of the day."⁸⁴ He has also criticized the youth-led Egyptian Islamist trend, stating that it "essentially

accepts the capitalist order—which I am not happy with,”⁸⁵ and has further argued that “some Islamist parties—are playing with Islam in an attempt to gain legitimacy.”⁸⁶ Alternatively, he has complained that “a veil of silence has fallen over Bahrain,” and that Sunni Islamists have broadly welcomed this for their own sectarian reasons.⁸⁷

Recently Ramadan has said, “I am not a member of the Brotherhood. My vision is completely different. My aim is to be critical of what they say about Sharia—how it should be implemented and how it should not.”⁸⁸ Like many of Ramadan’s pronouncements, this one is opaque. But this statement does broadly summarize Ramadan’s current position—i.e., that he is not formally part of the Muslim Brotherhood and yet sees himself as part of an evolving Islamist trend, which Ramadan apparently believes he can better influence as a critical and supportive outsider than as a card-carrying member of any political organization. Furthermore, Ramadan’s exclusion from many Western Islamist events may indicate a fear in these circles that even Ramadan, one of Islamism’s most potent assets, may himself be heading down the path toward “post-Islamism.” Moreover, this may indicate that in an age when the Brotherhood is openly forming parties, lobbying voters and putting forward candidates for Arab presidencies, Ramadan’s notorious fence-sitting on controversial political and ideological issues, and refusal to commit himself to any clear-cut position, is no longer appreciated.⁸⁹

Conclusions

UK ISLAMISM, LIKE ISLAM IN BRITAIN AS A WHOLE, REMAINS VERY MUCH A CACOPHONY of disparate trends and a work in progress whose ultimate trajectory is hard to determine. Given the enormous diversity of Islamist groups and individuals in the UK, no single pattern defines Islamists’ reactions to the Arab Spring. At the same time, however, the Arab uprisings have clearly shaken up the often stagnant waters of British Islamism, catalyzing change and accelerating existing trends; sometimes triggering new moderation and pragmatism, in other instances reinforcing existing extremist views. In response to the Arab Spring some Islamist activists who found refuge in the West grew noticeably more moderate and open-minded, even to the point of abandoning Islamist doctrine or breaking openly with their own organizations. Others, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and those from the deeply anti-democratic extremist trend within UK Islamism (including some Brotherhood members), grew evermore entrenched in their doctrines and conspiracy theories, and even more suspicious of anything new. Similarly, the Arab Spring has underscored that in almost all instances, it is clear that most exiles who have spent time in Europe know the West better than it knows them, while their experience in the West has also made them far more politically and media

savvy than were previous generations. Regardless of their personal politics, the leaders of groups like al-Nahda and the Egyptian Brotherhood will seek to use this knowledge of the West to their own advantage in the years to come.

That said, not all exile groups used their time in exile to re-organize, to acquire new skills, and to rebrand and reshape their political messages. For instance, the UK-based leaders of the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood seem to continue to be isolated in the era of the Arab Spring. Their efforts to overthrow Bashar al-Assad have been historically unpopular in London Islamist circles because of Assad's support for Hamas. Unlike al-Nahda, exiled members of the Syrian Brotherhood (and particularly their most prominent member, the shy, reticent and non-English speaking Ali Bayanouni) did not court Western policymakers, or potential political allies or journalists, and they have failed to forge ties with other Islamists as well as other exile communities like Syrian Kurds and Christians. As such, the Syrian Brothers have been unable to do much to persuade UK or international audiences of the importance of supporting the rebellion against the Assad regime. Indeed, the Syrian Brotherhood has struggled to convince Syrians in exile and in Syria itself mainly because these audiences lack confidence in the group's professed moderation.⁹⁰

The impact of the Arab Spring on "homegrown" Islamist parties and UK-born individuals has also been pronounced. While many UK-born extremists were initially enthusiastic about the Arab Spring, they rapidly demonstrated their inability to do much beyond commenting and organizing protests outside embassies. For some groups—most notably Hizb ut-Tahrir—the lack of radical "Islamic" change in the Middle East following the Arab uprisings has left them disillusioned. These extremists have already rationalized the failure of their much hoped-for Khilafa to appear by retreating into old tropes about Western domination and conspiracy. As the Brotherhood and its affiliated groups increasingly exercise political power in the Arab world, this extremist position seems evermore absurd. Because of their incapacity to respond to the new political opportunities created by the Arab Spring, these extremist groups and their ideology risk becoming increasingly irrelevant.

On the other hand, the Arab Spring has given more open-minded Islamists—both exiles and UK-born, Arab and non-Arab—the opportunity to reconsider simplistic ideological perspectives that "Islam is the solution" as well as their long-standing prejudices against the West and their delusions about Western conspiracies against Islam. Others, most notably pro-Hamas activists, have taken a longer-term view of the Arab uprisings, portraying them as events leading one step closer to the fulfillment of their doctrinal goals of destroying Israel.

In addition to shaking up Islamist ideas and sharpening divisions within the Islamist movement, the Arab uprisings have also impacted the organizational structures,

practices and capacities of some Islamist movements in the UK. Indeed, the return of exiles to the Middle East has meant that the leadership of some UK-based Islamist movements—most notably those connected to the Tunisian and Egyptian Brotherhoods—have been weakened or hollowed out. Over the longer term, it is possible that the continued migration of senior leaders and organizers from the UK in particular is going to have a damaging effect on the capacity of Islamist movements to propagate their own ideas in the West. After all, the Arab Spring has already plucked away some of UK Islamism’s most able and experienced political organizers as well as some younger rising stars, like the Scottish-born Osama Saeed, a former MAB youth leader who now works for *al-Jazeera* in Qatar. Now, in groups like the MAB, there is simply no younger generation ready to take over from older leaders. By contrast, other groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and al-Muhajiroun’s radical offspring have lost few senior leaders to the Arab Spring and, even though their political agendas appear increasingly less relevant, these groups still maintain large memberships of younger and ambitious activists. Will this mean, therefore, an acceleration of the increasing trend toward moderation among young British Muslims due to a general weakening of Brotherhood groups in the West and the descent of extremist groups into ever-deeper obscurantism? Or will the weakening of UK-based Brotherhood groups create a vacuum into which more extremist groups will step? Either way, it is already clear that while many Islamists arrived in the West hoping to change it, it was instead in many cases the West that changed them. It is also clear that the Arab Spring, and its ultimate outcomes, will likely play a decisive role in shaping the evolution of Islamism in the UK and throughout Western Muslim communities; indeed, its effects are already being felt.

NOTES

1. <http://ireland.fosis.org.uk/about-us/history>.
2. In 1964, FOSIS arranged for Malcolm X to speak at Manchester and Sheffield universities, during a visit to the UK; http://www.workershistory.org/linked_docs/NWLHJ27_Sherwood.pdf.
3. <http://www.angelfire.com/in/muslimscholars/three.html>.
4. Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity Amongst British Muslims* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), p. 102.
5. <http://www.investigativeproject.org/3418/qaradawi-no-chopping-off-of-hands-nowbut-later-is>.
6. Al-Massari ran the Center for the Defense of Legitimate Rights.

- http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=26182&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=178&no_cache=1.
7. This included the website Tajdeed.net, which became a key forum for the dissemination of radical ideas and material worldwide. Even though al-Massari claimed to have shut the website down in 2005, it remains in operation. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4191396.stm>. The site is accessible here: <http://tajdeed.net/>.
 8. http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/29/tunisia_new_al_nahda.
 9. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01bljwp>.
 10. "Interview transcript: Rachid Ghannouchi," *Financial Times*, January 18, 2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/24d710a6-22ee-11e0-ad0b-00144feab49a.html#axzz1q9NysppY>.
 11. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/09/weekinreview/conversations-sheik-rashid-el-ghanoushi-islamic-fundamentalist-abroad-talks.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.
 12. Cited in Azzam Tamimi, Rachid Ghannouchi: *A Democrat within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). p. 206.
 13. http://www.euro-muslim.com/en_u_foundation_details.aspx?news_id=343.
 14. Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
 15. Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 249.
 16. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/18/world/africa/tunisia-islamists-test-ideas-decades-in-the-making.html?pagewanted=all>.
 17. Ferjani's skill in winning such representational leverage for the Brotherhood is remarkable given that the Brotherhood controls no more than 5 out of the UK's estimated 900 mosques. It is also worth noting that the other three founding organizations were the al-Khoei Foundation, a Shia organization headquartered in America; the British Muslim Forum, which is now largely defunct; and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), an organization with close foundational links to Jamaat-e-Islami.
 18. <http://www.minab.org.uk/about-us/committees>.
 19. Paul Goodman, "MINAB's mosques may not be so moderate," *Daily Telegraph*, November 30, 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3644400/MINABs-mosques-may-not-be-so-moderate.html>.
 20. <http://mabonline.net/?p=2734>.
 21. <http://islamexpo.com/attractions.php?id=7&art=26&page=attractions.php>.
 22. Soumaya Ghannouchi, "Who's the extremist," *The Guardian*, August 5, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/aug/05/comment.politics>;
Soumaya Ghannouchi's pages:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/soumayaghannoushi> and
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/profile/soumaya-ghanoushi.html>; Intissar Kherigi's:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/intissar-kherigi?INTCMP=SRCH> and
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/profile/intissar-kherigi.html>.
 23. <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/liveblog/Yusra-Ghannouchi>.
 24. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9Ivc0-OwTM>.
 25. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmcaff/c1672-i/c167201.htm>.
 26. <http://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFL5E7LJ3ZR20111020>;

- <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/tunisia/8862963/Tunisias-Islamist-victory-good-for-women-says-female-figurehead.html>.
27. "Islamists' Ideas on Democracy and Faith Face Test in Tunisia," *New York Times*, February 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/18/world/africa/tunisia-islamists-test-ideas-decades-in-the-making.html?hp>.
 28. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00pbgq4>.
 29. <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/11/15/177378.html>.
 30. http://antzproduction.com/back_to_tunisia-2.html.
 31. <http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=3&id=27849>.
 32. In London, Ghannouchi was particularly notorious among Arab activists for his use of the UK's litigant-friendly libel laws to silence criticism and perceived inaccuracies, for instance, winning £61,000 from the *Al-Arab* newspaper in 2003 and £165,000 from the *Al-Arabiya* channel in 2008; http://www.carter-ruck.com/documents/newsletters/pdfs/newsletter_summer2008.pdf.
 33. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/12/muslim-brotherhood-share-power-egypt?news-feed=true>.
 34. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12356922>.
 35. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/38392/Egypt/Politics-/Will-ElShater-nomination-split-Egypt's-Brotherhood.aspx>.
 36. <http://ikhwanmisr.net/article.php?id=22724>. He also made the claim to a rather surprised-looking BBC Politics show in early 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12356922>.
 37. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/profile-kamal-al-helbawy-defector-conscience>.
 38. Ibid.
 39. Author interview, former jihadist, London, May 2012.
 40. <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/platform/2011/05/bin-laden-the-muslim-brotherhood-and-medhi-hasan.html>.
 41. <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1619455>.
 42. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/may/02/palestinian-freedom-arab-unrest-egypt>.
 43. http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/1893/extremist_speakers_in_conference_at_cardiff_university_update_event_moved_off_campus_.
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 45. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood-fate-of-israel-peace-treaty-may-be-decided-in-referendum-1.404889>.
 46. <http://azzamtamimi.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/what-syrian-people-want-is-what-matters.html>.
 47. Al-Tikriti is the son of the leader of Iraq's Muslim Brotherhood and has attempted to acquire funding from the British government, most notably through the Cordoba Foundation, an NGO that acts as a forum for pro-Islamist thought in the UK; <http://www.fairobserver.com/article/western-fear-%E2%80%98islamist-other%E2%80%99>.
 48. <http://www.hizb.org.uk/current-affairs/tunisia-protests-muslims-call-for-islam-and-khilafah>.
 49. <http://www.demotix.com/news/573113/hizb-ut-tahrir-turned-away-embassy-protest>; <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/01/29/uk-britain-egypt-protest-idUKTRE70S3D920110129>.
 50. <http://www.hizb.org.uk/dawah/first-tunisia-then-egypt--a-call-for-real-change-in-the-arab-world>.

51. <http://www.hizb.org.uk/dawah/bradford-community-meeting-discusses-the-uprisings-in-tunisia-and-egypt>.
52. <http://www.hizb.org.uk/dawah/video-one-ummah-one-struggle>.
53. Hizb ut-Tahrir, "Press launch of 'Gold Standard'," March 22, 2012, <http://www.thegoldreport.co.uk/publications/gold-standard-the-future-for-a-stable-global-currency>.
54. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsrv2ol0xAo>.
55. <http://inthearena.blogs.cnn.com/2011/02/01/tonight-radical-muslim-clerics-take-on-egypt/>.
56. <http://www.anjemchoudary.com/press-releases/lybia-the-islamic-verdict>.
57. <http://www.anjemchoudary.com/press-releases/2011-the-year-in-review-an-islamic-perspective>.
58. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39BpIrrxwM&list=UUN3SY9jKwPWWzX1cV_Gw7Q&index=1&feature=plcp.
59. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/7/41881/Egypt/Presidential-elections-/Brotherhoods-Mursi-vows-to-help-USheld-Blind-Sheik.aspx>.
60. "Islamic awakening—Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen riots demonstrations revelation (sic)," uploaded January 28, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHXw137CbEo>.
61. "An address to the Muslims of Syria," February 1, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTX4qaghWOQ>.
62. The grammatical error is Bakri's and is a reference to a famous British advertisement slogan for a chocolate bar.
63. "Muslim cleric banned from Britain claims al Qaeda poised to launch suicide attacks in Syria," *Telegraph*, January 25, 2012.
64. <http://www.authentictauheed.com/2011/07/109-khilafah-system-is-ultimate.html>.
65. <http://www.authentictauheed.com/2011/10/211-empire-strikes-back.html>.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. <http://www.authentictauheed.com/2011/12/239-love-love-love.html>.
69. <http://www.authentictauheed.com/2012/01/q-adam-and-shaitan-part3.html>.
70. <http://www.authentictauheed.com/2012/03/266-tafseer-surah-taubah-verse-of-sword.html>.
71. "Tunisia still in 'revolutionary mood'," *Press TV*, January 20, 2011, <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/161086.html>.
72. "Massive protests loom in Saudi Arabia," *Press TV*, March 5, 2011.
73. "Egyptian Islamists in Exile Call on Army to side with people," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 1, 2011. This was clearly a departure for a man who has long been on the UN- and US-sanctioned terrorist list and started his career as the lawyer for Egyptian Islamic Jihad members; <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/pdf/AQList.pdf>.
74. "Is al Qaeda over? Egyptian security experts sound off," *Asharq al-Awsat*, September 13, 2011.
75. "Egypt Uprising the Middle East Crisis XV: London-based Egyptian Islamist Yasser al-Sirri calls to block international shipping in the Suez Canal and to halt the flow of oil," *MEMRI*, Special Dispatch no.3557, February 3, 2011, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/print4971.htm>.
76. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/36/122/42074/Presidential-elections-/Presidential-elections-news/AbulFotouh-to-thousands-of-supporters-I-warned-SCA.aspx>.
77. A final detail to note, however, in the British jihadist scene is that the vast majority of the cur-

rent generation of British jihadists find their roots in South Asia. For them, while events in the Arab world have some salience—and in particular amongst those animated by pan-Islamist ideas—their focus has tended to be towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, where it is hard to find much evidence of impact from the Arab Spring. For them, the events in the Arab Spring did little to undermine the injustice of the current war in Afghanistan or drone strikes in Pakistan, key issues that dominate their outlook.

78. http://www.emel.com/article?id=94&a_id=2569.

79. <http://inayatcorner.wordpress.com/2012/01/21/terror-in-nigeria-why-an-islamic-state-is-not-the-answer/>.

80. <http://inayatcorner.wordpress.com/2012/02/13/the-jesus-and-mo-cartoon-and-the-right-to-offend-2/>.

81. <http://inayatcorner.wordpress.com/2011/02/16/pro-israel-lobby-continues-smear-campaign-against-engage/>.

82. <http://inayatcorner.wordpress.com/2011/11/14/our-jewish-ambassador-to-israel-and-the-plot-to-attack-iran/>.

83. <http://www.tariqramadan.com/Erdogan-visits-Egypt-Tunisia-and,11735.html?lang=fr>.

84. <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/islamists-current-dilemma-1.970001>.

85. <http://thinkafricapress.com/egypt/islamism-and-arab-spring-talk-tariq-ramadan>.

86. <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/political-islam-will-have-to-deal-with-clashing-interests-1.921436>.

87. <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/tunisia-s-challenging-future-1.990551>.

88. <http://thinkafricapress.com/egypt/islamism-and-arab-spring-talk-tariq-ramadan>.

89. It is true, however, that Ramadan's recent move to Qatar to become head of the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE), a Qatari government project that is also supported by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, complicates such analysis. And yet, at the same time, Ramadan's relocation to Qatar can equally be seen as a reminder that the Brotherhood's members are often distinguished not by strict fidelity to any single idea but rather by a hunger for money and proximity to power, Qatar of course being the richest and most important power-broker in the new Middle East. It is worth adding, however, that a rejection of Islamist doctrines does not necessarily lead individuals to become more moderate or democratic, or for that matter, less hostile to the West. Indeed, several individuals above remain religiously or socially conservative, for instance on issues relating to women, and deeply hostile to Israel to the point of anti-Semitism. Others may also retain an "us vs. them," almost tribalist, orientation and an unthinking support for the "Muslim" side in political conflict, a trend sometimes referred to among British Muslims as "Muslim-ism."

90. It is worth highlighting that this does not mean that the Syrian revolution is not something that has been noted by the British public at large, or the Islamist community in particular. As we saw earlier, it continues to be a focus of the British Islamist conversation, as well as the public discourse in general. What is clear, however, is that the Syrian Brotherhood members based in the UK have played no role in advancing this narrative or shaping the message.

The Milli Görüs of Germany

By David Vielhaber

THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY MILLI GÖRÜS (ICMG) IS TODAY THE MOST influential Islamist organization in Germany, and one of the most important Islamist movements operating within the Turkish Diaspora in Europe. The movement claims to operate over 514 mosques and cultural centers in eleven European countries; 323 of these institutions are located in Germany.¹ ICMG's total European membership is about 87,000, with an estimated 30,000 members in Germany. The organization estimates that about 300,000 people in Europe attend its religious services on a weekly basis.

The ideology and political agenda of the ICMG are rooted in the ideas of Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011), a leading Turkish Islamist intellectual who was also one of the most influential Turkish politicians in the second half of the 20th century. Erbakan's political vision was radically anti-secular and anti-Western, and throughout his career, he called for the overthrow of Turkey's secular Kemalist regime. Even though he abhorred Kemalism, Erbakan rejected violent jihadist revolution. Instead, he favored a gradualist, "bottom-up" approach to Islamist revival and political reform that relied heavily on Islamist *dawa*, or ideological preaching and education. In 1969, Erbakan created the Milli Görüs or "National Vision" movement to carry out his agenda of transforming Turkey into an Islamic state.

Milli Görüs missionaries set up the movement's first German branch in the 1970s. The missionary group sought in particular to spread their message among the large numbers of Turkish migrant laborers who had settled in Germany. Since its arrival in Germany roughly four decades ago, the ICMG has remained committed to Erbakan's political vision, both ideologically and tactically. While the Germany- and Turkey-

based Milli Görüş movements share a common ancestry in Erbakan's teachings, the parent movement in Turkey and its offshoot in Germany have faced very different operating environments over the last forty years. In Turkey, Milli Görüş preachers and activists have played an enormously important role in the gradual undermining of secular Kemalist institutions and principles and in the connected rise of political Islam over the last four decades. Now, and especially since the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, Milli Görüş along with other ideologically-kindred Islamic movements enjoys unprecedented influence over Turkish religious and political life.

In Germany, meanwhile, the ICMG has been repeatedly forced to shift its focus. Germany's security services have closely monitored the ICMG out of concern that it contributes to ideological radicalization and is connected to terrorism. At times, German security forces have moved aggressively to disrupt the group's operations. For instance, in December 2009, German police searched several ICMG facilities as part of an investigation into leading ICMG functionaries on charges of embezzlement and formation of a criminal organization. The investigation was later dropped in September 2009.

To understand ICMG in Germany today, it is useful to consider Islamism's rise in modern Turkey, and specifically, to examine the ideas and methods of Erbakan and the Milli Görüş movement he founded. Indeed, there are important ideological affinities between the Milli Görüş movement in Turkey and the ICMG, as well as substantial present-day operational linkages between the two movements. These linkages are likely to become more salient and powerful over time, not weaker. This is especially the case now, at a time when Turkey is ruled by the AKP, a party with clear Islamist sympathies whose officials have also demonstrated a desire to influence the Turkish Diaspora in Europe.

The Father of Turkish Islamism

NECMETTIN ERBAKAN, WHO DIED IN 2011, WAS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL TURKISH Islamist politician since the Kemalists established the secular Republic of Turkey in 1923. Born into a privileged family and educated in both Turkey and Germany, he was a charismatic, ambitious leader intimately familiar with the political institutions, decision-making processes, and values of Western societies. His political career began in 1969, when he was elected to the Turkish parliament as an independent candidate. Afterwards, Erbakan led five Islamist parties, four of which were banned due to their rejection of Turkey's secular constitution.² Erbakan was himself banned

twice from engaging in any political activity for several years. Nonetheless, he remained firmly in charge of the Turkish political Islamist movement: There were occasional leadership changes in the Virtue Party, for example, but these had no real operational consequences.³ Erbakan personally handpicked key personnel, and the Islamist party's doctrine was based principally on his concept of "Milli Görüş."⁴

Erbakan's manifesto, "Milli Görüş" or "National View," was published in 1969. "National View" was a euphemism for political Islam; the Kemalist nature of the state made the use of an overtly religious name impossible. As with many other Islamist revivalist tracts, the manifesto called for a radical rejection of secular "Western" values and opposition to all kinds of "infidel" economic and political ideas. The manifesto was notable for its deep intolerance toward all Muslims who did not share this vision of Islamist revival and reform. Moreover, the agenda of the manifesto was the overthrow of the Kemalist secular system in Turkey and its replacement with what Erbakan described as a "just order" based on Islam.⁵

A number of Turkish scholars have described how the basic ideological orientation of the Milli Görüş movement has remained unchanged since its founding. According to Sebnem Gumuscu, the "Milli Görüş movement under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan has implicitly envisioned an Islamic state, and it explicitly aimed for Islamization of Turkish society."⁶ Much like other influential Islamists of his generation, including the Egyptian Said Qutb, Erbakan's political vision was rooted in a highly selective and deeply ideological understanding of Muslim history and Western influence in the world.⁷ He held a romanticized view of Islam's early days, during the first generations after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and he called for a return to their model by purifying society of its un-Islamic influences.⁸ For Erbakan, the technology and institutions that made the modern West more powerful than Muslim countries were, in fact, originally Islamic.⁹ He blamed what he described as the political, economic, and moral decline of Turkey on corrupting Western influences, which weakened Islam and the Islamic character of Turkey.¹⁰ As Gunes Murat Tezcur points out, for Erbakan, "Islam was a holistic ideology that was in an inevitable struggle with the West."¹¹

Erbakan's political rhetoric was typical of other mainstream Islamists of his generation. He frequently used Manichean language, describing a fundamental struggle between "us versus them," "good versus evil," and "us against the West and the Jews." On "the stump," the author Marvine Howe has observed, Erbakan, "was the consummate Third World radical, crusading against Turkey's Western ties and ubiquitous Zionist plots and in favor of a new Islamic order."¹² Indeed, he seamlessly blended his ideological theories about history and the corrupting influences of Western political and economic theory, particularly capitalism, with a conspiratorial mindset that was

deeply rooted in anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Erbakan's worldview was vividly on display in a 2007 interview:

All Infidel nations are one Zionist entity; Jews want to rule from Morocco to Indonesia, the Zionists worked for 5,767 years to build a world order in which all money and power depend on Jews, the US dollar is Zionist money, the Jewish "bacteria" must be diagnosed for a cure to be found; Zionists initiated the Crusades, Jews founded Protestantism and the Capitalist order; and Bush attacked Iraq to build Greater Israel, so Jesus can return.¹³

This rant was hardly a one-time occurrence. In 2010, for example, Erbakan said in an interview with the German newspaper *Die Welt* that,

For 5700 years the Jews have rule the world. It is a rule of injustice, cruelty and violence. They have a strong faith, a religion that tells them that they should rule the world. Check out this one dollar bill. It is a symbol, a pyramid of 13 steps, with an eye to the tip. It is the symbol of Zionist world domination. The stages represent four "open" and other secret societies, behind that there is a "parliament of 300" and 33 rabbis parliaments, and beyond that others, invisible leaders. They rule the world via the capitalist world order.¹⁴

As with other Islamists of his generation, Erbakan was an ardent believer in Islamic solidarity and the idea that the whole of the world's Muslims could be unified into one Umma, a global Muslim Nation. The ideal of Islamic unity was a recurrent theme in his many speeches, and it dominated his political career and activism as well. He advocated, for instance, for the establishment of a Muslim customs union, an Islamic NATO, an Islamic United Nations, as well as a single Islamic currency.¹⁵ During his short tenure as the Prime Minister of Turkey, Erbakan founded the "Developing 8," which was intended as an Islamic equivalent to the Western-dominated "Group of Seven."¹⁶

As an activist and demagogue, Erbakan was especially skilled at connecting his ideological and political agenda to an individual's sense of religious duty and obligation. Islamists in general claim the exclusive right to define, according to their own standards, what a real Muslim's duties are and, by extension, who is a real Muslim and who is not. Muslims opposed to Islamism are frequently ridiculed as insufficiently faithful, or denounced as apostates. For Erbakan, a Muslim who did not adhere to the Milli Görüs political agenda was guilty of transgression against Islam. In an interview

with the London-based *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Erbakan stated, “Do not consider the Jews and Christians as patrons [for Islam]. How can any person who deals with the Jews be a real Muslim?”¹⁷ In a 2010 speech before an audience of Milli Görüs members in Duisburg, Germany, Erbakan reportedly stated that there were only two kinds of human beings: one kind actively supports the cause of Milli Görüs, and the second group does not.¹⁸

Gradual—But Relentless

DESPITE HIS PENCHANT FOR INFLAMMATORY RHETORIC, NECMETTIN ERBAKAN never encouraged his followers to wage violent jihad to overthrow Turkey’s secular political system. Instead, he favored a gradual, bottom-up Islamization of society which was to be accomplished through the replacement of secular laws and norms with Islamic law. This kind of revolutionary political change required, above all, a dramatic change in mindset, or the acquisition of what Erbakan frequently called a new Islamic “consciousness” or “awareness.” Without such an Islamic consciousness, Erbakan and Milli Görüs activists believed that Muslims would never successfully revive Islam in the modern era. Interestingly, in a 2007 interview with *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Erbakan was asked what he thought about Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, and he responded by saying it was most important for the prime minister to return to true Islamic consciousness.¹⁹

After being systematically suppressed for decades by the Kemalist state, political Islam resurfaced in Turkey in 1969 when Erbakan founded the Turkish National View movement. The movement’s first priority was to establish a nation-wide grassroots support network for the spread of a new Islamic consciousness. By 1973, the Turkish National Salvation Party, which was led by Erbakan and was the successor party to the banned National Order Party, had successfully established branches in fifty-two of Turkey’s sixty-seven provinces.²⁰ Initially, missionaries from the Islamist movement in Turkey focused their outreach on two distinct populations: one, the conservative religious populations in the rural Anatolian provinces and, second, the growing number of impoverished migrant workers in urbanized areas. The missionaries responded directly to the needs of the newly urban workers, offering food, hostels, scholarships, networks for young graduates, assistance with job searches, credit to shopkeepers, industrialists, and merchants, as well as self-help projects for women.²¹ In conjunction with these welfare services, missionaries also nationally distributed audiocassettes with recordings of Erbakan’s speeches. By 1977, the Islamist movement had firmly established itself all over the country.²²

The rigid organization of Erbakan's Islamist movement and its quick expansion soon paid off in the form of electoral successes. After the 1973 elections, the National Salvation Party became the junior partner in a coalition government and Erbakan was appointed deputy prime minister. During his tenure, Erbakan succeeded in exploiting Turkey's Imam Hatip religious schools in an effort to advance the Islamist cause. As the scholar Nilufer Narli points out, "One of the Islamist movement's important strategies was to develop an educated counter-elite as a base of support, especially by strengthening the Islamic stream in the educational system."²³ Erbakan allowed the Imam Hatip schools to offer secondary education and permitted its graduates to enter all departments at universities.²⁴ Erbakan was deeply committed to the schools, and he viewed them and Islamic education as the most effective avenue for the redefinition of national identity.²⁵ As Banu Eligur has written, "Islamists regard the Imam Hatip schools as social networks that sustain and enhance their political power by educating the youth according to Islamist principles."²⁶ Imbued with Islamist doctrine, graduates formed the core of the new economic, bureaucratic, and eventually political Islamist counter-elite.

The so-called "Turkish Islamic Synthesis," adopted after the 1980 military coup, represented a milestone for the Turkish Islamist movement. This new state doctrine provided much greater space for religion in the public, political realm and ended its confinement to the private realm. Religious instruction in primary and secondary schools became mandatory. The Turkish military, which ruled the country from 1980-1983, sought to cultivate a unified national identity based on Sunni Islam in order to counter ultranationalist as well as communist extremism.²⁷ The blowback has been substantial. In the post-1980 era, Islamist groups were able to set up Islamic dormitories, associations, and foundations that specifically targeted disaffected youth.²⁸ Banu Eligur emphasizes that, as a "result of the military's strategy, the process of Islamization in society grew stronger than ever."²⁹ In its attempt to accommodate the Islamists, the Turkish military not only sanctioned an assault on Turkey's secularism, but also created the conditions for the Islamist takeover of political power in the 1990s.

The gradual transformation of urban centers was another central focus of the Islamist political agenda in Turkey. A prime example of this was the Islamist transformation of the poor Istanbul suburb of Sultanbeyli, a topic explored in-depth by scholar Cihan Tugal.³⁰ Tugal describes how the Erbakan-led Islamist movement transformed the Sultanbeyli district into an "Islamic fortress" with the help of various religious groups and foundations, booksellers, entrepreneurs, publishers and activists, all of whom began operating in the district after the Turkish Islamic Synthesis. Again, the target groups were the large number of migrant workers living in the district and

youths. The Islamists established a quasi-monopoly over religious education and provided residents with a social safety net. As such, they essentially replaced the government as the main provider of basic social services.³¹

The net result of this was the gradual Islamization of everyday life. Businesses had to adopt Islamic symbols in order to stay in business and secular Muslims were pushed out of the district. In 1989, Erbakan's Welfare Party won the municipal elections.³² Islamists took control of a district in what was, at the time, the predominantly secularist-oriented metropolitan environment of Istanbul. They told the residents of Sultanbeyli that they were "the heirs of the companions of the prophet"—a direct allusion to their romanticized version of Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina.³³ Soon thereafter, Islamists promoted the Sultanbeyli district as the center of Turkey's religious revival and the district's residents became the political vanguard in the struggle to overturn Turkey's secular system.

In 1996, Necmettin Erbakan became Turkey's first Islamist Prime Minister. The Islamist movement's gradualist approach to transforming society had resulted in the takeover of political power on the national level. In many ways, Erbakan's agenda while in government was characteristic of his gradualist sensibilities and tactics. Despite his campaign slogans and the promises he made as a candidate that Turkey would leave NATO, close down U.S. military bases, and sever ties with Israel, Prime Minister Erbakan did not pursue an overtly Islamist political or social agenda. Mindful that the military was wary of his Islamist views, the prime minister instead adhered to a largely pragmatic agenda while in office and refrained from attempting to impose a top-down dismantlement of the Kemalist state. A report published by the Washington Institute observed, "Erbakan is tactically a pragmatist, but strategically an ideologue. To stay in power, he is willing to compromise in the short run."³⁴

Nevertheless, the military pressured Erbakan out of office in the so-called "soft coup" of 1997. After the coup, Erbakan's personal standing in Turkish politics decreased substantially. With the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a new generation of Islamic political leaders led by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and skilled in the rhetoric of democracy and moderation continued Turkey's transformation away from secularism. Erdogan was once Erbakan's student; he also served as a youth organizer in the National Salvation Party and later as mayor of Istanbul for the Welfare Party. Erdogan's tenure as prime minister has brought increasing repression of civil society, including Istanbul's assault on press freedom through the widespread incarceration of journalists on thin charges of conspiring to overthrow the government and the undermining of secular institutions such as the constitutional changes of 2010 that gave the government an unprecedented level of influence over the judiciary. These are ominous signs for Turkey's future as a "democratic" and

“moderate” country. Despite his personal loss of influence, Erbakan’s legacy has had a profound effect on Turkish political and religious life.

A New Conquest

THE MILLI GÖRÜS MOVEMENT SET UP ITS FIRST GERMAN BRANCH IN 1976. CALLED *Türkischen Union Deutschland e.V.*, or the Turkish Union of Europe, the original purpose of the organization was to raise money from the Turkish Diaspora, and mainly Sunni-Muslim migrant workers, to support Islamist proselytization and other political activities in Turkey. Since its establishment, the movement has repeatedly changed its name. In 1995, the movement was renamed the Islamic Community Milli Görüs and has kept this name to this day.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, the German branch of Milli Görüs maintained a strong focus on the Islamization of Turkey. The organization provided religious-minded individuals with a sense of community and identity in the Diaspora country. Members openly endorsed the Islamist agenda propagated by Necmettin Erbakan, and hoped to return home once the Islamic transformation of Turkey had occurred. However, over the course of the 1990s, and particularly after Erbakan’s ouster as prime minister and the banning of the Welfare Party in 1997, Milli Görüs activists in Germany lost faith in an impending Islamist transformation of Turkey and began to accept their stay in the Diaspora as permanent.

Today, the ICMG is the largest and most influential Islamist movement operating in Germany. According to the *Bundesverfassungsschutz* (Germany’s Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution), the ICMG in Germany numbers 30,000 members.³⁵ However, the number of people it reaches through its foundations and services is substantially higher.³⁶ The ICMG is affiliated with 323 cultural institutions and mosques, which are connected to the movement in different ways.³⁷

The ICMG’s official public self-projection, disseminated on its website and in the form of various magazines and brochures, attempts to convey the image of a moderate, exclusively religious organization that has abandoned its political, Islamist past.³⁸ For instance, one ICMG publication outlining the organization’s worldview and goals claims that “the ICMG avows itself to the free democratic basic order and considers it to be the basis for a pluralistic, peaceful, tolerant, and harmonic social life.”³⁹ Furthermore, it states that “there is no discrepancy between the way ICMG members think and the way they act.”⁴⁰ Also, the ICMG claims to support equal rights for men and women and it ostensibly rejects the formation of alternate or “parallel” communities for Muslims.

Contemporary ICMG functionaries, moreover, frequently downplay their move-

ment's affiliation with the Islamist ideals propagated by Necmettin Erbakan. Indeed, ICMG leaders sometimes seem to describe Erbakan's teachings as being outdated and out-of-touch with contemporary Muslim life in Europe. In a 2010 interview with the German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*, for example, an ICMG official Mustafa Yoldas stated, "For large parts of the Milli Görüs movement here in Europe, Erbakan is somewhat of a patriarch, the uber-father, the one you don't like to contradict, but basically we all know: He has to go, his time is up."⁴¹

The ICMG nominally supports Muslim integration into German society, but it has strongly rejected assimilation. The organization, for example, stresses the need for the retention of a religious Muslim identity. Religious services aim to "cultivate a self-contained Islamic identity," while the organization provides educational programs to assist ICMG members in advancing their professional careers.⁴² In its outreach to the wider community, the ICMG attempts to portray itself as a religious social welfare organization that attends to the needs of its ostracized clientele, all of whom are portrayed as being permanently subjected to discrimination and rejection. One source of contention between the ICMG and German elites has to do with the issue of one's "first language." Germany's political elites by and large accept the view that the acquisition of the German language as a person's first language is a crucial requirement for an immigrant's integration into society. However, the ICMG brands this German-supported policy as fostering assimilation, and thus as a policy that encourages Muslims to forsake their Islamic identity. Organization spokespeople have thus made the illogical claim that "being capable of speaking the majority's language requires the acquaintance of one's mother tongue."⁴³ This ongoing dispute is revealing insofar as it shows that ICMG is actively resistant to any meaningful integration of Muslims into German society by denouncing policy initiatives aimed at facilitating the integration process as attempts by the German government to strip immigrants of their Muslim religious identity. Consequently, the creation of alternate spaces and parallel societies can be justified as necessary for cultural survival.

The informal mouthpiece of the international Milli Görüs movement is the Turkish daily *Milli Gazette*, or the *National Newspaper*.⁴⁴ The European edition of the newspaper, which is distributed throughout the EU, serves as an important connective link between the different groups affiliated with the movement and helps to promote ideological conformity between Turkish-based Islamists and European-based ones. Representatives from the newspaper regularly attend events organized by the ICMG and members are actively encouraged to subscribe. In 2008, a high-ranking Saadet Party official from Turkey declared that anyone who does not read the newspaper could not be a true member of Milli Görüs.⁴⁵ For these reasons, the newspaper may be seen as an authoritative and representative publication of the ICMG. Consideration

of the opinions routinely expressed in the newspaper and the policies it has supported provides evidence that the claims made by ICMG to have stopped adhering to Islamism and the teachings of Erbakan are false.

In early 2008, for example, Necet Kutsal, the editor-in-chief of the *Milli Gazette* wrote that waging *jihad* is the duty of every true servant of God. The goal of *jihad* was the creation of a new world:

Milli Görüs is much more than the slogan of a political party. (...) In contrast to other organisms, God the lord created man with the gift of reason and commanded him: Be perfectly honest, as you were commanded. That means you have to fulfil your duties as a servant of God. This starts with the Jihad. The Jihad encompasses all efforts for the fulfillments of Allah's commands, and to keep away from those Allah has forbidden. The main objective of the Jihad is the establishment of a just world. When Milli Görüs speaks of the creation of a new world, she refers to this goal. The Milli Gazette is the bearer of the intellectual heritage of our ancestors, who have entrusted us these grounds. For 600 years, they were the base for a life in a just world. We were great in the past. Therefore we say: "A grand Turkey once again."⁴⁶

A 2008 editorial by Saadet Party official Mete Gundogang stated that the Milli Görüs movement was on the brink of a "new conquest," an important step to the creation of a new world order:

Even if they (the imperialists) try to hide their intentions, we must expose them and create a New World on a just foundation. For we are on the threshold of a new conquest. Conquest means a new phase. A new phase means a new world. A New World means Milli Görüs. Milli Görüs represents our noble people. Our noble people is synonymous with victory. The victory is ours and the victory is near.⁴⁷

An editorial published by the newspaper in July 2009 asserted that political systems created by men are only metaphorical. All true sovereignty lies not with the people, but with Allah, who is seen as the only political authority and administrator:

The State that people have created and administered through their common will is [only] metaphorical. The true master of the State and

its true administrator is Allah. He is the first and last lord of all that can be owned. He is the only Lord of all being. He is the king. Dominion and sovereignty are [only] with Him. For He is the ruler of all rulers.⁴⁸

The *Milli Gazette* is first and foremost a propaganda tool. The political ideas endorsed by the newspaper are essentially those of Necmettin Erbakan. It is openly anti-Western, anti-capitalist, and anti-Semitic, and supports the overthrow of the secular system in Turkey and the Islamization of European countries through Milli Görüs branches in Turkish Diaspora communities.

The Methods of the ICMG

THE PROMOTION OF “ISLAMIC CONSCIOUSNESS”—I.E., THE INDOCTRINATION OF INDIVIDUALS, from an early age on, with Islamist doctrine—is the common denominator underlying most of the ICMG’s educational, social, and charitable activities. These activities aim at replicating the success that Milli Görüs has enjoyed in Turkey by creating an educated Islamist elite that can gradually increase its political clout by infiltrating the German electorate and public bureaucracy.⁴⁹ ICMG seems especially focused on influencing the youth. Indeed, the educational programs ICMG offers are extensive: weekend seminars, summer camps, Quran classes, after-school clubs, a special club for young children, and a large amount of sports and artistic competitions.⁵⁰ In its efforts to inculcate in children a “self-contained Islamic identity,” the ICMG’s educational programs include reading and recitation of the Quran, study of the Arabic alphabet, and general religious instruction.⁵¹ The Milli Görüs ideology as formulated by Necmettin Erbakan continues to have a prominent role in these programs.⁵²

A look at the ICMG’s online bookstore quickly reveals that the organization distributes educational materials with a pronounced Islamist agenda.⁵³ The website offers dozens of books published by the Islamisches Zentrum München (Islamic Center Munich), a notorious hotspot for Muslim Brotherhood (MB) activity in Germany. Authors featured in the store include Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, the leading South Asian revivalist who championed the idea of Islam as a revolutionary ideology; Said Ramadan, son-in-law of the Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna whose doctoral thesis on Islamic law is a must-read in Islamist circles; and his son Tariq Ramadan, who is himself a ubiquitous and deeply controversial Islamist figure in Europe. Another curious book for purchase in the store is by Jamal Karsli, a former German politician who was at the center of a national debate about anti-Semitism almost a decade

ago after he accused the Israeli government of using Nazi methods against the Palestinians. In his book, he condemns what he describes as the influence of the “Zionist Lobby” in Germany.

Likewise, anti-Semitism was a crucial theme in Erbakan’s political ideology and anti-Semitic notions remain highly visible in the ICMG. According to the German scholar Johannes Kandel, anti-Semitic literature, including Henry Ford’s *The International Jew* and the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, is sold at book fairs organized by ICMG-affiliated mosques.⁵⁴ Moreover, the magazine of the ICMG’s children’s club, *Cocuk Kulubu*, reminds its young readers to give part of their pocket money to their beleaguered brothers and sisters in Palestine:

Dear children, as you probably know, our Palestinian brothers and sisters have been in a very difficult situation for days. (...) Thank God the Milli Görüs together with IHH rushed to our brothers and sisters and gave them Help. (...) Do not forget to give a portion of your pocket money to your Palestinian brothers and sisters, OK?⁵⁵

The ICMG’s education programs appear to serve two primary purposes. The program seeks, first of all, to lay the foundations for the establishment of a new Islamist elite who can carry on the work of Islamist revival and reform. For example, a columnist in the *Milli Gazette* demanded in May 2009 that the Islamist movement educate professionals that are better, more qualified, more cultivated, more honest, and more virtuous than their enemies:

We must train forces [who] are stronger, [more] skilled and cultured, moral, honest, sincere and virtuous than our Enemies are, with one sentence, we must develop forces that are better.⁵⁶

The second purpose of the ICMG’s educational programs is to convey to Europe’s Turkish Diaspora that religion and politics are inherently interconnected and that an individual’s identity is indistinguishable from his or her religion and cultural heritage.

Islamist movements that operate in Western countries commonly establish umbrella organizations and front groups that claim to represent the whole of the Muslim segment of the population. On this basis, these groups additionally seek recognition as official interlocutors between the Muslim population and the host government. The ICMG has pursued this objective in the form of the *Islamrat*, or the “Islamic Council,” which is ostensibly an association of conservative Muslim groups based in Germany.

The council's function as an ICMG front organization is so obvious that it, too, has become a focus of the German authorities. As a result, the German Ministry of the Interior has suspended the council's participation in a series of government-initiated summits aimed at facilitating the integration of Muslims into German society.⁵⁷ Also, the ICMG competes with other Muslim umbrella organizations, including the *Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion* (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religion), an organization established and controlled by the Turkish bureau of religious affairs in 1984 in order to provide religious services to Turkish migrant workers. However, the *Islamrat* is a member of the *Koordinierungsrat der Muslime* (Coordination Council of Muslims), an association of Germany's four largest Muslim organizations founded to improve coordination between the groups. Nevertheless, even the coordination council only represents about fifteen percent of German Muslims.⁵⁸ Scrutiny by security agencies and marginalization by the state have thus far constrained the ICMG's political clout.

One of the most curious aspects of the Islamist movement in Germany is the interconnection between the ICMG and the current AKP-ruled Turkish government, led by Prime Minister Erdogan. While there is no evidence of direct organizational links, Erdogan's personal history as a student of Erbakan is indicative of ideological affinities. For instance, in a speech at the end of February 2011 in Dusseldorf, Germany, Erdogan explicitly called on the Turkish population in Germany to learn Turkish as their first language and resist assimilation into German society.⁵⁹ His comments, although universally condemned by Germany's political establishment, undermined Germany's strategy for integrating immigrants into society, which prioritized learning German as their first language.⁶⁰ He also advised the Turkish population to concentrate on their education and careers in Germany and proposed a new plan to encourage immigrants to seek German citizenship, views very much in accordance with the position of the ICMG.

In effect, Erdogan, as a foreign head of state, was claiming special authority over the Turkish Muslim population residing in Germany. He was also essentially calling for the establishment of special rights for Muslims in Germany. Moreover, he was clearly trying to use his power and influence as prime minister to increase the political clout of Turks within Germany, and especially those Turks who seek to retain their "Islamic identities" in the face of assimilation into German society. Indeed, before arriving in Europe, the Turkish prime minister asserted that Germany in the future had to consult the Turkish government on all issues concerning the integration process.⁶¹ Although the Turkish prime minister's demands were either rejected or simply ignored by the German public, they showed that Erdogan was clearly attempting to obstruct the integration of Muslims of Turkish origin into German society. In many ways, this is reminiscent of Necmettin Erbakan's policies during his short tenures in the executive branch

in Turkey. Executive power is not only achieved through bottom-up Islamization, but it also abets the process in return by creating conditions for further Islamization.

The ICMG and Germany's Security Services

GERMANY'S SECURITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES, MOST NOTABLY THE *Bundesverfassungsschutz*, appear to have a very clear understanding of the Islamist threat Germany faces. In 2008, the *Bundesverfassungsschutz* published a document describing the agency's understanding of Islamism. The report accurately sought to distinguish clearly between Islam the religion, Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism and it correctly categorized Islamism as a form of political extremism while rejecting any notions of "moderate Islamism."⁶² In the view of the *Bundesverfassungsschutz*, Islamism as a political ideology interprets religious dogmas as political imperatives that are frequently irreconcilable with the values of democratic societies.⁶³ Furthermore, the report recognized the difference between revolutionary, violent jihadist groups and gradualist movements seeking to promote the Islamic transformation of society through legal means.⁶⁴ The annual *Verfassungsschutzbericht*, which is published by the *Bundesverfassungsschutz*, makes clear how the German authorities categorize the ICMG. According to the 2010 edition of the report, the ICMG pursues a long-term, gradualist strategy aimed at the eventual introduction of Sharia law in Germany.⁶⁵ ICMG activities contribute to the creation and expansion of Islamist milieus, initiate radicalization, and contribute to the establishment of "parallel societies" (*Parallelgesellschaften*).⁶⁶

The report emphasizes, contrary to ICMG's claims, that the organization maintains strong connections to the Saadet Party in Turkey. For the ICMG, advocating democracy and religious freedom is synonymous with establishing special rights for Muslims and the recognition of Sharia law in the German judiciary.⁶⁷ The Islamist label can have severe consequences for ICMG members. For instance, applications for German citizenship are frequently denied. Apart from that, German law enforcement agencies have repeatedly searched ICMG offices on suspicions of tax fraud, embezzlement, and the creation of criminal organizations.

German authorities are also deeply concerned about the ICMG's links to terrorism. While the ICMG neither engages in nor publicly advocates or endorses acts of terrorism, the movement's targeted indoctrination of young people has helped to create ideological environments prone to further radicalization that might express itself as

political violence. Militant rhetoric is common in Milli Görüs publications. For instance, a 2009 column in the *Milli Gazette* asserts that Milli Görüs members are the defenders of Islam, lying in the trenches and ready to march on.⁶⁸ The *Verfassungsschutz* reports regularly that the majority of Islamists in Germany with a propensity toward violence are ICMG members. An interesting example is Cuneyt Ciftci, a 28-year-old Turkish national who lived in Southern Germany. In March 2008, Ciftci killed four people in a suicide bombing in Eastern Afghanistan. He regularly attended an ICMG-affiliated mosque and also had connections to the transnational Islamic movement Tablighi Jamaat.⁶⁹

Another example is the banned German Islamist group known as “Kalifatstaat” or Caliphate, a Milli Görüs offshoot that has explicitly endorsed violent means. Its founder, Cemalettin Kaplan (known as the “Khomeini of Cologne”), was a spiritual disciple of Erbakan, who personally organized Kaplan’s relocation from Turkey to Germany and facilitated his assignment as an Imam in a Milli Görüs mosque. Kaplan split with Milli Görüs in 1983 in protest against the movement’s participation in parliamentary elections. After his death in 1995, his son Metin Kaplan became leader of the Kalifatstaat movement. In 1997, a German court convicted Metin to a four-year prison sentence for solicitation of murder after one of his rivals was shot dead. In 2004, Germany extradited Metin to Turkey, where he is serving a life sentence for treason. Among other plots, his group planned to crash a Cessna laden with explosives into the Atatürk mausoleum.⁷⁰

The ICMG also cooperated closely with the German branch of the International Humanitarian Relief Organization (IHH). The organization’s board of trustees is entirely comprised of ICMG functionaries.⁷¹ According to the *Verfassungsschutz*, the foundation, based in Frankfurt, Germany, channeled about 6.6 million Euros to organizations affiliated with Hamas under the pretext of collecting donations for humanitarian relief.⁷² Other recipients of IHH funds were radical organizations in Pakistan, Yemen, and Sudan, some of which are said to have contacts with al-Qaeda.⁷³ The foundation’s chairman, Mustafa Yoldas, is an active member of ICMG. In 2009, the ICMG and IHH jointly organized a charity event for the victims of an Israeli offensive in the Gaza strip. In 2010, the German Ministry of the Interior banned the IHH on grounds of embezzlement and support of a terrorist organization.⁷⁴ However, there is credible information that the financial support for Hamas has continued. According to an investigation conducted by the German newspaper *Der Westen*, the collection and transfer of funds has been taken over by a different organization, called *Weltweiter Einsatz für Arme* (WEFA; Global efforts for the Poor).⁷⁵ WEFA has close contacts to the ICMG.⁷⁶

Even though it rejects terrorism, the ICMG has resisted and, at times, even obstructed a wider socio-political debate about the ideological sources of contemporary Islamist

terrorism. Instead, the ICMG has embraced the narrative that Western societies are inherently hostile to Islam, and that Muslims are victims of unfair counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization policies. The ICMG has adapted the victimization narrative in a way that reinforces its own socio-cultural agenda, and it reflexively blames any suspicion regarding the organization's goals and ideology on the everyday racism and discrimination Muslims are allegedly subject to in German society.

The ICMG general-secretary Oguz Ucuncu said in March 2012, "Accordingly, the actions of the security agencies and the policies of the federal and state governments are dominated by the idea that these people (Muslims) do not belong to Germany."⁷⁷ The ICMG also rejects usage of the phrases "Islamism" and "Islamic Terror," pointing to the alleged stereotyping of all Muslims caused by these terms. Ucuncu stated in November 2011, "The term 'Islamist Terror' is offensive, subjects all Muslims to suspicion and promotes Islamophobia and violence against Muslims."⁷⁸ The organization even has an on-line forum on its website where victims can report acts of discrimination to the ICMG's legal department. When a Muslim is the victim of a hate crime in Germany, the ICMG portrays the crime as symbolic of the pervasive, latent racism and Islamophobia of German society as a whole. For instance, in June 2009 an ethnic German immigrant from Russia stabbed and killed an Egyptian Muslim woman during an appeal hearing in a German court. Ucuncu proclaimed at the one-year anniversary of the killing, "The necessary socio-political debate in the context of everyday racism against Muslims has not occurred." "Prejudices and stereotypes are now being invoked and cultivated under the guise of criticism of Islam."⁷⁹

When two Lebanese would-be terrorists planted two hidden but dysfunctional bombs in suitcases on two regional trains in Germany in July 2006, the ICMG released a joint communique with dozens of other Islamic organizations declaring that such acts could not possibly be committed in the name of Islam: "We, the signing Muslim and immigrant organizations, condemn with horror and revulsion the attempted bombings in recent days and protest against justifying these actions with Islam. The alleged perpetrators will find no justification in Islam for such acts. Terrorism is a threat and a crime against all humanity."⁸⁰ Furthermore, "We, as Muslims in Germany, are doubly affected by recent events. On the one hand, we are as part of society a potential target of attacks as well as all other citizens, on the other hand, we have to suffer to be increasingly regarded as 'accomplices' by many."⁸¹

The ICMG's stance on the "root causes" of Islamic terrorism, and the radicalization of Muslims in general, reveals another angle in the victimization narrative. Islamist groups and their apologists commonly claim that radicalization is not a result of, or inspired by, Islamist teachings and radical interpretations of the Quran, but rather a reaction to not only the widespread racism and discrimination Muslims are

allegedly subjected to, but also the preventive efforts that are taken by security agencies to monitor and prevent radicalization. Commenting on the increasing prominence of a radical Salafist preacher in Germany, the ICMG's deputy chairman, Mustafa Yeneroglu, wrote,

The lack of acceptance of a pluralistic society, no serious efforts to fight an increasingly rampant Islamophobia, the criminalization of Muslim life as "Islamist," the framing of outreach Muslim youth work as an integration problem, the dominance of the security discourse over any debate about the integration of Muslims, and not least the degradation of Muslim communities to auxiliary police officers, are factors that undermine the efforts of moderate Muslim representatives and give such persons [The Salafists] the arguments they need.⁸²

Yeneroglu continued,

In short, the current policy of prevention rather exacerbates the problems that it claims to fight. It does not fight religious extremism, but the religion itself.⁸³

The victimization narrative serves a concrete purpose for the ICMG. By portraying its members as the perpetual victims of widespread racism, discrimination and violence in a society inherently hostile to Muslims, separation from this society by creating separate "parallel societies" and demanding special rights can be portrayed as a necessity of survival. The ICMG also exploits the victimization narrative to categorically discount any allegations of contributing to radicalization. As such, responsibility for parallel societies and for radicalization lies not with the ICMG organization and its activities, but with the German government's suspicion and its policies. According to the ICMG's narrative, the government's efforts to curb radicalization and promote assimilation are, at root, manifestations of the government's larger efforts to target Muslims and Islam as a religion. Unfortunately, there are scores of non-Muslim journalists and academics in Germany who have accepted this narrative and continuously make excuses and provide justifications for radical Islamist groups.⁸⁴

However, German authorities contest both the victimization and apologist narrative, and they also reject the claim that the group has moderated. In a 2011 interview, Heinz Fromm, head of the *Bundesverfassungsschutz*, stated that he saw no signs of moderation within Milli Görüs and that the organization remained loyal to Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist ideology:

The direction of the organization is determined by those loyal to former Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and his Islamist ideology. There are still visible signs of anti-Jewish sentiments and, very practical support of Islamist groups abroad, especially the terrorist group Hamas in its conflict with Israel.”⁸⁵

Committed to Necmettin Erbakan’s Islamist ideology, the ICMG in Germany also strives to emulate many of the methods employed by its parent body, the Milli Görüs of Turkey. The group’s gradualist efforts to spread its Islamist ideology in Turkish communities could someday pose a substantial challenge to Germany’s democratic order. Already, the Islamist project in Germany poses clear challenges to the fabric and functionality of German society and politics. Extremism begets extremism: In part as a reaction to Islamist intrusion, nationalist and xenophobic populist movements are disturbingly on the rise in nearly every European country. Such movements have already appeared at a local level in Germany, and their emergence at the national level may be only a matter of time. Countering and marginalizing the Islamist agenda, and particularly the activities of the ICMG, is therefore of uppermost importance for Germany’s long-term democratic stability. Like many European countries, Germany will eventually have to find a way to cope with legal Islamist groups, such as the ICMG, and to marginalize and discredit their ideology.

The apparent support for the ICMG’s agenda in Germany by elements of the Turkish government, and the blatant disregard and contempt that top Turkish leaders have displayed for Germany’s efforts to assimilate its Turkish populations, contribute an even greater urgency to the problem. Countering the domestic Islamist threat will require Germany to reassess its perceptions of the political changes that are underway in Turkey, and eventually to make fundamental changes in the German-Turkish relationship.

NOTES

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- bodied in the Constitution shall be exercised with the aim of violating the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation, of endangering the existence of the Turkish State and Republic, of destroying fundamental rights and freedoms, of placing the government of the state under the control of an individual or a group of people.” *The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey* (Ankara, 1995).
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 13. Raphael Israeli, *Muslim anti-Semitism in Christian Europe* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), p. 108; See also The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) for a collection of anti-Semitic statements made by Erdogan, “Antisemitism and the Turkish Islamist ‘Milli Görüş’ Movement: Zionists/Jews ‘Bacteria,’ ‘Disease,’” August 29, 2007, Special Dispatch No. 1699, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/2356.htm>.
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 20. Banu Eligur, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 69.
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53. The bookstore can be reached at <http://www.kitapkulubu.de>.
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Is the End Nigh for the Islamic Republic?

By Bernd Kaussler

THE BELIEF IN THE MAHDI IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE SHIA FAITH that also influences contemporary political life in the Islamic Republic of Iran in important ways. In fact, Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary doctrine on Islamic Government was grounded on his novel interpretation of Shiite millenarian teachings about the Mahdi or Hidden Imam. Shiism has traditionally held that the Mahdi has entered into occultation, or hiding, but that one day, just before the end of time, this Imam will return to lead the Shia and establish on earth a just and perfect Islamic State. Shia eschatology remains somewhat unclear about what exactly will happen to mankind once the Hidden Imam returns and the world comes to an end. However, classical sources do make clear that the returned Imam will be especially ruthless toward existing religious establishments (which the messianic sources frequently depict as corrupt or deviant) and that the era of the Imam's rule will "cause a sharp and total break with existing Islamic norms."¹

Traditionally, Shiite messianism attached very little importance to politics or to other temporal affairs, and this helps to explain Shiism's historically apolitical or quietist character. In practice, Shiism conventionally called for the withdrawal of the clergy from public affairs, which were seen as intrinsically corrupting and sinful. This quietism derived in large part from messianic doctrine, which taught that the Mahdi, and the Mahdi alone, would reveal himself to create the perfect and just Islamic State. From this perspective, the pious were obligated to withdraw from worldly affairs and to spiritually prepare themselves and "wait" for the Imam's return. Direct involvement in politics by the clergy was seen as an illegitimate attempt to usurp the

Messiah's rightful role. Because of this, among other, orthodox beliefs, Shiite scholars historically played an active role in controlling and suppressing millenarian activity and teachings that deviated from political quietism. Thus, as the scholar Ze'ev Maghen has put it,

Mahdism has thus been for centuries the inveterate enemy of Shiism, and the Twelvers have proven exceptionally talented at suppressing this enemy. From the burning of medieval *ghulat* to the shooting of 19th century Babis, no one puts down messianic movements like orthodox Shiites. Any time in history that a door has been opened that purportedly led to the Hidden Imam—or through which the Hidden Imam was slated to re-enter our world—the Shiite *ulama* have done everything in their power to slam it shut. And practice makes perfect: They are better today at subduing such “*motamahdiyan*” than ever before in their history, having honed their methodology down to a science.²

Despite this history, orthodox Shiism has not always been successful at controlling political messianism. While clerical quietism contributed to an historical separation in Iranian society between religious and political authority, this separation also provided religious institutions and actors with an unusually large degree of autonomy and independence from direct political control. As such, the Shiite clergy did from time to time give rise to millenarian movements which came to challenge the political status quo. During the 1905-1907 Constitutional Revolution, for example, the Shiite clergy effectively provided Iran's revolutionary elites with the means to communicate with and mobilize the masses. Because of the lack of popular political awareness, the revolutionary discourse on rights and the rule of law championed by political elites would have found little traction among ordinary people were it not for the support of the clergy and their political use of Shiite symbolism and mythology.³

Likewise, Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary movement exploited the clergy's autonomy and legitimacy to lead a messianic crusade against the temporal authority of the Shah.⁴ Khomeini's revolutionary doctrine was rooted in his radical revision of Shiite doctrines on messianism. In his theory of *velayat-e faqih*, or the rule of the Islamic jurist, Khomeini claimed that during the period of the Mahdi's occultation the highest and most learned jurist in a Muslim country could legitimately administer government and implement the provisions of the Sharia.⁵ In some respects, Khomeini's doctrine resembled certain streams of Christian millenarianism whose aim is to create a messianic kingdom in anticipation of the Messiah's Second Coming. Khomeini's doctrine demanded the immediate establishment of an Islamic society and government

through revolution prior to the actual end of days.⁶ In effect, the revolutionary leader claimed a God-given mandate for Islamic scholars to exercise political rule and to prepare the world for the return of the Hidden Imam.

The power and appeal of Khomeini's teachings derived in large part from his political manipulation of popular Shiite messianic beliefs and rhetoric. By rejecting traditional jurisprudence and quietism, Khomeini was effectively able to use the potent concepts of Shia eschatology and theodicy to mobilize the Iranian masses and achieve revolutionary political ends. For example, the manipulation of Shiite notions of injustice and suffering and of the unceasing struggle of believers against worldly oppression and tyranny proved to be an effective tool of revolutionary mobilization—and especially in what was, at the time, one of the most unequal and impoverished societies in the world.⁷ Moreover, while Khomeini never claimed that he himself was the Mahdi, he did accept the title of Imam. By the standards of traditional Shiism, this was essentially an act of blasphemy which deviated sharply from accepted practice and jurisprudence. By claiming the title of Imam, Khomeini effectively claimed for himself an authority on par with the Mahdi—and thus a position above all other religious and political authorities. By successfully arrogating this authority, Khomeini was ideally situated to propagate his revolutionary propaganda and harness messianic fervor to overthrow the Shah and create the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁸

In recent years, the Islamic Republic has experienced a country-wide resurgence in messianic activity and rhetoric that, in terms of its sheer volume and intensity, has not been seen since the revolutionary era over thirty years ago. This resurgence in messianism has had profound implications for Iranian political life, which have included exacerbating existing divisions between contending factions in the regime and across Iranian society as a whole. At its core, this messianism presents a direct challenge to clerical authority and to the Khomeinist principle that jurists should rule. In fact, today, millenarian politics and rhetoric constitutes a direct threat to the future of the Islamic Republic itself.

The Return of Political Mahdism

IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC'S FORMATIVE YEARS, MESSIANISM WENT HAND-IN-HAND with revolutionary zeal, and both shaped the radical agendas of Iran's domestic and foreign policies. Yet, with the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, a relatively more pragmatic group of Shiite clerics and bureaucrats rose to political power. Under the helm of President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, Iran's international conduct became comparatively

less revolutionary. Iranian diplomats began to call for détente with the West, while the country's technocrats, who catered to the interests of the mercantile bourgeoisie, sought the reintegration of Iran into the international economy. In the years from 1997 to 2005, Iran's new pragmatic orientation appeared to further deepen when President Mohammad Khatami called for an end of dogma in the Islamic Republic and undertook to promote civil society, human rights and the rule of law. Khatami saw Islam as the "handmaiden of democracy," and he called for a new "Dialogue of Civilizations," which attempted to build bridges between the Islamic Republic and the West.⁹ ("The West," for its part, remained deeply divided over how to respond to the Islamic Republic's new orientation, in large part because of Iran's continued support for movements that employed terrorism.)

The Khatami era reformists met with stiff resistance and were eventually rebuked by revolutionary hardliners and conservatives within the clerical establishment. Faced with a severe political backlash, the reform movement ultimately failed to implement any lasting changes. The hardliners and conservatives, meanwhile, were reinvigorated; claiming to be the true heirs of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the hardline candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected president in 2005. As the former mayor of Tehran, Ahmadinejad was the first non-cleric to be elected president in the Islamic Republic. It is during Ahmadinejad's tenure as president that the country has experienced a dramatic resurgence of revolutionary messianic ideology.

In 2005, when Ahmadinejad was still the Mayor of Tehran, he purportedly ordered the construction of a direct train link to the holy city of Qom in order to make the mosque in Jamkaran more accessible to pilgrims. The City of Tehran also printed a pamphlet, which clearly showed the route that will be taken by the Mahdi.¹⁰ Later, in 2005, Ahmadinejad designated \$17 million for the renovation of the mosque in Jamkaran which houses the well from which, according to Shiite belief, the Mahdi will one day ascend.¹¹ In 2007, state television aired a series entitled "The World Toward Illumination." Transcripts of the show, which were posted on the state-run Islamic Republic Broadcasting website, describe the coming "messianic age to be inaugurated by the Mahdi":

[The Madhi] is to begin his uprising in Mecca, and then march on Iraq, where he will establish his "seat of world government" in the city of Kufa and subjugate the current world powers. This will be an age of unparalleled happiness; there will be completely new technologies at mankind's disposal, and "corruption, war, and rebellion will no longer exist." Neither will "liberal democratic civilization."

...How beautiful and auspicious will be the day when the world is cleansed of deceit and mischief and the government of justice is established throughout the world

...when he reappears, peace, justice and security will overcome oppression and deceit and one global government, the most perfect ever, will be established. He will make the earth prosper in a way in which no ruins will remain.¹²

Ahmadinejad's personal belief in the Mahdi's imminence has been manifested in numerous presidential speeches and interviews as well as in the policies that he has championed. Throughout his presidency, he has sought especially to merge messianic rhetoric with populist nationalism. He has claimed, for example, that the Mahdi is not only alive and directly informing government policy, but that the Iranian nation plays a special and unique role in the world at this time, when the Madhi is beginning to reveal his rule:¹³

Thanks to our people's decision to follow the path of the imamate today our nation has become a model nation; it has turned into an ideal nation for the *ummah* and an exemplary nation for other people. And it deserves such a status. A nation which follows the Prophet and his descendants, a nation which follows the remnant of God on earth [the Hidden Imam], such a nation deserves to become a model and an exemplary nation. This is because this nation's Imam is himself an exemplary imam and a witness.¹⁴

The world has become most familiar with Iran's millenarian nationalism through the president's speeches and Iran's assertive foreign policies. In Ahmadinejad's infamous address to the UN General Assembly in 2007, for example, the president combined references to the Mahdi with a blistering Third-Worldist ideological attack on "Western imperialism" and "Zionism."¹⁵ The president and his followers have also sought to portray Iran as a chosen nation and veritable "superpower," uniquely blessed "by the special favors of the Lord of Age" [Hidden Imam] to lead a global mission against political injustice.¹⁶ Such millenarian nationalism has been clearly on display in Iran's defiance of western demands to make concessions on uranium enrichment, as well as in the recent efforts by Iranian leaders to claim that the 2011 uprisings of the "Arab Spring" were fundamentally inspired by Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The contemporary resurgence of messianism has probably had its greatest impact

on Iran's domestic political life. Early on in Ahmadinejad's administration, regime hardliners sought to use messianic nationalist rhetoric to rollback the reformers and to pursue what they portrayed as a return to the original principles of the Islamic Revolution. This, in turn, became a pretext for the further deterioration of human rights standards in Iran as well as a "Second Cultural Revolution," which has attempted to purge public life and academia of all non-Islamic influences. In 2009, for example, Supreme Leader Khamenei made it clear that professors who lack a "practical commitment to the velayat-e faqih" would be dismissed. Subsequently, Basij militias increased their presence on university campuses, and students and faculty members across the country were arrested, forced to step down, and had their salaries reduced or entire departments terminated.¹⁷ In a manner reminiscent of Khomeini's campaign against "West-toxification," Khamenei called on academics to fulfill their duty to defend the Islamic Republic against the West's cultural onslaught and demanded in September 2009 an end to study of all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The Supreme Leader's main concern was the fact that almost two-thirds of enrolled students were seeking degrees in the humanities and liberal arts (*oloom ensani*). In his view, academics were no longer "believing in the Islamic world view."¹⁸ After a March 2011 speech by Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani, which called for changing the social sciences curricula "so that students learn less about kings and more about the Prophet and his successors," President Ahmadinejad urged the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution to likewise pass extensive reforms.¹⁹ Study of several social science disciplines was soon halted in universities. The head of Iran's judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, defended the government's decision, claiming that it strove not to eliminate the social sciences but rather to bring their foundations in line with faith.²⁰

The further deterioration of human rights in Iran has, in recent times, largely been connected to the regime-driven backlash against the grassroots Green movement that emerged during the contested 2009 presidential elections. However, the regime's repression is not simply a function of its autocracy, but also motivated by religious and millenarian ideas. The plight of the Baha'is is an illustrative case in point. Millenarian ideology has shaped anti-Baha'i propaganda and persecution since the Islamic Republic's founding. While the Bab (1819-1850) and Bahauallah (1817-1892) (the prophet-founders of the Babi and Baha'i Faith, respectively) both emerged out of Shiite messianic traditions, both claimed to represent new Manifestations of God and thus to have fulfilled the religious messianic expectations of the past.²¹ This belief was, of course, anathema to Twelver Shiite messianic doctrine on the Hidden Imam, and the clerical regime which came to power in 1979 has thus systematically worked to suppress this messianic "heretical sect." In 2006, for example, a fatwa by clerics in Qom called the killing of Baha'is a "meritorious act," and argued that the very

existence and teachings of the Baha'is are preventing the return of the Hidden Imam.²²

With approximately 350,000, the Baha'is are Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority. They have been subject to state-sponsored political violence and defamation since the Islamic Republic's founding. For example, the 1991 "Golpayegani Memorandum," which was sent by the Revolutionary Cultural Council to intelligence and security agencies and co-signed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, represented a state-led plan for a concerted effort to repress of the Baha'i community. Among other things, it mandated routine surveillance of the Baha'is and imposed severe restrictions on the practice and public expression of the Baha'i faith.²³

Discrimination of Baha'is has increased dramatically during Ahmadinejad's tenure. A 2005 directive from the chairman of the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces instructed security personnel to ramp up surveillance of all Baha'is. In 2006, the Ministry of Science ordered all universities to prevent Baha'is from enrolling at higher education institutions and further demanded that all Bahai's be expelled.²⁴ Under Ahmadinejad, concerted efforts to intimidate, imprison and physically attack have been carried out by security forces, paramilitary groups and ordinary citizens with impunity. Baha'i cemeteries and holy places have been desecrated and believers have been denied welfare benefits and the right to work or had their businesses destroyed or confiscated. A March 2012 report by the UN Special Rapporteur for Iran described the "systematic persecution" of Baha'is and claimed that over 474 Baha'is have been arrested since 2004. The rapporteur also noted that since 2010 at least 440 instances of slanderous speech against Baha'is were published or broadcasted in the Iranian media. For example, a *Rasa News Agency* article from March 8, 2011 accused the Baha'i community of "attempting to subvert Islam."²⁵

Over eighty Baha'is are now in Iranian prisons because of their beliefs, including the entire leadership, all of whom were sentenced to twenty years in prison in 2009 on charges including "insulting religious sanctities" and "corruption on earth."²⁶ In May 2011, authorities raided thirty-nine homes associated with the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (founded in 1987 to provide university education to members of the faith) and, according to Amnesty International, sentenced at least seven Baha'is to lengthy jail sentences after convicting them of "membership in the deviant Bahaist sect, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country."²⁷

Because of Ahmadinejad's messianic rhetoric and the regime's stepped-up efforts to harass Baha'is, there has been speculation in Iranian and Western media about the re-emergence of the secretive messianic anti-Baha'i society known as the "Hojjatieh." Founded by Shaykh Mahmoud Tavallai in 1952 to rid Iran of the Baha'i faith, the Hojjatieh had initially supported the Islamic Revolution in 1979, but the group was eventually forced to dissolve after Khomeini attacked its messianic beliefs, which

were not in accord with the revolutionary millenarianism of the Khomeini era. The Hojjatieh's ideology requires that believers wait in anticipation of the return of the Imam. Until that time, the group favors collective leadership of the clergy and opposes the involvement of religion in politics. However, it has also been alleged that the group believes that the Imam's return can be hastened by the creation of political chaos and thus, that the group is presently conspiring to create disorder on earth.²⁸ It may seem unlikely that Ahmadinejad is a member of such a messianic society, but the Iranian president's claims that true Islamic government can only come with the return of the Hidden Imam, as well as his government's concerted efforts to effectively eradicate the Baha'is, are clearly in keeping with fundamental Hojjatieh beliefs.

For these, among other reasons, Ahmadinejad's messianic fervor and his nationalist zeal has increasingly drawn criticism from the clerical establishment. Moreover, Ahmadinejad's penchant for eschatological rhetoric and his professed closeness to the Mahdi himself are coupled with the ascendancy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the Basij and hardliner clerics who share a totalitarian interpretation of the velayat-e faqih. The resurgence of political messianism has introduced new dynamics and created new fault-lines in Iranian politics which present an array of new challenges to the clerical regime itself. Ahmadinejad was Supreme Leader Khamenei's preferred candidate for president in 2005, and Khamenei and the conservative clerics ultimately backed Ahmadinejad again in 2009 in an effort to purge reformists from the political scene. Today, however, Ahmadinejad's ideology, in particular his eschatological hermeneutics, is seen by the conservative religious establishment as an intolerable challenge to their continued rule.

Domestically, reference to the Hidden Imam served as populist tool to rally the conservative grass roots against the clerical status quo. So, when Ahmadinejad talks about society's deprivation of the 12th Imam, it effectively is a vote of no confidence in the establishment:

We read that the Hidden Imam represents the vitality of the age. Today, human society feels his absence more than ever. Today, human society is even more enthusiastic than before, it seeks his school of thought and his ideology and leadership. Today, one can see quite clearly his coming. The era is the era of resurrection [of the Hidden Imam] and we all have to want him with every fibre of our being. We have to pray for his coming and for the bringing about of the conditions for the establishment of his world rule.²⁹

Thus, the focal point is less Ahmadinejad and his millenarian penchant but rather an entire generation of conservative war veterans, who the president aims to represent, who feel alienated with the existing power structures:

This generation increasingly personifies everything that Iran's clerical establishment is not; they are seen as young and confident; as the real reason for Iran's revolutionary survival and at the heart of a dissipating mistrust of the West in the wake of the Iran-Iraq war. Above all, they represent a belief system predicated on Iranian self-reliance and self-sufficiency. [...] To that end, they believe that the Islamic Republic has become corrupt and deviated from the true path of the 1979 Revolution.³⁰

After the fallout between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei in 2010 (which is directly linked to Ahmadinejad's challenge to the religious and political primacy of the Supreme Leader), the embattled President continued to lash out against his opponents, centering his counter-offensive on disclosing corruption amongst the elite and openly questioning the religious legitimacy of the clergy. Just before the March 2012 parliamentary elections, supporters of the president shouted at a rally: "Ahmadinejad the idol breaker, shatter the great idol!" A website close to the Majlis Speaker, Ali Larijani, claimed that Ahmadinejad replied to the crowd, "Velaayat [rule of the jurist consult] belongs to humanity, and does not belong to a particular person [i.e. Ali Khamenei]."³¹

The Coming is Near

THE ARAB UPRISINGS OF 2011 TOOK THE IRANIAN REGIME, MUCH AS THEY DID THE rest of the world, by surprise. As Iran's leaders adjusted their strategy and diplomacy to the new realities of the Middle East, they made the audacious claim that the revolts against autocratic and secular governments in Tunisia and Egypt were inspired by Iran's own 1979 Islamic Revolution. To that end, in September 2011, the Iranian government convened a conference called "Islamic Awakening" which included scholars, clerics and religious activists from across the Muslim world. Khamenei's keynote address described the popular movements across the region as signs of an "Islamic awakening" because "such revolutions, principles, values and objectives exist not in prewritten manifestos of parties and groups, but in the hearts and minds of the masses."³² Clearly, this was an effort by the Iranian regime to bandwagon with the popular Arab uprisings. The

regime also sought to downplay any similarities between the youth-led Arab revolts and Iran's own grassroots Green movement. But as the Iranian regime undertook to minimize the potential domestic impact of the Arab unrest, the clerical establishment soon faced another threat in the form of a homegrown millenarian movement.

Since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, there has been a new tide of millenarian activity and propaganda throughout Iran. A series of speeches by Iranian leaders as well as television programs and Iranian press accounts have all interpreted the turbulence in the Arab world as a sign of the Hidden Imam's imminent return. One especially noteworthy film in this vein was a "documentary" entitled "The Coming is Near." Directed by Ali Aghar Seihani, the film was distributed nationwide by a pro-regime institute based in Qom called the Mobasheran-e Mahdi, or "The Mahdi's Keeper." Ahmadinejad's administration seems to have been actively involved in making and distributing the propaganda film.

"The Coming is Near" depicted Iran as the epicenter of a globalizing messianic movement that was sweeping across the Middle East and preparing the way for the return of the Mahdi. The film issued stern warnings to world powers that the end of times was near. In addition to the uprisings in the Arab world, the film listed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 as signs that the Mahdi's coming was fast approaching. Iraq was said to be the central conflict in the present era hastening the messiah's imminent return, and it was said the country would ultimately serve as the Mahdi's global capital.³³ Israel was also singled out, with the film alleging that the country now finds itself in the final stages of its existence.

The film expressly linked Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah to prophecies in the Hadith, with all of these leaders portrayed as key figures in the movement to hasten the return of the Hidden Imam. Khamenei was compared to the scriptural figure Seyyed Khorasani, who, when backed by the might of Iran's military and the alleged resolve of millions of willing martyrs, has been prophesied to be "victorious in the intense wars that will take place before the [Mahdi's] Coming." Referencing millenarian visions contained in the Hadith, the documentary claimed that,

A courageous man from Bani Hashem will rise from the province of Khorasan with black flags and has a sign in his right hand. Seyyed Khorasani is from the province of Khorasan. Seyyed Khorasani has a sign or a disorder in his right hand. Seyyed Khorasani will prepare for the reappearance. Seyyed Khorasani will hand over the flag of Islam to the last messiah. Seyyed Khorasani has a strong and mobilized army. Seyyed Khorasani is a leader of the people who rise up from the East.³⁴

The film also appeals to Iranian nationalist sentiments and speaks to the important role that the Iranian people will and must play in hastening the Mahdi's return. As it claims, "The reappearance has other conditions that require strong beliefs and pious leaders with a strong will [...] In the Hadith, they have been named as the preparers of The Coming, and will rise from Lebanon, Yemen and Iran."³⁵ The film contains footage of Iranian crowds chanting a saying from the Prophet: "A nation from the East will rise and prepare the way for the coming of the Mahdi." It also contains footage of Iranian soldiers during the Iran-Iraq War; their famous front-line recitations of *noha* (chants and prose depicting the martyrdom of Imam Hussein) by Haj Sadeq Ahangaran reinforce the theme that Iranians are effectively the chosen soldiers of the Mahdi.

President Ahmadinejad was likened in the film to Soheib ibn Soheib, the Hidden Imam's right-hand man who is said to conquer Jerusalem in preparation for the Mahdi's return. With reference to the Hadith, the film describes Soheib as the figure who will be appointed "commander of Iranian forces on the threshold of the coming."³⁶

Unsurprisingly, such millenarian propaganda quickly struck a political nerve—and especially after the Iranian president himself began issuing pronouncements on the Hidden Imam's coming return. In a televised speech on March 11, 2011, Ahmadinejad reinforced the film's central message and claimed that the revolts in the Middle East were all signs of a "real movement" that was underway and which is readying the world for the Mahdi's imminent return.³⁷ The president further argued that believers should not wait piously for the Imam's return, as traditional Shiite practice and doctrine teaches. Instead, Ahmadinejad claimed that mankind must strive to realize the Hidden Imam's rule on earth, and he called on believers to go out and actively seek the Mahdi. As the president said,

There is a very important point about the connection between human beings and the messenger Imam, the Lord of the Age. Some think that waiting [for Imam Mahdi] means that we should wait until he comes. This perhaps is the most wrong interpretation of waiting. Waiting is a highly revolutionary action; waiting means that we should go and reach. The Imam is present [in this world]. The imam is the God's caliph. Even today he rules the world by God's allowance. Right today he is the mediator of all God's blessings. Right today any movement in the world is done by the Imam's permission. But me and you, and human society have been deprived from the Imam's ruling...³⁸

Ahmadinejad's calls to realize the Hidden Imam's rule on earth along with the messianic resurgence across Iranian society more generally had the combined effect of

exacerbating existing ideological and political divisions among the Iranian political elite. In recent years, the Supreme Leader and the hierocracy as a whole have grown increasingly at odds with Ahmadinejad's policies and his overall stewardship of Iran's economy and foreign policy. But the president's use of messianic rhetoric was seen as an especially egregious affront to the clerical establishment's authority. Indeed, the president's calls on believers to actively strive to bring about the rule of the Hidden Imam was regarded as an implicit challenge to the authority and continued rule of the jurists—and indeed, to the very foundation of the Islamic Republic itself.

The president's challenge to the hierocracy subsequently led to a swift and severe crackdown on millenarian propaganda and activity. During a Friday prayer in the city of Mashhad, Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda, a representative of the Supreme Leader, forcefully repudiated all claims of having contact with the Hidden Imam stating that, "any claims of contact with the Lord of the Time is a deviation, betrayal and blasphemous."³⁹ An editorial by Hossein Shariatmadari, a close confidant of Khamenei, called the "Coming is Near" documentary film "election propaganda for a deviated group"—a phrase usually reserved for members of the anti-regime Green Movement.⁴⁰

Even Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi—who is considered to be Ahmadinejad's spiritual mentor, and a well-known proponent of the belief that Mahdi's return is imminent—denounced the president's messianic propaganda as deviant, "unacceptable and dangerous." In the hardliner publication *Kayhan* (a mouthpiece of the Supreme Leader's Office) as well as in *Javan* (a paper owned by the IRGC), Ayatollah Yazdi described the very claim made by the president that the "Hidden Imam was running society" as a usurpation of the authority and power of the clerical establishment who rule the Islamic Republic.⁴¹ More recently, in July 2011 Ayatollah Yazdi told an audience in Mashhad that, "Many deviations from the true path of Islam have begun by the false claim of being connected to Imam Zaman [...] We should not accept anyone's words at face value, even though he has performed some services."⁴² The clear suggestion in this was that the Iranian President had effectively become part of the so-called "deviant current"—a term normally reserved for enemies of the Islamic Republic.

The Supreme Leader himself intervened in the feud, and publicly condemned what he deemed the "ignorant, unsubstantiated and delusionary" work on the concept of *mahdaviyat*—or belief in the reappearance of the Hidden Imam—which was spreading in the Islamic Republic. Khamenei argued that such "inexpert, unsubstantiated works, which are not based on authentic sources and are just based on dreams and illusions, will distance people from the real truth of waiting and paves the ground for lying and deceiving claimants."⁴³ He claimed that the clerical establishment's approach to the Mahdi was the sole acceptable interpretation of Shiite eschatology. He also took on the messianic movement's notion that believers can actively hasten the Imam Mahdi's

return, and he argued that the traditional practice of “waiting” piously for the Imam was in itself a deeply spiritual experience. As the Supreme Leader stated,

The issue of “waiting,” which is an inseparable part of *mahdaviyat*, is a key term in understanding religion and the fundamental, general and social movement of the Islamic *ummah* towards its lofty Islamic ideas. Waiting means getting close. It means expecting the advent of a definite event. This is the meaning of waiting. Waiting means: This particular event will certainly and positively happen in the future, particularly waiting for someone alive. It is not the case of waiting for someone to be born or someone to come into existence, no. It is about someone who already exists and is present among the people. Stories have it that people can see him [Imam Mahdi], just as he can see people, but they don’t recognize him. In some stories he has been likened to his eminence Joseph, who was visible to Muslim brothers and walked and sat among them but was unrecognizable to them. [...] The period of waiting is expected to be an atmosphere of justice, purity, righteousness, monotheism and piety.⁴⁴

The clerical establishment made it clear that religious and political claims about the Mahdi’s imminent return constitute a red line which must not be crossed. Furthermore, to the hierarchy and to many mainstream conservatives, the millenarian propaganda offensive unleashed by the president and his supporters amounted to an attempted usurpation of the Islamic Republic. As Hojjatolislam Mohsen Gharavian, a cleric at Qom’s Theological Seminary, has put it, by “claiming that people can communicate with the Imam of the Age, the deviant current is trying to cut off the ties between the people and the clerics, the guardianship of the supreme jurist-consult, and the concept of the sources of emulation. This idea is extremely harmful to people, and to the young generation specifically.”⁴⁵

The Clerics Strike Back

THE BACKLASH OF THE CLERICAL ESTABLISHMENT AGAINST PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD and his supporters marked the end of Khamenei’s political support for the president. The Supreme Leader had supported Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential elections, and then again in 2009, as the only candidate capable of safeguarding the Islamic

Republic against the reformist movement. However, as Ahmadinejad's loyalists have acquired more power and influence in the government and outside it, he has increasingly been seen by the clerics as a political threat. At first, Ahmadinejad's penchant for millenarian rhetoric may have been seen as a mere irritant to the learned clergy. But this rhetoric has since morphed into something else entirely. It now undergirds a politically ambitious movement which has challenged the hierarchy's authority and power, including the very institution of clerical rule.

The power struggle that has since emerged among Iran's ruling elite is essentially about the future direction and nature of governance in the Islamic Republic. In addition to challenging clerical authority, Ahmadinejad and his populist followers have also begun to rail against the crony-capitalist networks that support many regime conservatives and clerical leaders.⁴⁶ With their wealth and power in jeopardy, Ahmadinejad's populist millenarian revisionism is increasingly seen by conservatives, most of the clerical establishment, as well as some IRGC commanders as an indispensable part of what is widely perceived as the president's larger scheme to create an independent constituency to support his hardline agendas.

For his part, Ahmadinejad has attempted to purge supporters of the Supreme Leader from government ministries, and he has also challenged Khamenei in other ways. A public spat ensued following Ahmadinejad's dismissal of Heydar Moslehi, the intelligence minister, in April 2011. The Supreme Leader reinstated the minister, and then launched a crackdown against Ahmadinejad loyalists who were perceived to be part of the inner circle of the so-called "deviant current." Hojjatolislam Abbas Amirifar, the head of the President's Cultural Council who enthusiastically supported the production of the documentary film "The Coming is Near," was arrested and kept in solitary confinement for over forty days.⁴⁷ Sharif Malekzadeh resigned as Deputy Foreign Minister and was then arrested too. A number of presidential staff members and officials who were allied with Ahmadinejad's chief of staff Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei were also arrested on financial corruption charges.⁴⁸

At least twenty-five other staff members in the president's office were arrested. These included Kazem Kiapasha, a close ally of Mashaei, and Abbas Ghaffari, who was described by the pro-IRGC *Ayandeh News* as "a man with special skills in metaphysics and connections with the unknown worlds." Several other allies of the president—including perhaps most notably Mashaei—have been charged with "sorcery."⁴⁹ Numerous derogatory Iranian press reports about Mashaei have described his alleged trance-like states to communicate with the Hidden Imam.⁵⁰ Further, the Administrative Justice Court barred Hamid Baqaee, a Vice President for Executive Affairs, from holding any public office for four years on charges that he broke the law when he was heading Iran's Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Khamenei's allies in the parliament, the Majlis Speaker Ali

Larijani, his brother and the Head of the Judiciary Sadeq Larijani, as well as the powerful Guardian Council, all closed ranks behind the Supreme Leader and aggressively moved against what they perceived as presidential transgressions.⁵²

Perhaps most significantly, IRGC Commander Ali Jafari also declared that his forces were now in charge of policing the “deviant current”—i.e., the political millenarians—within the regime. The commander made it clear that the Guards supported the Supreme Leader and understood themselves as obligated to act against all anti-clerical forces—whether reformist, hardliner, or millenarian.⁵³ Clearly, the IRGC (despite its own internal feuds and institutional corruption) has emerged as a formidable political interest group and arbiter in the Islamic Republic. Given the IRGC’s major stake in the national economy as well as their constitutional role of guarding the Islamic Republic, it is perhaps not all that surprising that they have (for the time being) supported the Supreme Leader against the populist millenarianism.⁵⁴

The March 2012 parliamentary elections were important to the clerical regime for two reasons. First, high voter turnout was meant to boost the legitimacy which the regime had lost since the 2009 elections. Second, the elections were meant to further isolate Ahmadinejad and his faction.⁵⁵ With the reformists largely disqualified, voters were forced to choose from an assortment of conservative and hardliner factions. In the first round (190 out of 290 seats), the “United Principalist Front” and the “Stability Front,” conservatives loyal to the Supreme Leader, secured 120 seats. Ahmadinejad’s faction only gained 30 seats, and independents and reformists (only those who did not support the Green Movement were qualified to run) won 13 seats. The elections thus brought to power in the Majlis a new generation of hardliners who are led by Ayatollah Mohammad Mesbah Yazdi, loyal to the Supreme Leader, and enjoy strong ties to the intelligence community and the IRGC. Because of this, Ahmadinejad’s millenarian visions for the future of Iranian politics seem to have been checked by the clerical and military establishments.⁵⁶ Ahmadinejad’s summons before the Majlis eleven days after the elections (but based on a motion passed in the outgoing Majlis) focused largely on his stewardship of the economy. But the president was also publicly questioned about his loyalty to the institutions of velayat-e faqih and his alleged ties to the “deviant current” which seeks to undermine the Islamic regime.⁵⁷

Iranian Islamism

THE POLITICAL USE OF MESSIANISM BY AHMADINEJAD AND HIS SUPPORTERS HAS served two essential purposes. First, millenarian propaganda is part of a larger effort by Ahmadinejad’s faction to create a new constituency for their hardline, national-

ist agenda that includes Iran's poor and its conservative nationalists. By combining messianic ideology—which is revisionist and anti-status quo, as well as populist—with Iranian nationalism, Ahmadinejad's new generation of non-clerical hardliners have been pushing to recreate a revolutionary Iran rather than an Islamic Republic. By making the Iranian nation the "very manifestation of faith," it seems that Ahmadinejad has aimed to redefine Iran's so-called Principlist faction (*Osulgarayan*) as anti-clerical hardliners with an independent nationalist as well as conservative populist base. The president's use of millenarian and nationalist rhetoric is meant to mobilize the conservative and less educated strata of society by combining religious myths with the socialist populism originally championed by the revolutionaries of 1979.

It is useful and important to understand Ahmadinejad's penchant for millenarianism in connection with this broader context of Iranian nationalism. On March 12, 2007, a new 50,000 Rial banknote was issued. The note featured an atomic symbol (apparently a reference to the country's atomic ambitions), as well as a quote from the Prophet Mohammed which read, "even if knowledge is at the Pleiades, the people from the land of Persia would attain it." By injecting Iran's pre-Islamic history (including Iran's traditional mythologies as embodied in the national epic the *Shahnameh*, as well the relics of Persepolis and Achaemenid Empire) into the government's official discourse, Ahmadinejad is effectively seeking to undermine the clerical claim to a monopoly on power and to nationalize Shiite Islamism.⁵⁸ This effort to nationalize Shiite Islamism has resulted in what could usefully be described as an "Iranian School of Islam."

Till now, millenarian propaganda, which is by its nature deeply antagonistic toward clerical establishments, has served as one of the most effective ways for Ahmadinejad and others to promote this new religious and political creed of "Iranian Islamism." By combining millenarian ideas with Iranian nationalism, the president and his circle have sought to undermine the principles and institutions of *velayat-e faqih*. The chief architect of this movement was Ahmadinejad's chief of staff, Mashaei. In numerous speeches and other pronouncements, Mashaei has touted the superiority of Iranian Shiism. He has called Iranian Shiism the "most perfect interpretation of Islam, as it is based on the guidance of the imams, that Iranians have always been monotheistic and so enriched Islam." He has also said that Iranians have a "pure understanding of the truth of faith," and that "Iran is the very manifestation of faith."⁵⁹ To Mashaei, Iranian nationalism represented "a supreme state of religious understanding," and he has gone so far as to claim that being Iranian itself is a "state of religious experience," calling the very word "Iran a mantra."⁶⁰

When the president was summoned before the Majlis in March 2012, he was asked about whether he was promoting Iranian nationalism at the expense of the state's "Is-

lamic” identity and as an alternative to the clerical establishment.⁶¹ Ahmadinejad’s defiant answer was effectively a confirmation of his nationalist and millenarian agenda:

I say, brother, my dear friend, throughout the entire world and throughout all of history, everyone knows that the Iranian nation is a big nation. The behavior of the Iranian nation, the view of the Iranian nation and the living of the Iranian nation are different. Not just me—everybody says so. The Iranian nation is the follower of the path of the beloved prophet of Islam, His Eminence Muhammad, the follower of the [Shi’i] imams, the follower of the sons of the Prophet, the follower of the perfect humankind joined in the sky. The Iranian nation is Imam Husayn’s worshipper and the follower of Ashura and the middle of Shaban [Islamic month].

Of course, when we say Iran we do not mean a geographic, racial or ethnic group. Iran is a garden of different ethnicities. Iran is a culture and hundreds of millions of people belong to this culture, and love and respect it. Iran means the shape of Ali’s Shii worshippers and the pure Islam of Muhammad.

Let me tell you something. I assure you that God also loves Iran indeed. If you want to be with God, you have to say [singing:] Iran, Iran, which does not have ethnic conflicts, and it is clear that Iran is withstanding the global powers and raises righteous talks, the talks of leadership and Imams.⁶²

We are Iranians indeed. I swear to God that we are Iranians, and I announce it loudly so that it is fixed in history and in the world that I love and respect Iran, its history, culture, glory and people. There is nothing so that we hide it. You love Iran too. Do not cover it up. Just announce it. Indeed, loving Iran is the same as being revolutionary, being a member of the Party of God [“Hezbollahi”]. The Imam says they [Iranians] love the sacred fatherland. Iran is especially great. Let us assume that several people attack from different sides and put Iran aside. Where should they put it?

Ahmadinejad’s millenarian nationalist propaganda and, more generally, the resurgence of popular messianism have created new fault lines in Iranian politics. For the

time being, it appears that an irate clergy and the military establishment have managed to close ranks and join together, despite their ideological differences, for the purposes of suppressing this millenarianism and checking what they regard as the attempted efforts by the president to usurp political and religious power. While the clerics may have thrown their support behind Ahmadinejad to thwart a reformist comeback in the 2009 elections, the president's millenarian zeal and populist nationalism have proven as dangerous (if not more so) to the clerical regime as the Green Movement's call for democracy. As Iran is fighting battles at home and the country's economy continues to suffer under the most punitive international sanctions since the revolutionary era, the shadow of war looms large. Having consolidated his power, it is now up to the Supreme Leader and his allies to break the nuclear stalemate—either by coming to terms with the West, or by acquiring or demonstrating a “break out” capacity to manufacture a nuclear weapon. Should they fail to accomplish this, the clerical regime will soon face a new threat to its rule, one which will invariably spring from the “deviant currents” of either reformism or millenarian nationalism.

NOTES

1. David Cook, “Messianism in the Shiite Crescent,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 11, April 8, 2011, <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/messianism-in-the-shiite-crescent> (August 29, 2011).
2. Ze'ev Maghen, “Occultation in Perpetuum: Shiite Messianism and the Policies of the Islamic Republic,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Spring 2008), p. 250. The stepped-up systematic suppression of the Bahais in Iran, the country's largest religious minority, by means of the most violent pogroms by security forces, judiciary and state-sponsored vigilante groups since the Revolution in 1979, also supports this claim.
3. See Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921—The Pahlavis and After*, (Harlow, Pearson 2003), pp. 6-7.
4. See Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown—The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 75-80.
5. It should be noted that Khomeini believed that a government under the rule of velayat-e faqih is entitled to make any laws it wishes as long as it serves the interests of the republic, which naturally coincide with those of Islam. Following Khomeini's line of thought, the Islamic Republic has witnessed the adoption of a bulk of laws, statutory instruments, and resolutions that have no demonstrable relationship to the sharia. As Mayer puts it “the Shari'ah requirements are becoming redefined according to what is politically expedient, intelligible and appealing to a mass audience. In the course of this ideologization and the politicization of the Shari'ah, the connection to the Islamic Sources is growing more tenuous.” Ann Elizabeth Mayer, “Law and Religion in the Muslim Middle East,” *American Journal of Comparative Law*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1987), p. 155, quoted in Mehran Tamadon-

- far, "Islam, Law and Political Control in Iran," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2001), pp. 208-209.
6. See interview between Liane Hansen and Reza Aslan on NPR on June 28, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106020875> (June 20, 2011).
 7. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 448.
 8. See Mehdi Mozaffari, *Fatwa—Violence and Discourtesy* (Aarhus University Press, 1998), p. 44.
 9. See Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Liberty and Development* (Global Academic Publishing, 1998), pp. 149-151.
 10. A. Savyon and Y. Mansharof, "The Doctrine of Mahdism in the Ideological and Political Philosophy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi," *Inquiry & Analysis* # 357 (May 2007) MEMRI, http://www.memri.org/publicdocs/doctrine_of_mahdism.pdf.
 11. See Ilan Berman, "Who Is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and What is He Really After?" *USA Today*, March 2007; Scott Peterson, "Waiting for the Rapture in Iran" <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1221/p01s04-wome.html> *Christian Science Monitor*, December 21, 2005 (August 21, 2011).
 12. Quoted in "Waiting for the Mahdi: Official Iranian Eschatology Outlined in Public Broadcasting Program in Iran," Special Dispatch # 1436 (January 25, 2007) MEMRI, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP143607> (August 20, 2011).
 13. During a speech, Ahmadinejad claimed, "The Imam Mahdi is in charge of the world and we see his hand directing all the affairs of the country [...] We must solve Iran's internal problems as quickly as possible. Time is lacking. A movement has started for us to occupy ourselves with our global responsibilities, which are arriving with great speed." *AFP* (May 7, 2008) <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gZxynkYHW-GrZ3SB965i1TxhulxQ>.
 14. Speech given by Ahmadinejad in Mashhad on 9 April 2008, *INRA* (April 9, 2008).
 15. After his first speech at the UN, Ahmadinejad and a member of his entourage claimed that a light surrounded him during the speech, forcing the entire audience to "unblinkingly focus on him" see Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iran: President Says Light Surrounded Him During UN Speech" *Radio Free Europe* (November 29, 2005) <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1063353.html> (March 12, 2012); For Ahmadinejad's speech in 2011 see Chris McGreal, "Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's UN Speech Prompts Diplomatic Walkout" *The Guardian* (22 September 2011) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/22/mahmoud-ahmadinejad-united-nations-speech> (March 28, 2012).
 16. See speech given by the President on February 10, 2009, *Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network* 1 (February 10, 2009).
 17. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World Report 2011*, "Iran" <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/iran?page=22&year=2011&country=8057>.
 18. Rasool Nafisi, "Another Cultural Revolution" Tehran Bureau (September 6, 2009) <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/09/another-cultural-revolution.html> (March 28, 2012).
 19. Bahmand Nirumand, "Iran Report 05/2011" (*Heinrich Böll Stiftung*), pp. 7-8.
 20. At the end of August 2011 (the beginning of the Fall Semester) authorities purged thirteen subjects from Tehran's Allameh Tabatabai University, including Political Science, Economics, Education, History, Philosophy and Communication Studies. This caused even conservative outlets

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The Ayatollahs Against the Rest

By *Jamsheed K. Choksy*

WHILE HE PLOTTED TO OVERTHROW THE SHAH AND ESTABLISH Islam as the basis for administering Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini lectured that, “Islamic government is constitutional because its leaders are subject to a set of conditions in governing and administering the country, conditions set forth in the holy Quran and the Sunna of the prophet [Muhammad]. Islamic government is based on the laws and regulations of Islam and can therefore be defined as the rule of divine will over humanity.” Knowing that even “the rule of divine will” needs manifestation through human leaders, Khomeini observed further, “The Shiite view of government and of individuals who can assume leadership was clear from the time following the demise of the prophet [Muhammad] down to the occultation [of the twelfth imam]. It specified that the [supreme] leader should be foremost in knowledge of the laws and regulations of Islam.” Speaking up against the growing totalitarianism of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Ayatollah Khomeini suggested, “It is necessary that the regulations of Islam upon government be preserved and maintained in order to prevent anarchy. Consequently, the establishment of an Islamic government is necessary.”¹ In many ways, those statements were self-serving—both personally and on behalf of other ayatollahs who ascribe to the activist school of religio-politics.

However, while they were swept up by revolutionary fervor in 1978 and 1979 against a despotic monarch, many Iranians assumed Ayatollah Khomeini was a pragmatist who would temper Islamic fundamentalist mores with notions of representational government. They based their assumptions on Khomeini’s own writings: “Islamic government is not tyrannical nor absolute ... [It] is a government of law.”² Moreover, with the shah’s

heavy-handedness manifest in many features of life at that time, restoring a balance to society by placing greater emphasis on Shiism seemed appropriate to many Iranians. So even Iranians who feared the ascendance of religion in public life united with those who sought it, to demonstrate, face bullets, and run Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi out of their country.

Unfortunately for those seeking democracy, Khomeini had assimilated theocratic ideas unsuccessfully expounded by the archconservative *mojtahed* or independent Islamic legal authority, Fazlollah Nuri, during the Constitutional Revolution seven decades earlier. Khomeini augmented Nuri's belief that clergymen must rule because secular governance fails to follow divine will with an additional religious concept, that of *maslaha* or fundamentalist Muslim interests aimed at ensuring Islam's welfare. Khomeini then used his personal popularity and revolutionary authority to install an absolutism centered on *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) wherein an autocrat rules as *rahbar* (also *rahbar-e enqelab*) or supreme leader to ensure "the rule of divine will over humanity"—or at least the particular interpretation of divine will that the clergy who hold power deem appropriate.³

The current supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei follows the tenets of his late teacher, regarding himself as God's singular representative on Earth and his use of force as *jihad* or holy war justified by divine mandate. All who fail to show pliancy toward the *Velayat-e Faqih*, be they persons in Iran or nations like the U.S. and Israel, are regarded as falling under the rubric of those against whom violence is religiously justified—just as Nuri had called for during the first decade of the twentieth century. Yet, now the political system established by Khomeini and upheld by Khamenei is under considerable stress from domestic and global pressures. The ayatollahs fear their rule could be swept away, forcing them back into their former roles as religious guides rather than power-wielding politicians.⁴ In an effort to legitimize their continued rule, they have begun to blame Iran's domestic and foreign challenges on conspiracies by outside forces who aim at regime change in Iran. Determined to thwart any transformation in the current theocratic system, Supreme Leader Khamenei now has made it clear he "will not accept meddling" in affairs of state and has moved on domestic and global fronts to reinforce the theocracy's absolutism. Such actions by Khamenei, and Khomeini before him, go against the objections of many *mollahs*—those of the Quietist school—who prefer less direct involvement in politics.⁵

In their fervor to ensure that the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* permeates and regulates every aspect of the Iranian polity, the hardline ayatollahs around the supreme leader have begun to regard all their actions as at most valid and as at least justifiable. Rigging elections, disbarring candidates, arresting opposition leaders, silencing reporters, even executing protestors have all become acceptable and common under

the alleged mandate of God's will. But even if the ayatollahs succeed in the near term, their own totalitarian actions are laying the stage for their ouster over the long term. Across the range of Iran's political spectrum, from the traditional conservatives to the radical reformers, there is a growing sense of despondency as more and more Iranians are reaching the conclusion that "even elections are not sufficient to realize the national will" because "I do not have any rights."⁶

The Legitimacy Crisis

"ELECTIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A CHALLENGING ISSUE FOR OUR COUNTRY. WE should be careful that this challenge does not hurt the country's security. Everyone should be vigilant. The various authorities should guard the elections," Supreme Leader Khamenei told worshippers at prayers marking the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on August 31, 2011. Indeed, many Iranians have begun to ask why, after having deposed a monarch thirty-three years ago, their nation is now led by religious despots. Many now seek to oust the theocracy. So the supreme leader's words capture the sense of anxiety that fundamentalist Shiite theocrats ascribe to ensuring each and every election goes in their favor, and "without protests like those which marked the last elections" for the country's presidency in 2009.⁷

Khamenei therefore took no chances in the parliamentary elections on March 2, 2012 when approximately 48 million Iranians over the age of 18, or 64 percent of the Islamic Republic's population, were eligible to cast ballots to elect 290 representatives for four-year terms of office in the *majles* or Islamic Consultative Assembly. The *majles* is the legislative or parliamentary branch of Iran's government—alongside theocratic, executive, and judicial branches—and the source of legislation; hence its importance to the system of Islamic governance in Iran.⁸ Led by Khamenei, ayatollahs allied to the theocratic branch of Iran's government have increasingly shown less and less tolerance for engagement with those who seek other political, social, and religious norms even through the ballot box. As a result, ordinary Iranians are prone to comment with both fear and dislike: "If the supreme leader could kill all of us, he would so he would have no opponents."⁹

Events involving the 2012 parliamentary elections are broadly instructive because they suggest that regime change through domestically-inspired, popularly-determined politics is less likely than ever before in Iran owing to ever-rising tyranny from the ayatollahs. The long-term significance of the election's outcome is that, faced with the most serious political, social, and economic challenges in three decades to

their rule, the ayatollahs manipulated (and in the near future will seek to radically transform) the representational process through a combination of maneuvers not just to thwart reform but to ensure that all avenues for change are shut down. The ayatollahs wanted to project a consensus for continuing the Shiite theocracy—so they sought to impose the image of one via the elections of 2012. Indeed, Supreme Leader Khamenei forewarned the public: “Don’t blame the elections ... an atmosphere of conflict should not be displayed.”¹⁰

Iran’s 2012 parliamentary elections occurred at an extremely turbulent time for that nation’s people, society, and economy. Iranians increasingly do blame their leaders, especially those inflexible Shiite clergymen who govern through the theocratic branch, for the nation’s internal woes and international isolation. The populist uprising that was violently suppressed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Basij paramilitary after June 2009’s rigged presidential election continues to simmer, periodically erupting in protests, work stoppages, and violent clashes between demonstrators and authorities.¹¹ Iranian youth, who comprise over 50 percent of the country’s population, were born after the last shah was deposed. They have known only the Islamic Republic’s repressive ways and have begun to overtly reject clerically-mandated behavioral codes. Even the younger residents of Qom, the ideological center of Islamist Iran, are no longer swayed by the clergymen.¹²

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, having sensed the shifting winds of popular sentiment, has begun opposing the mandates and mores of his clerical overlords, too.¹³ The economy is in shambles due to domestic mismanagement and international sanctions. The country now ranks a lowly 171/175 for freedom in internal commercial activities, and the rial has lost so much of its value against international currencies like the U.S. Dollar that many citizens have seen their purchasing power and assets decline by upwards of 50 percent. Those who can still afford to do so are buying up much of the gold bullion that was circulating within the country.¹⁴ Simultaneously, as Iranians experience daily shortages of essential goods and endure increasing separation from the world, more of them are questioning the wisdom of enhancing nuclear technology against the community of nations’ wishes. Not surprisingly, a Gallup poll in December 2011 and January 2012 found that “Iranians are more likely to approve of Iran developing its nuclear power capabilities for non-military use (57%) than for military use (40%).”¹⁵

Political parties in contemporary Iran that vie for power range from fundamentalist to reformist ones.¹⁶ The fundamentalist political parties include the Islamic Society of Engineers led by Ali Larijani who has served as the Speaker of Parliament; the newly-formed Moderation and Development Party led by former IRGC commander turned 2009 presidential candidate and now Secretary of the Expediency Council Mohsen

Rezai; the newly-formed Insight and Islamic Awakening Front of parliamentarian Shahabuddin Sadr; and the Society of Combatant Clergy whose founders included the Islamic Republic's first Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Linking many of those fundamentalist groups together is the hardline United Front of Principlists, or *Jebhe-ye Mottahed-e Osulgarayan*, which is led by Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani, the chair of the Assembly of Experts. The Islamic Revolution Resistance Front (also known as the Islamic Constancy Front or *Jebhe-ye Paydari-ye Enqelab-e Eslami*) of the messianically-inspired Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi had recently fallen out with President Ahmadinejad. For these reasons, the front allied itself with the United Front for electioneering purposes.¹⁷ Indeed, as the March 2012 parliamentary elections became more hotly contested and rhetoric increased between the principlist factions, Mesbah Yazdi's followers came into contention with the factions around Ahmadinejad whom they blame for the violence after the 2009 elections. This demonstrated vividly how fragmented the incumbents have become ideologically and administratively. The Islamic Coalition Party led by Gholam Hossein Elham, who has served as a Guardian Council member and as Minister of Justice, is the main political group in this alliance brought together by Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi.

The best known reformist groups are the Green Path of Hope party, or *Rah-e Sabz-e Omid* (popularly known as the Green Movement), which was established by former Prime Minister and 2009 presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, and the National Trust Party or *Etemad-e Milli* of former Parliament Speaker and 2009 presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi. Both are proscribed from civic activities. Other reformist groups include the Islamic Labor Party of Hossein Kamali who served twice as Minister of Labor, the Democracy Party (Democratic Coalition) linked to former two-term president Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and to parliamentarian Mostafa Kavakebian, and the Popular Front of Reforms.¹⁸

Situated in the political landscape between the traditional fundamentalists and emergent reformists are groupings of religiously conservative yet socially progressive politicians. They derive from an offshoot of the Principlist *Abadgaran* or Builders Alliance, and are known as the Monotheism and Justice Party led by former Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki. They support the "Iranian Islam" or *Eslam-e Irani* ideas of presidential Chief of Staff Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei.¹⁹

Khamenei and the hardline ayatollahs who line up alongside him responded to the turmoil generated by both insiders and outsiders through focusing on the March 2012 parliamentary elections as a mechanism for drawing a red line against any major transformations within Iran. In all, approximately 5,200 Iranians including 490 women had submitted their candidacies to the Ministry of the Interior, which reports to President Ahmadinejad, is headed by the president's ally Mostafa Mohammad Najjar,

and technically administers the elections. The number of candidates represented a 27 percent decline from registrations for the 2008 parliamentary elections. Women's electoral participation, especially among reform-minded candidates, was down too. Overall, even by the Interior Ministry's own reckoning, only 14 percent of candidates campaigned as reformists. But Khamenei no longer trusts Ahmadinejad's officials and so he had an ace up his sleeve, knowing full well that registering as a candidate provides no guarantee of actually being permitted to participate in an electoral cycle.²⁰

An Iron Fist in God's Name

ALL CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE ARE SCRUTINIZED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE Guardians of the Constitution as decreed by Articles 91 to 99 of the Islamic Republic's Constitution, which grants the Council "responsibility of supervising the elections." The Guardian Council also must ratify electoral results—as it did in Ahmadinejad's favor during the hotly contested presidential election of 2009 after examining only 10 percent of ballots—and can even choose to annul electoral outcomes.²¹ The power-broker Guardian Council has been chaired since 1988 by the much-feared and much-hated octogenarian fundamentalist Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati. Jannati, a close revolutionary ally of Supreme Leader Khamenei, publically denounces those who seek any degree of political, social, and religious change in post-revolution Iranian society as "heretics who should not be permitted to participate in politics," even calling for "execution of opposition members ... as enemies of God."²² The Guardian Council intervenes routinely and unhesitatingly to ensure that political change does not occur within the Islamic system through representational governance. Reformist and liberal candidates seeking seats on the 86-member Muslim scholar-filled Assembly of Experts, which appoints and can impeach Iran's Supreme Leader, are consistently rejected on the basis of "insufficient theological qualifications." Female candidates to the Assembly often are precluded en masse on the basis of their gender supposedly making them unqualified to render decisions about national issues.²³

Disqualification of candidates by the Guardian Council has become especially frequent in recent parliamentary elections. For instance, of the 7,168 registered candidates during the 2008 parliamentary elections, only 4,946 or 69 percent were allowed to contest. Those struck from the ballots included one-third of the earlier majles membership.²⁴ So the Guardian Council provides a constitutionally-sanctioned means for the ayatollahs to consolidate their political power by determining the eligibility of candidates for the parliamentary elections and then utilizing a pro-clergy legislature to

thwart democratic aspirations by the people or by former allies like the incumbent president.

Only 700 reformist and opposition candidates, among the approximately 5,200 parliamentary office-seekers, were even permitted to register for the March 2012 elections. Subsequently, the Guardian Council began systematically throwing out the candidacies of anyone suspected of harboring notions of sociopolitical transformation—including retired ambassadors and provincial governors, even honorably discharged police and military commanders. Names of at least several dozen outgoing members of the majles also were not allowed onto the ballot for having disobeyed Supreme Leader Khamenei in the past. Ultimately only 65 percent of registered candidates' names were allowed on the ballots—with the number of reformist candidates from within and outside the regime substantially reduced. Grounds for disqualification included allegations of “not believing in Islam,” “not being a practitioner of Islam,” “not being loyal to the Constitution,” and most importantly to the ayatollahs, “not being loyal to Governance by the Islamic Jurist.”²⁵

Politically, Khamenei, Jannati, and other fundamentalist clergymen appear seriously threatened by the waning of Islamist ideology among Iran's masses. For this reason, the clergy denounces the Green Path which seeks to reform the political system, Ahmadinejad's supporters who wish to transform it from within, and the youth who desire to excise it completely as “a triangle of seditionists, deviationists, and counter-revolutionaries” who need to be “neutralized.” Even long-term and high-ranking service within the Islamic Republic no longer safeguards those clergymen and politicians who seek to alter the absolutist Velayat-e Faqih system. The regime's hardliners are systematically utilizing diverse pressures to silence opponents, successfully ensuring that the opposition remains fragmented and still trying to build consensus.²⁶

Ayatollah Rafsanjani participated in the Islamic Revolution of 1979, served two terms as Iran's president, and chairs the Expediency Discernment Council—a 28-member appointed governmental organization charged with resolving disputes between the Parliament and the Council of Guardians. Nonetheless, fundamentalists forced Rafsanjani to cede his position as chairman of the Assembly of Experts when he unsuccessfully canvassed its members to remove Khamenei after the populist uprising of 2009. Subsequently, in March 2012, he held on to chairmanship of the Expediency Discernment Council after much difficulty. His daughter Faezeh, a feminist activist, was sentenced to 6 months prison-time for “spreading propaganda against the ruling system,” one son Mehdi who headed the private Azad University system was forced into European exile, and another son Mohsen was stripped of his directorship of Tehran's underground transportation network. The family and their supporters, including reform-minded deans and professors, have been stripped of all political,

social, and educational influence. Supreme Leader Khamenei made a very public example of Rafsanjani for having dared challenge the Velayat-e Faqih broadly and the Rahbar specifically.²⁷

In January 2012, Ahmadinejad's presidential media advisor Ali Akbar Javanfekr was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment and banned from all civic activities for five years for "publically insulting" the supreme leader and for suggesting that the *hejab* or conservative dress code "should not be enforced" on women.²⁸ This judicial action deprived the president's allies of a key spokesman at election time. Some ayatollahs and their supporters have even called for presidential chief of staff Mashaei's arrest and execution on charges of heresy and witchcraft because he campaigns for excising the clergy from politics.²⁹ Last month, when former IRGC commander and up-and-coming politician Admiral Hossein Alaei suggested the supreme leader and other fundamentalists were abusing the political system and trampling the rights of Iranians, his home was besieged by the ayatollahs' supporters, his fellow officers were lined up to denounce him and cast suspicion on his loyalty to Iran, and Khamenei's representatives sought to persuade him to publically recant.³⁰

Leaders of the Green Path of Hope and the National Trust Party, including Mousavi and Karroubi, have been under house arrest since early 2011 and, therefore, are unable to participate in elections. Other leading opponents of the regime, like Mostafa Tajzadeh, Behzad Nabavi, Mohsen Mirdamadi, Feyzollah Arabsorkhi, Abdollah Ramazanzadeh, Mohsen Aminzadeh, and Abolfazl Ghadiani are in jail, too. All political, social, and religious organizations have to register with the state, which can ban their existence on the basis of "violating Islamic morals," "failing to serve the public good," and "promoting sedition." Under these broad and politically-motivated guidelines, not just the Green Path and the National Trust, but many other political parties that challenge the ayatollahs' hegemony have been banned from civic life and driven underground—including the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF) and the Organization of Islamic Revolution Mojahedin (OIRM).³¹

Journalists and bloggers are detained, their equipment confiscated, and their families and associates intimidated verbally and physically with increasing frequency. Indeed, Human Rights Watch notes that Iran imprisoned more journalists and bloggers in 2011 than any other nation. At least one blogger is currently on death row in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison for criticizing the regime.³² Opposition websites are periodically censored and blocked, including those of the Green Path. So are those of government agencies and officials regarded as working toward electoral, administrative, or civic reforms—such as one run by supporters of Ayatollah Rafsanjani—for "committing illegal activities."³³

With the Green Movement and National Trust Party out of serious contention and

factions loyal to Iran's president emerging as the main opposition to the ayatollahs, even media outlets associated with President Ahmadinejad are being jammed on the basis that those sites propagate messages of sociopolitical change. Indeed, *Mahramane News*, *Raha Press*, *Zaman News*, *Super Enherafi Blog/News*, *Khordad Press*, and *Hemmat Negar News* display pictures of Supreme Leader Khamenei but proceed to attack his appointees and policies as detrimental to Iran, Iranians, domestic affairs, and foreign policy. Those new-media outlets allied with the president's policies are well-known and viewed favorably by many Iranians for criticizing hardline ayatollahs and politicians like Assembly of Experts Chairman Kani and Speaker of the Parliament Larijani. Pro-Ahmadinejad media outlets also direct a steady stream of criticism against the IRGC's high command for siding with the ayatollahs against the wishes of many others within the armed forces.³⁴

In an even broader attempt to control Iranians' access to and use of the Internet, the government has begun reducing Internet speeds and interrupting access to frustrate users to the point of abandoning online dissent and seeking information from pro-fundamentalist sites which are easier to access. Likewise, the government's firewalls have been blocking access to websites that facilitate encrypted electronic communications between Iranians and the outside world. Simultaneously, the authorities have worked feverishly to disable software that facilitates bypassing of state-controlled firewalls. Email access to large segments of the general population is cut off for days at a time whenever the regime fears protests may erupt or an opposition cause may gain some popularity. Additionally, the government's technologists are constructing a national internet which will facilitate official oversight and blocking of uploads, downloads, browsers, and webpages. Ultimately, the authorities hope to force all users inside Iran, including persons within the regime such as Ahmadinejad and his allies, on to the state's own internet so that all e-communications can be monitored for individual and collective conformity to the dictates of the supreme leader.³⁵

Not surprisingly, Iranians are concerned that the national internet will cut them off from the rest of the world, and put them under increased surveillance by authorities. However, a proliferation of electronic news outlets, political party websites, and fundamental rights websites, in addition to Twitter feeds and Facebook pages, has made the ayatollahs' attempt to censor internet traffic most difficult—indeed, when the censors act aggressively their actions also end up impacting those outlets favored by the fundamentalists. Moreover, despite the arrest of editors, reporters, bloggers, and activists, Iranian public media has proven remarkably diverse and resilient, with prominent newspapers even publishing letters and opinions critical of the supreme leader and of his intolerant domestic policies and isolationist foreign actions.³⁶

Electronic means of stifling change are not limited to control of communication,

however. The Islamic Republic's security apparatus—centered on the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), also known in Iran as VEVAK—conducts extensive surveillance operations, sometimes for the personal voyeurism and gain of Khamenei. Those who oppose the rahbar and his Velayat-e Faqih have their homes, offices, and automobiles bugged and followed; others are beaten up, arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and even executed for supposedly opposing the “will of Allah and the imams.” Each evening the supreme leader is said to listen to surreptitious recordings of senior officials and colleagues talking about him in a summary compilation that usually lasts twenty minutes. Khamenei thereby gains knowledge of those attempting to oust him—like Rafsanjani's attempts within the Assembly of Experts in late 2009 and Mashaei's maneuvers within the executive branch which also gained steam in 2009.³⁷

Beyond its impact on political elites who oppose Khamenei, the clandestine information facilitates crackdowns by Islamic Guidance Patrols supervised by the Committee on Public Morals seeking to “rigorously” enforce the ayatollahs' pro-Islamist, anti-individualist, Social Discipline Plan on a daily basis in the cities, towns, and villages of Iran. The ayatollahs' cohorts in the security forces justify their sweeping intolerance for dissent and diversity by claiming, “The public expects us to act firmly if we see any social behavior defying our Islamic values. We will first warn, then arrest and imprison those women and men.” Approximately the equivalent of \$6.5 billion is expended each year on internal security to terrorize the population and another \$4.5 billion to enforce public conformity. To buttress his control over the instruments of domestic terror, Khamenei also has carefully nurtured links with the militant high-ranking officers of the IRGC to ensure that opposition to his rule can be combated violently in public—as happened in the fall of 2009. Surely and steadily Khamenei has built around him a clique of like-minded persons who benefit vastly from the incumbency and therefore are hostile to plurality, moderation, political change, and fundamental rights.³⁸

As part of the crackdown on all forms of political and social dissent, Minister of Intelligence Heidar Moslehi, a cleric close to Supreme Leader Khamenei, whom Ahmadinejad tried but failed to oust from his cabinet in 2011, even alleged “the enemy is trying to create tension and dispute in the election process; this requires extra vigilance by the security establishment and by the brave revolutionary nation.” To that end, Moslehi established a schedule of weekly meetings where commanders of the IRGC, regular armed forces, and Basij paramilitary briefed Supreme Leader Khamenei on how their organizations were imposing the theocracy's will upon the population.³⁹

The ayatollahs' attempt to control the polity seems to know fewer and fewer boundaries the less secure the clergymen feel. In the wake of mounting tensions with the executive branch over whether unelected clergymen should have such broad sway

over national and international affairs, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei suggested publically in late 2011, “There may no longer be the need for the country to have a president; rather, an official appointed by parliament can be in charge.” Quickly, hardline members of the majles including Speaker Larijani seized this opportunity for abolishing a major, independently elected, center of executive power. Larijani, who hails from a family of ayatollahs (even though he did not become a cleric) and whose own position will be enhanced by termination of the presidency and elevation of his role to that of prime minister, has been especially vocal on implementing the constitutional change.⁴⁰

The Dissolution of Representation

DUE TO DISQUALIFICATION AND INTIMIDATION OF CANDIDATES, CENSORSHIP OF media, and a seeming inevitability that the ayatollahs and their cronies are determined to prevail at all costs, some factions in Iran’s opposition reached the conclusion that results of elections will always be rigged in favor of fundamentalist candidates. So the Green Path of Hope and National Trust parties began a de facto boycott of the franchise process just prior to the majles elections of 2012. In a sense they have few other options; despite popular support for their causes both groups had little on-the-ground organization outside of the main cities still intact after Khamenei’s concerted crackdown.⁴¹ However, their decision not to mount concerted campaigns plays into the clergy’s hands. Those political parties that champion extremism quickly realized that if the already small groups of opposition candidates cease to present electoral challenges, fundamentalists may succeed in maintaining control of state institutions and passing constitutional changes they fancy, such as amending the Constitution, abolishing the presidency, and declaring reformist actions unlawful and sacrilegious.

Sensing these dangers, President Ahmadinejad’s supporters took more pragmatic approaches during the parliamentary elections of 2012. Some even signed up to run as independents and as regime loyalists—attempting to hide their true intentions when possible (and many could not for their public stances were well known) from the Guardian Council to prevent disqualification. Covertly financed by the president and his backers, these pro-Ahmadinejad candidates also targeted constituencies where they enjoy strong support, especially in the smaller cities and rural areas. As in the 2009 presidential election, Ahmadinejad’s allies have not hesitated to use their

control over the Interior Ministry, which handles the voting process, to manipulate electoral outcomes to increase their share of power in the branches of government. Controlling the parliament would let them thwart any moves by the ayatollahs to eliminate the presidency. Placing additional supporters in both elected and appointed positions also enhances their ability to push aside the theocratic branch of government and to prune the power of IRGC generals loyal to the supreme leader. So the regime's factions that view internal reforms as essential remain committed to their belief that the clerics are "not capable of administering a country."⁴²

Aware of this strategy, the ayatollahs' supporters tried as best as possible to identify and disbar these opponents in the executive branch, fearing "the deviant current [Ahmadinejad's supporters] is like a termite eating up the regime from within and its danger is much bigger than one can imagine ... for it intends to separate Islam without any coup from the political establishment." Attempts to link the president and his supporters to the messianically-inclined Hojjatiyeh Society, which had been banned by Ayatollah Khomeini, have gathered steam as the clerics seek to convince ordinary citizens to turn their backs on reform and the president's policies. Claiming the executive branch is part of the Hojjatiyeh, Khamenei's supporters have alleged that, "They believe in the Satanic thesis that one must spread corruption to hasten the emergence of the Imam of the Era [i.e., the twelfth imam], and so champion embezzlement, corruption, theft of public funds and moral and economic corruption." Essentially, the fundamentalist clerics suggest "the Twelfth Imam remains hidden during this government and his deputy, His Holiness Ali Khamenei, is in charge of affairs" rather than the president or independent-minded parliamentarians.⁴³

Yet the ayatollahs are aware the president's allies or any other opposition group including the Greens could decide to mobilize the public. To thwart such plans, Khamenei's appointees like Tehran Governor Morteza Tamaddon do not hesitate to warn of dire consequences for those citizens who dare challenge results decreed as valid by the Guardian Council: "We will confront such moves with full preparation and all kinds of security measures." Indeed, since the events in 2009, the state's security forces have been instructed to ensure that even silent marches and peaceful demonstrations remain both few in number and small in size. The Guardian Council also has taken a far more active role in overseeing the Interior Ministry's Commission on Elections to ensure that the executive branch is stymied in its efforts to stuff the ballot boxes in its favor, and that the ayatollahs' strategy of saturating the electoral field with its subordinates leads to victory.⁴⁴

The two rounds of parliamentary elections in 2012 were hailed by Iranian hardliners as a sweeping victory for Supreme Leader Khamenei's fundamentalist policies and a deathblow to President Ahmadinejad's reformist agenda. Western scholars, an-

alysts, and reporters followed suit—partially hoping that Khamenei would have a free hand in quashing the political infighting that doomed nuclear deals in 2009 and 2011, even though he may remain averse to broader accommodation with the US.⁴⁵ Yet the new 9th majles will be little different from the outgoing one, even though there will be 196 new parliamentarians serving four-year terms of office. Indeed, Iranian political scientists and analysts have noted, “The traditional principlists claim that the executive branch was defeated in the recent election, but that it is not so for the number of President Ahmadinejad’s supporters in the [next] parliament will be more or less the same ... so the conflict between the executive and legislative branches will grow deeper and greater during the coming year.”⁴⁶

A total of 290 parliamentary seats were up for grabs. The final tally gave hardline groups supporting Supreme Leader Khamenei 65 seats, other pro-Khamenei conservatives 15 seats, reformists within the regime who support President Ahmadinejad 25 seats, reformists who are not part of the incumbency 21 seats, and religious minorities the usual 5 seats (after the election commission initially misreported that Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews had gained a few more seats). But 61 seats also went to individuals who ran as candidates jointly for the pro-Khamenei and pro-Ahmadinejad factions. And another 98 incoming majles members are independents—the largest block and clearly the swing vote which could serve as powerbrokers resistant to clerical influence.⁴⁷ So the new parliament, which took office in late May 2012, reflects the political disunity that is engulfing the Islamic Republic.

Knowing that election results have compounded Iran’s instability, Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani who chairs the pro-Khamenei Assembly of Experts recommended that “the branches of government cooperatively deal with issues the people face.”⁴⁸ But when President Ahmadinejad appeared before parliament shortly thereafter, Khamenei’s supporters among the legislators found his testimony “unconvincing” and “insulting.” Indeed the president showed scant regard for the legislative branch’s power by sticking to his socioreligious positions including not enforcing “chastity and the hejab” by saying “Let me be quite clear that cultural approaches are incompatible with harsh methods because the youth’s wishes must be respected,” preferring “Iranian nationalism over Islam” by emphasizing “I love the greatness of the Iranian nation and I am proud of it,” and even ridiculing parliamentary foes and their questions by concluding “those who designed these questions were from among those who got a master’s degree by just pushing a button.”⁴⁹ Iranians found the entire exchange entertaining and disheartening, joking ironically, “Where do wild asses compete to prove who’s brightest? In Tehran’s parliament building, where else!”

Ultimately, like the pro-Ahmadinejad groups and the reformists, the ayatollahs

themselves know full well that their totalitarianism is increasingly becoming unpalatable to many Iranians. Even some of their supporters in the majles are acknowledging that “the public should have the right to criticize the Velayat-e Faqih and other branches of government” and warning that denying that right demonstrates the “Islamic Republic is moving towards the direction of authoritarianism.” So even though they may successfully control the outcome of elections, the ayatollahs are in a bind. Supreme Leader Khamenei and his cohorts cannot get away from the reality that broad-based public support and participation in the political process is necessary for the theocracy’s survival. Consequently they do their best to portray elections that they manipulate as nonetheless being “manifestations and instances of the people’s partnership in deciding the country’s future.” They counsel that other governmental organizations including the Assembly of Experts are in “the position of preserving the Guardianship of the Jurist and not in a position to criticize or weaken it. Therefore, we should demonstrate greater self-sacrifice and forgiveness.”⁵⁰

Such portrayals do not however fool most Iranians among whom there is widespread apathy owing to the whole process being a sham. Officials like retired IRGC Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi who now serves as a senior adviser to Khamenei are reduced to pleading with fellow citizens “to take elections seriously for the national good.” Ayatollah Jannati advises, “Show your religious zeal by voting for those who oppose the enemies of Islam.” Supreme Leader Khamenei even declared voting to be a “religious obligation” or *vajeb*. More desperately the influential cleric Gholam Reza Mesbahi Moghaddam, who is also a parliamentarian, openly suggests “giving people cash handouts to encourage them to vote.”⁵¹

Yet, invoking state, faith, and pocketbook after ruling by fiat no longer compensates for the disenfranchisement that Iranians from all walks of life increasingly experience. A prominent blogger who supports the notion of an Islamic Republic yet has grown dissatisfied with how it has evolved in Iran sums up the dire situation that the ayatollahs face from their own people: “Each time in the past when dissatisfaction led me to conclude ‘do not participate,’ speeches by the supreme leader, reports on television, and patriotic songs convinced me to vote for maintaining the [Islamic] Revolution. But this is no longer enough. [Political] participation should convey what the people want. They want economic stability. They do not want to witness confrontations between the majles and [other branches of] the administration. They do not want to be a tool in the games that the political elite play. I believe that participation will make the regime even more emboldened to repeat its mistakes in the future.”⁵²

International Reverberations

THE AYATOLLAHS' ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL POLITICS AND SOCIETY HAVE NOT BEEN restricted to Iran for they firmly believe that fundamentalist Muslim polities elsewhere will bolster their global influence while mitigating the possibility of domestic democratic movements succeeding. Consequently, when the Arab uprisings began in December 2010, leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran were quick to claim credit, declaring their 1979 revolution as its "religious and ideological progenitor." Iran's ayatollahs not surprisingly proposed that fundamentalist Islamic theology should direct change from Morocco to Yemen. They expected that Sunni Muslims across the Middle East would install governments similar to their own system of Velayat-e Faqih. Indeed, the ayatollahs had carefully nurtured ties with Tunisia's Islamic Renaissance Movement since 1988 when its leaders were exiled to Europe. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Libya, in addition to the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, has received clandestine Iranian support for decades. Bahrain's politically disenfranchised Shiite majority views Iran as a potential supporter. So do Shiite minorities in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. Shiite Houthi rebels along the porous border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia look to Iran's ayatollahs for support too. The ayatollahs have even maintained a covert relationship with al-Qaeda, despite the fact that the Sunni terrorist organization's global jihad is often at odds with Shiite Islamist ideas of leading the worldwide Muslim Nation. All this suits Iran's leaders well, for they covet a prominent place on the world stage.⁵³

Yet, when the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen fell, citizens there did not seem too eager to replace autocratic leaders with intolerant Muslim clerics. Indeed opinion polls demonstrated the ayatollahs' esteem had fallen since Arabs witnessed images of Tehran's hypocritical leaders unleashing violence against their own citizens in 2009, stifling free speech and individual rights, and tailoring election results to create illusions of widespread domestic support. Essentially the more Supreme Leader Khamenei, his clerical cohorts, and their iron-fisted comrades in the armed forces and paramilitary impose a religiously-based minority viewpoint upon Iran's people, the more other Muslims in the Middle East realize that the ayatollahs' ways should not be duplicated lest Arabs, too, end up replacing one form of despotism with another. Arabs see that Iran's Velayat-e Faqih is not constitutional and does not adhere to the essential principles of Islamic law or Sharia, but turns Islam against its followers. Those realizations are reshaping and rejecting favorable dispositions towards the ayatollahs in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt. More Sunnis than before are becoming concerned about Iran's negative influences in

the domestic politics of other Middle Eastern nations. Even the ayatollahs' nuclear program is no longer seen as an Islamic bomb to counter Israel's assumed nuclear capability. Perhaps most distressingly for those in Iran who seek to shape other Muslim societies in their own image, more Arabs are supporting a Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council pushback against Iran's Middle East adventurism.⁵⁴

The ayatollahs' predicament is made worse by their own, handpicked yet increasingly independent president whose penchant for Iranian nationalism routinely emphasizes the divisions between Arabs and Iranians even in religious matters. For instance, on a state visit to neighboring Tajikistan in March 2012, Ahmadinejad claimed "Ferdowsi [the poet who compiled Iran's national epic, the *Shahnameh* in the early eleventh century] saved the Faith of the Great Prophet [Muhammad] by removing the unenlightened from carrying the burden of the Faith [Islam] and put it squarely on the shoulders of the Iranian Nation which has well-fulfilled this responsibility." In addition to deriding Arabs as "unenlightened" and linking Iranian nationalism to the survival and flourishing of Islam, Ahmadinejad was also taking a dig at the ayatollahs themselves for those clergymen are often derided as "Arabs" or as "Arab-like" by the Iranian public for preaching that Islamic fundamentalism should prevail in Muslim belief and custom. The president's supporters have additionally been mounting a campaign to re-write another aspect of Islamic and Iranian history by depicting the arrival of Islam in Iran during the Arab invasions of the seventh century as an "act of war."⁵⁵

Not surprisingly, as the Arab Spring unfolds, many Sunni Islamist groups have begun to distance themselves from Tehran. Some Sunni Islamists have even argued that they are moderates who can accommodate themselves with civil democracy. Just before Tunisians went to the polls in October 2011, the Islamic Renaissance Movement projected Turkey, not Iran, as a preferred political model. It was the principal winner in that Tunisian election, garnering 89 out of 217 electoral seats. During Morocco's November 2011 elections, the Justice and Development Party focused on efficient, transparent governance rather than pushing strict Muslim codes. That Islamist group emerged as the largest parliamentary block with 107 out of 395 seats. In Egypt's elections the Muslim Brotherhood too garnered nearly half the parliamentary seats while Salafis, who advocate even stricter socio-political rules more akin to those of the ayatollahs, took only 20 percent. Moreover, following its victory the Moroccan Justice and Development Party issued an announcement that, "Religion belongs in the mosques; we are not going to interfere in people's personal lives." Likewise, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party claimed, "Millions of Egyptians voted because they want a strong, democratic Parliament."⁵⁶

Yet those words may not reflect how Sunni Islamists will govern once in power—for they too are predisposed by years of revolutionary ideology based on fundamentalism

to seek theocratic solutions to political, social, and economic issues. Indeed, like Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1960s and 1970s, they, too, have been careful not to actually renounce their officially-declared Islamist stances. So Iran's Shiite ayatollahs continue to publically urge the emerging Sunni leaders of post-revolutionary Arab countries to stay true to Islam as the only way forward. Privately, the ayatollahs press home to their Sunni political counterparts that Khomeini spoke conciliatory words only out of necessity until his supporters gained control of Iran. At the very least, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt will be governed by religio-political groups which may be tempted to gradually institute foreign policies that are more in line with Tehran's regional agenda. Indeed, already the new Egyptian parliament has voted to send home Israel's ambassador and turn off energy exports to that nation.⁵⁷

The ayatollahs are by no means blind to changing circumstances abroad having negative impacts on Iran's geopolitics. They have watched Azerbaijan on Iran's northwestern border, another nation that is predominantly Shiite, slip out of their ideological orbit and into the American and Israeli ones diplomatically and militarily. Now they fear Baku will extend logistical assistance against Iran's nuclear program. Despite threatening words, Iran's fundamentalists have been stymied by Saudi Arabia from assisting the Shiite majority's uprising against the Sunni minority ruling family in Bahrain. As the Bahraini and Saudi royal families talk about uniting the two countries—a move which would turn the Shiite majority on the Persian Gulf island into a minority—there seems to be little Tehran can do to keep the two monarchies apart.⁵⁸ And they know full well that the greatest setback on the global stage to Iran's revolutionary and messianic goals has been the uprising against Syria's Alawite elite led by dictator Bashar al-Assad.

When Syrian protestors—a majority of whom were Sunnis—began seeking change in their country, Khamenei initially ensured that Tehran would provide guidance and technology to Assad's forces. But as the revolt spread, President Ahmadinejad and other officials of Iran's executive branch urged Assad to accommodate his "people's legitimate demands" while warning against Libya-like "interference by foreigners."⁵⁹ Increasingly, Iran's president has written off his Damascene counterpart and made contact with Syrian opposition groups in what appears to be an effort to reconfigure Iran's longstanding relationship with Syria and protect it for the future. The uprisings in Syria have clearly divided Iran's powerbrokers, and have contributed to schisms among political elites over domestic demands for socio-political liberalization.

The ayatollahs did not concur with abandoning Assad, who has aided in channeling Iranian resources to militant organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah, and began using the IRGC to spearhead the shoring up of Assad's troops despite the executive branch's wishes otherwise. IRGC Quds Force Major-General Qasem Soleimani (who is

a loyal appointee of Supreme Leader Khamenei, and who despite having UN and EU sanctions upon himself is able to travel freely in that region) aided the ayatollahs by ensuring that “15,000 troops from the IRGC Quds Special Force” reportedly “were sent to Syria to offer intelligence support and security consultations to the regime of Syrian President Al-Assad ... and to participate in the crackdown on pro-democracy protests.”⁶⁰ However, it appears the ayatollahs made the wrong call, for as the Syrian revolt spread, IRGC Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari eventually had little choice but to “order Iranian troops in Syria to move to the Lebanese Bekka Valley region” in February 2012 for their own safety and to try and secure the Lebanese Hezbollah, who are also Shiite allies of Tehran, against political change there. Worse still for the ayatollahs, the Hamas leadership, too, is sensing that siding with the Islamic Republic is a no-win cause. So the Palestinian Sunni organization declared it would not intervene on the ayatollahs’ side if war were to occur between Iran and Israel over Syria or over the nuclear standoff. The unraveling of a two-decade militant partnership between Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas is occurring and with it Iranian fundamentalists’ worst foreign policy nightmare is coming to pass.⁶¹

Despite these impediments, the ayatollahs still nurture hopes of spreading their radical model of Islamic politics across the Middle East. Because the dissatisfaction fueling Arab protest is homebred, they realize that Sunnis may not be able to hold the line against fundamentalism. Indeed once Tunisians concluded voting, Iran’s Foreign Ministry revealed Islamic Renaissance Movement leaders were in regular contact with Tehran while planning election strategies. Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi organizers, too, have visited Iran frequently since Mubarak’s fall, while preparing for Egypt’s elections and for Pan-Islamic Awakening conferences. Houthi leaders have also participated in those meetings, and their ties with and dependence on Tehran for financial support and arms appear to have deepened.⁶²

Because of their ideology and resources, the ayatollahs remain a potent threat to the establishment of new representative governments throughout the Arab Middle East. Their biggest appeal is anti-monarchist, anti-Western words and deeds. As Arabs seek significant political restructuring and attempt to rebuild their nations, Iran’s ayatollahs will continue to point to the U.S., Britain, and Israel as obstructing tangible change. Likewise, the Supreme Leader’s cadre regards “the Saudi and Qatari regimes as playing the role of the errand boys of the United States and the West ... This will certainly be to the detriment of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, [ensuring] the days of those regimes are numbered.” Taking on the U.S. and its Western and Middle Eastern allies also facilitates the ayatollahs’ efforts to portray themselves to the Arab masses as defiant Muslim victims of the global powers. In attempts to bolster their credibility among Muslims, the ayatollahs have continued sponsoring a series of international

conferences—under titles like Youth and Islamic Awakening Conference, Islamic Awakening Literature Congress, and “International Unity Conference”—and all within the space of a few months in early 2012.⁶³ But even those attempts are undermined by the ayatollahs’ disdain for popular representation in national governance. Hojjat al-Eslam Ali Saidi, the supreme leader’s representative to the IRGC predicted, “The result of the [2012 parliamentary] elections will have a great impact on the Arab Spring.”⁶⁴ He was correct, but not in the manner intended—for Iran’s flawed electoral process has failed to inspire confidence anywhere in the Middle East.

Likewise, more and more of the ayatollahs’ foreign policy actions are facing criticism at home for causing isolationism rather than cooperation and pan-Islamism. Ordinary Iranians blame the regime for bringing the world’s wrath upon the nation through reckless actions: “With sanctions, poverty, and a government that knows nothing but force, the condition of our society will only get worse.”⁶⁵ Similarly the executive power block, especially the Foreign Ministry, blamed fundamentalists for the sacking of the British Embassy in Tehran in November 2011 and then apologized publicly to London. The ayatollahs who instigated that attack by student members of the Basij expressed outrage at the response by Ahmadinejad’s appointees because the clergy stand to benefit from the increased isolation of Iranians. But subsequently even some hardline clerics like Ahmad Khatami who oppose Ahmadinejad’s outreach to the West on economic and nuclear issues have also questioned the wisdom of antagonizing Europeans who provide many commercial goods Iranians need. In that manner, the embassy attack revealed schisms over how Iran’s power blocks should be acting in the nation’s interest.

The ayatollahs are not above seeking to deflect the Iranian public’s attention from domestic problems by generating foreign affairs crises—as they did, for example, with the British embassy attack, and with the U.S embassy seizure and the subsequent diplomatic hostage crisis from November 1979 to January 1981. Indeed, a standard tactic of the clerical regime is to provoke threatening reactions from the U.S. and Israel specifically and the European nations generally, in the hope this will rally Iranians around their nation. So, just before negotiations began in Baghdad in May 2012, Iranian scientists loaded 20 percent enriched uranium plates into the Tehran reactor; and once the talks ended it announced the construction of additional reactors. At the same time, the elected leaders in Tehran are fearful of actually confronting the West directly in a military engagement knowing Iran will take a beating and that the public could then turn against the regime for needlessly bringing foreign calamity upon the nation. For these reasons, even as Iran inches forward on the nuclear front in defiance of the world’s wishes and allegedly plans assassinations of other nations’ diplomats, leading politicians associated with the executive branch under President

Ahmadinejad make sure to repeatedly emphasize that “Iran is not a threat,” despite knowing that many at home and abroad do not take those words at face value.⁶⁶

Iran’s current executive branch is not alone in its attempts to reach out to the West, however. Even Ayatollah Rafsanjani had attempted, during the early months of his presidency in late 1979, to convince Khomeini to acknowledge that negotiations and diplomatic relations with the U.S. were necessary. Rafsanjani’s public revelation in April 2012 of those attempts reflects yet another effort by him to normalize Iran’s foreign relations with the U.S.: “The way we have now, which is not talking with the United States and not having relations, is untenable. The United States is a primary power in the world. What difference is there between Europe, China, and Russia and the United States? If we negotiate with them, why should we not negotiate with the United States? Negotiations do not mean surrender. We should negotiate. If the U.S. accepts our position or if we accept its position, the problems will be over.” For similar reasons, Rafsanjani has also urged that Tehran nurture good relations rather than antagonism with Riyadh and Cairo.⁶⁷

On the other hand, immediately dangerous actions are being undertaken by the IRGC’s high command loyal to Khamenei—including military maneuvers in the Persian Gulf as a threat to the world’s oil supply and assassination attempts against foreign diplomats within the U.S. and in Third World countries as retaliation for attacks inside Iran on its scientists.⁶⁸ Military engagement with the U.S. and/or Israel would be most welcomed by the ayatollahs because future elections could be cancelled (under Article 68 of the Constitution), reformists rounded up, and all dissent silenced under the guise of national survival. As such, if another nation decides to take on the ayatollahs it will not end with mere tactical strikes but would necessitate complete elimination of the ayatollahs’ means of external and internal tyranny to be successful.⁶⁹

A Fragile System

THE 1979 REVOLUTION THAT OVERTHREW THE SHAH PRODUCED A SYSTEM THAT awkwardly tried to reconcile mechanisms for popular representation with what is essentially a clerical dictatorship. The consequence of events beginning with the suppression of popular dissent after presidential elections in 2009 and culminating with the attempt at fixing parliamentary elections in 2012 lies in that the ayatollahs are persisting in their Machiavellian scheme to consolidate power even further domestically. Consequently, the bottom line is that representative governance is unlikely to emerge in Iran so long as the theocracy endures through force and freedom-seeking

Iranians lack the might to overthrow it.⁷⁰ Yet, the political process also demonstrates the limits of the ayatollahs' ability to predetermine events inside Iran. For instance, even with the majles on their side, abolishing the presidency requires a national referendum that the clergy are unlikely to win.

Politically weakened by protests and infighting, Iran's theocratic leaders are maneuvering to secure their own, often individual, futures just as they have been doing since late 2009. In the meantime, the security and military apparatus, including the MOIS, the IRGC, and the Basij, that sustains the ayatollahs' despotism is showing widening ideological differences between commanders whose allegiance lies (often for self-serving reasons) with Ayatollah Khamenei and the lower-ranking officers and conscripts who find the reformist ideas championed by Ahmadinejad and Mashaei and even by Mousavi and Karroubi to be appealing. Fundamentalist clergymen have begun fretting not only about their declining influence within the ranks of the state's security forces but even within their own clerical ranks as many mollahs reassert notions of being politically Quietist. Essentially, the Islamic Republic and its revolutionary creed are now being destabilized from within by the very religious, political, and social dynamics that propelled the ayatollahs to power in 1979.⁷¹

The ayatollahs' undemocratic actions at home have negative consequences for their image in the rest of the Middle East, too, as has been analyzed. Despite fervent claims by them to the contrary, freedom rather than Iranian-style religious radicalism is the main factor rallying Arab citizens against their autocratic heads of state. Indeed, understanding this, even Arab Islamist groups funded by Iran have decided to bide their time rather than demand that countries like Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan transform into Sharia-based nations.⁷² Additionally, many Arabs are now well aware that the ayatollahs violently and unhesitatingly suppressed Iranian citizens' aspirations for freedom—in the summer and fall of 2009 and again in February 2011. Arab intellectuals and activists have witnessed even a political event like parliamentary elections, which should be routine, being far from free and fair in the Islamic Republic—and therefore at odds with Arabs' own political aspirations. So Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt, realizing that the mantles of Khomeini and Khamenei will not serve them well either with their own people or in creating the needed working relationships with the U.S. and the E.U., continue distancing themselves from the negative images of Iranian fundamentalism.⁷³

Supreme Leader Khamenei presents himself and his supporters as defending not only Iran but Islam as well against internal and external foes—comparing their actions to the trials of the Prophet Muhammad and the earliest Muslims.⁷⁴ These ayatollahs regard the Islamic Republic as “established according to the decree of the twelfth Shiite Imam [the Mahdi or Savior] and, therefore, any criticism of the regime is unacceptable.”⁷⁵

Yet, despite the Supreme Leader's best efforts, alliances of convenience have been forming—even between once arch-foes like the former President and current Expediency Discernment Council chairman Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad, who has returned to attending that council's meetings after a three-year boycott. Moreover, far from backing down from Khamenei, Ahmadinejad is expanding the executive branch's overt challenge to the principles and institutions of the Guardianship of the Jurist. He is gaining support among reformist ayatollahs, too, for his attempts to have the executive branch monitor implementation of the Constitution. More brazenly, upon the heels of the recent election, the Iranian president issued an executive order that all officials within the executive branch are not bound by the laws passed by parliament. Ahmadinejad also continues to employ controversial yet publically popular supporters like Chief of Staff Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei and Executive Vice President Hamid Baghaei despite orders from Khamenei and other high-ranking ayatollahs to dismiss them. Both of these men have openly called for an end to the theocracy, much to the citizenry's widespread delight. The executive branch persists as well in its efforts to blame Iran's growing international isolation, worsening economic woes, and stifling socioreligious codes upon the clerics' "Arabian-style Islam."⁷⁶ As dissent continues to mount, all the political factions are busy preparing for the next conflict—not with the UN, the United States, EU, or Israel, but over Iran's presidential election to be held in June 2013. Former presidential candidate Rezai has said that "six or seven prominent political figures will run for that office" in what is likely to be the most hotly contested and politically unpredictable balloting since the founding of the Islamic Republic.⁷⁷

At the heart of the Islamic Republic's problems is a moribund political system which is spiraling into absolute dysfunction. Paramilitary commanders close to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei have boasted that their troops "can secure elections," and the IRGC does not mince words when urging its troops to "vote for Islamic candidates" and "safeguard the Islamic state." Yet fixing ballots in favor of the ayatollahs does not translate into holding back the tensions that are building into a populist tsunami. Even the Basij and IRGC may not be able to suppress the next revolt. "It is in reality increasingly a show, a political farce," commented a University of Tehran political scientist about the Islamic system of government. The popular Tehrani female rapper Bahar captures her fellow citizens' longing for regime change:

The land of Iran is a prisoner of a cold night.
Tomorrow the bright dawn will come.
You [Khamenei] are not a wise man, you tyrant.
You've shown how you believe in God.

So you have only a few criminal disciples.
Where does the Quran say 'be vile and corrupt?'
Why do your clothes smell like blood?
What are you trying to hide?
Why do you crush this cry for justice?
The people don't deserve such disdain.
Know that no regime can hang on through hatred and violence.
We are ready and waiting.

She adds:

They think they've put out the fire.
But we're the smoldering coals under the ashes.⁷⁸

Ironically, it was a former stalwart of Ayatollah Khomeini, the late Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri, who laid down a theological basis for challenging the Islamic Republic's very existence: "A political system based on force ... is illegitimate. Taking action against it entails paying heavily, but will be rewarded greatly by God." Essentially, the will of Iran's people is regarded as superior to that of any leader and his cohorts, a viewpoint enshrined in Iran's current constitution as well. History as well as current trends suggest that Iranians will eventually succeed in separating religion from state. Naturally, they will not reject Shiism and its mollahs completely, for faith has been central to Iranian life for centuries. Instead, the object of Iranian reformers will be to return the clergymen to an appropriate place in society as religious guides rather than politicians. In this, Iranian nationalists may be inspired by the example of those early Iranians led by Darius the Great who, in the year 522 BC, successfully ousted the magi or Zoroastrian priests who had seized political power through their leader Gaumata.⁷⁹ Yet, exactly when Iranians will succeed this time around remains unclear.

NOTES

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2. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Hokumat-e Islami or Islamic Government*, p. 55.

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8. For Iran's demographics see *Statistical Center of Iran*, <http://www.amar.org.ir/default.aspx?tabid=52>. On the majles see further Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Why Iran's Islamic Government is Unraveling," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 10 (2010), p. 23, http://www.currenttrends.org/docLib/20100802_Choksy.pdf. On the number of candidates and the voting-eligible population see *Mehr News Agency*, "Over 3,400 get endorsement to seek parliamentary seat," (February 21, 2012), <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1540232>.
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<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/07/grand-ayatollah-montazeris-fatwa.html>. The *magophonia* or purge of magi from politics is discussed by Richard N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1984), pp. 98-102, 363-364. For the buildup to a similar event aimed against the ayatollahs see Jamsheed K. Choksy, “Iran’s Leadership Struggle Reveals Secular-Islamist Split,” *World Politics Review* (May 13, 2011), <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/8838/irans-leadership-struggle-reveals-secular-islamist-split>. In this sense the meaning of religion in Iranian life is not difficult to understand, on which see further Hooman Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), p. 80.

Khairat al-Shater on the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood

UPON HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON IN MARCH 2011, KHAIRAT AL-SHATER, the Deputy Guide of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, was reportedly tasked by the Guidance Council of the Brotherhood with performing a comprehensive review of the movement's overall strategy in the post-Mubarak era. This new strategy, which is supposed to reflect the fact of the Brotherhood's rise as the most powerful political force in Egypt today, has often been referred to as "The Nahda Project." (Nahda means "Renaissance" or "Rise.")

We know very little about al-shater as a politician. he has been described as the "IronMan" of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). As one of Egypt's most successful businessmen, his prestigious stature within the MB's ranks might be attributed to his financial support to the movement over the years. His prestige also derives from the enormous personal suffering that he has endured for the MB's cause: He has spent more than half of the past two decades in prison, and his property has been confiscated twice in the same period. Al-Shater, moreover, is well connected internationally, and has very strong business ties across the region—in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, among other places. He is also said to be a major supporter of Hamas.

When the Muslim Brotherhood sought to contest the present Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and his cabinet, it was not surprising that their nominee for the office was Khairat Al-Shater. When, more recently, the Brotherhood failed to force their will on the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the movement decided to renege on all of their reassuring promises since the outbreak of the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 and run a candidate in the upcoming presidential elections. Once more, this candidate was Khairat Al-Shater.

The importance of Al-Shater and his project therefore cannot be exaggerated. The following text is a complete English translation of a lecture Al-Shater gave in Alexandria, Egypt on April 21, 2011. The lecture, which is entitled “Features of Nahda: Gains of the Revolution and the Horizons for Developing,” is perhaps the single most important elaboration to date of not only Al-Shater’s worldview and politics, but of the MB’s plan for the future of Egypt and the region more generally in the post-Mubarak era.

The following translation of Al-Shater’s speech is based on a transcription of a video recording of the lecture, which is presently available on YouTube.¹ This transcription and translation is made available through the efforts of a team from the Egyptian Union of Liberal Youth, including (as transcriber) Ahmed Ragab Mohameed, (translator) Damien Pieretti, and (editor) Amr Bargisi. ~*Translator’s Note*

* * *

FIRST OF ALL I WOULD LIKE TO DIRECT MY THANKS TO MY MENTORS AND IKHWAN in Alexandria for this audience and reception, with thanks due to Ustath² Gum’a Amin, Deputy General Guide and our mentor for a long time, and to all of our mentors in Alexandria, and likewise to our sisters in the Administrative Office, thanks to all of you, and may God reward you well and bless you, and accept your deeds and ours. I truly feel great happiness to have this meeting today with my brothers in Alexandria, after prisons have deprived us for a long time from meeting you and enjoying your company, and this was bestowed upon us by God after the success of the great revolution of this kind and blessed people, so may God reward you well.

Our talk today is about the developing of Ikhwani³ work. As you all know that His Grace the [General] Guide and the Guidance Bureau charged me with the supervision over the issue of developing Ikhwani Work. This matter, as you all know, is an imperative and continuous one. We were taught that Ihsan⁴ is an important degree in the life of the Muslim which he constantly seeks by pursuing the causes⁵ for improving [one’s] work up to the highest degree of mastery. We were also taught that wisdom is the believer’s objective, wherever he finds it he is the most worthy of it. And, we were taught that the mercy of God comes to him who came to know his times, so that his path became straightforward. Therefore one’s [i.e. our] approach, while keeping faith in the General Rules of the Islamic method, is to continuously examine reality and the changes he or his Ummah⁶ experience, or that occur in his life or in that of the Gama’a,⁷ so as to pursue the causes which render his methods, manners and means compatible with this reality; benefitting from all its positive changes while minimizing the effects of its negative changes. The issue of improvement, betterment, mastery, developing or

changing for the better is one which is concomitant to the nature of the Islamic⁸ movement and Islamic thought; occasionally, however, some circumstances and major transformations occur in the life of the Ummah or the Gama'a which make the issue of development and change even more pressing. None is more significant than the historical moment which Egypt and most of the peoples and states of the region are now experiencing. We call upon God Almighty to make this transformation the beginning of a new Nahda⁹ for the Ummah and the shaking off of the state of backwardness from which it has suffered for decades.

As Ikhwan, it is imperative that we, as well as the entirety of the Ummah God Willing, take advantage of this revolution which took place in Egypt and continues in the countries surrounding us, and which undoubtedly represents a historical moment and a major new transformative stage. As I mentioned, this makes the issue of developing even more of an obligation. But what do we mean by the development of Ikhwani work: i.e. What is the nature of such development? Does it involve the entirety of Ikhwani work or parts of it but not others? What are the mechanisms which we will apply in the process of developing? Who is responsible for the planning of developing? And, who is responsible for executing the matters which we will agree to develop?

Who is responsible for the planning of developing, and who is responsible for executing the matters which we will agree to develop? Before answering these questions I find myself in need of discussing a number of introductions to which you are undoubtedly privy due to your understanding of the Da'wah¹⁰ and its history, however, I shall mention them for the sake of reminding and because I will infer some of the issues related to development around them.

The first introduction is that I would like us to remember and review together briefly the general framework for our method and our way of working as Muslim Brothers because we need to distinguish within this framework between Constants and Variables. Naturally, Constants are not subject to developing, hanging, addition or omission; only Variables are. You all know that our main and overall mission as Muslim Brothers is to empower¹¹ God's Religion on Earth, to organize our life and the lives of people on the basis of Islam, to establish the Nahda of the Ummah and its civilization on the basis of Islam, and to subjugation¹² of people to God on Earth.

All of these are synonyms conveying the same meaning. This is why one of the Ikhwan's preachers said [cut in video].

Everywhere, the Ikhwan are working to restore Islam in its all-encompassing conception to the lives of people, and they believe that this will only come about through the strong society. Thus the mission is clear: restoring Islam in its all-encompassing conception; subjugating people to God; instituting the religion of God; the Islamization of life, empowering of God's religion; and establishing the Nahda of the Ummah on the

basis of Islam. All of these synonymous phrases give the same meaning, intention or definition, and that is the overall mission which we are seeking to accomplish as Ikhwan.

We were also taught in the method of the Muslim Brotherhood that, with regard to this overall mission: Imam Al-Banna, may he rest in peace, through his understanding of the Prophet's method (PBUH) and his way of instituting religion, outlined for us a number of stages or secondary objectives which, after their completion, will eventually lead to the achievement of this overall mission. Thus we've learned [to start with] building the Muslim individual, the Muslim family, the Muslim society, the Islamic government, the global Islamic State and reaching the status of Ustathiya¹³ with that State. If all of these secondary objectives are completed, then the overall mission is achieved: the Empowerment of God's Religion.

[Repetition...]¹⁴

We also learned in the method of the Muslim Brotherhood that this overall mission and these secondary goals can only be achieved by means of the strong Gama'a. The Gama'a is therefore the one primary instrument to achieve this overall mission and these secondary goals. We say Islam disappeared from life, thus preachers of the Ikhwan undertook the work of restoring Islam in its all-encompassing conception to the lives of people, and they believed that this would only come by way of the strong Gama'a. This is the same idea as that was expressed by His Eminence Omar Bin Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), which some scholars attribute to the prophet himself, stating that "there is no religion without a Gama'a, no Gama'a without an Imam¹⁵, and no Imam without obedience."

[Repetition...]

The Gama'a is thus an instrument and not a long-term goal. It is an instrument or means to Islamize life in its entirety and institute religion as His Eminence Omar said, and as such, this is part of the constants which we believe in as Ikhwan. The primary instrument for implementing this project is the Gama'a, not the Party or any other means, because whoever studies the jurisprudence of instituting religion as established by our master the prophet (PBUH) will find that the instrument which he used was the Gama'a.

[Repetition...]

The party, my brothers,¹⁶ as an instrument, means, or vessel, is not born of the Islamic idea, or of the Islamic experience, or of the Islamic model. Rather, it is one of the various products of Western civilization, the Western model, or the Western Nahda. It is an instrument or a vessel for the deliberation of power in the political space, an instrument for [engaging in] the conflict for the sake of obtaining power. The Gama'a,

on the other hand, is not an instrument of conflict or competition. The Gama'a is an instrument of integration and rallying of the entire Ummah in order to build its Nahda on the basis of Islam.

Therefore in our process of developing and changing, it would not be possible if someone says "the Gama'a should become a party," or "forget about the Gama'a and let's establish a party or two or three," because the party is a vessel born of the Western idea which has a particular nature within particular limitations; it is designed and conceived, as manifested by everything from its philosophy to its methods, for the political process which is only one part of the greater Nahda project in politics, economy, society, education, morals, values, behavior, children, women, the elderly, the young. Every aspect of life is to be Islamized and the primary instrument for this is the Gama'a. The Gama'a may establish a party, an association, schools, and many other means for some of the secondary tasks; but the Gama'a is to remain the instrument which establishes an entire life for the Ummah on the basis of Islamic reference or the basis of the Islamic method.

[Repetition...]

We also learned in the Ikhwan's method and in the jurisprudence of instituting religion as applied by God's prophet (PBUH) that this Gama'a has a Shar'i¹⁷ definition, a specific meaning, as well as special characteristics. If these characteristics are not attained within a community of human beings, we cannot call it an Islamic Gama'a, which His Eminence Omar meant to be the instrument for instituting religion.

The Gama'a has two primary prerequisites that must be on hand. The Ulama¹⁸ have said the first prerequisite is the strength of the psychological construction of the Gama'a's individuals. Every individual in the Gama'a should be [an] Islam, a walking Quran; his deeds should be the Quran; His faith, worship, manners, relationships, and all that is related to his behavior, thoughts, and emotions should be identical with the Islam that Muhammad (PBUH) got from God Almighty.

So if this psychological construction is present, does that alone bring a Gama'a into being? They said "no," a strong organizational construction is imperative. His Eminence Omar says "there is no religion without a Gama'a, and no Gama'a without an Imam." This means officials, structures and groups; a particular structure, not just a matter of circumstance. This structure also needs to be obeyed and committed to. The structure applies Shura¹⁹ in decision-making, but when a decision is reached, all levels [of the structure] must commit and obey.

[Repetition...]

So we are Groups, Families, Branches, Regions²⁰ and officials, the form of such struc-

ture may change from one era to another, but the idea is that there must be an organization. There must be work and, in this system, there must remain certain degrees of commitment. So it is not possible for us to call any gathering a Gama'a, as in the technical term of the Islamic movement, where each can do what he wants or an one with an idea different from that of the majority comes out saying it or committing to it. Not any existing gathering is a Gama'a, even if it were a group of good people who are committed to Islam; they are not a Gama'a as such without their structures and officials, without system, commitment, and obedience.

The Gama'a thus requires the strength of psychological construction and the strength of organizational construction. The organizational construction needs structures, officials, and relationships that bind them together.

The Ulama classified these relationships into brotherhood, trust and obedience. [Political] Parties always talk about partisan commitment, which is synonymous with obedience; meaning that people hear and execute the party's policy and commit to its instructions, so the analogous term we have for Partisan commitment is obedience. However, we have two [other] important issues, that of brotherhood and that of trust. These relationships must be present, so we won't call just any gathering a Gama'a, and won't call just any individual a member of a Gama'a, if he didn't commit and can't be described by these characteristics on the level of personal piety as a Muslim person and on the level of adherence to the particular relationships of Ikhwan, confidence and commitment to the Gama'a. We can't call such an individual a member of a Gama'a, even if he refers to himself as such, because the issue at stake is not what I say about myself, but the criteria of how I behave: Are these characteristics present in me or not?

[Repetition...]

It is not possible for someone to say I'm one of the Ikhwan despite his lacking some of these characteristics in the first place, even if he himself is a virtuous and pious brother. This is why Imam Al-Banna in his memoirs warned of the pious unorganized man or he who always breaks ranks because the issue is not only one of individual piety, but rather with individual piety the issues connected to organizational development must also be present.

Thus, we learned in the Muslim Brotherhood's method that the overall mission is to empower God's religion or establish the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic reference, from the Muslim individual to Ustathia, a mission that can only be achieved through the Gama'a which has certain prerequisites and characteristics. We also learned that this Gama'a, in order to achieve this objective and mission, must proceed along three lines: definition, formation and execution.²¹

[Repetitions...]

When Imam Al-Banna told us that these are the fundamentals of the Muslim Brotherhood method, he did not come up with them, nor was it he who invented them. Rather, he examined the method of the Prophet (PBUH) and how he instituted the religion of God Almighty in the first stage after [receiving] the revelation and found this framework. The Prophet strove to achieve this mission and these objectives; he formed this Gama'a with these characteristics and attributes, and during the time of the prophet this Gama'a proceeded along the lines of definition, formation and execution.

Thus this part of our method represents constants, and there is no room for discussion about change and developing. No one can come and say "let's change the overall mission." No one can come and say, "Let's change the overall mission." No one can say, "Let's remove one of these objectives." No one can say, "Instead of the Gama'a let's make a party or two." No one can say, "We'll work along three lines other than definition, formation and execution." No one can say, "Forget about obedience, discipline and structures of the Gama'a," claiming that we can call any gathering a Gama'a." No. All of these are constants that represent the fundamental framework for our method: the method of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is not open to developing or change.

[Repetition...]

We have reviewed the stages from the Individual to Ustathiya, but where are we now along these stages? I mean are we now at the stage of the individual, household, society, Government, Global Islamic State or Ustathiya? To answer this question we look at our situation and our history. His Eminence the Prophet (PBUH), before he met his creator, had already made headway for the Muslim Gama'a under his leadership, regarding the household, individual, and society stages, and he established the Islamic state in Medina. He then began to expand this state to cover the Arabian Peninsula and then began the launch of the Global State of Islam; the evidence is that Ghzawat Mo'tah²² took place in his time (PBUH), and we all know that Mo'tah is in Jordan and not in the Arabian Peninsula.

Therefore, the path was clear, thus the Rashidun (rightly-guided) Caliphs, God's grace upon all of them, continued the stage of the Global State of Islam, and so its domain expanded, and the Persian and Roman (Byzantine) States fell as the new state of Islam emerged on the global level. This state arrived after some time to the point where it became the strongest state in existence, and therefore Ustathia was actualized in reality. This, my brothers, was concluded in forty or fifty years and endured for more than 1000 years. Sometimes, Ustathia was lost, and at other times, like in the period of the Tatar War (Mongul Invasion), the Caliphate fell in Baghdad. But because Islamic

regimes and governments were present in states in Egypt, Palestine, and North Africa, Muslims gathered together again, fought and defeated the Tatars, restored the Caliphate once more, and after a while, the Caliphate returned to a state of greatness.

The last form of the Islamic Caliphate was the Ottoman government, but last century, it first lost the state of Ustathia which had been present but in a weak form. Hence we lost Ustathia and then after this the Caliphate itself collapsed. If Islam had been governing our states and countries in Egypt, Libya, the Hejaz, and so forth, perhaps it would have been possible to pursue the reinstatement of the Global State of Islam. However, what happened was that many of the states of the Islamic world had been occupied [by Western powers] before or after the fall of the Caliphate. The English (British) came to Egypt in 1882 and [before that] went to India. The French descended upon the Levantine region, Lebanon, Algeria and Tunisia. Italy descended upon Libya. Holland went to Indonesia. The colonial states spread across all of our states to a large extent, and, step by step, secular systems were put in place [of Muslim ones] with regard to the organization of the lives of Muslims in their petty states, so that in the end we couldn't say that we have an Islamic System of Government in any of these states.

What was changed first in Egypt was the judicial or legal system. They said "you all govern yourselves in Shari'a courts; here we have foreigners so we'll create special courts for them." After a little while they told us "foreigners are feuding with Egyptians, so we'll make mixed courts." After a little while these mixed courts became the norm, relying on positive (man-made) laws, with the exception of personal status laws, in addition very little articles in civil or criminal codes which might be said to be related to the Islamic Judicial system.

After that came the economic system. Muslims didn't know the system of interest or banks or management of the economy on the basis of capitalism. So after changing the laws step by step as well, the secular economic system, or the capitalist system, was also instated in the place of the system which had been dominant in our Islamic states, the same happened in education and in most of the other matters.

The crucial issue here is the systems which are being implemented, not only whether the president is nominally Muslim or is chosen in an Islamic manner even if that had happened—and it didn't. What is more important and more dangerous than this was that in the end, we are saying that an Islamic system in our countries means that the various areas of our life are organized on the basis of Islam, on the basis of the Islamic idea, or Islamic Reference, however this system was replaced one part after the other, so that the systems which are implemented in all of our Muslim countries became secular systems, systems imported from the West or the East, but not Islamic systems. I am not addressing the issue of Takfir,²³ since this is not the subject of my discussion right now, but the criteria for the organization of the various

aspects of our lives is no longer based on Islam, and as such we have lost Ustathiya, we have lost the Caliphate or the Global State of Islam, and we have also lost Islamic governments on the single-country level.

So for the first time Muslims became exposed. For the first time Muslims had no state and no Sultan.²⁴ There was no government protecting religion's territory. That was it. For the first time in the history of Muslims and with the fall of the Caliphate, secular systems were substituted for the existing systems of life and government in our petty states, our society became completely exposed since there was no Sultan. The words of His Eminence Omar "No religion without a Gama'a and no Gama'a without an Imam": there was no Imam, there is now no regime protecting religion in the lives of these people.

When this happened, there were reactions in the Islamic world to this new tragedy as to what we were supposed to do. His Grace Imam Mohamed Abduh, may he rest in peace, said that the solution lies in the reform of religious education. Sheikh Mohamed Ibn Abd Al-Wahab in the Hejaz said that the solution lies in combating Bid'as²⁵ of creed. Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Sobky, the founder of the Shari'a Association in Egypt, may he rest in peace, said the solution lies in combating Bid'as of rituals. The Sennusi movement in Libya and the Mahdiyya in Sudan said the solution lies in liberating the occupied homeland first.

Developments, visions and initiatives emerged for dealing with this new reality, but the problem is that none of these paid attention to the fact that the situation had changed and that for the first time we were outside the sphere of government or authority. We became a society without a government that represents Islam. Therefore, [we ask] Imam Mohammed Abduh, who is going to reform the religious education if the new government imposes a secular system which doesn't want a religious educational system in the first place? It brought us an educational system tied to the Western model. Also who will fight Bid'as? Who will do anything?

There was no clear answer to this question. The first person, as far as we know, to be aware of the change in the situation, was Imam Al-Banna, may God have mercy on him. He acknowledged that the equation had changed, that we were now outside the realm of state and authority, so he researched the history of Muslims in order to find what the solution was when something like this happened previously. He found that there was no precedent in the lives of all Muslims, because we never in our history lost Ustathiya, the Caliphate or government at the level of the states. Even when the Caliphate fell in the days of the Tatars, or was weakened in the days of the Crusaders, there was Qutuz²⁶ in Egypt; there was someone here or there, and the situation was rectified. But there was no similar experience in over a thousand years in the history of Muslims, so Al-Banna did not find anything but in the method of the Prophet (PBUH) and his ear-

ly biography; he was the [only] one who instituted religion without being in the seat of power. Where did he start from then? He started with the Muslim individual, the household, and the society. He established the Muslim Gama'a under his leadership (PBUH).

So Imam Al-Banna, may God have mercy on him, went back to the method of the Prophet (PBUH) and studied his jurisprudence or his Way of instituting religion, and thus he extracted this Way, explained it and outlined it for us in what is known as the method of the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, my brothers, the Muslim Brotherhood's method is that of the Prophet's (PBUH), and thus we say that the Muslim who is connected to the Gama'a and the method must believe and realize that he is on the right path and that he must not be on a path other than this one. One of the fundamental prerequisites to develop the Brother within the Gama'a is to realize that you are on the right path and that you must not be on a path other than this one.

[Repetition...]

As Ikhwan we have spent a long time working on the individual, walking along this line, working on the household, working on society. So we are now developing the Muslim individual, and God willing we will continue. We are developing the Muslim household and God willing we will continue. We are developing the Muslim society, and God willing we will continue. We are preparing for the stage of Islamic government after this because it is what follows the stage of society. Our preparation for the stage of Islamic government does not, as the secularists understand it, entail us striving to reach the seat of government ourselves. Our one and only concern is for there to be a government that is faithful to the method of our Lord Almighty, and a government keen on establishing the lives of people on the basis of Islamic reference, whether it be us or someone else.

We are different from other parties; the issue is not that we ourselves need to govern as some think. No. The issue is that we are working on the stage of society, and we are preparing this society for the stage of Islamic government, which is what organizes the remaining aspects of people's lives, those outside the scope of society, such as economics, politics and all other fields, on the basis of Islamic Reference.

So this is our first introduction: Our mission is to develop the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference. This mission requires the progression through a number of stages from the individual to Ustathiya. Our primary tool, based on the method of the Prophet (PBUH) is the Gama'a, which has characteristics and components, and must proceed along the three lines of progress. On the historical or realistic front, we are at the stage of society and about to be in the stage government alongside which we must continue to work on the individual and the household. This first introduction outlines our overall mission and our instrument and delineates that which is

constant in our method, that which is not subject to developing or change because it is connected to the method of the Prophet (PBUH).

As for the second introduction: when we talk about developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference, some [people] do not realize how deep the issue of Islamic Reference is; they imagine that it is an emotional word or that I can take the experience of Japan, of Britain, of Malaysia, of Turkey, or any other experience and dress it an Islamic appearance or Islamic outfit. The issue is not like this. The issue is that the Islamic method is a substantial method that deeply impacts the organization of [all] aspects of life. This needs to be clear before us; it is not a matter of an emotional or a formalistic slogan, but rather a substantial and fundamental issue.

So for example, when we come to the political regime based on Islamic reference, we will find that Islam outlines general rules for life, in its political conception, amidst the Muslim society, country or people. One General Rule, among others, for example states "their affairs being Shura (counsel) between them."²⁷ This means that all the decision-making mechanisms inside the Muslim society become based on Shura, and means also that the choices of officials and representatives at the various levels should be based on Shura. As for the system we will use in decision-making or the organization of our political lives; or the issues of whether we will choose a parliamentary republican system or a presidential republican system; or whether we will have unicameral or bicameral legislature; or whether we will elect one president of the republic, or the ruler or primary official, or three or four and not one; whether we will choose them directly or by way of representation; all of these issues, my brothers, are subject to Ijtihad.²⁸

We cannot take the words of His Eminence Omar Ibn Al-Khattab which were present in his time as a framework or executive structure for the administration of the state and say that it will be useful to us today. For our Lord Almighty, because he knew that the variables in life would be many, outlined for us a number of rules. It is demanded of us that the Muslim political scientist living in our time apply Ijtihad and start to tell us the design of the political system that we will use. On what basis does he lay down this system? On the basis of the General Rule, "their affairs being Shura between them," the experiences of Muslims from the days of His Eminence the Prophet to the present, and human experiences in general if he finds in them something useful. The Muslim political scientist comes to do this and lay down the system, and since [the process] involves human beings, reality and experience, if we said to three people to engage in Ijtihad each one by himself, it is possible that the three will come up with three systems similar to each other and also possible that the three to come up with somewhat different ones.

Who will delineate the system which the Ummah will commit to and apply to its

life? [It is] the Ummah itself. Thus the matter is posed to the Ummah, to the public organization, to the council (parliament) which represents it, and they decide on the most favorable political system to apply and use. So for example if a Mujtahid²⁹ says “nothing will work with you but a Just Despot,”³⁰ we would say no, because this contradicts the General Rule, “their affairs being counsel between them;” a despot does not work. If a Mujtahid who had studied the experience of the Soviet Union in a particular historical stage came and said the idea that the workers should rule is plausible because they are the ones who produce and work in the factories, we say no, because the General Rule, “their affairs being counsel between them,” didn’t say “the affairs of workers;” affairs, rather, refers to the entire people.

What I mean by this discussion, my brothers, is that for the systems that we will use in organizing our lives on the political, economic, social or educational level, there are rules that govern them, and there are Islamic experiences, and the matter requires Ijtihad. So it’s not possible for me to take experience X or Y and say this is what I’m going to use and that’s it, because it might not conform with these rules which exist for us, in addition to the fact that Islam posits some of details about the characteristics of the Ruler or official, and about the [rules] governing his relationship, [considering duties and rights], with the citizens. Thus the Islamic system is a system which has substance. It has conceptions and rules which govern it. It has means and modes. Of course, Muslims stopped living their lives according to Islamic reference, we’ve spent 200 to 300 years, so what Muslims see now are the models of the West, Japan, China, Korea, or others, because there are now no systems based on Islamic Reference among all of present states of the Sunni people throughout the entire world.

[Repetition...]

The third introduction is a historical introduction specific to the period of twenty or thirty years, i.e. the period which just passed. You all know that the Society of the Muslim Brothers, and as such its method of working to institute God Almighty’s method and empowering God’s religion in the lives of people, stopped since the year 1954 and disappeared until the second half of the seventies of the last century; for more than twenty years. It is true that there was the organization of 1965 but the numbers and duration were limited and the public did not feel its presence strongly. So we can all say that the Ikhwan disappeared from 1954 to 1974 roughly, because there were some of the Ikhwan that showed up in 1972 and 1973 but their numbers were small. Had this absence been for a short time, hadn’t there been misrepresentation of the Ikhwan’s method, and hadn’t there been another model presented, i.e. the Nasserist model, which they tried to spread to a great extent; if the Ikhwan were for example imprisoned for two years, and the number of prisoners were three or

four thousand while there were a hundred thousand outside, then the Muslim Brotherhood was brought back, it would have been easy to reorganize their ranks and reestablish their structure. What happened, however, was that most or a large fraction of the Ikhwan were sent to prison, and for a long time, the Nasserite model was massively propagated, and it was heavily attempted to misrepresent the method and ways of the Muslim Brotherhood.

As such we are able to say that there was a long period of severance that affected the history of the Ikhwan's work in Egypt. For when the Ikhwan got out of prisons during the second half of the seventies or at the end of the first half, they started the re-establishment of the Gama'a or the second establishment of Society of the Muslim Brothers. This issue of establishment is of course important and necessary because we said in the first introduction that the primary tool for empowering God's religion is establishing the Gama'a and considering the discussion of His Eminence Omar that there is no religion without a Gama'a. So it was imperative for the Muslim Brothers when they left the prisons to establish or re-establish the Gama'a after it was made to disappear for a long time.

It might be true that there was a group of Ikhwan present in prison that stayed in contact with each other in some form or another and in some cases organizational connections emerged, however this was far removed from the reality of society. The Gama'a wasn't present or widespread in cities and villages. There were no structures and as such it was the primary mission of the Ikhwan who got out of prison during the beginning of the seventies was the re-establishment of the Gama'a. This is of course, my brothers, a process that took a long time and toward which enormous efforts were exerted, because there were no Groups, no Families, no Branches, no Regions, no administrative offices, and no Shura Council. Some of the old members of the Guidance Bureau were in prison, and they retained their positions when they got out in the beginning of the process of re-establishing the Gama'a, but the rest of the structure was not present and, as I said a little while ago, if the matter had just been imprisonment for two or three years followed by their release, their regrouping and re-organization would have been simple. However this was for twenty years or more, and another intellectual model was propagated, that being the Nasserite model.

When the Ikhwan were released and began the re-establishment, the first stage during the first year or two was an attempt to get acquainted with the existing reality. Later they began the attempt to correct the negative image which Nasser and his regime had drawn on the Ikhwan. So they began their activities on this basis and then moved to the issue of Da'wa (calling) to Islam in its totality, introducing Islam in its totality, and began to introduce the Muslim Brotherhood's method. Then they scouted for elements [in society] which were prepared to believe in this method, so efforts were

exerted to educate them, followed by the process of organizing them in groups. When the work first started, there was a group at the central level in Cairo [consisting of] Ustath Umar El-Tilmisani³¹ (may God have mercy on him), Ustath Mustafa Mashhur³² (may God have mercy on him), Doctor Ahmed El-Malt³³ (may God have mercy on him), Al-Hajj Hosni,³⁴ there was a group of twenty, thirty, or forty Ikhwan present. In the other governorates there were also groups. In Alexandria there was Al-Hajj Abbass As-Sissi,³⁵ and Al-Hajj Mahmoud Shukri,³⁶ and many other names. However, we are still talking about twenty or thirty Ikhwan in the governorates; there were also some two to six working in each governorate.

Some people, my brothers, underestimate the issue of the re-establishment of Ikhwan work in the seventies by reducing it to student activism. This is wrong. Some people reduce it to activism in Cairo University, and this is an even bigger mistake. Some go so far as to Qasr Al-Aini Faculty of Medicine (Cairo University Medical School), and this is also incorrect. I was a witness to this stage, so was Ustath Guma'a [Amin], and Ustath Muhamed Hussein³⁷ and many others.

The Ikhwan were released and began their activities in the governorates. It is true that they focused on working in the universities because there was an Islamic revival present after the setback of '67—a divine Islamic revival. The Islamic work that started after '67 began gradually and every year was improving on the last, but the work lacked a vision or a project—meaning that we were trying to be religious and were trying to serve our religion, but didn't know how. I said in the introduction that in the Ikhwan's method there's an overall mission of instituting God's Sharia and developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islam, that there are sub-goals from the individual to Ustathiya, that the primary instrument is the Gama'a which has specific characteristics, and that the Gama'a must proceed along the three lines. This is a method. This is a vision. This is a comprehensive project known as the Islamic project which the Ikhwan are trying to accomplish.

Our blessed revival in the universities, however, was a random revival of religiosity without a clear vision for the way of instituting religion. I remember my mentor Ustath Mohamed Hussein. It was 1973, and I and a group of my colleagues were finishing our BA in Engineering. We were sitting together and Ustath Mohammed was with us, and we were wondering what we were going to do when we leave the university. Would we go to Al-Mansoura or Port Said and spend some time in each city? We were now used to Islamic activism in the university, we knew what we were doing there, and things went [for us] even if there was no [immediate] project. But when we returned to our homes, in what ways would we become active and how? We didn't find a clear and specific answer, so I personally decided not to take the exam that year and actually postponed my graduation a year because we agreed, and Ustath Mohamed Hus-

sein was with us, that we would form a group and study what methods are available. But if we did not like any of them, was it possible for us to make our own method? We sat, talked and studied. We'd study Creed, History, Islamic Movements and many other issues in order to put forth a conception for when we leave the university and for how we would continue our activities.

Why am I telling you this story? So that you realize, my brothers, the nature of this stage, that there was no clear vision and that there was a huge amount of suffering. When the Ikhwan were released from prison, though their numbers were small relative to the total number of students, this blessed revival started to have a vision before it, and they began to mobilize our brothers [in the university] and illuminate for them the mission, goals and the Gama'a as a project. So there was some response from the individuals taking part in the Islamic revival, and there were people who chose the Salafi line, while our brothers in Upper Egypt took another path. I remember after we agreed to stay a year in order to figure out what we were going to do, I graduated and went to work at Mansoura University, and I didn't sense that there was a problem because there were Islamic activists in the university. After a while Ustath Mohamed Hussein and a group of brothers were beginning to become convinced with the Ikhwan's method. He came and visited me so as to discuss the subject. Before discussing anything, he asked me "Where will we go to Friday prayer?" I told him I would pray in a mosque here where the Ikhwan deliver the sermons. He then answered, "That's it, you've made it easier for us, because we came to discuss this [specific] subject, so thank God you've made the distance shorter."

Why am I telling you this my brothers? So that you realize the amount of suffering that existed during that time, as well as the amount of effort exerted by the Ikhwan who left prison, and the youth who cooperated with them on the subject of re-establishing the Ikhwan structure or Gama'a. This matter took ten or even fifteen years, not just a few days, because as I said from the beginning, if the incarcerated Ikhwan had served just two years and then released, it would have been easy; they would have exerted a little effort and organized what had existed before. However the matter took a much, much longer time, and the Ikhwan's project succeeded by the grace of God in most of the universities, then in most of the cities, followed by most of the neighborhoods in the big cities, then the villages and the rural areas.

In the year 1990, the Muslim Brotherhood's first generally elected Shura Council was formed, as were Shura Councils and administrative offices in the governorates; the first elected Guidance Bureau was also chosen in 1990, and after it was based on the historical [contribution] criterion; it became a matter of election that [first] year. The structure became visible everywhere in the entirety of the Arab Republic of Egypt, from Cairo to of all the governorates and villages, in many of the neighborhoods and

rural areas. We started sections, committees, branches and regions: a very, very huge structure. But this was by the blessing and efforts of a great number of the Ikhwan that came out of prison and those who allied with them, cooperated with them or accepted their project from among the university youth at this time. No one individual or group, whoever that may be, can take credit for this by themselves. It was by the grace of God Almighty that our brothers who were coming out [of prison] were successful in their marketing and calling for the vision of the Ikhwan, spreading it among many of the youth and others so that this structure came into existence. Thus the new generations need to realize the nature of this stage and the efforts that were exerted by our brothers coming out of prison in spite of their many problems and circumstances resulting from their absence from their homes and families for so long.

A Brother now, by the grace of God, finds everything working: Branches, Regions, Committees, Departments, and Offices. He can go onto Facebook and say, “We don’t want the [General] Guide; we don’t want a Guidance Bureau.” However, he grew up in easy and simple circumstances; he didn’t feel the efforts and hardships endured by the Ikhwan in this period, and he is now a passenger on a functioning train, asking for [a choice of] coffee, tea, food, and juice. That’s it, the issue is easy and simple for him; he puts any idea that comes to him on Facebook.

Therefore it is very important, my brothers, that we realize that very, very great efforts were exerted during this period so that the structure could be established and stabilized. When the structure was solidified and started to become present after 1990, it was natural that the Gama’a would begin to prepare for a stage of opening up to society. It started to prepare the path, with bigger steps in the project of developing the Nahda of the Ummah on the basis of Islam, because in the stage of establishing the structure, a large part of the Ikhwan’s efforts were directed to building the structure itself, and to re-establishing the Ikhwan. Thus sixty to seventy percent of the effort was exerted by the Ikhwan in order to bring back this structure because the issue is not merely re-organization plain and simple. There was spreading the idea and searching for supporters, educating and organizing them, and distributing them across the structure’s units, so that sixty to seventy percent of the effort was focusing on the structure itself and its re-establishment and twenty to thirty percent was for our work in society and our activities in the mosques.

[Break for Maghreb (Sunset) Prayer]

[Repetition...]

We participated in the elections for the People’s Assembly in ’84 and ’87; we entered the Union elections and the University Faculties Clubs Elections, and we began working in the mosques and associations. By 1990 or the beginning of the nineties, Ikhwan,

represented by His Grace Ustath Moustafa Mashhour, who, may God have mercy on him, was Deputy to the General Guide and responsible for the planning committee in the Muslim Brotherhood during this time, began to be orientated towards opening up more to society and focusing more on the issue of developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference. Directives were indeed put forth and devising of the plan began, and any of you who goes back to the plan that exists now, or the version that preceded it, will find in it explicit texts indicating that seventy percent of the Ikhwan's efforts were directed to work in society.

This was written, but it was not implemented because in the year 1990 or in the beginning of the nineties, an essential change was beginning to take place in the interaction between the incumbent regime and the Muslim Brotherhood during this time. Before this time, there was some room for movement; I'm not saying room for movement means complete freedom. However, there was to a certain extent some degree of freedom with restrictions. The change that occurred was that the regime picked a new strategy. Why did this change occur? The objective of this strategy was to curb, confuse and constrict the Ikhwan. Why though? Many explanations were given but the most plausible of these was the success of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria in the elections. Before that, Mubarak was making statements in the press and international news agencies stating that the Ikhwan could possibly be absorbed into the political process. After the Islamic Salvation Front succeeded to a great extent in Algeria, Mubarak and some of the factions in his regime began to fear that this political process and this marginal position given to the Ikhwan in the form of partial freedom to work would give them the room to sweep the elections at any time and create a problem.

The new strategy was based on two primary lines. The first line was the enactment of a number of oppressive procedures against the Ikhwan, first manifested in the imprisonment of Ikhwan for various reasons, some of which were connected to the events of day. We all know that during the elections for the People's Assembly or other elections, some two, three, four, five or even seven thousand of us were kept in prisons. Also, they started a second methodical way which they learned from the Yemeni regime of Imam Ahmed: the hostage system. In order to control the tribes which he feared would rebel, Imam Ahmed would take as hostage from every tribe the young man dearest to the heart of the leader of the tribe and keep him in his palace so as to guarantee that this tribe, due to its concern for its son, would stay calm and not cause problems.

So Mubarak applied this system with some modification, and thus began in 1992 by taking groups of Ikhwan and placing them in prisons. These groups always included a number of the higher leaders (a member of two from the Guidance Bureau, someone from the officials in the provinces of departments, and groups of Ikhwan on

various administrative levels) because his objective was to cause a state of concern, fear or panic for the entire body of the Gama'a. So if he took someone from the Guidance Bureau only, the middle-ranking leaders and the rest of the Gama'a could still work and say that it was the leadership's fate, may God be with them. If it was only individuals from the bottom and the base, the leadership might have said this is a tax and the Ikhwan must pay it and the group will remain in prison for some time and then get out. However, he took groups, that is, key sectors from top to bottom, in which all levels were represented, to that no one inside the body of the Gama'a felt himself safe from prison. It began with groups in 1992 in the Salsabil Case,³⁸ and he put them in precautionary incarceration from six months to one year. In 1995, he developed the idea by bringing in martial courts, and the sentences became, instead of six months to a year, three to five years.

Cases followed one after another—until the last case of 2006, in which I was included, along with Engineer Mehdat [El-Haddad], Ahmed En-Nahas, Gamal Shaaban, Mahmoud Abd Al-Gawad and other Ikhwan from various regions. The price tag became three, five, seven or ten [years]; it grew a little bit. This, my brothers, was primarily meant to cause the maximum amount of fear and confusion to the body of the entire Gama'a. Everyone who was exposed to prison from '92 all the way to the fall of Mubarak, [came to] about 30 thousand Ikhwan, some of whom were imprisoned one, two, three, four, or five times. Every now and again you'd find Medhat in jail, you'd find Mohamed Ibrahim in jail, and you'd find Khairat in jail, and so on. Thirty thousand doesn't mean thirty thousand incarcerations. No. This is thirty thousand people, many of whom were imprisoned more than once, so huge numbers and multiple incarcerations.

Therefore we all began to put our prison suitcases under our beds as we expected to be imprisoned at any time. When any door that was knocked at twelve or one o'clock at night, even if it was a Brother was coming to you about an issue or with a problem, the first thing to come to your mind was that State Security had arrived. Therefore incarceration of this type had as its intention to confuse and frighten the Ikhwan, make them feel unsafe and insecure, and more. They prevented our children, Ikhwan and youth from being hired for faculty positions at universities; those who came out first were not appointed as lecturers, or representatives in the union, judiciary, or press. Those who worked as teachers in education were moved to administrative positions; those who worked as mosque preachers were moved to administrative positions. He prevented people from traveling. Lately, he started to shut down our companies and in the year 2000, even cracked down upon nine thousand firms and companies throughout the Republic on the eve of the elections.

Therefore the first line employed by Mubarak from the beginning of the nineties

was directing a number of oppressive procedures aimed at individuals and leaders of the Gama'a with the intention of frightening and confusing them and of course also as a message to society that if you walk with these people your fate will be the same as theirs. So this was the first line of strategy.

The second line was tightening or closing us off from external work outlets. So [we were allowed entry to] no syndicates or unions; parliamentary elections were rigged except for a few exceptional cases; no local councils or mosques; nothing. All venues were being completely closed. He ordered crackdowns on us as individuals, as groups and as Ikhwan, and the tightening of the outside environment in which we could work led to two issues. First, in the language of Administration, when any organization, institution or group is cut off from all the opportunities to work in the outside environment and is struck at its core, it must become significantly weakened almost to the point of dying. But because the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamic Gama'a based on God's method, our Lord Almighty protected the organization despite the existence of a number of negative forces on the work and objectives of the Gama'a.

Here I don't necessarily mean by negative effects flaws among the Ikhwan. Rather, to take but one example, when we wanted to hold elections, we either could not hold them [at all], or we held them by passing [the vote from one level to the next]. The last elections for the Guidance Bureau took place when I was in prison. The General Shura Council convened in six or seven places, not just one place. There was a time, during the period of relative openness, when for example, the administrative office grew to sixteen or seventeen members because the burdens of work are many. But when they entered the Alexandria office and arrested them once, then twice—besides the Beheira and other offices—the Ikhwan said 10 is enough for the administrative office.

The issue of Shura itself and its activation [was affected]: in the eighties we used to meet with the Ikhwan, or the Ikhwan officials would meet us like our meeting with you right now. The meetings could maybe have one, two or three thousand; or in the camp in Agami in Abu Talat, there were hundreds of Ikhwan and Ikhwan leaders present. We were denied all of this, and therefore our education took place in closed spaces and with limited actions. Our bylaws became highly complicated and our Shura was, to a great extent, suspended. Thus many of our means of decision-making, working and administration were negatively affected against our will as a result of this difficult circumstance. Were this to happen to any organization, institution or group in any place, it has to suffer some sort of introversion. We are saying this in the context of evaluating our reality so that when we talk about change and development, we also become aware of the matters which circumstances of confinement and danger imposed on us. Therefore we should change and treat these problems in the coming stage.

The second result achieved by the strategy of Mubarak or his regime was the delaying of our release to expand the project of developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference because we could not open up to society. Even [our] companies in the private sector were closed, even liquidating our associations. In the end, you want to involve society and anchor the values of societal participation so that all the people participate in the developing of their own Nahda and that of the Ummah on the basis of Islam. But how do you do that? Through the private sector, through associations, through society's different institutions, your schools, your hospitals, and all your means and instruments. So when all of this is closed off to you, this prevents you from undertaking your project of developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference. So this was also a major effect, a product of the plan undertaken by Mubarak and his regime starting in the nineties.

So now, by the grace of God and after the revolution, Mubarak and a large part of his regime are gone, and we hope that what remains of the regime is removed and God willing never returns. The Ummah has embarked on a new stage of freedom unknown for long times, having tied the hands of the security institution to a great extent up until now, and God willing it will return to its natural task without harming citizens, as its chief role becomes only that which is outlined by the law and constitution. The obstacle has now been removed, so we must return to the beginning of the matter which we were supposed to have undertaken since the nineties and on which we are expanding now, opening up to society to a great extent, enlightening the entire Ummah, and summoning its strength so that it contributes to the realization of its Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference.

Therefore the Ikhwan's first and main task is to contribute to the developing of the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference; this is now our essential task. We can't say that we must focus on the completion or building of the Gama'a because its structure, thanks to God, is very strong. So we may spend twenty to thirty percent of the effort on the Gama'a, however we must return to the words of our speeches and attitudes, and spend sixty to seventy percent on societal work to anchor the values of participation by everyone. The issue of the Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference, my brothers, is not as easy a subject as its title suggests, because this project of the Ummah's Nahda does not exist on the level of planning or formulation. This means that efforts are demanded of us to organize and think about what developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islam means. Mubarak, and before him Sadat and the regimes that existed since '52 did not seek to push Egypt and summon her efforts to participate in the developing of its Nahda on the basis of any method. Even this never happened.

They were focused on the fact that the president, head of state, and inspired leader be the one who directs and executes everything; that his directives be the ones that

drive [everything]. That the Ummah be responsible for the developing of its Nahda, the very concept of it, was absent. It was non-existent. Thus today it is required of us that we first contribute alongside the honest and the loyal among the children of this Ummah to the formulation of what the Nahda project means. This “Nahda” is big talk, but in the end we need to have a number of tracks in social, economic, health, education and moral development in many fields. Each of these tracks comprises sub-tracks, and these sub-tracks comprise projects. Who will execute the projects? The people will. The private sector has a role. Civil society associations have a role. All Islamic and non-Islamic institutions have a role. The state also has a role in order to develop the Ummah’s Nahda.

So we, as a people and as Ikhwan, should contribute to defining what “Nahda” means, and we invite people to take part in the implement of this Nahda. As for the part that is specific to the state, we advise the state or the government. This issue might require pressure, so we hold demonstrations or any type of pressure so that the state fulfills its role. We may, after the coming elections, get part of the cabinet, or part of the government. Therefore we should not neglect or marginalize the aspect specific to the government because it is a major aspect, however we advise government and apply pressure to it, and perhaps participate in government at some point.

Thus now, while discussing the developing of the Nahda, we are required to put effort into formulating the project; we plan, work and discuss the meaning of “Nahda” and the meaning of projects, and who will run the projects. This subject is a big challenge that the Ikhwan must assist in preparing for. After that, besides thought and planning, it is demanded of us that we tell the people how to work and that we help them: those who want to start an association, those who want to form a company, those who want to start a school, those who want start an institution. All of these issues require major efforts because the people don’t have experience. We as Egyptians have some experience only in charity work: a project on supporting orphans, Ramadan [charity] kit, winter clothes or blankets. But now we are talking about efforts for development, about efforts for Nahda, and the topic is much larger than the issue of [social] solidarity. Our thinking needs to be on a wider scale than this.

So we will think and plan, while at the same time we want to arrange for how the work will go, because we are the biggest faction currently present in the Ummah; present, organized and aware of the issues management. Thus we need to make an effort in this field. When we talk about developing the Ummah’s Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference, we don’t mean that the Muslim Brothers are the Ummah’s representatives in developing the Nahda, but rather that they think, plan, spread awareness and market the idea. The entire Ummah participates in developing its Nahda because the responsibility falls on the shoulder of the Ummah as a whole; coopera-

tion with the entire Ummah in all shades of its spectrum so that we contribute to developing this project however long it takes. This is the first and primary mission, and we said from the beginning that we learned in the Muslim Brotherhood that our mission is to develop the Ummah on the basis of Islamic Reference. [With regards to] this mission, we've passed a historical stage; we were establishing the Gama'a, and when we came to focus on it, we were greatly obstructed. Now, the obstacles have been removed, and so we return to the origin; to our natural objective; to our main mission.

We are not making and constituting a Gama'a in order to stay and work only on ourselves and on each other. This is required; but all of this is a means or instrument to develop the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islam, to empower God's Shari'a, to organize our lives and the lives of all people on the basis of God's method. Thus this issue requires a great effort in the coming stage, God willing, and as one of the pious businessmen said "he who begins is never late," meaning that even if we begin with a small effort; [gradually] this effort and work will accumulate so that we establish for the developing of a strong Nahda for our nation on the basis of Islamic Reference. This is the first and primary mission.

Our second mission in this stage is to maintain, to an appropriate level, the vitality of the revolution and maximize its results. Someone says to me "ok so you're talking about the Ummah's Nahda, what is the issue's relationship with the revolution?" I say that what prevented us and the Ummah from developing its Nahda was the autocratic regime. We don't want the autocracy to return once again. We don't want someone to incarcerate the Ikhwan or anyone else. We don't want someone to shut down the institutions we form for the developing of society. For this to happen, the revolution needs to be partially perpetual, and it needs to push for the achievement of as much of its objectives as possible because it hasn't realized all of them until now. [The revolutionaries] don't need to come out in the many millions that came out before; this was a situation relevant to the historical event of overthrowing the regime. Rather the appropriate level of at least one or two million should remain so as to keep a guarantee that the current government or any future government commits to the interests of the people, to building a stable political life including peaceful rotation of power, independence of the judiciary, rule of law, security, and attempts to develop the country and people and fix [their] problems. In short a government with which we wouldn't have a problem and would support. However if it deviated from this path and changed the rule to its own advantage, or that of its [entourage] as was the case with Mubarak, then the people who have awakened must never again sleep.

Therefore part of the vitality of the revolution must continue, and this must become part of our mission in cooperation with the different forces of the people: the improvement of its results, meaning that the revolution right now has achieved some

of its results and still has other demands. However, now there is a struggle of many wills. The West is playing in the region. The remnants of the old regime are playing. The current ruling power is dealing with the issue a bit slowly. The people have demands. So all of us must think of how we can help each other in order to maximize the results which we obtain from this great revolution.

Thus we have two fundamental missions. The first mission is to contribute to developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference, and this needs efforts on the planning and formulation level, as well as on the organizational and administrative level. The second mission is to maintain to an appropriate level the vitality of the revolution and maximize its results. These two missions together require of us a third fundamental mission and that is the re-interpretation of the Ikhwani work and developing it so that it is able to undertake these missions in the circumstances and stage in which we are now living, for we agreed that we have [suffered] some negative effects; our structures, bylaws and some of our other aspects were influenced during the period of crackdowns. The circumstances today have changed. The degree of openness is significant. The missions cast upon our shoulders and on the rest of the people are major. It is imperative that we train our Gama'a and ranks, develop, improve and perfect so that we become able to execute the first and second mission. What will we develop? What will we change? We will look in our programs and plans. We will look into the fields of our work because the circumstances have changed today. My programs were relatively limited with regard to the movement for society because of crackdowns. Now things have changed, so we must re-examine my programs for interaction with society.

I was pursuing human development and educational programs that were influenced one way or another by the stage that just passed. Today there are new requirements, so I must reexamine the human development and educational programs that are present around me. We used to educate in a closed atmosphere. Now the world is open, so I must think about changing my ways and means with regard to the educational process. I had structures; these structures were related to my fields of work, meaning that maybe in the period of Imam Al-Banna some of the administrative units in the body of the Ikhwan didn't exist because the field didn't exist. For me to say that I will form a section for professionals (white-collars), I need to have work in the field of professionals, so the fields are determined before the structure. I need to revise the fields of work. Are the existing fields of work currently sufficient, or do I have an opportunity to add to them or modify them? After that I look at the administrative structures. After I've outlined the projects, programs, vision and educational methods, I begin to see whether these structures are appropriate or not. I need to add one, two or three. I need to change, I want to combine. The matter must be looked into.

The last thing we look into is the bylaws; I look at what type of amendments my by-laws need, but why are they the last thing, my brothers? It is because the by-laws delineate the relationship between the structure's units and define the relationship between individuals inside the structure. It would not work if I have not finished the structure's units and start speaking about the by-laws, so we always say because of this that the issue of developing is one that has technical rules and a particular arrangement that needs to be dealt with in its way. The first one is to look in the culture and prevailing thoughts, then the long-term projects and strategies, then the intermediate programs, fields of activity and structures, and then the by-laws. Thus what I said just right now entails two issues of utmost importance.

First, when we talk about developing the Ikhwan's work we talk about developing until we are able to undertake the major missions: cooperation with the people in developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference, and cooperation with the people in preserving an appropriate level of vitality for the revolution and maximizing its results. For I see a lot of Ikhwan who meet me and bring me papers or suggestions. One brother, for example, was angry that he didn't make it to the regional council of Muharam Bey [district in Alexandria] in the last elections, and he imagined that with the change and developing that we would amend the bylaw and re-hold elections because he was angry about the composition of the region's council. Or he didn't make it to the administrative office, or he didn't make it in any of the various issues. A Brother is annoyed about a branch official and wants to change him, so his thinking about developing and change is that he wants to solve some of the problems that he's suffering from.

We don't have a disagreement in that we must look at the problems, solve them and understand them. But there is a difference if you're thinking about developing on a big scale since the Gama'a has major tasks that need to be launched in order to realize them. Therefore when you think of developing you think on this [major] level, and between thinking, about developing in order to solve a small problem of conflict with the head of Family in one Branch, or the Branch Official in one of region. There is a huge difference between the two levels of thinking.

[Repetition...]

Second, [...] development is a technical process that has rules, and so it's not possible for a Brother to tell me or present a suggestion as soon as he meets me, saying "tomorrow we want to change the by-law," or "tomorrow we want to hold elections for the administrative office in Alexandria," or in the Guidance Bureau or anywhere.

All of this talk is acceptable as suggestions, but the issue requires preparation. Before I speak about amending the by-laws I must have looked at the structures; and

before them at the fields of work, and before them at the vision and strategies, and before them at the prevailing culture. The subject needs to be in this order. Therefore, we need to realize that the issue will take time.

The third point in development is that the issue of development is not the responsibility of one person or one group of people inside the Ikhwan but rather the responsibility of the Ikhwan as a whole. Why, my brothers? Because you fill different positions inside the Gama'a. When I'm an individual in a family, I see the Ikhwan as an organization and as a method from one angle; when I am a leader of a family, I see it from a different angle. When I become a member of a Branch Council, a Branch Official, a member of a Regional Council, or the Students' Committee, or the Scouts, or the Sisters' Section, the place in which I work always affects the angle of my vision, and perhaps I can see [my part] better than anybody else.

We all see the Ikhwan from different angles; therefore it becomes the duty of every Brother to examine the work he practices and try to answer the question: how can we develop this state? That's number one, and because he's part of the Ikhwan as a whole, if he has advice, an opinion or a suggestion for developing the Ikhwan's work from any other angle he must also say it. For this reason I came to you today to clarify for you, so that you understand and realize the nature of the process of development. It is a large, wide, and continuous issue and departs from the philosophy or idea of executing the primary tasks of the Ikhwan's mission, the two missions which I've mentioned. It's a major issue; it's not on the level of treating some of the small problems, despite our keenness to solve these [small] problems.

[Repetition...]

The Family thinks, the Branch thinks and writes its particular suggestions on developing. Brothers and Sisters promote these suggestions on all administrative levels; it is required of them that they set aside part of their time and write us ideas and suggestions. Only so that we organize the process and keep it simple, we will submit to you a written questionnaire containing a group of questions specific to the development process and suggestions. The last question will be an open question, meaning that if we, for example, asked for your opinion on the development of the structure or the by-laws, you would write the part about the by-laws under the question specific to the by-laws, but in the last question we will ask you whether you have any other suggestions for development because it's probable that the questions don't cover all of the ideas you have. So you write all of these ideas, and we will take all of these opinions and suggestions.

This investigation or questionnaire will be sent to you by way of the administrative, regional, branch and family offices God willing, and they will be compiled. Even if this investigation was sent tomorrow or in one week or two and compiled, the door will

remain open for the ideas and opinions of any other person who wants to send a suggestion. We put up a web page to collect suggestions, and more than two or three thousand suggestions have now come to me by way of the internet, relevant to the development of the work. We've actually opened it up to Ikhwan and non-Ikhwan. To Ikhwan because, naturally, this is their Gama'a and they are the ones responsible for developing and improving it, and to non-Ikhwan because we also want to learn how others want to see it. What do they imagine us to be? What do they want? We may find someone with a useful suggestion.

All of these suggestions and data will be compiled in a number of steps and in a number of committees and units that will consider them inside the Gama'a until they are manifested in a program of development that has priorities, means of execution, and a timetable and then sent to the different units of the Gama'a in order to execute them in the coming stage.

Therefore, development on the level of suggestion is the responsibility of all of us, and then on the level of execution it is also the responsibility of all of us. It is not the responsibility of the Guidance Bureau, nor is it that of Engineer Khairat, nor that of one or two. Even the groups of committees that are working on the topic are only there to organize, classify and filter it in order to put in the form of a program to be presented to the institutions of the Gama'a to adopt it and then execute it. Therefore developing is the responsibility of all of us as Ikhwan.

So we want all of the suggestions you all raise through the existing survey or through any other method you see as appropriate after this, through the internet or otherwise. After this, development is not our responsibility only on the intellectual level, but on the level of execution as well, and I want every Brother and Sister from among you to take heed of a lesson regarding our responsibility in this field because, my brothers, we are in a major historical stage in Egypt after the revolution. Thus we must take advantage of this opportunity to develop our Gama'a and push it to the furthest level possible to contribute to Egypt's salvation, the success of her revolution, and the developing of her Nahda on the basis of Islamic Reference, so that this people and this Ummah may enjoy the life it deserves, and so that we succeed, God willing, in completing our mission related to realizing the objective of Muslim society and Islamic government, launching onto what comes after.

[Break in video...]

Also with this came great media misrepresentation, and there were also attempts to divide the Ikhwan's ranks and many other means that you all know of. Now, after the diminishing role of security attacks and oppressive procedures, another gulp of media distortion is expected, and you all noticed this to a great extent. So now many

of the so-called independent channels and newspapers are starting to exploit all situations to distort our image as Ikhwan, to distort the image of the entire Islamic Movement, and then the entire Islamic perspective on organizing matters of life. I don't believe that I need to give you evidence of this because you saw what happened with the constitutional amendments. Had we said "No" to the constitutional amendments, they would have attacked us as well, and you saw today that they are exploiting every word and stray opinion here or there and blowing it out of proportion to a great extent as well as distorting [our] statements.

My advice to the Brothers and Sisters first of all is not to be annoyed much by these campaigns because they are inflated and they are trying to misrepresent us to the greatest extent. So we can perhaps be annoyed to the extent that we try to confront them and counter their effects, but let's not be confused, perplexed or lose confidence in ourselves because this is a natural development; after they lost a number of oppressive means, they're now focusing to a great degree on media. So first our confidence in God Almighty, then in ourselves, doesn't shake. No ruse or confusion will work on us. The second issue is that we should not believe everything that is published in the media because they change words, and/or statements. They cut and paste so as to misrepresent the image of the Ikhwan and their statements. So let no Brother come to me asking why did someone say this or why did someone do that because in this you will be assuming the honesty of these media which are unfortunately in many cases dishonest in their campaigns to misrepresent us. So this is one point we need to pay attention to. Of course, as Ikhwan we are now preparing a media strategy and will gain some of the media outlets which will emerge, God willing, in the coming period. Also, your role is to try and clarify our image with the audience you're dealing with and [help] people understand the truth.

This, God willing, is possible because the biggest independent newspaper in Egypt distributes 400,000 copies. You all participate in society and can reach millions of people, not 400,000. Therefore our ability to influence and communicate directly is, God willing, important and effective, in addition to our media outlets which we will try to increase and multiply in the coming stage.

The second point is that, my brothers, we are in a major fundamental transformative stage, and in a nation or a Gama'a that goes through such transformative stages, there are always many approaches in dealing with the new stage. How do we deal with it? There is no problem that, within the body of an organization like the Muslim Brotherhood, there would be a plurality of visions. On the contrary, this is something natural and desirable; there should be many opinions. What's important is how we decide upon our differences. We decide through Shura and by adopting the majority opinion because our Shura is binding and not only informative. When

it happens that we agree on a subject and the majority ratifies it, most of those in the minority whose opinions were not taken commit to the opinion of the majority and life goes on. However, in the current transformative stages, an individual, or two, or five, or ten or twenty might emerge and insist that their vision, their choice and their method deals with the new reality. We try with them once, twice, three or four times as Ikhwan, as representatives for the majority, and if they comply, they're welcome. They're also welcome not to comply and may God reward them well, and we wish success for them and for us. This is because sometimes good deeds in the service of Islam, Muslims or the homeland are not all necessarily absolutely right or wrong. I might expect the relative advantages of one way to be seventy percent compared to that of a second way which might be fifty percent. Someone else might say the fifty percent is better and insist on working with it.

So I'm not saying that his way is one hundred percent wrong, and he also has no right to say that my way is one hundred percent wrong. I am trying, and I would like that all of us be together as Ikhwan; however if a person, or two, or three, or five want to take another path saying "I don't agree with the choice of the Gama'a," or "I don't agree with the method of this party, and I want to start a party" or "I want to take another method," or "I have a different opinion," we pray to God Almighty to grant him success without leading to any confusion in our camp. For, my brothers, in major transformative stages this is always a natural issue to emerge. You'll notice when the '52 revolution occurred, a group of Ikhwan followed their own line; a small number, not a large number. In all of the major stages this always happens, so no one is annoyed that x or y resigned, this one took a different line, that one wants to start a party, or that one wants to run in the presidential elections. Every human is free in his choice because a Gama'a is based on voluntary commitment. We chose this path; no one forced it upon us, and if our Lord Almighty said "no compulsion is there in religion,"³⁹ then definitely there is no compulsion in the Muslim Brotherhood's method. Therefore we deal with the issue in a natural spirit without anything that causes any agitation or confusion or annoyance. Thank God, five, six, ten or twenty; hundreds join the Gama'a daily, so there's no problem for us in numbers, even if we feel badly if any human being leaves us or walks away from us. What's important is that if he insists on walking away or taking a choice other than that taken by the majority in the Ikhwan, this does not confuse anyone or not influence you because the criterion for us is the majority and in what the majority of the Gama'a agrees upon; what we believe is the most right even if it is not absolutely right.

In the end of my talk, or the subject I talked about, I apologize for the long-windedness, but once again I reiterate my thanks and joy to meet you all. May God reward you well, and we ask that God Almighty provide for us all salvation to him alone, and

fear of him alone, and confidence in him alone, and delegation to him alone. May he grant us success in this world and the next and make you and us all among the builders of the Nahda of the Ummah on the basis of Islam. God is Great, and Praise be to God.

NOTES

1. Recording of Al-Shater's full speech may be seen at:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnSshs2qzrM>.
2. Ustath ("th" pronounced as in "the," or "z" in Egyptian slang) means mentor, master or simply teacher, as well as the formal way of address for men (Mr).
3. Ikhwani is the adjective form of Ikhwan (Brethren), commonly used to refer to Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun (The Muslim Brotherhood).
4. Ihsan is the third and highest degree of religiousness, superseding and combining the practice based degree of Islam and the faith-based degree of Iman (belief).
5. Pursuing Causes is an important concept in Islamic Creed whose primary function is to resolve the tension between God's Omnipotence and Causality, whereby a Muslim pursues causes but depends on God bringing about the result.
6. Ummah will always be transliterated, instead of being rendered as Nation. It could mean either the Egyptian Nation or the Muslim Ummah.
7. We have opted for the (Egyptian) transliteration Gama'a to avoid confusion with the various other organizations calling themselves Jama'a, primarily the Egyptian Jama'a Islamiyya. The definite Al-Jama'a can mean both society and the society (as in the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood).
8. There is usually no distinction between Islamic and Islamist in Arabic. Islamists usually prefer Islamic since they believe Islamism is synonymous with Islam.
9. Nahda is usually translated as Renaissance, which gives it more of a Western flavor than it actually carries. The term Nahda has come to signify "flourishing" or "prosperity," and it is obviously the title of Ustath El-Shater's project.
10. Da'wah is a very common concept, generically meaning the preaching and proselytizing of Islam. Here it denotes exclusively Hasan Al-Banna's teachings.
11. Empowerment is the closest translation of the key term Tamkeen, which means, basically, upholding Islam by means of political, perhaps military, power. Naturally, the Jurisprudence of Tamkeen is a major issue for all Islamists.
12. Subjugation is the English equivalent of the Arabic Ta'beed (to make a slave). The concept, however, does not necessarily involve the use of force; it rather means the theological "liberation of people from slavery to men, to the freedom of slavery to the god of Men."
13. Ustathiya is derived from Ustath (See note 2). The term Ustathiya, here used to indicate a status of "eminence among nations" is rarely applied in Hassan El-Banna's own work. It appears only

- once, in this sense, in his posthumously collected “tracts,” widely used as an instructive text for Muslim Brotherhood recruits.
14. We use [Repetition...] in places where the speaker repeats his previous arguments with more or less the same wording.
 15. Imam is used here in its original sense meaning Political Leader.
 16. The addressing form, “ya ikhwanna” (lit. our brothers) is very common in Egyptian slang and usually means “folks,” but because of the significance of the term in this context, we decided to render it as “my brothers.”
 17. Shar’i is the adjective from Shari’a.
 18. The term Ulama is now common enough in English not to be rendered as (Islamic) Scholars.
 19. Shura means counsel; it is a key term in the literature of and about Islamism. The basic question is whether Shura is compatible with or substitutable by democracy.
 20. Groups, Families, Branches and Regions are the traditional local units of the Muslim Brotherhood Organization.
 21. This is more of a literal translation of the Arabic Ta’reef, Takween and Tanfeeth (“th” pronounced as in “the,” or “z” in Egyptian slang) put forth by Hassan El-Banna in his most influential tract Al-Ta’aleem or The Teachings. There the actual meaning is closer to Information (of the public), recruitment (and organization) and implementation (or activism).
 22. Ghazwah is the Arabic term for a (holy) battle, the use of which is generally confined to the battles which took place during the prophet’s lifetime. And Ghazwat Mo’tah was the first Moslem campaign against the Roman (Byzantine) Armies.
 23. Takfir is attributing Kufr (apostasy) to a Muslim person, community or government on the basis of their actions. The overwhelming majority of scholars hold Kufr to be punishable by death in the case of individuals, but there is little consensus as to whether it is applicable to groups and, if yes, what the proper response to such groups should be. Jihadism emerged as a faction which embraces the possibility of applying Takfir to groups, and considers the fighting of such groups to be justifiable if not desirable Jihad.
 24. Sultan here could mean either “power” or the head of state.
 25. Bid’a is perhaps the single most important concept in Salafist Islam, meaning innovation in matters of religion, i.e. practicing rituals or promoting doctrines which were not upheld by the prophet and his companions (the Salaf, or ancestors). Salafists preachers often begin their sermons with the Hadith: “Every novelty is innovation, every innovation is heresy, and every heresy is in hell.”
 26. Saifuddin Qutuz (d. 1260) was a Mamluk Sultan of Egypt. He led the Egyptian army to defeat the invading Mongols at Ain Jalut; thereby practically putting an end to the Mongol conquests. Qutuz enjoys a legendary status in contemporary Islamist, Pan-Arabist and Egyptian-Nationalist narratives, second only to that of Saladin.
 27. Quran (42:38), A. J. Arberry translation.
 28. Ijtihad is the practice of issuing Fatwas (responsa) or any other form of ruling without conforming to an already established school of jurisprudence, but within the limitations of Quran and Sunnah. Ijtihad is opposed to both Taqleed (imitation) and Ibtida’ (innovation or establishing bid’as, see note 25). Etymologically, however, the term means “exertion of effort” or “diligence,” and in many cases the term carries both meanings.

29. Mujtahid is the scholar who applies Ijtihad.
30. Just Despot is a very common concept that was formulated by Muhammad Abduh as a local variation of Enlightened Absolutism.
31. Umar El-Tilmisani (d. 1986) was the third General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood; famous for the deal or “understanding” he had with President Sadat concerning the return of the Muslim Brotherhood to social activism, especially in universities to counter the influence of Nasserist and Communist students.
32. Mustafa Mashhur (d. 2002) was the fifth General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood.
33. Ahmed El-Malt (d. 1995) was Deputy General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood under Umar El-Tilmisani, Mohammed Hamed Abul Nasr and Mustafa Mashhur. He participated in the 1948 Palestine War as a volunteer doctor.
34. Hosni Abdel-Baqi (d. 1990) was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Guidance Bureau since 1948. He won a seat for the MB in the first open parliamentary elections in 1984.
35. Abbass As-Sissi (d. 2004) was a member of the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood who enjoyed a great reputation in Alexandria as one of the MB’s most famous preachers.
36. Mahmoud Shukri (d. 2010) was head of the Muslim Brotherhood Administrative Office in Alexandria, and one of the founders of Dar El-Dawah, the MB’s largest publishing house.
37. Mohammed Hussein Issa is a Muslim Brotherhood leading preacher in Alexandria.
38. The Salsabil Case was the first case of mass arrest for Muslim Brotherhood members since the sixties. Salsabil was the name of a Computer Software company founded by Khairat El-Shater himself, along with his longtime partner Hassan Malek, that was allegedly working on a MB plan to take over government in Egypt. The case was a government failure on both legal and publicity fronts, but El-Shater spent a year in prison.
39. Quran (2:256) A. J. Arberry Translation.

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