

# Current Trends in Islamist Ideology

JANUARY, 2013

VOLUME 14

- WHAT IS A CONSTITUTION ANYWAY? / *Samuel Tadros*
- EGYPT'S LOOMING COMPETITIVE THEOCRACY / *Eric Trager*
- THE JORDANIAN BROTHERHOOD IN THE ARAB SPRING / *Jacob Amis*
- ANSAR AL-SHARIA IN SOUTHERN YEMEN / *Robin Simcox*
- AFTER AL-SHABAAB / *Ioannis Gatsiounis*
- THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT IN AZERBAIJAN / *Fuad Aliyev*

**HUDSON INSTITUTE**  
*Center on Islam, Democracy, and  
the Future of the Muslim World*

# Current Trends in Islamist Ideology

VOLUME 14

*Edited by*  
Hillel Fradkin,  
Husain Haqqani,  
Eric Brown,  
and Hassan Mneimneh

HUDSON INSTITUTE

---

*Center on Islam, Democracy, and the Future of the Muslim World*

©2013 Hudson Institute, Inc. All rights reserved.  
ISSN: 1940-834X

For more information about obtaining additional copies of this or other Hudson Institute publications, please visit Hudson's website at [www.hudson.org/bookstore](http://www.hudson.org/bookstore) or call toll free: 1-888-554-1325.

#### ABOUT HUDSON INSTITUTE

Hudson Institute is a nonpartisan, independent policy research organization dedicated to innovative research and analysis that promotes global security, prosperity, and freedom. Founded in 1961 by strategist Herman Kahn, Hudson Institute challenges conventional thinking and helps manage strategic transitions to the future through interdisciplinary studies in defense, international relations, economics, health care, technology, culture, and law. With offices in Washington and New York, Hudson seeks to guide public policymakers and global leaders in government and business through a vigorous program of publications, conferences, policy briefings, and recommendations. Hudson Institute is a 501(c)(3) organization financed by tax-deductible contributions from private individuals, corporations, foundations, and by government grants.

Visit [www.hudson.org](http://www.hudson.org) for more information.

#### ABOUT THE CENTER ON ISLAM, DEMOCRACY, AND THE FUTURE OF THE MUSLIM WORLD

Hudson Institute's Center on Islam conducts a wide-ranging program of research and analysis addressed to the political, religious, social, and other dynamics within majority Muslim countries and Muslim populations around the world. A principal focus of the Center's work is the ideological dynamic within Islam and the connected issue of how this political and religious debate impacts both Islamic radicalism and the Muslim search for moderate and democratic alternatives. Through its research, which includes collaboration with partners throughout the Muslim world and elsewhere, the Center aims to contribute to the development of effective policy options and strategies to win the worldwide struggle against radical Islam.

For more information, visit [www.CurrentTrends.org](http://www.CurrentTrends.org)

# Contents

What is a Constitution Anyway? / 5

*By Samuel Tadros*

Egypt's Looming Competitive Theocracy / 27

*By Eric Trager*

The Jordanian Brotherhood in the Arab Spring / 38

*By Jacob Amis*

Ansar Al-Sharia in Southern Yemen / 58

*By Robin Simcox*

After Al-Shabaab / 74

*By Ioannis Gatsiounis*

The Gülen Movement in Azerbaijan / 90

*By Fuad Aliyev*

# What is a Constitution Anyway?

*By Samuel Tadros*

**O**N THE 15TH AND 22ND OF DECEMBER 2012 EGYPTIANS HEADED AGAIN to the polls for the eighth time<sup>1</sup> since the January 25, 2011 revolution which toppled President Mubarak and his regime. The frequency of the voting was not, however, an indication of a vibrant democracy taking shape; rather, it has been the result of the haphazard transition that post-revolutionary Egypt has undergone. Nearly two years after the revolution and after seven elections, Egypt has still not formed the institutions required to sustain a democracy. Today, the country only has an elected president and an upper chamber of parliament—a body which, even though it exists, suffers from the same specter of unconstitutionality under electoral law that haunted its lower counterpart's existence and led ultimately to its dissolution. However, what was at stake in the elections was far more important than merely an elected body. Moreover, the election wasn't purely about approving or rejecting a proposed constitution. Instead, the battle over Egypt's proposed constitution is a function of the larger battle unfolding over ownership of the 2011 revolution and the very identity of the country.

As the saying goes, victory has many fathers, and the Egyptian revolution is no exception. The astonishing success of the revolution in bringing down the Mubarak regime has left political forces scrambling to take credit for the revolution and sole ownership of its narrative.<sup>2</sup> Non-Islamists, who can claim few political successes if any over the past two years, have become nostalgic for the eighteen days of protest in Tahrir Square which set-off the revolution. Given their lack of anything to celebrate since the uprisings, non-Islamists are adamant on being the sole owners of the

revolution. It was the non-Islamists, they claim, who sparked the revolution and who led its battles. In a sense, life itself began for them on January 25, 2011 when a new Egypt was born in Tahrir Square.<sup>3</sup> At a time when the Muslim Brotherhood remained in the shadows hesitant to join the anti-regime protests, when Salafi Shaykhs were rejecting the popular calls for disorder, it was the non-Islamists who were on the front lines and who fought for every yard and inch of the street.

For Islamists, however, the revolution represents the culmination of a much longer historical struggle. Some trace the struggle back to 1954, when the Brotherhood believed itself close to taking power but was then ruthlessly crushed and forced underground by Nasser.<sup>4</sup> Others trace it to an older battle between Islam and secularism that began in the nineteenth century and which Muslims have fought ever since against foreign missionaries, colonialism and Westernization.<sup>5</sup> After languishing for years in Mubarak's prisons, newly released members of jihadist groups asserted that it was their struggles that were the precursors to the 2011 revolution. When accused of being latecomers to and hangers-on of the revolution, Islamists are quick to respond that it was they who protected the revolution during its darkest moment in the "Battle of the Camel," when all hope seemed to be lost. Left unsaid is the role Islamists played in the attacks on police stations and prisons throughout the country, which arguably was the most important factor in the regime's collapse.

The struggle now between Islamists and non-Islamists over ownership of the revolution is only one part of the story, however. Before the constitutional referendum and the present-day impasse and street clashes between the supporters and detractors of President Morsi, the battle over the constitution and over Egypt's future was fought not only along Islamist vs. non-Islamist lines, but among the Islamists themselves. Indeed, within the Islamist camp, the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis were involved in a battle over what Islamism both meant and necessitated in post-revolutionary Egypt and how this should be expressed in the language of the country's new constitution. Each side approached the question of the constitution from a different point of view, and while they have, for the time being, managed to overcome their differences and unite against non-Islamists, examining the past disputes between them provides fascinating insights into their current relationships and their prospective ones as well.

## The Brotherhood's Plan

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD APPROACHED THE CONSTITUTIONAL WRITING PROCESS with a keen eye on how to manipulate both the process and the new document to

further strengthen their power in Egyptian politics. With a long history of political participation and organization, the Brotherhood's senior leadership is politically sophisticated and shrewd. They have clearly been aware that the new constitution could potentially give them unparalleled powers to shape the political process in their favor. As an Islamist movement that has sought to both rule Egypt and shape its people's identity, no area of the new constitution was irrelevant to the Brotherhood, and all areas represented opportunities to enlarge the movement's power.

The first area of attention for the Brotherhood was the political system. Following the uprising, when the Brotherhood was still unsure of the governing military council's agenda and was also eager to assuage Western and non-Islamist fears, the Brotherhood had initially promised not to run a presidential candidate. Because of this, and since they were also well-aware of their movement's potential to dominate a parliament, the Brotherhood leadership was adamant that the country adopt a parliamentary system. In articles and press releases the vices of a presidential system including its prospects for authoritarianism were highlighted while the virtues of parliamentarism lauded. The Freedom and Justice Party's official program stated explicitly that the Brotherhood preferred a parliamentary system.<sup>6</sup> However, changed political circumstances and dynamics, including ones that led to the Brotherhood's decision to contest the presidential elections (and ultimately win them), changed the movement's thinking about the desired political system. Especially after the Constitutional Court dissolved parliament, the Brotherhood sought to give its man in the presidential palace all the powers needed to ensure its domination of the political system.

After the revolution, the Brotherhood wasn't initially convinced that the regime had actually fallen. There was in fact disbelief over how easily Mubarak fell. After decades of conducting its affairs secretly under heavy state repression, the movement was sure that a "deep state" still stood and was actively conspiring against its vision of Islamist revival and reform. A series of court rulings dissolving parliament, the first constituent assembly, and barring the Brotherhood candidate Khairat El Shater from running for the presidency, while all legally sound, only served to strengthen this conspiratorial mindset. As a result, the Brotherhood felt driven to ensure that the sole institution it dominated, the presidency, was more powerful and able to defeat all others. Thus, the Brotherhood began to pay special attention to constitutional articles that dealt with the Supreme Court and the District Attorney, and attempted to limit their powers. Moreover, a means to exclude former ruling party cadres from competing in future elections was also sought.

The second focus of the Brotherhood's attention in the unfolding constitutional debates concerned how to co-opt its traditional adversary, the military, so as to insure that it does not stand against the movement's interests and plans. To accomplish this,

the Brotherhood has publically sought to ensure that the military's main organizational goals and interests are protected. Since the Brotherhood shares the military's ultra-nationalist views and believes in the existence of an international (and also homegrown) conspiracy against Egypt and the Islamist movement, the Brotherhood's decision-makers needed little convincing to adopt the military's point of view on the defense budget.

Thirdly, the Brotherhood was clearly aware of the potential spoiler effect that the Salafis might have on the constitution drafting process. Because the Salafis far outnumber Brotherhood members and have the ability to mobilize the masses under the banner of Sharia, the Brotherhood needed to keep them on board and make sure that the Salafis were satisfied enough with the constitutional process. If there were ever a chance that the constitution would be defeated, it would be defeated by the Salafis. Thus, by all means necessary, the Brotherhood aimed to ensure that such an outcome would not materialize.

The Brotherhood's efforts to mollify the Salafis were complicated, however, by the fact that the non-Islamists could also spoil their ambitions. Even though their voting power was and remains weak, the non-Islamists were widely seen by Islamists as controlling the country's airwaves and strengthened by their connections to foreign institutions and leaders. While the Brotherhood would have preferred to dismiss the non-Islamists as an inconsequential minority, they also feared that the minority could mobilize foreign powers against the new constitution and the Islamist movement. If anything, the specter of 1954 and of the more recent experience in Algeria still loomed large over the Brotherhood's thinking. For these reasons, the Brotherhood felt it was politically necessary in the course of the constitutional debates not to antagonize the non-Islamists and official opinion in Western countries.

Of course, despite these political considerations, strengthening the role of Sharia and the Islamic nature of the new constitution remained a top priority for the Brotherhood. Indeed, Khairat El Shater, the Brotherhood's Deputy General Guide, explicitly stated that: "our main and overall mission as Muslim Brothers is to empower 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 the subjugation of people to God on Earth."<sup>7</sup> What this meant according to him is "restoring Islam in its all-encompassing meaning ... and the Islamization of life." Such a clear pronouncement leaves little doubt on the centrality of Islamist ideology to the movement's agenda. El Shater has further identified "Islamic government" and the "Islamic state" as the fourth and fifth stages or future goals in the overall mission of the Brotherhood from its founding till today.<sup>8</sup>

But it is not only the contemporary tactical need to balance between non-Islamist



and Salafi forces that may obscure the importance of Islamist ideology to the movement. Nor is it the Brotherhood's pragmatic approach to politics or its attempt to assuage Western fears. More important is the specific Brotherhood understanding of what Islamization in practice entails. Unlike other Islamist movements that placed an emphasis on changing society from below by combating secularism, Westernization, imperialism or vices and innovations, the Brotherhood, which was modeled on the European fascist movements of the 1920s, has always maintained a top-down approach. Its goal has been to build a movement strong enough to control the state and use the state's powers to implement its vision. Moreover, unlike the Salafis whose goal and ultimate mission is Islam, the Brotherhood's sights are not set on Islam *per se*, but on building an Islamic State and restoring the power of "Islamic civilization."

Indeed, the most important aspect of the Brotherhood's project to "Islamize life" is the emphasis it places on the Gama'a or the "Society." Since the movement's founding by Hassan El Banna, the key difference between the Brotherhood and other Islamist reformers and revivalists such as Mohamed Abdu or the early Salafis of the 1920s is the importance that the former gives to the role of the Gama'a in realizing the Islamist project. In the view of contemporary leaders like El Shater, the Gama'a was not a Brotherhood innovation, but rather reflects El Banna's discovery of the "Prophet's Method." It is, therefore, not merely the case that the Brotherhood views their party as the vanguard of the Islamist project and, thus, what serves the party serves the project and its mission. Instead, the idea of the Gama'a runs much deeper, and is part of the very theological foundation of the Brotherhood. For example, El Shater quotes the second Caliph, Omar, as saying: "There is no religion without a Gama'a." The boundary line, therefore, between the Brotherhood's mission (of Islamization) and its method (the Gama'a) is not simply murky, it is nonexistent. As such, whatever serves to strengthen the Gama'a automatically serves the overall goal of restoring Islam to its all-encompassing role in people's lives.

## The Salafi Agenda

YASSER BORHAMY, A MEMBER OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND ONE OF THE leaders of the Salafi Call (the mother organization of the Nour Party), explained in a recent video that "participation in political work had as one of its most important goals participation in writing the constitution."<sup>9</sup> The issue of the constitution and the role allocated to Sharia in its articles were not only the main campaigning platform of the Nour Party in parliamentary elections but, more importantly, it was the

central concern of the Salafi leadership. Given the fluctuating nature of Egyptian political dynamics, the Salafi agenda and its goals concerning the Sharia have developed over time.

In the wake of the revolution, the Salafis were initially fearful that non-Islamists were seeking to establish a secularist state. Since the political debate at the time centered on whether to write a new constitution or amend the old one until an elected body could be chosen to write a new document, Salafis were content with playing defense. Since they worried that non-Islamists were seeking to write a new constitution to remove Article 2 of the old one (which stipulates the principles of Sharia as the main source of legislation), the first active participation by Salafis in Egyptian politics came in the form of massive mobilization in the March 2011 referendum. The results were spectacular, with the unorganized coalition of Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood and the military winning a whopping 77 percent of the vote.

With the threat to Article 2 defeated, and with their street strength proven, Salafis embraced politics with a new found enthusiasm. For years, Salafi scholars had argued that political participation and democracy were forms of polytheism that were rooted in modern man's arrogation of God's unique power as legislator. But now, important Salafi scholars, especially those of the Alexandria-based Salafi Call, have begun to argue both for political participation and for the formation of political parties. Importantly, this change of mind has not occurred as the result of a comprehensive embrace of democracy and democratic politics *per se*. Instead, it has been the result of a Salafist call for participation in elections that is rooted in a theological argument based on the doctrine of necessity (*darura*). It is because the Salafis perceive a threat to Sharia and the Islamic identity of the country that most of them, but not all, have deemed it justified to rise above their principled objections to democracy and enter the political competition.

Salafi participation in politics has also partly been driven by their fear of the Brotherhood. There exists deep theological differences between both currents of Islamism, and there is no love lost between them. The Salafis, especially the Salafi Call, understand that only by a strong and effective presence in Egyptian political life can they make sure that the Brotherhood does not "eliminate" them.<sup>10</sup>

The Salafi approach to constitution writing, and their turn to politics more generally, have been motivated by their twin desires of "increasing good and decreasing evil." To increase the good in society, Salafis have sought to cement the role of Sharia in the new constitution. To decrease the evil, Salafi members of the constituent assembly have sought to remove or block constitutional articles deemed "un-Islamic" either because of their terminology or because of their basis in secular legal traditions. While new to politics, Salafis have proven themselves to be quick learners. They ap-

proached the constitution writing process with a clear and coherent agenda, including with specific articles that they wanted to see incorporated into the text or removed. They also learned when to twist arms and when to cut deals, and they've demonstrated a unique capacity to mobilize the street, which they've threatened to do when it serves their agenda and to bring outside pressure to bear on constitutional deliberations. Should their initial attempts to push their preferred articles fail, the Salafis always had a back-up plan and a clear understanding of how to express articles in a language that would create loopholes for them to push their agenda in the future.

To "increase the good," the Salafi constitutional agenda has been concerned with a number of articles, but chief among them is Article Two. In the previous constitution, the article said "the principles of Islamic Sharia are the main source of legislation." From the Salafi perspective, the word "principles" was a loose term that allowed so much room for interpretation that it rendered the Sharia irrelevant to Egyptian political life. They were further infuriated by the Constitutional Court's interpretation of the word "principles" as only those texts of Sharia that are definitively established as authentic and interpreted by scholars. This made the implementation of any rulings according to Sharia virtually impossible as most of the Sunna would be dismissed. Changing the article's language became the Salafis' main goal. To achieve their end they proposed either replacing the word "principles" with the word "rulings" or deleting the word altogether and maintaining Sharia and not its principles as the main source of legislation.

Moreover, Salafis suggested a whole set of articles that would increase the Islamic identity of the constitution. They proposed adding in the first article that Egypt belonged to the Islamic nation, and they also suggested a new article that would ban blasphemy. Most importantly, they attempted to replace the constitutional principle of the sovereignty of the people with the sovereignty of God. This latter issue is of vital importance to Salafis. Under the doctrine of *Hakimiyya*, God is the sole legislator. Through the final message to his Prophet, God has given mankind a complete and perfect framework of reference and rules for life. Those rules are all-encompassing and unchangeable. Acknowledgment of this role of God is an article of faith in Islam. To reject this and argue that the people can legislate for themselves and that sovereignty belongs to them is seen by Salafis as an act of apostasy.

To "decrease evil" in society, the Salafis sought to remove from the constitution any language which they deemed as un-Islamic. A key target was the word "democracy." The Salafis attempted to replace it with the word "*Shura*" arguing it is a more "authentic" term. The real reason however was the Salafi view of the two terms. *Shura* only allows deliberation on issues that do not violate the provisions of Sharia. Democracy on the other hand is viewed as without a limitation and as permitting what God

has forbidden and forbidding what God has permitted. Another key word that received the Salafis' wrath was "citizenship," which is understood in the Egyptian context as complete equality between Christians and Muslims. Because Muslims and non-Muslims are not seen as equals (in legal terms) in the Salafi conception of the Islamic State, the Salafis have sought to eliminate the concept of citizenship from constitutional deliberations. Borhamy, in a video speech, attempted to defend this position by saying that the word "citizenship" is not necessarily a bad one; in fact, he argued that it describes harmony and cooperation between members of a society, and that these are goods that are encouraged by Islam. Nonetheless, Borhamy concedes that he attempted to remove the concept from public discussion anyway. (In the end, the Salafis managed to remove any mention of citizenship from the first article of the constitution, but it remains in Article 6.)

The Salafis also attempted to proscribe the freedoms guaranteed in the constitution. Language that guarantees absolute freedom of thought, religion and creativity is unacceptable to Salafis. To limit these freedoms, Salafis sought to put language in each article that would permit those freedoms within the premises of Sharia. Similarly, in order to deal with social vices not punishable by secular law, such as consensual sex and bank interest rates, the Salafis sought to insert language into the constitution that would allow society to punish such "crimes" given that they are punishable according to Sharia.

## Islamists Assembled

BY THE END OF FEBRUARY 2012, THE UPPER AND LOWER CHAMBERS OF THE EGYPTIAN parliament had both been elected. Islamists overwhelmingly dominated both chambers, the first with 72 percent and the second with 83 percent. Immediately after the leaderships of both chambers were elected, they started the process of selecting the one hundred members who would comprise the constituent assembly.

The focal point of contention between Islamists and non-Islamists became what percentage of the one hundred-member body would be selected from members of parliament. In reality, this dispute over whether assembly members should come from parliament or not was largely irrelevant, given that what really mattered was how the assembly members would be chosen and the percentage allocated to each political grouping. Nonetheless, the non-Islamists chose that banner for their fight against the assembly. With the Salafis pushing for 70 percent of the assembly to be selected from parliamentarians and non-Islamists for 10 percent, the Brotherhood settled on 50

percent. On March 24, both chambers of parliament met to select the list of members of the constituent assembly. Non-Islamists were shocked to discover that the Brotherhood and Salafis had secretly agreed on the one hundred-member list, and even chose who would represent the non-Islamists. This meant the official vote on the list was an empty formality. In the end, the constituent assembly was 75 percent Islamist.

Non-Islamists felt betrayed. The Brotherhood had reneged on its promises to form a representative and inclusive constitutional assembly that did not exclude other political groups. Out of the whole assembly, for example, only five members were Christians; one of these was a Brotherhood member and none of them represented the Coptic Church. It also had only six women, four of them Brotherhood members and the others Christians.<sup>11</sup> Immediately upon the assembly's formation, the 24 non-Islamist members announced their resignations from the body. Since the military council was still in control of the country, the Islamists were not in full control of state institutions. The military expressed its displeasure with the way the constitutional assembly was formed. Non-Islamists filed court cases against the assembly and on April 10, 2012, the courts ruled in their favor, thereby dissolving the constituent assembly and returning the process back to square one.<sup>12</sup>

The presidential elections changed political dynamics once again. On May 23-24, 2012, Egyptians voted to elect their first post-revolution president. Since no candidate won an outright majority, the two highest vote-receivers, the Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi and former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik, were pitted against each other in a second round of voting on June 16-17. Because of the need for non-Brotherhood support for their candidate, Brotherhood leaders attempted to cut deals in two contradictory directions. To win over the Salafis, they promised that Sharia would be implemented and that the word "principles" would be eliminated from Article Two. To win over non-Islamists, the Brotherhood attempted to cut a grand bargain between all political groupings on the composition of the new constituent assembly.

After numerous meetings and disagreements, a deal was finally reached in which 50 percent of the assembly members would be Islamists and 50 percent would belong to non-Islamists, though it remained unclear how representatives from state institutions, trade unions, professional syndicates and religious institutions would be allocated.<sup>13</sup> It was agreed that in its internal voting on articles, consensus would be sought, but if that failed, a 67 percent majority would be needed and eventually a 57 percent would be required. The deal was signed on the June 8, 2012 by all political forces, although controversy soon erupted over the details of the exact shares. Non-Islamists soon discovered that they had been tricked as the share allocated to official entities was counted as belonging to their half, even though Islamist members of these official entities meant they would largely support an Islamist agenda.

In all events, the Egyptian Parliament—in what would prove to be one of its last acts—codified the agreement and elected the new constitutional assembly members on June 12, 2012.<sup>14</sup> Two days later, the Constitutional Court dissolved the lower chamber of the parliament, arguing that it was unconstitutional because elections did not provide the same equal opportunity to independent candidates that they did to party candidates. Though non-Islamists had a contentious relationship with the military, many hoped that the military would step-in and provide a check against the Islamists. But such hopes were proven delusional when President Morsi sacked the military's leadership on August 12 and, more importantly, cancelled the SCAF's constitutional declaration which provided some guarantees of inclusivity in the new constitution. Non-Islamists were from that point forward completely on their own, their fate awaiting the outcome of the colossal battle that was to begin among the Islamists.

## A Clash of Islamisms

THE CONSTITUTIONAL BATTLE EVERYONE WAS BRACING REVOLVED AROUND ARTICLE 2, and the Salafis came well-prepared for the fight. The debates intensified as non-Islamists refused to change the language of the article and the Brotherhood, appearing to watch disinterestedly from the sidelines, reneged on its promise to Salafis. Meanwhile, Salafi leader Borhamy offered the assembly four options; either 1) the word “principles” should be removed from the article; or 2) the whole article would be disputed in a separate referendum; or 3) an explanation of the word “principles” would be provided; or 4) the Salafis would mobilize against the constitution in the polls.<sup>15</sup> Since the first option was completely unacceptable to non-Islamists, the second meant that the Salafi version would pass, and the fourth option guaranteed the constitution would be voted down; therefore the only possibility for non-Islamists and the Brotherhood was to take Borhamy's third option and include a new article explaining what the word “principles” means.

Naturally, the issue then became who would provide such a definition. In an ironic twist of fate, secular non-Islamists went to Al-Azhar for religious support and protection. While Al-Azhar is hardly favorable to liberal freedom, it has frequently clashed with Islamists, and it shares with the non-Islamists a common fear of the Salafis. Indeed, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed El Tayeb, has been feeling especially vulnerable to growing Islamist power in the country given his previous membership in Mubarak's ruling party. He was desperately looking for ways to protect himself and his institution, and this inclined Al-Azhar to cooperate with the non-Islamists.

The Senior Scholars Board of Al-Azhar thus released its ruling on how the “principles of Sharia” should be interpreted, and this would later become the basis for Article 219 of the new constitution. Initially, Al-Azhar’s suggested article stated that “the principles of Islamic Sharia include its total evidence and its fundamental and jurisprudence basis.” The Salafis were not satisfied with this, and Borhamy insisted on adding to the text the following words: “and its accepted sources according to the doctrines of Sunnis.” This addition had two elements. First, by stating that Sharia principles could only be interpreted on the basis of “accepted sources,” Borhamy was limiting interpretation to the five accepted sources of Sharia; Quran, Hadith, Ijma’a, Qiyas and Ijtihad. Secondly, it was important to the Salafis to state that it is only the five doctrines of Sunnism that are acceptable since Al-Azhar teaches Shi’a doctrines and one of its previous Shaykhs has ruled that it is permissible for Muslims to pray according to Shi’a doctrines. It was the Salafi’s sectarian understanding that ultimately carried the day.

Defining how “principles” should be understood was one thing, but setting up a scholarly body to provide an interpretation whenever a question arose was a different matter entirely. The body naturally suited for such a task was Al-Azhar. The trap that non-Islamists noticed was that this would create a non-elected religious body that would determine what was acceptable according to Sharia and what was not. This would be the first step in creating a theocratic state. After initially agreeing, Al-Azhar was encouraged to refuse such a role. With the Brotherhood agreeing with Al-Azhar, Salafis immediately went on the attack. The Salafis threatened to demand the deletion of the word “principles” from Article 2 once again and, furthermore, they threatened to demand changing the law governing Al-Azhar and removing the Grand Imam in order to replace him with an Islamist who would implement God’s law.<sup>16</sup>

By the end of July 2012, a new battle emerged over who would be appointed the new minister of religious endowments. In order to appease Salafis, the name of Mohamed Yousri Ibrahim, a Salafi who is especially close to the Brotherhood and to El Shater, was floated as the next minister of religious endowments. Al-Azhar’s fear of an Islamist takeover seemed to be materializing, and it fought against this nomination with full force. As rumors circulated that Al-Azhar was asking the military for protection, Salafis and Azharites began to hurl accusations at one another and Salafis accused the Grand Imam of high treason.<sup>17</sup> The crisis was finally averted when a compromise candidate was nominated for the ministerial post.

A grand bargain was then proposed. This proposal involved keeping Article 2 as it is and Article 219 would also be included with Borhamy’s language. Further, a new article would be added (Article 4) that would explain the role of Al-Azhar and, most important from the Grand Imam’s perspective, it explicitly stated that he could not be

removed from his post.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, another new article would be introduced (Article 3) stating that non-Muslims are to be governed in their personal status affairs and on issues pertaining to choosing their religious leaders by the principles of their religious laws. The grand bargain seemed to have provided each side with something to celebrate, and it was ultimately backed by all political groupings. However, non-Islamists soon realized they had fallen once again into a hole and attempted to revoke the agreement.

The Salafis had achieved a major victory, but their appetite had hardly been satisfied. They immediately pushed for more. Their new proposals included replacing the word “democracy” with “Shura” in the constitutional language concerning the basis of the political system, and to replace the phrase that “sovereignty belongs to the people” with “sovereignty belongs to God.”<sup>19</sup> They also pushed a whole new set of proposals concerning limiting each of the freedoms listed in the constitution by adding a line to each of them stating “as long as they do not contradict Sharia,” and for a blasphemy article. They also sought an article stipulating that parliament could not pass any law that contradicted Sharia.

The Brotherhood agreed with the substance of many of these Salafi proposals, especially on limiting freedoms and the blasphemy clause. Moreover, the Brotherhood rejected all attempts by non-Islamists to introduce constitutional language asserting the complete equality between men and women; such gender equality, the Brotherhood argued, was limited by Sharia. The Brotherhood also rejected international treaties that affirmed female equality as well as sexual freedoms, and insisted that international treaties and agreements are only applicable as long as they did not give freedoms or rights rejected by Sharia. Fearing repercussions domestically and internationally, the Brotherhood refused to relent on the article concerning sovereignty, and it joined non-Islamists in voting the suggestion down.

Meanwhile, the Salafis demonstrated their knack for the political game. In Eid sermons, Salafi preachers brought the debates over the constitutional articles from the halls of the assembly to the mosques and to the streets. Borhamy in his sermon on August 19, 2012 warned that amongst the Egyptian people there were some who rejected the rules of Sharia and some who wished for freedom so that they could be slaves to the Devil. He stated that anyone who accepted a law or regulation besides what God has commanded is guilty of worshiping someone else besides God.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Nader Bakar, the Nour Party spokesman, argued that the anti-Muslim online movie, *Innocence of Muslims*, proved the need for an article in the constitution that criminalized insulting God, his Prophets and the Companions.<sup>21</sup>

Growing Salafi demands were beginning to take their toll on non-Islamists’ tolerance. By the beginning of October 2012, the constitutional assembly was once again



descending into crisis. Non-Islamists had come to realize the extent of the damage all those articles would have on the future of the country and were attempting to cancel the grand bargain that they had previously signed onto. Salafis were becoming increasingly furious with such backsliding, and their rhetoric grew stronger as they threatened to mobilize the street. Nour Party leader Younis Makhyoun attacked Al Azhar's Grand Imam for backing away from previous agreements and called for an emergency meeting to discuss putting an end to articles that contradicted Sharia. He also rejected demands by non-Islamists to include an article banning human trafficking as such a phenomenon, according to him, did not exist in Egypt.<sup>22</sup>

## The Critical Moment

BY THE END OF OCTOBER, SALAFI ANGER WITH THE BROTHERHOOD WAS ABOUT TO explode. The Salafi Call issued an official statement championing the various articles it proposed inside the assembly on limiting freedoms, adding "Shura" and attempting to add sovereignty to God. The enemies of Sharia were "tyrants who were trying to erase the nation's identity". The Salafi Call had established Al Nour party in June 2011 and put the defense of identity at the forefront of its political message. It declared the acceptance of Sharia as synonymous with being a Muslim.<sup>23</sup>

From the point of view of Salafis, the Brotherhood failed to keep its promises. Above all, the Brotherhood failed to keep the non-Islamists in check. After all, they reasoned, an Islamist president was not elected to permit non-Islamists to continue shaping the country's future. It is worth noting, however, that the Salafi Call was feeling a more radical pressure. Apolitical Salafis who had refused to take part in the political process were pointing to its failure to uphold Sharia as proof that the initial decision to embrace political participation was wrong. On the other end of the spectrum, more revolutionary Salafi movements like the Salafi Front and the movement gathered around Hazem Abu Ismail were threatening to sideline the Salafi Call on the streets as the true defenders of Sharia.

Mohamed Saad El Azhary, a Salafi representative in the constituent assembly, gave an interview in which he voiced the frustrations of his colleagues.<sup>24</sup> He spoke of conspiracies and wars to remove Sharia from the constitution and of the Brotherhood's betrayal and its failure to remember Morsi's campaign promise to implement Sharia. Sharia, he argued, was the nation's identity and it had to be implemented in full with its principles, provisions and rules. Salafis had already compromised when they accepted not including "rulings of Sharia" and instead agreeing to keep the word prin-

ciples with the new article on interpretation. The Salafi Call and its Al-Nour party were, however, still hoping to avert a clash with the Brotherhood. The message thus had two sides. On the one hand, Salafi-Brotherhood cooperation in foiling attempts by non-Islamists to insist on complete equality between men and women and rejecting references to international treaties were praised. They also reminded the Brotherhood of its previous promises to implement the Sharia. On the other hand, the Salafis threatened that if the final document was not to their liking they would hold massive demonstrations and more importantly reveal to the public who inside the constituent assembly voted against Sharia, and thus expose the Brotherhood.

Other Salafis felt no obligation to keep the careful balance that Al Nour wanted to maintain. Salafi calls for massive demonstrations on November 2 under the name “A Million Men for Sharia” began to circulate. Adel Afifi, President of the Salafi Asala Party asked the Egyptian people to go to the streets to reject the constitution. “Support God and reject the Constitution” were his fiery words, further declaring that anyone who voted yes on the constitution is an apostate from Islam.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Gama’*a* Islamiya attempted to play the role of go between.<sup>26</sup> Its rhetoric, however, was as fiery as that of other Salafis. It demanded “a constitution that would liberate Egypt from French legal colonialism” and included the words “in accordance with Sharia” in every article on freedoms and rights.<sup>27</sup>

Increasingly cornered, the Muslim Brotherhood went on the defensive. In late October, it issued an official statement detailing the centrality of Sharia in its ideology and agenda.<sup>28</sup> The Brotherhood movement was “founded to revive the spirit of Islam” it declared. This Islamic revival was not only spiritual, but was “the road to the Umma’s renaissance and its recovery of its position and civilizational role.” Responding directly to the Salafist attacks, the statement declared that “Sharia is one of the most important issues that they are occupied with and seek to consolidate in society” and that “our brothers were exposed to martyrdom, imprisonment and detention for this cause over the decades.” It asserted that the Brotherhood would “in no way compromise on demanding Sharia.” Moreover, the statement touted as proof of the movement’s commitment to Sharia the support it gave to the explanatory article in the constitution as well as their rejection of complete equality between men and women and of international treaties that contradicted Sharia. It also claimed that the position occupied by Sharia in the new constitution would allow the next parliament to put it into action by codifying its laws and rulings.

Four days later, with the pressure from the Salafists still mounting, the task of defending the Brotherhood’s conduct in the assembly fell onto Abdel Rahman El Borr, the movement’s mufti. El Borr affirmed that the Brotherhood would not accept any article in the constitution that contradicted Sharia, and, again underscored their

insistence on limiting equality with Sharia and on rejecting international treaties.<sup>29</sup>

The Brotherhood's self-defense was too little, too late to appease the already agitated Salafi rank and file. The "Friday of Sharia" was delayed by a week to November 9th as demonstrations by Salafis continued.<sup>30</sup> While the Al Nour party did not officially mobilize for the demonstrations, it nonetheless used the opportunity to pressure the members of the constituent assembly. One of their spokesmen declared that Egypt's constitution had already been written 1400 years ago (when the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad), and that millions were ready to write the Islamic constitution with their own blood.<sup>31</sup> Firebrand Hazem Abu Ismail threatened to remain in a sit-in until Sharia was implemented and declared the current article explaining Sharia as unsatisfactory to the demands of the street.<sup>32</sup> By far the most important pronouncement, however, was the one issued by the Shura Council of the Ulama. The council, which is composed of ten of the top Salafi scholars and clerics in Egypt,<sup>33</sup> demanded that the new constitution state explicitly that Sharia is the source of legislation and that any law which contradicts Sharia should be void. They also raised Salafi demands by both rejecting the proposed article on the rights of minorities to be governed by their own religious principles in personal status matters and by rejecting the inclusion of the very word "democracy," which was deemed contrary to Sharia. The council finally called on all Muslims to support Sharia.<sup>34</sup>

The day after the Salafi demonstrations, another Brotherhood leader, Farid Ismail, reiterated the movement's commitment to rejecting any constitutional article that contradicted Sharia. Furthermore, he declared that "Sharia is a red line in the constitution on which no compromises or negotiations would take place."<sup>35</sup> Another Brotherhood legal expert framed the new impasse as a fight that pitted believers against non-Islamists who were attempting to achieve complete gender equality; and also adopted the Salafi language on why the explanatory article was necessary.<sup>36</sup>

By then, most non-Islamist members of the constituent assembly had declared their withdrawal from the body citing the Islamists' lack of inclusion and insistence on writing a polarizing document. By November 17, Borhamy was still standing firm and threatening anyone who was against Sharia with massive million-men demonstrations and demanding Morsi's fulfillment of his campaign promise and implementing Sharia. Liberals, he stated, were fighting religion and he and other Salafis would not allow changing a single letter of what had been agreed upon.<sup>37</sup> His pupil, Shaykh Abdel Moneim El Shahat, bluntly blamed the Church for the constitutional impasse and warned that if the Islamist-driven constituent assembly was stopped, Salafis would demand a new assembly elected directly by the people and would write a pure Islamic constitution.<sup>38</sup> Salafis were getting close to the point of turning the tables on the Brotherhood and destroying the whole process if their demands were not met.

# The Brotherhood-Salafi Alliance

AT THE LAST MINUTE, AN OPEN CLASH BETWEEN THE BROTHERHOOD AND SALAFIS was averted. Instead, the two pillars of the Islamist movement managed to temporarily solve their disagreements and form a common front against non-Islamists. The secret behind the sudden change was, of course, President Morsi's Constitutional Declaration on November 22, 2012. With non-Islamists withdrawing from the constituent assembly, and with the Constitutional Court scheduled to issue a ruling soon on the constitutionality of the assembly's formation as well as the expected verdict on the unconstitutionality of parliament's upper chamber and its dissolution, Morsi struck first. By now entirely convinced that a web of deep conspiracy was being spun around him, Morsi immunized the assembly and the upper chamber from any court verdict. While the president certainly must've expected a reaction from non-Islamists, the scope and power of their reaction combined with that of the judiciary far exceeded his expectations. Faced with such stiff opposition, the Brotherhood now knows it cannot fight on two fronts against both Salafis and non-Islamists. Desperately needing Salafi support, the Brotherhood reached out to Borhamy and an agreement was soon struck.

The exact content of the deal remains very much a mystery. It most certainly included an agreement on the constitution. Even though Morsi had officially given the assembly two more months to finish the document, getting the Salafis on board required resolving the document sooner. In two days, the whole constitution was formalized and approved, article by article, by members of a constituent assembly that by now had hardly a single non-Islamist in its ranks.<sup>39</sup> Newspaper stories shed light on other parts of the deal,<sup>40</sup> which was said to include promises about Salafi representation in the next government and in choosing governors. The Salafis, for their part, were expected to mobilize on the street in support of Morsi and important Shaykhs were to rally for a yes vote on the constitution.

The new constitution, which was immediately put for a referendum, represents an almost complete Salafi victory. Article 1 removed the word "citizenship" as one basis of the new political order and affirmed instead Egypt's allegiance to the "Islamic Nation," a greater order to which the country of Egypt belonged. The articles that Borhamy insisted on concerning the role of al-Azhar as interpreter of Sharia and the explanatory article were all included, the word *Shura* was added to the basis of the political system, and so was the blasphemy article. While the constitution maintained the article on the sovereignty of the people, in a concession to Salafis, the word "only" was removed indicating the existence of another unmentioned sovereignty. The ban on the formation

of religious parties was naturally removed. Freedom of belief was guaranteed in principle, but proscribed in practice: the constitution limited the construction of houses of worship to the three Abrahamic religions; it also qualified religious freedom with the phrase “as organized by law.” Notwithstanding the potential threat it posed to other faiths, the constitution’s language effectively enabled the state to continue to deny Christians an adequate number of churches. The new document also included an article that established a new administrative body for religious endowments, a development that potentially paves the way for controlling the Church’s finances, a demand the Brotherhood had in its party program.<sup>41</sup> International treaties are only acceptable as long as they do not contradict the rulings of the constitution (that is, the Sharia), and the article that prohibits discrimination no longer has the added explanation “on the basis of sex, origin, religion, and creed.”<sup>42</sup>

By far the most important Salafi achievement may be found in Articles 10, 76 and 81. Under Article 10, society was given a role of responsibility next to the state for protecting the values of the Egyptian family. The addition of society opens the door for Saudi-style religious committees commanding good and forbidding evil. It also permits Hesbah cases,<sup>43</sup> which the Brotherhood endorsed in its party program.<sup>44</sup> The old constitution included the famous legal principle “no crime or punishment without a law.” Such an article was unacceptable to Salafis because what they consider crimes are not legally penalized such as consensual sex and bank interests. With the help of an Islamist jurist, Borhamy managed to introduce the words “or a constitutional text” into article 76. Given that the constitution includes the language on the principles of Sharia in Article 2 and their explanation in Article 219, this addition creates a serious loophole under which a whole set of “crimes” become punishable. Finally, in Article 81, it is explained that constitutional rights and freedoms shall be exercised only insofar as they do not contradict the principles in the section of the constitution on state and society (that is, the Sharia). In effect, all the articles backing religious freedom, freedom of the press, and freedom of thought have thus been limited.<sup>45</sup> In fact, Borhamy proudly declared to his fellow Salafis that “this constitution has restrictions that have never been included in any Egyptian constitution before.”<sup>46</sup>

In the end, the agreement between the Brotherhood and Salafis was beneficial to both sides. In return for getting most if not all of what they wanted in the constitution, Salafis were happy to provide the Brotherhood with the street support and political defense that they needed. Borhamy led the charge accusing the Islamists’ opponents of being an unholy alliance of liberals, the Church and the remnants of the Mubarak regime who were bent on igniting chaos in the country.<sup>47</sup> Other leaders of the Salafi Call and Nour party followed suit by attacking non-Islamists, portraying them as against religion, and arguing that the implementation of Sharia would bring

forth blessings to Egypt.<sup>48</sup> Gama'a Islamiya also took part in the campaign.<sup>49</sup> For its part, the Brotherhood was more than happy to highlight the outpouring of Islamist support which it received in an attempt to win greater support from Islamists and conservatives.<sup>50</sup> By coming to an agreement with the Salafis, the Brotherhood effectively unified Islamist ranks, and this permitted the Brotherhood to focus all of its attention and efforts in fighting the battle with non-Islamists and securing its hold on the state.<sup>51</sup>

However, this grand Islamist alliance and the new constitution itself have not been without their Islamist detractors. Within the Salafi movement, apolitical Salafis, known by their enemies as "Madkhaliya," cursed those Salafis who backed a constitution that ruled contrary to God's laws. If a Muslim believed in the articles of the new constitution, he was an apostate as the document did not acknowledge the doctrine of *Hakimiyya* and subjected God's laws to man's will.<sup>52</sup> Jihadists for their part likewise rejected the constitution and denounced its supporters.<sup>53</sup> Salafi Call members attempted to answer their critiques by defending the new constitution and pointing out their successes in strengthening its Islamic character.<sup>54</sup>

The debate over the new Egyptian constitution thus provides a revealing glimpse into intra-Islamist dynamics. While the fall of the Mubarak regime and its security apparatus has provided the Brotherhood with unprecedented opportunities to acquire power and begin implementing their vision, it has also unleashed an extraordinary challenge in the form of Salafism. Unlike the non-Islamists whom the Brotherhood have previously handled with caution but now routinely dismiss as an insignificant minority, the Salafis present a direct challenge to the Brotherhood both because of their raw numbers and street power and because of their unique ability to claim ownership of the Islamist cause and identity.

The Salafi monster is thus unlike anything that the Brotherhood has ever dealt with in the past. It also comes at a time of considerable ideological incoherence within the Brotherhood, which has failed to produce any original intellectual contribution since Said Qutb. Thus far, the Brotherhood has been able to throw the monster a bone or two every once in a while, but this may not be sustainable over the long run. As Salafis become better organized, they will not be content with accepting the few pieces the Brotherhood throws at them. As the fight over Egypt's constitution proves, the monster's appetite is only growing and there may come a day in the future when the Salafist movement desires to eat the whole meal.

## NOTES

1. Egyptians went to the polls for the first time after the revolution in March 2011 to vote on a temporary constitution, twice to elect a lower chamber of parliament, twice for the upper chamber and twice to elect a President.
2. Wael El Sahhar, "It is their revolution," *Libraliyya*, December 3, 2012. Available at: <http://libraliyya.org/?p=1592>.
3. The line "Egypt was born in Tahrir" is perhaps the best description of this mindset. It comes from a song by a leading Leftist band.
4. In a telling incident on the kind of historical memory the MB maintains, the day after Mohamed Morsi was declared the winner of the Presidential elections, Khaled Abdel Kader Ouda, an MB politician and the son of prominent MB leader Abdel Kader Ouda who was killed by Nasser in December 1954, announced that he and his brothers would finally hold a condolence gathering for their dead father. In the tradition of Southern Egypt, condolence gatherings are not held for the murdered until their families have extracted revenge on those who murdered them. "Khaled Ouda: Now I take condolences in the Martyr Abdel Kader Ouda." June 29, 2012. *Al Masry Al Youm*. Available at: <http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=344555>.
5. The Gama'a Islamiya in a statement supporting the constitution called it "a constitution that saves Egypt from the French legal colonialism."
6. "Freedom and Justice Party Program," (p. 11). The detailed party program is available for download in Arabic on the FJP's official website: <http://www.hurryh.com/>.
7. "Khairat El Shater on the Nahda Project." April 10, 2012. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Volume 13. Available at: <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/khairat-al-shater-on-the-nahda-project-complete-translation>.
8. The six stages of the overall Muslim Brotherhood mission are: Building the Muslim individual, the Muslim family, the Muslim society, the Islamic government, the global Islamic State and reaching the status of Ustathiya with that State.
9. The video features a gathering of some of the most influential Salafi preachers and scholars in Egypt. In the hour long video, which only has Borhamy's initial remarks and his answers to questions, Borhamy is attempting to explain to his fellow Salafis what his plan in the constitutional assembly was, highlight his efforts and show how he managed to dramatically alter the language of the document both explicitly and implicitly by creating enough loopholes for Salafis to use in the future. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95rXAdSxAs&feature=share>.
10. In this video, Borhamy tells the story of how Brotherhood members throw him outside a mosque before. He warns that if the Brotherhood is empowered it will eradicate Salafis and argues that only by a strong Salafi presence in the political sphere will the two currents maintain a good relationship. "El Borhamy: If the Brotherhood is empowered they will eradicate the Salafi Call," available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2lntFfAgc>.
11. Hesham El Ghieniemy, "With the names: The announcement of the committee of 100 tasked with

- writing the constitution,” *Al Masry Al Youm*, March 25, 2012. Available at: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/731661>.
12. Wahid Abdel Meguid, “The Full Story of the Battle of the Constitutional Assembly Part 1,” *Al Shorouk*, June 20, 2012. Available at: <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=20062012&id=3a6452e6-5c5f4856-8300-ff8241b63569>.
  13. Wahid Abdel Meguid, “The Full Story of the Battle of the Constitutional Assembly Part 2,” *Al Shorouk*, June 21, 2012. Available at: <http://shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=21062012&id=e0f322e9-e17c-42fa-89c0-39057201e099>.
  14. “Winners of membership of the Constituent Assembly for the Egyptian Constitution,” *Egyptian State Information Service*. Available at: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Ar/Story.aspx?sid=52878>.
  15. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95rXAdSxAs&feature=share>.
  16. Hamdy Dabsh, “The crisis of Article Two returns to square one,” *Al Masry Al Youm*, July 21, 2012. Available at: <http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=347233>.
  17. Salah El Din Hassan, “The discord over the Religious Endowments minister is ignited and the Salafis accuse the Sheikh of Al Azhar with high treason,” *El Watan*, July 30, 2012. Available at: <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/32542>.
  18. Borhamy in the video of his talk to fellow Salafi scholars highlights this as a tactical act. By protecting the Grand Imam, they won his support for the grand bargain. Borhamy admitted that making the Grand Imam irremovable from office, was of course unacceptable, but remedies would be found in the future, by passing a law through parliament that would put a retirement age for the job and thus get rid of the current Grand Imam.
  19. Hamdy Dabsh, “Borhamy: We will call for the rejection of the constitution if the constitutional assembly abstained from interpreting the word principles,” *Al Masry Al Youm*, August 20, 2012. Available at: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/1060431>.
  20. Kamil Kamil, “Borhamy during the Eid sermon: God owns us and there are those who reject the rules of his Shari’a,” *Youm 7*, August 19, 2012. Available at: <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=761172&SecID=97>.
  21. Shaimaa Rashid, “Bakar asks for adding an article to the Constitution criminalizing insulting the Devine, his Prophets and the Companions,” *Al Shorouk*, September 10, 2012. Available at: <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=10092012&id=8d840e31-9e5d-42dd-89bf-f03b99fa399b>.
  22. Hamdy Dabsh, “Nour threatens the Constitutional Assembly: We will respond strongly if the constitution violates God’s law,” *Al Masry Al Youm*, October 1, 2012. Available at: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/1149231>.
  23. “Salafi Call and Nour Party and the Constitution and Shari’a,” *Salaf Voice*, October 23, 2012. Available at: <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=6442>.
  24. Ramy Nawwar, “Salafi leader Mohamed Saad El Azhary, member of the Constituent Assembly to Youm 7: Salafis want to apply Islamic Shari’a with its provisions, principles and rules. Seculars and the Church insist on excluding Shari’a from the Constitution,” *Youm 7*, October 27, 2012. Available at: <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=828699&SecID=12>.



25. Hamdy Dabsh, "President of Asala: Whoever votes yes on the Constitution is an apostate and will be thrown in Hell," *Al Masry Al Youm*, October 27, 2012. Available at: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/1203166>.
26. "Gama'a Islamiya seeks a Constitution that liberates Egypt from the French Legal colonialism," *Al Shorouk*, October 28, 2012. Available at: <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=28102012&id=7078ff81-8dce-4301-9841-e495769e5cb6>.
27. "Gama'a: A serious attempt in the constitution to solve the problem of seculars with Shari'a and identity," *Al Shorouk*, October 31, 2012. Available at: <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=31102012&id=a5b4ebdf-848f-40b5-8104-382027654e74>.
28. "Muslim Brotherhood Statement on Islamic Shari'a and the Nation's Identity," *Ikhwanonline*, October 31, 2012. Available at: <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?ArtID=127040&SecID=212>.
29. "El Borr: We will not accept any Constitutional article that contradicts Islamic Shari'a," *Freedom and Justice Portal*, 4 November 2012. Available at: <http://fj-p.com/?t=27262&m=2K>.
30. Ramy Nawwar, "A Salafi Call leader demands Islamists to rally for the million men Shari'a," *Youm7*, 1 November 2012. Available at: <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=833433&SecID=65>.
31. Ramy Nawwar, "Yousry Hammad to members of the Constituent: Write the Constitution as God commanded," *Youm7*, November 9, 2012. Available at: <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=841223&SecID=97>.
32. Ramy Nawwar, "Abu Ismail: We will come next Friday to Tahrir and will not return until Shari'a is implemented," *Youm7*, November 9, 2012. Available at: <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=841174&SecID=65>.
33. The ten members are: Abdallah Shaker, Mohamed Hassan, Abu Ishaq El Howeiny, Mohamed Hussein Yacoub, Saeed Abdel Azeem, Mostafa El Adawey, Gamal El Marakby, Abu Bakr El Hanbali, Wahid Bali, and Gamal Abdel Rahman.
34. "Statement No. 27 of the Shura Council of the Ulama regarding the draft constitution issued by the constituent assembly," November 10, 2012. Available at: <http://www.shora-alolamaa.com/eg/play.php?catsmktba=80>.
35. "Ismail: Islamic Shari'a is a Red Line in the Constitution and we will not relinquish it," *Freedom and Justice Portal*, November 10, 2012. Available at: <http://fj-p.com/?t=28406&m=2K>.
36. Mohamed Ebied, "Ahmed Abdel Moneim: Attacks on the Constituent Assembly will not benefit," *Ikhwanonline*, November 11, 2012. Available at: <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?SecID=270&ArtID=128238>.
37. Mohamed Ezz, "Borhamy opens fire on Liberals and Seculars from Gharbia and threatens those who are against God's law with countless million men, and demands from Morsi to keep his promise and implement Shari'a and asserts Mousa was bargaining with me over Article Two," *Youm7*, November 17, 2012. Available at: <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=848277&SecID=12>.
38. Abdel Moneim El Shahat, "The Church and the Constituent," *Salaf Voice*, November 19, 2012. Available at: <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=6483>.

39. Fady Salah, "The 85 People deciding the fate of Egypt," *Daily News Egypt*, December 4, 2012. Available at: <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/12/04/the-85-people-deciding-the-fate-of-egypt/>.
40. Mohamed Kamel, "Confirming El Watan's breaking story: Salafi Sources: El Shater promised us good representation in the government and governors," *El Watan*, December 1, 2012. Available at: <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/87492>.
41. "Freedom and Justice Party Program," (p. 64).
42. Samuel Tadros, "Egypt's Draft Constitution: Religious Freedom Undermined," *NRO*, December 5, 2012. Available at: <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/334908/egypt-s-draft-constitution-religious-freedom-undermined-samuel-tadros>.
43. "Constitution and Hesbah: A question and answer," *Ana Salafy*, December 7, 2012. Available at: <http://www.anasalafy.com/play.php?catsmktba=37149>.
44. "Freedom and Justice Party Program," (p. 14).
45. "The Constitution and Human Rights: A question and answer," *Ana Salafy*, December 7, 2012. Available at: <http://www.anasalafy.com/play.php?catsmktba=37148>.
46. Sara Labib, "Constitutional Highway to Theocracy," *Open Democracy*, December 13, 2012. Available at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/sara-labib/constitutional-highway-to-theocracy>.
47. Yasser Borhamy, "The Constituent and the identity struggle," *Salaf Voice*, December 1, 2012. Available at: <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=6503>.
48. Examples of Salafi articles: <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=6504>; <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=6515>; and <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=6530>.
49. Building and Development Party, "Yes to the Constitution, why?" Available at: <http://www.benaaparty.com/ViewArticle.aspx?ID=4404&CategoryID=4>.
50. For examples of Brotherhood highlighting support from Islamists: from Tarek El Zomor, <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?ArtID=130560&SecID=0>; from Mohamed Hassan <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?ArtID=130545&SecID=0>; from Tarek El Zomor and Nader Bakar, <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?SecID=271&ArtID=130757>; and from Gama'a Islamiya <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?ArtID=130990&SecID=0>.
51. "Statement by the Muslim Brotherhood: The Egyptian people protect legitimacy and choose their constitution," *Ikhwanonline*, December 5, 2012, available at: <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?SecID=212&ArtID=130913>.
52. For examples of such statements by apolitical Salafis: <http://www.4salaf.com/vb/showthread.php?p=73339#post73339>; <http://www.4salaf.com/vb/showthread.php?p=73296>; <http://www.4salaf.com/vb/showthread.php?t=24524>.
53. For examples: Sheikh Ahmed Ashoush, "Clarification on Answering Salafis and the Brotherhood," December 7, 2012. Available at: [http://ansarsharia.blogspot.com/2012/12/blog-post\\_1549.html](http://ansarsharia.blogspot.com/2012/12/blog-post_1549.html); Ahmed Gaballah, "Notes on the new Constitution," December 4, 2012. Available at: <http://ansarsharia.blogspot.com/2012/12/blog-post.html>.
54. "Misconceptions about the draft constitution," *Salaf Voice*, December 4, 2012. Available at: <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=6508>.

# Egypt's Looming Competitive Theocracy

*By Eric Trager*

**I**N THE AFTERMATH OF HIS NOVEMBER 22, 2012 CONSTITUTIONAL DECLARATION seizing virtually unchecked executive power, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi had few political allies more stalwart than the Salafists. As non-Islamists poured into Tahrir Square to protest Morsi's edict, the long-bearded Salafists locked arms with Morsi's shorter-bearded Muslim Brotherhood colleagues, hastily drafting a new—and quite Islamist—constitution while also coordinating a series of counter-protests to overwhelm Morsi's detractors. Even amidst the bloody clashes on December 4, when the Muslim Brotherhood sent its cadres to attack those who had gathered outside the presidential palace to protest Morsi's decree, the Salafists remained in Morsi's corner. "If you are capable of using violence there will be others who are capable of responding with violence," declared prominent Salafist Shaykh Yasser Borhamy, who blamed the civil unrest on those "saying words that were insulting to the president" during an Al-Jazeera interview.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, the Salafists didn't agree entirely with Morsi's actions. The most prominent Salafist party, al-Nour, openly criticized the second article of his constitutional declaration: that all presidential acts "are final and binding and cannot be appealed by any way or to any entity."<sup>2</sup> Nor were the Salafists entirely pleased with the final draft of the constitution, which held that the potentially broad "principles of *sharia*," rather than the stricter "*sharia* judgments," would be the primary source of Egyptian law.<sup>3</sup> But for Egypt's most hardline Islamists, the choice between a somewhat less hardline Islamist president and a relatively secular opposition was a no-brainer, since it enabled

them to collaborate with the politically stronger Brotherhood to achieve their shared goal of a *sharia*-based constitution.

Yet the currently cordial relationship between Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood isn't likely to last. Their mutual pursuit of an Islamic state belies their deep ideological and behavioral differences; ultimately, the two parties are bound to battle with each other for power, new recruits, and the mantle of Islamist authenticity. And given that these two groups now possess the greatest mobilizing potentials, the Brotherhood-Salafist divide is likely to become the defining cleavage of Egyptian politics, rendering Egypt a competitive theocracy.

## Fundamentalists Versus “Moderates”

IN THE UNIVERSE OF POLITICAL ISLAM, SALAFISTS ARE CONSIDERED THE ULTIMATE fundamentalists. Indeed, the very word “*salaf*,” which means “predecessor,” implies the first generation of Islam, which the Salafists aim to emulate. “Salafists have one way of doing politics,” said Salafist youth activist Mohamed Bakr, who participated in the coalition that organized the January 2011 uprising. “It comes from the Qur’an and Sunna.” For Salafists, these texts are to be interpreted literally. Perhaps that best example of an outward manifestation of this literalism is in Salafist males’ facial hair: it is typically groomed to look exactly like that of the Prophet Mohammed himself consisting of a long beard and a short mustache, which is occasionally dyed red with henna.

The centerpiece of Salafists’ textual literalism is their rejection of *bid’ah*, or innovation. Indeed, Salafist preachers frequently begin their sermons by proclaiming, “I bear witness that all updated things are evil, and every update is an innovation, and every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance leads to hell.” Within Salafist legal discourse, anything that the Prophet Muhammad’s traditions (*hadith*) or the Qur’an does not sanction is considered *bid’ah*. Furthermore, the Salafist jurisprudential approach frequently uses *hadith* to interpret the Qur’an in determining what is and is not *bid’ah*. In some variations of Salafism, *bid’ah* is expanded to include everything that the Prophet Muhammad did not do thus representing the strictest possible emulation of the Prophet.

In refusing *bid’ah*, Salafists aim to realize *hakamiya*, a term which implies that rightful governance belongs to God. “Arab prophets came just to advocate for God,” explained Salafist television preacher Hesham Abul Nasr during a December 2011 interview. “What he orders me to do, I obey. And what he orders me to stop, I stop.” In other words, a literalist implementation of the *sharia* that eschews all innovations

provides the clearest path to living the life that God commanded in the Qur'an and that the Prophet Muhammad clarified through his traditions.

For Salafists, contemporary democratic procedures are thus anathema; they represent a form of *bid'ah*, since popular rule contradicts *hakamiya*. This, as well as repression from the previous regime, kept Egypt's Salafists away from politics until the January 2011 revolution. Following the revolution, however, a number of prominent Salafist organizations made the strategic decision to enter elections, explaining their participation as a necessary evil for establishing a true Islamic state in Egypt. Yet the tension between their rejection of *bid'ah* and participation in modern political institutions remains. In this vein, Abdel Moneim al-Shahat, an Alexandria-based spokesman for one of Egypt's largest Salafist organizations, argued in the run-up to Egypt's first post-Mubarak parliamentary elections that Western democracy was strictly "forbidden and for infidels;" however, he also argued in the same instance that "Egyptian democracy" was acceptable because it would empower Islamists, who would then implement a Salafist interpretation of the *sharia*.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to the hardline Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood presents itself as more "moderate" in two respects. First, unlike the Salafists, it has historically embraced political participation, running in every Egyptian parliamentary election since 1984. The Brotherhood justifies this acceptance of formally democratic institutions by equating them with the Islamic concept of *shura*, or consultation among qualified individuals for the purpose of determining the law. "Democracy is *shura*," first deputy supreme guide Khairat al-Shater stated during a March 2011 interview: "The Holy Qur'an is the main source for Muslims and the order is *shura*."

Second, the Brotherhood rejects the Salafists' textual literalism. It embraces an interpretive approach to the *sharia* that traces its ideological lineage back to the Islamic "modernism" of Mohamed 'Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashid Rida (d. 1935), both of whom aimed to reconcile Islamic principles with modern science.<sup>5</sup> This theoretical approach sought to revive Islam's contemporary relevance and also to resist Europe's growing political, legal, and societal influence within Muslim lands. The Brotherhood was the resulting political manifestation of these ideas, projecting itself as the mechanism for implementing the "modernist" concept.<sup>6</sup> Such is evident in the writings of the Brotherhood's founder Hassan al-Banna. In particular, al-Banna's teachings reflect a desire to build an organization that would revive Islam as "an all-embracing concept," since the Qur'an and Sunna could be interpreted for "adjudicating on every one of [life's] concerns and prescribing for it a solid and rigorous order."<sup>7</sup>

The Brotherhood's interpretive jurisprudence emphasizes the *maqasid*, or broad intentions and general principles, of the *sharia*. In practice, this rather vague framework can be used for justifying a wide range of political action. Indeed, when asked what

implementing the *sharia* might mean for policy, top Brotherhood leaders frequently fall back on platitudes. “It means peace and security, equality and citizenship and freedom and giving rights for people despite their religion or his ethics or his color or his sex,” stated Farid Ismail, a former parliamentarian and leading member of the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, during a July 2012 interview. “Sharia is general principles ... and all these principles secure morals and freedom.”

To be sure, the Brotherhood understands these concepts like “freedom” and “rights” quite differently from how they are commonly understood in the West. As then Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi claimed during an August 2010 interview, “freedom” entails being “governed by Islamic principles to be implemented in the constitution.” This, of course, is the opposite of the Western conception of freedom, which emphasizes, among other things, the freedom *from* religious domination.

The Brotherhood’s characteristic vagueness regarding how it would actually interpret the *sharia*’s broad intentions serves an important political purpose; above all, it enables the organization to refute accusations of ideological rigidity and portray itself as a representative of “moderate” Islam. “*Sharia* is a holy text,” Sobhi Saleh, one of the Brotherhood’s leading legal theorists, stated in a March 2011 interview. “But *fiqh* (a legal code) is man-made, and we can choose from among various *fiqh*.” The Brotherhood’s supposed openness to multiple interpretations of the *sharia*’s intentions thus widens its appeal among Egypt’s religiously conservative, but not uniformly Islamist, population.

Indeed, the Brotherhood consciously uses its purported ideological flexibility to contrast itself favorably with the Salafists. “We’re open to all political forces, and work with all different movements and streams, and this influences the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology,” stated Saber Abouel Fotouh, a Brotherhood parliamentarian and labor leader during a December 2012 interview. “It’s different from the [Salafist] Nour Party, which is closed.” Salafists, of course, take the opposite approach, using the Brotherhood’s flexibility to undercut its Islamist credentials. “The Muslim Brotherhood doesn’t wear beards or wear a *galabiya* [traditional tunic], except on special occasions,” stated Shaykh Mohamed El-Kordi, a Nour Party leader. “Ideologically, we just depend on the Qur’an, *hadith*, and knowledgeable people.”

The ideological divide between the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists emerged most prominently in the context of the debate within the Constituent Assembly regarding the status of *sharia* in Egypt’s new constitution. The Brotherhood advocated preserving Article 2 of the 1971 Constitution, under which “the principles of the Islamic *sharia* are the main source of legislation.” Non-Islamists were willing to accept the clause, though sometimes grudgingly, because of its open-ended interpretation. Salafists, however, found this formulation too loose, and they instead pushed for standards of legislation that are based on much more restrictive “*sharia* judgments”

while demanding additional articles to ensure that certain gender inequalities under Islamic law, such as allowing young girls to marry, were protected.<sup>8</sup>

The final draft of the hastily written constitution largely indicates that it was the Salafists' vision, not the Brotherhood's, which prevailed. For example, while Article 2 remained as is, a new Article 219 narrowly defines the principles of *sharia* as including "general evidence, foundational rules, rules of jurisprudence, and credible sources accepted in Sunni doctrines and by the larger community."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a new Article 10 empowers the state to "preserve the genuine character of the Egyptian family, its cohesion and stability, and to protect its moral values," thereby providing a constitutional basis for future legislation that could significantly undermine women's rights.

To some extent, the Muslim Brotherhood's concession to the Salafists on these matters reflects the weakness of the Brotherhood's still-ill-defined "moderate Islamism" relative to the Salafists' more ideologically consistent, and perhaps more compelling, fundamentalism. The Brotherhood's apparent preference for quickly ratifying a constitution over ensuring a "moderate" document, however, indicates something very important about the group's preferences: the Brotherhood is ultimately much less invested in the ideological pursuit of implementing "moderate Islam" than it is in the organizational prerogative of pursuing power.

## An Organization Versus an Ideology

DESPITE EMERGING AS THE FOREMOST POLITICAL PLAYER IN POST-MUBARAK EGYPT, the Muslim Brotherhood envisions itself not as a party, but as a *gama'a*, which is loosely translated as "society." The *gama'a*'s long-term goal is ideological: it aims to Islamize Egyptian society from the ground up in order to establish an Islamic state in Egypt. However, the Brotherhood's leaders view the *gama'a*'s internal unity and solidarity as essential to achieving this vision. Therefore, they focus primarily on building a strong organization while, according to former Muslim Brother Ibrahim El-Houdaiby, "postponing all intellectual questions."<sup>10</sup> It is worth emphasizing two key structural features through which the Brotherhood maintains this organizational strength.

First, the Brotherhood uses a rigid process of internal promotion to ensure its members' commitment to the *gama'a* and its cause. The process begins at recruitment, when specially designated Muslim Brothers scout out potential members at mosques and universities across Egypt. During the process of recruitment, prospective Muslim Brothers are introduced to the organization through social activities, such as sports and camping, which give the Brotherhood an opportunity to further assess each recruit's personality

and confirm his piety. If the recruit satisfies local Brotherhood leaders, he begins a rigorous five-to-eight-year process of internal promotion, during which he ascends through four different membership ranks, *muhib*, *muayyad*, *muntasib* and *muntazim* before finally achieving the status of *ach 'amal*, or “active brother.”

During each stage of internal promotion, the rising Muslim Brother’s curriculum intensifies, and he is tested, either orally or through a written exam, before advancing to the next stage. For example, a *muayyad* (second stage) is expected to memorize major sections of the Qur’an and study the writings of Brotherhood founder al-Banna, while a *muntasib* (third stage) studies *hadith* and Qur’anic exegesis. Rising Muslim Brothers also assume more responsibilities within the organization: *muayyads* are trained to preach in mosques and recruit other members, and *muntasibs* continue these activities while also donating six-to-eight percent of their income to the organization.<sup>11</sup> This process serves to weed out those who are either less committed to the organization, or who dissent with some of its principles or approaches. Muslim Brothers’ commitment to the organization is further established through their assumption of a *bay’a*, an oath, to “listen and obey,” which occurs sometime after the midpoint of this promotional process.<sup>12</sup>

Second, the Brotherhood pursues its Islamizing project by maintaining a well-developed nationwide hierarchical organization. At the top of this structure is the Guidance Office (*maktab al-irshad*), a twenty-member body largely comprised of individuals in their late fifties to early seventies. The Guidance Office executes decisions on which the 120-member Shura committee (*magles al-shura al-'amm*) votes, and orders are sent down the following chain of command: the Guidance Offices calls leaders in each regional sector (*qita'*), who transmit the order to leaders in each governorate (*muhafaza*), who pass it on to their deputies in each subsidiary area (*muntaqa*), who refer it to the chiefs in each subsidiary populace (*shu'aba*), who then call the heads of the Brotherhood’s local cells, known as *usras*, or “families.” The *usra* is typically comprised of five to eight Muslim Brothers, and they execute the Guidance Office’s orders at the local level throughout Egypt. Such directives can include everything from managing social services to mobilizing the masses for pro-Brotherhood demonstrations, to supporting Brotherhood candidates during elections.

The union of a committed membership and a clear chain-of-command provides the Muslim Brotherhood with a well-oiled political machine and thereby a tremendous advantage over the Salafists. Indeed, whereas the Brotherhood is one cohesive entity that can summon hundreds of thousands of veritable foot soldiers, not to mention the millions of ordinary Egyptians who benefit from its social services, to execute its agenda, the Salafist movement is entirely decentralized and spread out among a plethora of Salafist groups, schools, and shaykhs.



In a certain sense, Salafists are mirror images of Muslim Brothers in that they privilege ideological objectives above organizational ones. Indeed, many Salafists are “quietist,” in that they view Salafism as a personal religious commitment and reject attempts to politicize it: “I don’t have to join any organization to be more religious,” stated Bakr, a Salafist who participated in the youth coalition that organized the 2011 anti-Mubarak protests, when asked why he never considered joining the Muslim Brotherhood. He said: “There is no organization in Salafism because an organization needs a target. And there is no target in Salafism, the only point is *dawa* (outreach).” Even those Salafists who are deeply involved in Salafist organizations view their affiliation as secondary to their personal religious commitments. “Salafist streams are movements and different schools, not an organization,” said al-Gamaa al-Islamiya member Abdullah Abdel Rahman, son of the infamous “Blind Shaykh” Omar Abdel Rahman, who was convicted for his involvement in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. “It’s a way of life. Anyone who follows the Holy Book and Sunna, they call him a Salafist. They don’t have a certain person to follow. ... They all have their own schools, but agree on one way.”

Salafism’s deeply personal, self-directed nature is perhaps most evident in the independent process through which one becomes a Salafist. In stark contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood’s five-to-eight-year, four-stage process of internal promotion, one becomes a Salafist simply by declaring himself a “*multazim*,” or “obligated” to follow a literalist interpretation of the Qur’an and Sunna. Typically, a *multazim* attaches himself to a specific Salafist shaykh, with whom he studies how to live a deeply conservative lifestyle. But the *multazim* can choose his shaykh, unlike a Muslim Brother, who is assigned to an *usra* and handed a standardized curriculum.

Under the reign of Hosni Mubarak, the regime’s repression, much of which targeted Salafist terror groups, such as al-Gamaa al-Islamiya, deterred Salafists from entering politics. Instead, Salafist organizations transmitted their message and gained adherents through preaching and the provision of social services. “They were well organized from before,” said Abboud al-Zomor, a member of al-Gamaa al-Islamiya’s shura council who was implicated in President Anwar Sadat’s assassination and spent thirty years in prison. “They had their schools and their scholars. State Security knew about them and let them do this, because [State Security] was only against jihadists. They otherwise let these people organize because it’s not in politics: [Salafists were] just delivering speeches in mosques and teaching the Qur’an.”

As a result, when a number of Salafist groups decided to enter formal politics following Mubarak’s February 2011 ouster, their hardline ideology possessed substantial grassroots support, even if their newly formed parties had no political experience. Their lack of an organization approximating the Muslim Brotherhood’s nationwide mobilizing structure notwithstanding, the Salafists finished second in the 2011-2012

parliamentary elections, winning 24 percent of the parliamentary seats to the Brotherhood's 47-percent-seat plurality.

The Salafists' decision to run as a unified coalition greatly contributed to their political success. While the Nour Party, the political wing of the prominent al-Dawa al-Salafiyya organization based in Alexandria, anchored the Islamist bloc, it also drew on the regionally-centered strengths of the Cairo-based al-Asala party and al-Gamaa al-Islamiya's Building and Development Party (BDP), which, according to al-Zomor, operated social services in Upper Egypt in the cities of Sohag, Assiut, Minya, Qena, and Aswan. This enabled millions of Egyptian Salafists, who are otherwise divided among a wide variety of movements and follow an even wider variety of shaykhs, to converge on a single electoral list.

There is, however, no guarantee that Salafists will be able to maintain this unity in subsequent elections. Since last winter's elections, the Salafist political field has become substantially more crowded as new parties have emerged, including the Salafist Front's People's Party and former presidential candidate Hazem Abu Ismail's Egyptian Ummah Party.<sup>13</sup> Both of these parties have differed sharply with the now better-established Nour and BDP: whereas Nour and BDP both endorsed former Brotherhood leader Abdel Monem Abouel Fotouh during the first round of the presidential elections, the Salafist Front endorsed Morsi, while Abu Ismail's followers were divided between the two candidates.<sup>14</sup>

The relatively individualistic nature of Salafism may also undermine Salafist parties' ability to consistently mobilize their followers. Indeed, this was the case during the presidential elections when, despite the Nour Party's official endorsement of Abouel Fotouh, many lower-ranking Nour Party leaders supported Morsi. Furthermore, reports indicated that a critical mass of Nour Party members either supported Morsi or stayed home.<sup>15</sup> "When we supported Abouel Fotouh, some al-Dawa al-Salafiyya followers disagreed," said Nour Party leader Ashraf Thabet during a June 2012 interview, referring to the Nour Party's parent organization. "This is normal. ... Our followers follow decision of al-Dawa when it affects Salafists. But this was a political decision, it was up to them."

The Brotherhood, of course, would never take an "it was up to them" approach. In fact, when a number of its younger members announced their support for Abouel Fotouh's candidacy last year, the Brotherhood punished them by freezing their membership. So long as the Brotherhood can ensure that its cadres remain disciplined, it will maintain a substantial political advantage over its Salafist competitors.

# Who Will Win?

THE RAPID EMERGENCE OF THE SALAFISTS DURING THE 2011-2012 PARLIAMENTARY elections, and their second place finish to the Muslim Brotherhood, affirmed for many analysts that Islamists are destined to dominate post-Mubarak Egyptian politics. Egypt's new constitution, which an Islamist-dominated Constituent Assembly drafted, bolsters Islamism's ascendancy. In addition to privileging Islamist legislative approaches, the new constitution empowers the state to "safeguard ethics, public morality, and public order, and foster a high level of education and of religious and patriotic values," thereby creating a substantial foothold through which Islamists can institute their authority. Add to this the religiously conservative nature of Egyptian society, the political salience of appeals to Islamic values, and the fact that non-Islamists lack the Islamists' mobilizing capabilities and ideological cohesion, and one can only reasonably predict an Islamist future for Egypt.

This is not to say that non-Islamists will disappear. Non-Islamist candidates, after all, won nearly 57 percent of the vote in the first round of the presidential election. Ahmed Shafik won 48.3 percent of the vote in the second round—despite the fact that he was Mubarak's former prime minister and therefore deeply unattractive to many non-Islamist Egyptians. The non-Islamists remain deeply fragmented, however, both ideologically and organizationally, and this will hamper their ability to build a truly coherent opposition movement in the near future. This, combined with the Muslim Brotherhood's co-optation of the military through constitutional clauses preserving the military's relative autonomy, has convinced the Islamists that they can run roughshod over their secularist opponents. The rammed-through constitution, as well as the Brotherhood's use of organized violence against the anti-Morsi protesters, is likely a sign of things to come.

At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists' current political alignment against the non-Islamists is not likely to last. At the heart of the battles between them is a contest for the mantle of Islamist authenticity. The Brotherhood will tout its supposed "moderation" as making the implementation of *sharia* more politically feasible, while the Salafists will argue that the Brotherhood is not implementing true Islam. The Brotherhood's rather vague *sharia* approach, however, will make it especially sensitive to the Salafists' critique, perhaps forcing it to adopt more extreme policies to cover its right flank. Indeed, the outcome of the constitutional process suggests that the Salafists may frequently win these ideological battles, because they are more invested in an intellectually consistent approach to the *sharia* than the Brotherhood.

Politics, however, is not only about ideology; organizational factors are often decisive.

In the short term, organizational factors will almost certainly benefit the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood, after all, has a recruitment strategy that ensures that only the most committed individuals become members. It also has a nationwide hierarchical organization that can mobilize these veritable foot soldiers with unmatched efficiency. By contrast, the Salafists have no structure; indeed, most Salafist parties may end up competing for the same votes, thereby cancelling each other out. Of course, a unified Salafist coalition would solve this problem, and the Salafists may align with each other once again during the next election. The relatively individualistic nature of Salafism, however, makes this kind of cohesion unlikely over the long-term. Different parties follow different shaykhs, who are liable to attempt to make their own unique impact on Egyptian politics. This would benefit the inherently cohesive Muslim Brotherhood.

Yet the long-term isn't without risks for the Muslim Brotherhood. In an era of unprecedented political openness, the rigorous five-to-eight-year process that it takes to become a Muslim Brother may lose its appeal. By contrast, the ease with which one can become a Salafist *multazim*, as well as the fact that Salafists are free to choose their own shaykhs in practicing a "purer" Islam, may hold more appeal to Muslim youths choosing among Islamist trends.

Salafist parties seemingly recognize their advantage among Islamist youths. To enhance their youth outreach, Nour Party rules dictate that decisions cannot be taken unless one-fifth of the voting members are under the age of 35. Their spokesman Nader Bakkar is emblematic of this appeal: he is 28-years-old, iPad-toting, tie-wearing, and tweeting. He thus strikes a stark contrast with the Brotherhood's stodgy spokesman Mahmoud Ghozlan, a graying sexagenarian whose style is institutional. Still, young Muslim Brothers report that despite the organization's rigid structure, recruitment is steady. This isn't surprising: the Brotherhood is Egypt's new ruling party, and power is attractive.

No matter which Islamist trend attracts more recruits in the near-term, however, the real competition between them will focus on winning the allegiances of Egypt's next generation. That is to say, the contest among Egypt's theocrats is just getting started.

## NOTES

1. Salma Shukrallah, et al, "A Bloody Night at Egypt's Presidential Palace," *Ahram Online* (December, 6, 2012) <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/59852.aspx>>.

2. “Statement from the Nour Party Regarding the Constitutional Declaration Published on 11/22/2012” (Arabic), *Nour Party Official (Facebook) Page* (November 24, 2012): <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=383812695035282&set=a.383812635035288.90868.124035494346338&type=1>>.
3. Ekram Ibrahim, “Salafist Support for Morsi Limited to Recent Constitutional Declaration,” *Ahram Online* (November 29, 2012): <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/59455.aspx>>.
4. Mohamed Suleiman, “‘MP’ Abdel Moneim al-Shahat: Democracy Is Still Forbidden,” (Arabic) *Masrawy* (December 1, 2011): <<http://www.masrawy.com/news/egypt/politics/2011/december/1/4635898.aspx>>.
5. In the literature on Islamism, ‘Abduh and Rida are often referred to as “Salafists,” because the name of their movement was “*Salafiyya*.” However, as Henri Lauzière notes, the term was used differently during their lifetimes, and since “modernism was a moderate approach to Islam because it struck a balance between reason and revelation,” it is quite distinct from contemporary Salafists’ textual literalism. (Henri Lauzière, “The Construction of *Salafiyya*: Reconsidering Salafism From the Perspective of Conceptual History,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010): 375.
6. Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 321.
7. Charles Wendell, *Five Tracts of Hasan Al-Banna (1906-1949)*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 46.
8. Mohamed Gharib, “Salafists in ‘The Constituent Assembly’: We’re Sticking With ‘Sharia Judgments’ in the Article on Equality Between Men and Women” (Arabic), *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (October 30, 2012): <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/1208366>>.
9. Nariman Youssef, “Egypt’s Draft Constitution Translated,” *The Egypt Independent* (December 2, 2012): <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-s-draft-constitution-translated>>.
10. Ibrahim El-Houdaiby, “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Trial of Pluralism,” *Ahram Online* (April 23, 2011): <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/4/0/10662/Opinion/0/The-Muslim-Brotherhoods-trial-of-pluralism.aspx>>.
11. Eric Trager, “The Unbreakable Muslim Brotherhood: Grim Prospects for a Liberal Egypt,” *Foreign Affairs*, 90.5 (September, October 2011) 117.
12. Ella Landau-Tasseran, “Leadership and Allegiance in the Society of the Muslim Brothers,” *Research Monographs on the Muslim World*, Hudson Institute 2.5 (December, 2010) 16.
13. Hanem Al-Tamasah, “The Party of ‘Abu Ismail’ Begins Collecting Authorizations in the Mosques” (Arabic), *Al-Moheet* (September 17, 2012): <<http://www.moheet.com/2012/09/17/بزه/للي ع ايسا-وب ا-ب زح/>>.
14. Bahi Hassan, “‘The Salafist Front’ Announces Its Support for ‘Morsi’ In the Presidential Elections” (Arabic), *Al-Masry Al-Youm* ( May 2, 2012): <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/810426>>; Mohamed Kamal, “Campaign of ‘Abu Ismail’ in Suez Announces Its Support for ‘Mohamed Morsi’” (Arabic), *Al-Youm Al-Saba’* (17 May 2012):<<http://www2.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=681240&SecID=296>>; Mustafa Ali and Ahmed Othman Fairs, “The Stream of Hazem Abu Ismail Turns to Support Abouel Fotouh,” *Al-Masryoon* (May 16, 2012): <<http://www.almesryoon.com/permalink/8483.html>>.
15. Hany Salah Eddin, “Will Nour Retreat From Its Support of Abouel Fotouh?” (Arabic), *Al-Youm Al-Saba’* (May 1, 2012): <<http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=667101>>; Ashraf Thabet, interview by the author, June 27th, 2012.

# The Jordanian Brotherhood in the Arab Spring

By *Jacob Amis*

**T**HE “ARAB SPRING” HAS HAD A DRAMATIC IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL strategy and discourse of Muslim Brotherhood movements worldwide, including in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.<sup>1</sup> Since January 2011, changing regional dynamics have emboldened the Jordanian Brotherhood and exacerbated tensions with the monarchy. In a marked escalation, the Brotherhood has led calls for constitutional reform to erode crucial aspects of royal prerogative. At the same time, the Islamists have positioned themselves at the vanguard of a robust protest movement that organizes demonstrations across Jordan on an almost weekly basis.<sup>2</sup> Now, a determined Brotherhood boycott of forthcoming parliamentary elections threatens to derail the official Palace-led “reform process” and has set the scene for further confrontation.

Jordan is by no means immune to the diverse processes of change that the 2011 Arab Uprisings have unleashed, and which brought Islamists to power in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere. Yet the kingdom has frequently been overlooked in the broad sweep of academic, journalistic, and policy analysis of the Arab Spring and contemporary Islamism.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has always attracted less scholarly attention than its counterpart in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> This paper’s aim is to shed light on the neglected case of the Jordanian Brotherhood and its formal political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). In particular, it will draw on a range of primary sources, including official brotherhood “declarations” (*bayānīn*; sing.: *bayān*) and interviews with senior leaders, to assess the impact of the Arab Spring on the movement’s political posture and interactions with the monarchy. It is argued that the

Jordanian Brotherhood represents yet another example of the regional rise of Islamist actors since 2011, one that now poses a potent challenge to the country's rulers.<sup>5</sup>

## Before the Spring

MOST SCHOLARSHIP ON THE JORDANIAN BROTHERHOOD HAS TENDED TO EMPHASISE its amicable and cooperative relationship with the Hashemite monarchy. In *The Management of Islamic Activism*, Quintan Wiktorowicz saw the Brotherhood and the monarchy as locked in a mutually beneficial “role complementarity” which gave the Islamist movement a vested interest in the status quo and the character of a “loyal opposition.”<sup>6</sup> Even when allowing for occasional flux in relations, scholars have consistently stressed the inability or unwillingness of the Islamists to question royal authority, the structure of the political system, or regime-defined “red lines” regarding oppositional activity and protest mobilization.<sup>7</sup>

Yet even before the cataclysm of 2011, and particularly in the turbulent years of Abdullah II's reign (1999-), the Brotherhood-Hashemite concord had largely unravelled. Indeed, by the eve of the Arab Spring, the harmonious “winking relationship”<sup>8</sup> described by most scholars had descended into mutual suspicion and open-ended crisis. Compared with the intense historical confrontations between the Brotherhood and autocratic regimes in neighboring Egypt and Syria, it is clear that the movement found in Jordan a relatively benign host. King Abdullah I (1921-51) and King Hussein (1953-99) both courted the Brothers as a conservative counterweight to secular Pan-Arab and Palestinian nationalisms. As such, the Brotherhood was the only political entity that enjoyed both legal recognition and direct royal patronage during Jordan's martial law period (1957-89).<sup>9</sup> This *modus vivendi*, which allowed the Brotherhood to quietly expand its social welfare network and develop influence among the ranks of student and professional unions, prevailed as long as Islamists and the monarchy alike regarded secular nationalism as a common threat, and, for as long as national political contestation remained closed.

Both pillars of the relationship disintegrated, however, in the last decade of King Hussein's reign. A top-down experiment with political “liberalization” revealed that once-formidable Leftist and Nationalist ideologies had lost their popular appeal and an Islamist alternative was newly ascendant. In 1989, to defuse widespread social unrest that followed IMF-imposed economic austerity measures, King Hussein lifted martial law and announced parliamentary elections. Political parties remained illegal; however, the Leftists and Nationalists failed to coordinate, and the Brotherhood

formed a national list and campaigned in earnest under the banner “Islam is the solution.” The result was a landslide: the Brotherhood won 22 seats outright, and proceeded to form a bloc with independent Islamists which took their total to 34 out of an 80-seat parliament.<sup>10</sup>

Henceforth, the regime sought to contain its former client, and political liberalization “gave way to its opposite, de-liberalization.”<sup>11</sup> In the run-up to 1993 elections, after parliament had been dissolved, King Hussein changed the electoral law by decree to introduce a single non-transferable vote system or, “one man, one vote” (*sawt al-wāhid*) which encouraged voting along familial and tribal lines rather than ideology.<sup>12</sup> In addition, new electoral districts vastly under-represented large urban and predominantly Palestinian-origin populations favourable to the Brotherhood while privileging traditionally loyalist rural constituencies. Following the 1994 Wadi Araba Peace Accord with Israel, the gulf between the Brotherhood and the regime increased. Restrictive press laws were introduced, anti-normalization rallies led to a ban on political protests, and the Brotherhood boycotted the 1997 elections in response.<sup>13</sup>

The first ten years of Abdullah II’s reign saw a progressive deterioration in the relationship between his regime and the Brothers. Regional and domestic instability, particularly the 2005 al-Qaeda hotel bombings in Amman and the January 2006 Hamas victory in Palestinian legislative elections, led the new king to crack down on the Brotherhood in an unprecedented manner. In July 2006, the government sequestered the Brotherhood’s umbrella NGO, the Islamic Centre Society, and thus deprived the movement of its institutional hub and perhaps a third of its revenues.<sup>14</sup> Never before had the regime taken serious action against the Brotherhood’s grassroots network. Having withdrawn from the 2007 municipal elections amid accusations of voting manipulation, the Brotherhood nevertheless decided to run for parliament later in the year. They secured only 6 out of 22 candidates for the 110-strong Lower House. Although the campaign suffered from internal disagreements, local civil society organizations reported serious irregularities at the polls.<sup>15</sup> The IAF Secretary of the time stated that the election was “an unprecedented fraud, the worst election in the history of Jordan.”<sup>16</sup>

Thoroughly alienated, the Brotherhood adopted a policy of non-participation in electoral politics. Close to 70 percent of the Shura Councils of both the Brotherhood and the IAF voted to boycott parliamentary elections in November 2010, with reform of the “one man, one vote” system cited as “the principle condition for participation.”<sup>17</sup> Many in the regime’s circles sought to ignore or even welcome the Brotherhood’s marginalisation; however, the subsequent low turnout in the 2010 elections, especially in the traditional Brotherhood strongholds of Amman, Zarqa and Irbid, did not go unnoticed.<sup>18</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that they were on the defensive, the



Brotherhood retained certain political trump cards. After all, the legitimacy of Jordan's "façade democracy"<sup>19</sup> required the participation of the country's sole mass-based political party. It was with this fragile backdrop that the Arab Spring erupted in January 2011.

## “Things Have Changed”

LEADERS OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD MAKE NO SECRET OF THEIR VIEW THAT the uprisings which have taken place across the region since 2011 have radically altered Jordan's internal political balance. The sight of successive regimes teetering under popular pressure in neighboring countries raised the morale of the beleaguered Jordanian Brotherhood and shifted the power dynamics between the monarch and movement. Ghaith al-Qudah, head of the IAF Youth Sector, described this new mindset:

What's happening right now in the Arab world is giving us, the Muslim Brotherhood, a strong message that we can make changes ... Take Syria—I myself was shocked that the Syrians could go and hold demonstrations. This was not allowed at all in Syria—but now people are going out in thousands, and saying everything on their mind... All leaders in the Arab world should understand this message: things have changed. No more “iron fist.”<sup>20</sup>

The electoral victories of Islamist parties in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco contributed further to the Jordanian Brotherhood's newfound confidence. Increasingly, the Arab Spring appeared to confirm the Brotherhood's conviction that Islamists are the rightful and “natural choice” for self-governing Arab societies:

We're Muslims by nature, we're religious by nature as Arab peoples, no matter the impact of Westernization and Globalization and so on. So when people are given their free choice ... it's a choice that heads towards Islam.<sup>21</sup>

In the view of the movement, the Arab Spring had revealed Islamists' latent influence after decades of suppression. As Dr. Eyda Mutlaq of the IAF Shura Council argued: “The Islamic movement in the Arab world was repressed, it was under dictatorship and

they suffered... So now the Arab Spring uncovered the real power among the people. Look at al-Nahda: after years of exile, they came [back to Tunisia] and the people elected them.”<sup>22</sup> Even though secular trends largely initiated the Arab Spring, the head of the IAF Political Office, Dr. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, went so far as to credit Islamist movements for laying the seeds of the 2011 uprisings:

The Arab Spring is one of the “fruits” (*themār*) of the work of the Islamic movement in the Arab world. The “approach” “*minhāj*” of the Muslim Brotherhood is based on the peaceful transformation of the people, meaning that the *umma* comes to a level of understanding and consciousness to demand change to the rule of corruption and oppression by popular—but peaceful—means. What has happened is precisely the approach for which the Muslim Brotherhood has been working for more than eighty years.<sup>23</sup>

Most significantly, Brotherhood leaders understood that the electoral triumph of Islamist movements abroad could be translated into political leverage at home: “We use the results in the other Arab countries to say to our government: “look, when the elections are fair, the Islamists win.”<sup>24</sup>

New conditions called for new demands. In 2005, the Brotherhood and IAF had released an extensive manifesto that closely mirrored the contemporary platforms that their Egyptian and Syrian counterparts had issued.<sup>25</sup> The document emphasized pluralism and “democratic *shūra*,”<sup>26</sup> and listed nineteen requirements for national political reform, including judicial independence, alternation of powers, dissolution of the unelected Upper House, and accountability for the security apparatus.<sup>27</sup> To the movement’s misfortune, however, the November 2005 Amman bombings overshadowed the publication, and abruptly switched national priorities from political reform to security concerns. In practice, the lofty goals of the manifesto were rarely invoked.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the reforms it proposed were explicitly based on the implementation of, and, the adherence to the *existing* text of the constitution. As yet, “the Pandora’s Box of constitutional change”<sup>29</sup> lay unopened.

The Arab Spring shattered this taboo, as debate across and beyond the Jordanian political spectrum settled on the subject of constitutional reform. The Brotherhood was not slow to capitalize on this development: for the first time in its history, the movement embarked on a determined drive for constitutional amendments to substantially redefine royal prerogative. In particular, the Brotherhood focused on the unrestricted power of the king to dissolve parliament (Article 34), appoint the prime minister (Article 35), and appoint the entirety of the Upper House (Article 36).<sup>30</sup> Brotherhood

leaders argued that, in keeping with the existing constitutional description of Jordan's system of government as a "parliamentary hereditary monarchy" (*nizām al-hukm niyābi malakī wirāthī*) in which "the people are the source of powers" (*al-umma masdar al-sultāt*) (Articles 1, 24), the Jordanian Constitution should enshrine the right of a parliamentary majority to appoint the prime minister, should either abolish the Upper House or subject it to popular election, and provide safeguards for the Lower House against arbitrary dissolution.<sup>31</sup>

The Brotherhood effectively zeroed in on some of the key powers with which the Kings of Jordan have historically ruled as absolute monarchs, rather than merely reigned as constitutional ones. Leaders of the movement made clear that this marked a bold departure in the Brotherhood's strategy, one which derived from Islamism's sudden regional empowerment. For example, Hayat al-Missayami, an IAF Shura Council member, stated:

I think what happened in the Arab countries has given us great power in our demands. This is very important. If nothing happened in Egypt and Yemen and so on, I think we would be talking about the election law—a very low-level of demand. Now, we are talking about very high-level demands ... this is coming from what is happening around us, especially in Egypt.<sup>32</sup>

Previously, the questioning of royal power had been unthinkable. As an analyst at the Brookings Institution Shadi Hamid observed before the Arab Spring, even in moments of political crisis "the monarchy's institutional prerogatives were, with very few exceptions, rarely brought up or discussed publicly. The "red lines" remained safely in place, immune to pressure of any kind."<sup>33</sup>

No longer immune, and with popular pressure rising, the Palace launched the Royal Committee for Constitutional Review in April 2011. Four months later, the committee proposed 41 amendments to the Constitution. Well-received by the nation's press, they included the establishment of an independent commission to oversee elections, a constitutional court to monitor legislation, and restrictions on State Security Courts. The amendments stopped short, however, of limiting the king's power.<sup>34</sup> Within days, Brotherhood General Supervisor Hamam Sa'īd told the audience of a high-profile Ramadan event that the committee's findings "did not make the people the true source of power, and could only lead to more "political oppression" (*al-istibdād al-siyāsī*).<sup>35</sup>

The Brotherhood and IAF went on to reject the amendments in a joint statement, declaring that the committee "had failed to address the demands and expectations

of the Jordanian people.” In a *bayān* remarkable both for its strong language and the content and specificity of its demands, the movement stated:

The government squandered an opportunity to present substantial amendments to the structure of the “political system” *binyat al-nizām al-siyāsī* to render to the people its right as the source of powers, to implement the meaning of the constitutional text “parliamentary hereditary monarchy”... and to accede to the demands of the Jordanian people for “real and comprehensive reform” (*al-islāh al-haqīqī wa-l-shāmil*), to meet the challenges that are shaking the region.<sup>36</sup>

The *bayān* renewed the movement’s demands regarding the crucial articles and royal powers that the committee did not address, and thoroughly criticized the proposed amendments. The fact that protests intensified nationwide in spite of the government’s reform package indicated that the Brotherhood had successfully aligned itself with public opinion.<sup>37</sup>

Alongside this detailed constitutional critique, many within the Brotherhood pointed to the Moroccan experience as a model for Jordan to emulate in the immediate term. Morocco’s King Mohamed VI had acted early to introduce constitutional reforms that proved more substantial than those Abdullah II ceded. They included increased judicial independence and the stipulation that the majority party appoint the prime minister, and were legitimized by popular referendum. By November 2011, elections held under the revamped constitution had delivered a victory to the Islamist Justice and Development Party and its Secretary General Abdellilah Benkirane; the King then duly appointed Benkirane Prime Minister.<sup>38</sup>

Though aware of the limitations of the Moroccan reforms, the Jordanian Brotherhood looked to them as a realistic first step. As Eyda Mutlaq of the IAF Shura Council stated:

It’s not enough—but it is substantial. The [Moroccan] King still has a lot of power, but gradually through democratic government and a democratic parliament—and since he appointed the Prime Minister from the majority—this is a progressive step towards elected government and constitutional monarchy.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, Brotherhood Deputy General Supervisor Zaki Bani Irsheid specifically touted the “Moroccan model” as the least bad option for the regime: “the least costly solution for solving the current problem would be the Moroccan model, to reach a

compromise between the desires of officialdom and the desires of the people by way of a tangible reform program, to bring Jordan out of this state of crisis.”<sup>40</sup>

At times, Jordanian Brotherhood leaders have been moved to state the case for reform of the monarchy still more forcefully. Since the Arab Spring, a controversial discussion about “constitutional monarchy,” *malakiyya dusturiyya*, has revived itself within certain sections of the movement.<sup>41</sup> Previously stifled by the cautious leadership, in its current maximalist expression the discourse surrounding *malakiyya dusturiyya* appears to envision a role for the Hashemites that is little more than ceremonial. As Ruhayil Gharaibeh, the intellectual progenitor of the initiative, explained:

The King should become the head of state, the “symbol of state” (*ramz al-dawla*), and the people should be the source of power with political parties and elections, like any other democracy in the world: like Malaysia, Spain, Japan, Sweden, Denmark. There are many states with monarchy *and* democracy...We can’t go on living under a form of rule that goes back to the Middle Ages, whereby one person exercises all the power without accountability... absolute power is absolute corruption, this is a well-known rule of politics.<sup>42</sup>

For Gharaibeh, the fact that constitutional monarchy had been established in Malaysia, a Muslim-majority country, and one that achieved independence after Jordan, was particularly significant. While acknowledging the long-term nature of the goal, Ghaith al-Qudah, the head of the IAF Youth Sector, mirrored the argument for constitutional monarchy with equal forthrightness:

We need the King to be like the Queen and royal family in Britain... We think our King should understand this message. We need him to stay, we respect him; but, we need actual changes on the street. It will take time, I think they will go step-by-step: it’s not easy for the Jordanian royal family to switch from absolute power to constitutional power... it’s not easy to take power from them and to eliminate the power they have. But we hope that things can be changed.<sup>43</sup>

Though he eschewed the term “constitutional monarchy,” stating that “what you want to call it is up to you,” Nimr al-Assaf, the Deputy Secretary General of the IAF, described a similar vision for the future of the royal institution:

Of course the King will have his role in some subjects, but not the same way that it is now. I mean, we are in the 21st century, and nobody accepts absolute power to be in the hands of one single person. No way.<sup>44</sup>

Calls for such drastic reduction of the king's power remain contentious within the Brotherhood. One insider rued the fact that "some of the Brothers are asking for constitutional monarchy, some are not." Nevertheless, such a broad spectrum of the movement's leadership has never so openly promulgated these ideas.

No senior Brother has called for the end of Hashemite monarchy. Indeed, they affirm the institution as indispensable to Jordanian national unity. However, the Brotherhood's expanded demands would certainly amount to the end of Hashemite rule as we know it. For Gharaibeh, the question is *when* and *how* this transformation will take place, not *if*:

I believe all the Arab regimes will change, and that the revolutions of the Arab peoples will continue step-by-step, with the only difference between countries being the timing and the form. The sun of freedom will rise over the whole world, and all the corrupt, oppressive and backward tribalistic regimes will be demolished, and there will be a democratic system based on the freedom and participation of peoples in future years. Jordan is definitely part of this process.<sup>45</sup>

Questioning once-sacrosanct royal authority is a political Rubicon that the Jordanian Brotherhood has most definitely crossed. Meanwhile, the power of the movement to mobilize its supporters on the street has given urgency to the new demands.

## Activating Islam

SINCE JANUARY 2011, THE JORDANIAN BROTHERHOOD HAS MOBILIZED POPULAR protests on a larger, more regular, and more oppositional basis than ever before. Of course, the movement is no stranger to "street politics." It has organized political demonstrations in Jordan as far back as the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Baghdad Pact.<sup>46</sup> More recently, the Brotherhood led rallies against the U.S.-led intervention in the First Gulf War and braved an uncompromising security crackdown to protest Jordanian inaction during the second Palestinian Intifada.<sup>47</sup> Yet such campaigns have

always been sporadic, and have usually revolved around foreign affairs. When domestic policies sparked unrest in the southern governorates in 1989, and then again in 1996, the Brotherhood was at best a secondary contributor to the demonstrations.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps for this reason, Wiktorowicz identified the Brotherhood's apparent reluctance to "threaten to mobilize mass-based social protest" as a clear sign of the movement's subjugation.<sup>49</sup>

The balance has drastically changed since the onset of the Arab Spring. As the parameters of public expression have expanded across the region, the Jordanian Brotherhood has been able to consistently organize and lead substantial popular demonstrations in Amman and other cities under the new banner of structural political reform. Protests in Jordan began on January 7, 2011 in provincial Dhiban, and then spread to the capital the following Friday.<sup>50</sup> Though it did not participate at first in the largely acephalous, non-partisan and youth-dominated protests, the Brotherhood turned up in force on January 28, the third consecutive Friday march in Amman.<sup>51</sup> Thereafter, the Islamists eased into a leadership position in the nascent protest movement, which became known locally as "the mobilization" (*al-hirāk*).

Indeed, the Brotherhood is uniquely positioned within the *hirāk* as the only traditional political actor to have remained prominent during this new phase of post-Arab Spring activism. In a protest movement largely based on informal, non-traditional and localized networks, the Islamists alone possess a unified national infrastructure as well as a registered political party. Because of this, Islamic demands easily eclipse newly established "youth" groups and regional reform committees (which can be dynamic but tend to be highly fragmented.) "Nobody can compete with the Brotherhood at this moment" confirms Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman, an expert on Islamic movements based at the University of Jordan. The "Brotherhood controls the street."<sup>52</sup> The Islamists grasp that they have this advantage. As Hayat al-Missaymi of the IAF Shura Council has said:

We are the largest movement. Most of our partners don't have the population with them: the population is with us. So if you go to any demonstration, if there are ten thousand people, 90 percent are from the Islamic movement. And if the Islamic movement did not support the demonstration, you would find very few people there.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the Brotherhood's joint protests with other parties and youth movements serve not only to increase overall pressure on the regime, but also to underscore the Islamists' status as the single most significant political force in the Kingdom.

Regular Friday protests have provided a new platform for the Brotherhood to

disseminate its demands for reform and connect with its popular base. In Amman, the most senior figures of the Brotherhood and IAF frequent the protests, often leading the “march” (*masīra*) arm-in-arm from al-Hussayni Mosque to al-Nakhil Square in the bustling downtown market district. There they address the crowd from a truck-mounted microphone podium, to spread the gospel of constitutional reform. The tenor of these speeches is remarkably consistent with the movement’s written discourse; it is peppered with calls for “structural” (*banyawī*), “fundamental” (*jadhri*), “core” (*jawhari*), “comprehensive” (*shāmil*) and “real” change (*taghayyir haqīqī*), as opposed to the “superficial” (*shikkli*), “illusory” (*wahmī*), and “counterfeit” (*tazwīrī*) reforms advanced by the government.<sup>54</sup>

Although most demonstrations have concluded peacefully, violent incidents that have marred the *hirāk* are widely attributed to the activities of the General Intelligence Department (GID). On March 24, 2011, a youth activist group seized the Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir roundabout (known as “Duwwar Dakhiliyya” due to its proximity to the Interior Ministry) in Amman, and declared an “open sit-in,” *i’tisām maftūh*. Although the Brotherhood did not overtly lead the demonstration, a “very good percentage” of the “March 24 Youth” belonged to the movement.<sup>55</sup> The following evening, security forces and pro-regime activists violently cleared the square, leaving one protestor dead and many wounded.<sup>56</sup>

When “thugs” disrupted a subsequent demonstration in Karak, the IAF accused the government of colluding in the violence, to “terrorize activists and stop them from pressing for reform.”<sup>57</sup> In December 2011, police dispersed a Brotherhood rally outside the Prime Ministry in Amman after demonstrators allegedly tried to storm the building.<sup>58</sup> At around the same time, a Brotherhood march in the northern town of Mafraq, which was held in conjunction with youth and tribally-based committees, came under a prolonged attack that left dozens of activists injured and the local Brotherhood and IAF headquarters burned to the ground.<sup>59</sup> Islamist leaders have occasionally become targets of intimidation: in January 2012 a group of pro-regime activists attempted to attack the vehicle of IAF Secretary General Hamza Mansur as he left an Amman rally.<sup>60</sup>

Whether or not such incidents are indeed condoned by higher powers, Brothers often attribute them to elements of the security apparatus eager to confront the Islamist movement with force. According to the head of the IAF Youth Sector, attacks on demonstrations are “a message from the intelligence department. We have two governments here in Jordan: the government that the King forms, and the government of the intelligence department.”<sup>61</sup>

The risk of escalation is clear. Brotherhood leaders know that the convergence of regular mass mobilization and increased demands for political reform places the



authorities in a position of acute difficulty. According to Ruhayil Gharaibeh, the head of the IAF Political Office:

There is a crisis. The regime wants the Brotherhood under control, but the movement is standing firm, exposing the superficiality and inadequacy of the small reformist steps taken so far. After the King signed off on the latest reforms, the Brotherhood went to the streets again, with the biggest force mobilized so far, and the message was clear. But the message has not been heeded, so I expect the popular movement on the streets will grow stronger and mobilize further.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Qudah, another senior leader, described orderly and “institutionalized” protest as a key pillar of the Brotherhood’s interaction with both political elites and Jordanian society as a whole:

We will do our best to remain in the street and mobilize everyone in the country, peacefully, without harming anything, even using polite language, but spreading the facts to the people, so they will choose between remaining asleep, or increasing pressure on the government to make reforms.<sup>63</sup>

When combined with an outspoken boycott of elections, this represents a powerful opposition strategy.

## Resisting Co-option

THE SHOCKWAVES OF THE ARAB SPRING SOON INDUCED A SHIFT IN THE REGIME’S thinking towards its largest opposition movement. In the view of some policymakers, the Brotherhood’s resurgence revealed the failure of the aggressive measures which the regime had pursued over the previous decade: “they failed to decrease the power of the Brotherhood, to damage them, and they began to realize that it was the wrong strategy.”<sup>64</sup> The obvious alternative was to co-opt the Islamists, and the authorities soon embarked on a series of attempts to draw the Brotherhood into the official reform process.

When Abdullah II bowed to popular pressure and dismissed the government of Prime Minister Samir Rifa’i on February 1, 2011, the king himself led efforts to entice

the Brotherhood into a reconstituted cabinet.<sup>65</sup> Personal contact between the monarch and the movement was restored after years of estrangement, and the king's offer was unprecedented. As one Brotherhood leader said, "this was the first time in the political life of Jordan in which the King opened the door for us to select any number of ministers."<sup>66</sup>

Yet the Brotherhood remained unmoved. Certainly, the choice of prime minister had been uninspired: Ma'ruf al-Bakhit, a returnee to the job whose previous tenure oversaw the controversial elections of 2007. More importantly, however, the Brotherhood showed it would not be bought off with transient appointments in lieu of lasting changes to the political system.<sup>67</sup>

The regime repeatedly sought to win over the Brotherhood and secure its involvement. At every turn, however, the Islamists refused to endorse a tentative reform agenda that didn't affect the king's power. The National Dialogue Committee, which met between March and June 2011, was the first official reform initiative in Jordan. Inauspiciously for the regime, the IAF refused to take part in the 52-member Committee and criticized its strictly advisory role and limited remit, which initially excluded constitutional reform.<sup>68</sup>

Far more damaging was the announcement, in September 2011, that the Brotherhood would boycott forthcoming municipal elections. Slated for December 2011, and following on the heels of the Royal Committee for Constitutional Review, the polls were set to be the first test of public approval for the Kingdom's reform effort. In a joint IAF-Brotherhood *bayān*, the movement re-tabled its demands for a substantive overhaul of royal and institutional powers and called for the establishment of a "National Reform Government" to administer the required changes.<sup>69</sup>

In this particular confrontation, the authorities were the first to blink. The problematic Ma'ruf al-Bakhit was sacked in October 2011, municipal elections were postponed, and 'Awn al-Khasawneh, the former vice president of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, was brought in with directions to accommodate the Brotherhood. Again, the regime offered the Brothers an unprecedented degree of representation at cabinet level, and again, they rejected the overture. "It doesn't matter who's at the top, whoever comes as Prime Minister," stated Dr. Dima Tahboub of the IAF Shura Council. "At the moment it's just like a chess game, putting someone here, someone there, and this is a problem."<sup>70</sup>

With the Jordanian regime now openly courting a formerly marginalized movement, the Arab Spring has clearly tilted State-Islamist power relations in favor of the latter. While the Brotherhood found itself able to expand its demands and mobilize mass support as never before, "the regime," on the other hand, "is weak. There is a lack of legitimacy." The core dilemma for the monarchy, Dr. Rumman notes, is that

“for any movement towards democracy, they need to talk to the Brotherhood.” Indeed, it is widely predicted that a Brotherhood boycott of the elections could single-handedly derail the official reform process:

(The Brotherhood) knows, above all else, that if they boycott the elections, the regime will be in a crisis, because it needs the Brotherhood to participate, to give legitimacy to the elections... all of us know that, because the Brotherhood represent the opposition, and the seat of the opposition in Parliament, and because they represent the Palestinian social class in Jordan.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, as the IAF Deputy Secretary General asserts, “a large chunk of the Jordanian people won’t be participating if we don’t.”<sup>72</sup>

Yet for all the rotations of personnel, and the consistent offers of high-ranking cabinet positions, successive governments have proven unable or unwilling to countenance the Brotherhood’s far-reaching demands for structural change. In May 2012, Khasawneh shocked Jordan when he submitted his resignation from abroad amid rumours of a debilitating power struggle between the Prime Ministry, the Royal Court, and General Intelligence. An overnight icon of the opposition, Khasawneh claimed that royal interference had handcuffed reform, and thus precluded any entente with the Brotherhood. “I was supposed to run the country,” he protested. “I won’t accept instructions from the Palace.”<sup>73</sup>

Any real prospect of a reform settlement inclusive of the opposition ended when Khasawneh’s successor, Jordan’s fourth Prime Minister in eighteen months, verified his conservative reputation and signed into law a new elections measure that retained the “one man, one vote” formula, and ruled out further constitutional amendments at this stage. “The King’s powers are not negotiable,” a government spokesman declared, “and we will not bargain with any political party in return for its participation.”<sup>74</sup> With parliamentary elections set for January 23, 2013, and the door to compromise apparently closed, pressure on the political system will continue to build.

## Countdown to Crisis

JORDAN’S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD NOW STANDS AT THE HEAD OF A BROAD BOYCOTT coalition poised to discredit perhaps the most important elections in the country’s history. While increasingly carousel-like governments have dithered over reform, the

Brotherhood has forged and maintained alliances with an impressive array of societal forces. These range from established political parties of secular Leftist or Nationalist orientation with whom the Brotherhood has long enjoyed a measure of cooperation, to formerly loyalist factions (including influential East Bank tribes), to the novel grassroots “popular movements” (*harakāt shaʿbiyya*) that have emerged across the country in the wake of the Arab Spring.<sup>75</sup>

This union of urban-based and predominantly Palestinian-origin Brotherhood constituencies with the East Bank towns and tribes of the “provinces” (*muhāfizāt*) is of particular significance. Not since the peak of the 1950s Arab Nationalist mobilization has a regime adept at “divide and rule” experienced such sustained and vocal discontent across the kingdom’s core communal divide. Even as the opposition is metasizing into a pan-Jordanian phenomenon, a top-down retreat from the “Moroccan model” of pre-emptive compromise reform threatens to put the country’s rulers permanently on their heels. In the words of the Brotherhood’s second-in-command, “the smooth stability that Jordan has long witnessed is starting to shake.”<sup>76</sup>

In Jordan, as elsewhere, the Brotherhood is entering uncharted territory. The Arab Spring has allowed the Jordanian Brotherhood to shape and direct popular pressure as never before, and to challenge the once sacrosanct authority of the king. By embracing a new discourse focused on constitutional change, mobilizing grassroots protest in conjunction with other political actors, and resisting co-option, the Brotherhood has dealt a significant blow to the legitimacy of the prevailing order. “Now, our movement, the Jordanian people’s movement, is irreversible, not as it was before,” states one Brotherhood leader. “It is irreversible, and it is increasing day by day. I ask Allah to help our king make a brave breakthrough decision, to avoid for Jordan the fate of Syria and Yemen.”<sup>77</sup> By the time Jordan’s rulers are forced to take heed, it may already be too late.

## NOTES

1. There is no consensus on what to call the various encounters between and among Middle Eastern autocracies and peoples that have taken place since unrest began in Tunisia in December 2010. The choice of “Arab Spring” here reflects its broad usage, in Jordan (*al-rabiʿ al-arabi*) as elsewhere.
2. *The Jordan Times* estimates that some 1,000 demonstrations took place in 2011 alone. See: Taylor Luck, “Pro Reformers to Continue Protest Drive” *The Jordan Times*, 20 January 2012

- <http://jordantimes.com/pro-reformers-to-continue-protest-drive>. In an August 2012 interview, King Abdullah II himself stated that Jordan had experienced over 5,000 demonstrations since the beginning of the Arab Spring. King Abdullah of Jordan, Interview by Charlie Rose, August 7, 2012 <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/12495>.
3. Three useful exceptions are: Shadi Hamid and Courtney Freer, "How Stable is Jordan?," *Brookings Doha Center Policy Briefing* (November, 2011); The International Crisis Group, "Dallying with Reform in a Divided Jordan," Middle East/ North Africa Report No. 118 (March, 2012); Asher Susser, "Jordan 2011: Uneasy Lies the Head." *Crown Center for Middle Eastern Studies* 52 (June, 2011).
  4. The most recent holistic study of the Muslim Brotherhood included chapters on the Egyptian, Syrian and European branches, but no detailed treatment of the Jordanian case. See: Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition* (London: Saqi Books, 2010). Marion Boulby's *The Muslim Brotherhood and the Kings of Jordan, 1945-1993* (Tampa FL: University of South Florida Press, 1999) is still the only book-length case study in the English language, although several comparative works have since been published.
  5. The term "regime" is used throughout to denote the institution of Hashemite monarchy which, via the Royal Court and senior echelons of the intelligence services, over and above the elected parliament and appointed government, constitutes the executive authority in Jordan: "the head of the nation, above the law, and entirely unaccountable to the electorate." Shadi Hamid, "Jordan: the myth of the democratizing monarchy" in Nathan Brown and Emad El-Din Shahin, *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 124.
  6. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 95.
  7. Ibid, 4-5, 83, 95; Boulby, 158-9; Well into the reign of Abdullah II, Jillian Schwedler found that "Jordan's mainstream Islamists... have never challenged the authority of the monarchy, and have sought to promote their social reform program within the boundaries of regime-defined constraints." Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 66-7.
  8. Curtis C. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah* (Boulder CO: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 2002), 21.
  9. The King himself was guest of honor at the Brotherhood's inauguration ceremony in Amman on 19 November 1945. See: Ibrahim Gharaibeh, [Arabic] *Jama'a al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi al-Urdun, 1946-1996* [The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan], (1997), p. 47.
  10. With political parties still illegal, Brotherhood candidates ran as independents. The figure is sometimes broken down as 20 Brotherhood seats, with 14 independent Islamists. The ambiguity concerns whether two particular candidates were Brotherhood members or independent Islamists closely affiliated with the movement, and is open to interpretation. Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation*, 97 fn. 34.
  11. Russell Lucas, "Deliberalization in Jordan." *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 14, No.1 (January, 2003), p.138.
  12. Under the previous formula, constituents could vote for as many candidates as there were available seats in any given electoral district. Thus, in multi-member constituencies, each voter possessed several votes, enabling support for both ideological and tribal candidates. A single-vote

- system, on the other hand, favored the latter at the expense of political parties and made for fragmented and loyalist parliaments.
13. Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 188-193.
  14. Muhammad Abu Rumman, *The Muslim Brotherhood in the 2007 Jordanian Parliamentary Elections* (Amman Jordan: Freidrich Ebert Stiftung, 2007), 26.
  15. "Press Statement," Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development, 20 November 2007, [http://www.ndi.org/files/2224\\_jo\\_elect\\_press-stamt\\_11202007.pdf](http://www.ndi.org/files/2224_jo_elect_press-stamt_11202007.pdf).
  16. Zaki Bani Irsheid, Muslim Brotherhood Deputy General Supervisor, Interview [in Arabic] by Author, Amman, December 20, 2011.
  17. Muhammad Abu Rumman, [Arabic] *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn ma ba'd Muqat'a Intikhabat* [The Muslim Brotherhood after Elections Boycott] (Amman: Center for Strategic Studies, 2011), p. 4.
  18. Ibid, 10-11.
  19. Beverley Milton-Edwards, "Facade Democracy in Jordan," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (January, 1993).
  20. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the author, Amman, August 25, 2011.
  21. Dima Tahboub, IAF Shura Council, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 11, 2011.
  22. Eyda Mutlaq, IAF Shura Council and Head of Women's Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 15, 2011.
  23. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council and Head of IAF Political Office, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, October 3, 2011.
  24. Hayat al-Missaymi, IAF Shura Council and former IAF MP, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 18, 2011.
  25. The Egyptian Brotherhood released a reform initiative in 2004 and an electoral platform in 2005, despite having no legal party. See: Nathan Brown and Amr Hamzawy, "The Draft Party Platform of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Paper, (January, 2008), 12. From exile, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood published *al-Mashru'a al-Siyasi li-Suria al-Mustaqbal* [The political project for the Syria of the future] in 2004. Available at: <http://www.ikhwansyria.com/ar/default.aspx>.
  26. The concept of *shūra* (consultation) has often been employed by Islamists to legitimize democratic processes. The extent to which this elastic term qualifies their acceptance of democracy is open to interpretation. See: Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation*, 154-157.
  27. [Arabic] *Ru'ya al-Haraka al-Islamiyya li-l-Islah fi al-'Urdun* [The Vision of the Islamic Movement for Reform in Jordan] (Amman: Islamic Action Front, 2005), 25-31.
  28. Muhammad Abu Rumman, [Arabic] *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn ma ba'd Muqat'a Intikhabat*, (Amman: Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, 2011). 4.
  29. Avi Shlaim *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 597.
  30. Constitutional text available at: [http://www.mpil.de/shared/data/pdf/the\\_constitution\\_of\\_the\\_hashemite\\_kingdom\\_arabic.pdf](http://www.mpil.de/shared/data/pdf/the_constitution_of_the_hashemite_kingdom_arabic.pdf).
  31. See: "[Arabic] *al-haraka al-islamiyya tu'lin ru'yatuha min al-ta'dilat al-dusturiyya al-muqtaraha* [The Islamic Movement announces its view on the proposed constitutional amendments]." IAF website, 27 August 2011, [www.jabha.net](http://www.jabha.net).

32. Hayat al-Missaymi, IAF Shura Council and former IAF MP, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 18, 2011.
33. Shadi Hamid, "Jordan: the myth of the democratizing monarchy." ed. Nathan Brown and Emad El-Din Shahin, *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East* (New York NY: Routledge, 2010), 128.
34. Marwan Muasher, "Jordan's Proposed Constitutional Amendments—A First Step in the Right Direction," Carnegie, 17 August 2011, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/08/17/jordan-s-proposed-constitutional-amendments-first-step-in-right-direction/5tz7>;  
Taylor Luck, "Parliament "biggest winner" in constitutional reform." *The Jordan Times*, 24 August 2011.
35. "[Arabic] *sa'id: al-ta'dilat al-dusturiyya lan tu'adi 'ila 'ila mazid min al-istibdad* [Said: the constitutional amendments can only lead to an increase in oppression]." Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood Website, 21 August 2011, [www.ikhwan-jor.com](http://www.ikhwan-jor.com).
36. "[Arabic] *al-haraka al-islamiyya tu'lin ru'yatuha min al ta'dilat al-dusturiyya al-muqtaraha* [The Islamic Movement announces its view on the proposed constitutional amendments]." IAF Website, 27 August 2011, [www.jabha.net](http://www.jabha.net).
37. Mohammad Ben Hussein, "Islamists protest against proposed constitutional amendments." *The Jordan Times*, 19 August 2011, <http://archive.jordantimes.com/?news=40565>.
38. Marina Ottoway and Marwan Muasher, "Arab Monarchies: Chance for Reform, Yet Unmet." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Papers, (December,2011). 5-7.
39. Eyda Mutlaq, IAF Shura Council, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 15, 2011.
40. Zaki Bani Irsheid, Brotherhood Deputy General Supervisor, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, December 20, 2011.
41. The evolution of this idea is discussed in: Muhammad Abu Rumman, *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun ma ba'd Muqat'a Intikhabat* [The Muslim Brotherhood after Elections Boycott] (Amman: Center for Strategic Studies, 2011), 6-9. Rumman notes that "a great proportion of the Brotherhood feared this initiative" as a provocation to the regime, and that, before the Arab Spring, "constitutional monarchy" remained at best an unofficial narrative, promulgated in conjunction with opposition figures outside the Islamist fold.
42. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council and Head of IAF Political Office, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, October 3,2011.
43. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 25, 2011.
44. Nimr al-Assaf, IAF Deputy Secretary General, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 12, 2011.
45. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council and Head of IAF Political Office, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, October 3, 2011.
46. Beverley Milton-Edwards and Peter Hinchcliffe, *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy* (New York NY: Routledge,2009), 35.
47. At one demonstration, the IAF Secretary General was injured by riot police. See: Jillian Schwedler, "More than a Mob: The Dynamics of Political Demonstrations in Jordan," *Middle East Report*, No. 226 (Spring, 2003), 23.
48. Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, *Jordan*, p. 48; Curtis C. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition*, 57.
49. Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism*, 5, 95.

50. Khaled Kalaldeh, Secretary General Social Left Movement, Interview by the Author Amman, August 19, 2011. The Social Left (*al-yasar al-ijtim a 'i*) were one of few politically organized elements involved in the Dhiban protest.
51. Kamal Khoury, Social Left Movement activist and participant in the demonstration, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 19, 2011.
52. Muhammad Abu Rumman, Centre for Strategic Studies, Interview by the Author, Amman, October 3, 2011.
53. Hayat al-Missaymi, IAF Shura Council, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 18, 2011. Although the figure of 90% should be taken as gestural, the view is widely supported by non-Islamist analysts in Jordan, and is confirmed by the author's personal observation of demonstrations in Amman on 9th and 30th September 2011.
54. Speeches delivered by Brotherhood General Supervisor Hamam Sa'id on 9th September 2011, and then IAF Deputy Secretary General Ahmad Majali on 9th and 30th September 2011. Recordings in possession of the author.
55. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 25, 2011.
56. This was the most significant episode of violence in Jordan's Arab Spring, and one of few events to be covered by international media. See: "Jordan: Man Dies in Hospital After Amman Clashes." BBC News, March 25, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12866531>.
57. Mohammad Ben Hussein, "Political parties condemn attack on Karak protesters." *The Jordan Times*, August 14, 2011, <http://archive.jordantimes.com/?news=40392>.
58. Raed Omari, "Police disperses Islamist protesters 'attempting to storm the Prime Ministry.'" *The Jordan Times*, December 25, 2011, <http://jordantimes.com/police-disperses-islamist-protesters-attempting-to-storm-prime-ministry>.
59. The violence followed threats by pro-regime activists intent on stopping the march. Despite prior knowledge of the danger, security forces were slow to respond. See: Nur al-'Amad, "[Arabic] *al-tawattur yukhayam 'ala al-mafraq qabla jum'a al-islah wa-l-wala'* [Tension engulfs Mafraq ahead of Friday of reform and loyalty]." *Amman Net*, December 22, 2011, <http://ar.ammannet.net/?p=138148>; Taylor Luck, "Mafraq clashes place Islamists, gov't at crossroads," *Jordan Times*, December 27, 2011, <http://jordantimes.com/mafra-q-clashes-place-islamists-govt-at-crossroads>.
60. Taylor Luck, "Islamists return to the streets in 'Friday of Affirmation,'" *The Jordan Times*, January 27, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/islamists-return-to-the-streets-in-friday-of-affirmation>.
61. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 25, 2011.
62. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council and Head of IAF Political Office, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, October 3, 2011.
63. 'Abd al-Hamid al-Qudah, Brotherhood Shura Council and former Deputy General Supervisor, Amman, December 14, 2011.
64. Interview, Muhammad Abu Rumman, Centre for Strategic Studies, Amman, October 3, 2011. Dr Rumman was consulted by the Royal Court on strategies to achieve Brotherhood participation.
65. Asher Susser, "Jordan 2011: Uneasy Lies the Head," *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, 52, (June, 2011), 4.
66. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 25, 2011.



67. By contrast, in January 1991, King Hussein succeeded in drafting the Brotherhood into a limited number of Cabinet positions to calm popular discontent during the Gulf Crisis. Having done so, the government was peremptorily dissolved within six months. Robins, *A History of Jordan*, 173-174.
68. Cory Eldridge and Nicholas Seely, "Taher Masri: The Struggle for Reform." *Jo Magazine*, April 17, 2011, [http://www.jo.jo/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1984%3Ataher-masri-struggling-for-reform&catid=81%3Apolitics&Itemid=197&limitstart=2](http://www.jo.jo/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1984%3Ataher-masri-struggling-for-reform&catid=81%3Apolitics&Itemid=197&limitstart=2).
69. "[Arabic] *al-haraka al-islamiyya tarhan musharakatuha al-siyasiyya bi-khamsa mutalib* [The Islamic Movement stakes its political participation on five demands]," IAF website, September 27, 2011, [www.jabha.net](http://www.jabha.net).
70. Dima Tahboub, IAF Shura Council, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 11, 2011.
71. Muhammad Abu Rumman, Centre of Strategic Studies, Interview by the Author, Amman, 03/10/11.
72. Nimr al-Assaf, IAF Deputy Secretary General, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 12, 2011.
73. "The King's Sad Men," *The Economist*, May 5, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21554229>.
74. Hani Hazaimah and Khaled Neimat, "Gov't says King's powers are not negotiable." *Jordan Times*, August 12, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/govt-says-kings-powers-are-not-negotiable>.
75. In July, thirty-five popular and tribal movements from across Jordan convened at the Muslim Brotherhood's Amman headquarters to formally announce a united election boycott. Amman Net, "Meeting of Islamists and movements: general agreement on election boycott." *Amman Net*, July 11, 2012, <http://ar.ammannet.net/news/163664#.UCvYrqmPWa8>.
76. Zaki Bani Irsheid, Muslim Brotherhood Deputy General Supervisor, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, December 20, 2011.
77. 'Abd al-Hamid al-Qudah, Brotherhood Shura Council and former Deputy General Supervisor, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 14, 2011.

# Ansar al-Sharia and Governance in Southern Yemen

*By Robin Simcox*

**Y**EMEN IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPOVERISHED NATIONS IN THE MIDDLE East. It has also emerged as the most important front of the U.S.-led war against al-Qaeda (AQ) and its affiliates. Given that the Yemeni state's inability to provide basic provisions and services is a key driver behind AQ's growth, these two issues have become inextricably linked.

A war for territory between the Yemeni government and AQ's Yemeni franchise, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), has escalated since the start of the "Arab Spring" in 2011. Throughout the upheaval, the AQAP made significant territorial gains, especially in the Abyan and Shabwa provinces. In March 2011, al-Qaeda's insurgent wing Ansar al-Sharia (AAS) took control of the southern town of Ja'ar in Abyan.<sup>1</sup> While the town's fall to AQAP was significant, it was not a complete surprise. AQAP already had a strong base there; Ja'ar supplied the Afghan mujahideen with fighters in the 1980s, and remnants of the Aden Abyan Islamic Army already lived in the city. Two months later, AQAP took control of Zinjibar, Abyan's capital. Shaqwa, in Shabwa province, was then captured in August 2011. The towns were subsequently declared Islamic "emirates." Meanwhile, AQAP's leadership remained entrenched in the mountainous territory of Azzan in Shabwa.

AAS did not have to win a series of set piece battles with the army to gain control of these towns. As Barbara Bodine, the former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, said: "there was simply "no-one there to stop them."<sup>2</sup> By the time the political crisis developed in Sana'a, state control in southern Yemen had essentially evaporated. Moreover, al-Qaeda's tactics had evolved. It became evident that they were beginning to provide

basic services to the people in the towns they controlled in an effort to harness popular support. Winning this support would, presumably, allow them to recruit in even greater numbers.

The Yemeni military only regained control of these towns in June 2012. After the government expelled AAS, the group stated in June 2012 that under their leadership:

The Sharia was implemented, security prevailed, people were safe on their properties, honors and blood, the virtue was established and the vice was removed, crime disappeared, and blackmail ended, also the aid reached to the villages of the people and the services reached to many villages and taxes were cancelled and even the fees for services like water, electricity, municipality and others were cancelled.<sup>3</sup>

These are significant claims; and, if AAS take these claims seriously, or even if they are trying to give the perception of such achievements, it is important to understand how much is fact and how much is propaganda. The manner in which AAS governed the areas it controlled over the last year provides insight into how AQ could resolve one of its most challenging dilemmas: how to gain local support for its global agenda. In some ways, AAS's Abyan and Shabwa policy provides an outline of how the group may have to operate in the coming years to retain its relevance and potency. It also gives clues about how governments may be forced to respond.

## The AQAP—AAS Nexus

AQAP'S CREATION WAS ANNOUNCED ON JANUARY 20, 2009 FOLLOWING A MERGER OF the Yemeni and Saudi wings of al-Qaeda. Soon thereafter, the group became especially notorious as it proved to be operationally capable of breaching Western security measures. In several instances, it nearly succeeded in carrying out terrorist plots that would have resulted in mass casualties.

On December 25, 2009, AQAP recruit Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted and failed to detonate a bomb concealed in his underwear on a flight headed to Detroit, Michigan. On October 29, 2010, AQAP bombs were discovered in U.S.-bound cargo planes during stopovers in the United Arab Emirates and the UK. In April 2012, the CIA thwarted an AQAP plan to use another underwear bomb on a flight headed to the U.S. after a Saudi agent infiltrated the group. These plots prompted John Brennan, assistant to President Obama on homeland security and counterterrorism, to call AQAP "the most

operationally active node of the al-Qaeda network.”<sup>4</sup> The perception of AQAP in the West as a group that specializes in spectacular, creative terrorist attacks designed to kill on a mass scale has, however, a limited bearing on how the group is regarded in Yemen. Much of this simply comes down to the work that AAS carries out at a local level.

On October 4, 2011, the State Department designated AAS as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and as an extension of AQAP. It stated that “AAS is simply AQAP’s effort to rebrand itself, with the aim of manipulating people to join AQAP’s terrorist cause.”<sup>5</sup> Those who have seen the group in action in Yemen have said the same.<sup>6</sup> Both groups are headed by Nasir al-Wahishi, and both share supporters. Senior AQAP cleric Abu Zubayr Adel al-Abab, has said that “the name Ansar al-Shari’a is what we use to introduce ourselves in areas where we work, to tell people about our work and goals.”<sup>7</sup> Mohammed al-Bashar, the Yemeni Embassy’s official spokesman in Washington, D.C., described AAS as “AQAP’s attempt to empower local jihadi-linked actors with ties to AQAP, and rebrand the movement under a global positive banner. After all, who would dare say no to Islamic law?”<sup>8</sup>

Within the organization, however, there are undoubtedly layers of loyalty, support, sympathy and membership. Yemenis concerned with local issues may consider themselves part of AAS but not a global jihadist movement such as al-Qaeda. Ambassador Bodine posits that even if key AQAP leaders were eliminated, AAS would still exist; moreover, even if AAS was eliminated, it may not destroy AQAP. The two groups “feed on each other. They support each other. They certainly are related, but they’re not identical.”<sup>9</sup>

However, the fact that AAS is a vital component of AQAP’s attempt to harness ground support for its agenda, and the fact AAS can and does promote sharia law without having to explicitly associate with al-Qaeda,<sup>10</sup> are in and of themselves signs that the group is increasingly concerned about fighting its propaganda wars in a more effective manner. Therefore, an analysis of AAS’s interest in providing effective governance provides insights regarding AQAP’s priorities and how it may operate in the future.

## A Change in Style

AL-QAEDA’S PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT TAKING OVER, CONTROLLING AND THEN GOVERNING significant pieces of territory have all been failures. This was most apparent in Iraq, where AQ found it impossible to maintain any level of support. This was not only because of its inability to govern, but because of inter-tribal fighting and high levels of civilian casualties. The growing disaffection of local Muslim populations culminated in the Anbar Awakening of late 2006. An AAS official interviewed in Azzan this year

said that the group was keen to avoid the same confrontations that they faced in Iraq, and the biggest threat to his organization was not the U.S., but southern Yemen's tribes.<sup>11</sup>

The group's tactics have adapted accordingly. In Yemen, AAS has courted religious and tribal leaders with grievances. Muslim collateral damage has been reduced to focusing on government targets. Jalal Baleedi Al-Murqashi, al-Qaeda's commander of the Abyan governorate, indicated a fundamental shift in political strategy when he stated that "we are doing our best to ensure that the vulnerable people, whom the military and its mercenaries are using as human shields, are not hurt."<sup>12</sup> Safa al-Ahmad, a film director who visited southern Yemen in 2012, said an AAS representative had told her that the group had "learned their lesson from Iraq," and were focused on a "hearts and minds" campaign.<sup>13</sup> To al-Bashar, it was "like they had read a U.S. Army COIN manual."<sup>14</sup>

Abu Zubayr Adel al-Abab promised that AAS would find "solutions" for the biggest problem facing Ja'ar: a "lack of public services such as sewage and water."<sup>15</sup> Taking this seemingly more conciliatory and "political" approach, AAS provided a host of important material services to needy populations that the central government in Sana'a had been incapable of providing for many years. At the same time, AAS began to introduce an alternative legal system, and they attempted to implement their own standards on social and criminal behavior on those who lived in the towns they controlled.

There is a consensus that AAS provided food, gas, and fresh water to the populations under its control.<sup>16</sup> However, the achievement AAS was especially proud of and keen to highlight was its ability to provide electricity. Several sources have corroborated this, including a host of Ja'ar residents interviewed between March and May 2012<sup>17</sup> and a documentary filmmaker who visited the region.<sup>18</sup>

An AAS propaganda video filmed in March 2012 and distributed through their Madad News Agency media wing shows AAS connecting electricity lines in Ja'ar suburbs and images of electric lights and fans operating correctly. The video goes on to ask several different villagers how many houses in their area are being powered by AAS electricity. The answers range from 50 to 300. All interviewed are fulsome in their praise for AAS. One al-Fateh villager is asked how the group treated the suburb: he responds "Oh, sweet. They were great!" A resident of Hajfoor notes "how many times have we asked for it and demanded it, electricity and water, no one gave us our request...God give them goodness, [AAS] didn't fail us." A resident in Seehan speaks about approximately 300 houses that now have electricity, stating "Even the children, look at the children, they are happy! We used to wish for this, our grandfathers used to wish for this." Another interviewed in Saken Waees says that "Ansar Al-Sharia did what the generations before didn't do."<sup>19</sup>

These interviews regularly stress that AAS provided these public services for free and performed them quickly. These achievements are then explicitly contrasted with

the fact that electricity had not been provided in these periods for, in some instances, decades. In the words of one resident of Ja'ar not featured in the propaganda video, "Ansar al-Sharia have solved many problems for us that the government hadn't managed to do for 20 years."<sup>20</sup>

Basic provisions, however, are not the limit of AAS's goals. There is also evidence that they installed sewage pipes,<sup>21</sup> provided teachers, ran the police force,<sup>22</sup> collected trash, and connected phone lines.<sup>23</sup> According to Nadwa al-Dawsari, the director of Partners Yemen, an NGO based in Sana'a, AAS even went so far as to stop the practice of cheating during school exams in Azzan.<sup>24</sup> It is also believed that they hijacked Saudi aid drops containing items intended for Yemeni soldiers and distributed it to residents in towns they controlled.<sup>25</sup> Other Ja'ar sources have said AAS's population outreach efforts even involve providing basic healthcare to some, though not all, residents.<sup>26</sup> Al-Razi hospital in Abyan, for example, was rumored to have only treated sick and injured members of AAS.<sup>27</sup>

Nadwa al-Dawsari believes that AAS in South Yemen were "genuinely trying to provide services in the areas that it controlled as a means of establishing support and legitimacy."<sup>28</sup> Safa al-Ahmad, having personally seen the group's presence in these towns, confirms that "They were really into running [it]."<sup>29</sup> AAS is also an ideological organization, however, and their efforts were not restricted solely to providing material aid and services. While referencing AAS's sharia law courts, al-Dawsari says the group's role was "not just collecting garbage or helping poor families but also providing justice."<sup>30</sup>

An AAS judge interviewed in April 2012 stated the new courts system had resolved 42 cases in two weeks, and claimed that "People come to us from parts we don't control and ask us to solve their problems. The sharia justice system is swift and incorruptible. Most of the cases we solve within the day."<sup>31</sup> Rulings were made almost instantly on backlogged cases left unresolved for over a decade.<sup>32</sup> The courts even dealt with murder cases.<sup>33</sup> According to al-Dawsari, these courts were "treat[ing] people as equal...regardless of their social status or tribal affiliation."<sup>34</sup>

A particular incident in April 2012 supports al-Dawsari's claim. A member of the Alja'adnah tribe in Abyan murdered a fellow tribe member.<sup>35</sup> Tribes have generally tended to prefer their flexible, tribal law over an AAS brand of sharia. Yet as al-Dawsari notes, "such killing incidents risk dragging the whole tribe in revenge killing. The formal justice system is ineffective and the informal system has limitations when it comes to revenge killing issues." Therefore, AAS offered their services to the community, and locals subsequently turned the murderer to AAS. This suggests that on some level, they trusted their justice system.<sup>36</sup>

To an extent, AQAP has been willing to compromise on the harshness of its brand of sharia in order to gain local support. An unemployed laborer in Ja'ar commented

that the group “talked about religion in a friendly way until people felt comfortable with them.” Moreover, the market for *khat*, the local narcotic, was moved to the outskirts of Ja’ar but not banned.<sup>37</sup> An AAS soldier described both cigarettes and *khat* as “sinful” and “bad for society,” but claimed that they tried to “persuade people to give up their sins...[not] force them.”<sup>38</sup>

However, even if AAS made attempts to moderate its agenda and tactics for political gain, there should be no illusions about the harshness of the group’s implementation of sharia law or the totality of its overall agenda.<sup>39</sup> One suspected spy was crucified, while others were publicly executed. In Ja’ar, a local shaykh who objected to AAS targeting Muslims and killing soldiers was imprisoned.<sup>40</sup> AAS also flogged those who drank alcohol,<sup>41</sup> and banned Arabic music. Anti-American sentiment remains virulent: AAS has installed loudspeakers in public places that denounce America and U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia. Many claim that Jews control the U.S.<sup>42</sup>

The group also reportedly assaulted those who did not attend mosque at the required times.<sup>43</sup> This contrasts with AAS claims that their response to those who do not want to pray is to “just take them aside and advise them on the importance of prayer” and, if that does not work, to “lock them somewhere quiet and give them reading material until they realize how wrong they were.”<sup>44</sup>

AAS has also chopped off the hands of those accused of stealing. One of their on-line video shows members revelling in such incidents.<sup>45</sup> AAS judges continue to say that such incidents are “not to punish the thief, it is to deter the rest of society.”<sup>46</sup> Another member of AAS tried to stress the importance of “context,” saying “If you steal food from the market because you are hungry, we will not cut the hand. But...if you steal during prayer time, or if you steal more than something like \$65, then we cut.”<sup>47</sup> This contrasts with stories which have emerged from others living under AAS rule. For example, when the father of a youth whose hand was amputated asked the group why the punishment had taken place, he was told by an AAS fighter “*mazaj*”—or, “we were in the mood.”<sup>48</sup>

Such actions are likely to have confirmed to most Yemenis the brutality with which AAS intended to govern. However, one Ja’ar resident said that “al-Qaeda members made us feel safe, they cut off the hands of thieves. This is part of sharia: those who steal should have their hands cut off.”<sup>49</sup> Another resident, speaking in September 2012 after the army’s offensive against AAS, claimed that “When al-Qaeda was here, it was good. There were no robberies. People treated each other in a decent way. No one would try to make problems.”<sup>50</sup> It is possible that these interviewees were simply AAS sympathizers. However, it is also possible that the punishments were not universally disapproved of.

If AAS wanted to use these punishments as a deterrent, then it worked. Shops were left open during times of prayer, and no stealing took place.<sup>51</sup> A Ja’ar street vendor said

that “People felt secure and safe (under al-Qaeda)...People would leave their shops open when they went to pray and when we came back our goods were untouched.”<sup>52</sup> This was a respite for tradesmen, who had previously been forced to bribe local criminals in order to allow them to operate their business: a practice which returned as soon as AAS had been forced out of Ja’ar.

AAS eventually gained enough confidence to invite Western journalists to Ja’ar, albeit in a “highly controlled way.”<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, they were willing to allow Western observers to see their running of the town first hand.<sup>54</sup> The material benefits such as greater access to food, electricity and water that AAS brought to parts of Abyan and Shabwa certainly made their policies popular to at least some of the population. However, the key to assessing AAS’s success overall is to study how receptive residents of these towns were to their ideological approach: whether the citizens of Abyan and Shabwa became more sympathetic to AAS while they were in power, and how they reacted to their departure. In this respect, AAS’s experiment in governance was not as successful.

## Hearts and Minds

ON SOME LEVEL, IT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING IF SOME YEMENIS IN THE SOUTH WERE receptive to the AAS message. The majority of the population there remains destitute and marginalized. Alternative governing models such as socialism and Sultanism have been tried and have largely failed in Yemen. The state has a reputation for illegitimacy and corruption from which it has never really recovered. In oil-rich governorates such as Shabwa and Mareb, there is a perception that wealth generated goes to the regime, while basic services in most areas are non-existent.<sup>55</sup> For these, among other reasons, Jalal Baleedi Al-Murqashi, al-Qaeda’s commander of the Abyan governorate, claimed in May 2012 that:

Several people in Abyan, Shebwa, Baida’a and Hadramout governorates want us to be there, so that we apply the laws of Islamic Sharia and maintain security. People in those areas love us and now we have become a part of them. They realized that we are honest and fair.<sup>56</sup>

AAS certainly won some hearts and minds. After AAS’s rule collapsed, a disappointed Ja’ar resident was quoted as saying that, under AAS, “Everyone was comfortable, the young and old.”<sup>57</sup> And yet, overall, it seems the most common reaction to the group’s departure was happiness and relief. A member of the Zinjibar local council said the



“horrors” of AAS rule were “unthinkable,” and that she was “incredibly happy” at their departure.<sup>58</sup> Another Zinjibar resident stated that it was “great” that AAS had gone.<sup>59</sup> One woman interviewed in Abyan also expressed happiness at AAS leaving, saying “We can’t believe this, it’s a dream today! This dream came true today! We didn’t see something like today. It’s a priceless day...Thank God for this day that we are living in today!”<sup>60</sup> A man from the same region claimed “they are not really Ansar Al-Sharia, they are Ansar of destruction.”<sup>61</sup>

A Ja’ar resident speaking out against the group said “Man, if they wanted to jihad and that crap, send them to Israel, not here. We are Muslims, all of us are Muslims. If there is really jihad, let it go to the people who we are truly against and are enemies of Allah. We are not enemies of Allah.”<sup>62</sup> Even Ja’ar residents thankful for the services AAS was able to provide still stressed the need to expel them. Two such individuals interviewed said that “We have to get rid of al-Qaeda, and yes, we need help from anyone...including America,” and that “[AAS] have brought war. Civilians are dying now because of them.”<sup>63</sup>

The outbreak of war has provided another incentive for Yemenis to reject AAS. There is an awareness that the AAS presence has led and will continue to lead to a greater U.S. drone and Yemeni Air Force presence, more bombing and higher levels of violence. As it becomes increasingly clear that an AAS presence will lead to a forceful Western response, AAS could find it increasingly difficult to muster much support.

Even some of those who initially welcomed AAS’s presence came to change their opinion. One Ja’ar resident said that:

In the beginning when [AAS] came here, they were simple people and weak. We were one of those people who were harmed by the government, because the government stole from us, and we were without work. We aligned with them in the beginning. We found out, thank God, before we did anything with them, we found out that they are liars...they love blood, and they are terrorists.<sup>64</sup>

This type of statement, in which the respondent confirmed his initial involvement with the group was out of anger and frustration with the Sana’a government, helps confirm that while AAS is increasing in numbers, this is not always for ideological reasons. As one former recruit who eventually became disillusioned with the group commented: “I thought Ansar al-Sharia would improve our lives.”<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, it is also known that tribal elders have recruited fighters for AAS in return for wells, irrigation systems and food for their tribes.<sup>66</sup> Some join to fight what they regard as an illegitimate regime.<sup>67</sup> Yet, these localized and short-term gains for the

group do not necessarily translate into support for AQ's global ambitions. Furthermore, it can only ultimately have limited traction in Yemen because, as Ambassador Bodine says, despite its best efforts, "al-Qaeda does not have a constructive program."<sup>68</sup> It has certainly not yet found one that appeals to the majority of Yemenites.

Despite this, it is important to remember the impoverishment of Yemeni society, and the social conditions working in AAS's favor. There are still significant pools of disaffected and politically disenfranchised youths for AAS to recruit. It is estimated that 54 percent of the population lives in chronic poverty; unemployment is as high as 40 percent.<sup>69</sup> The national average age is just 18.1 years old. Furthermore, 16 to 28 year olds make up two thirds of the local population in Abyan and Shabwa.<sup>70</sup> A young, politically disenfranchised, impoverished and unemployed populace will not all gravitate to AAS—yet they are likely to distrust and dislike the government as much as many of their parents. A weak central government unable to command authority or gain popular support is likely to lead to greater opportunity for AAS to pursue its political agenda.

## Aftermath of AAS Rule

IT IS ENCOURAGING THAT MANY YEMENI'S LIVING UNDER IMPOVERISHED CIRCUMSTANCES remain resistant to al-Qaeda's ideology. Yet, despite AAS's departure, there are still grave problems facing the towns that they formerly controlled. These problems are undoubtedly linked to the central government's continued inability to provide basic services and justice.

For example, electricity and water shortages in Abyan are once again commonplace.<sup>71</sup> Not only does this aggravate many Yemenis, but civilians in these areas do remember that AAS managed to provide such services just months ago. In a June 2012 interview, a Ja'ar resident indifferent to the ideology of AAS commented that "We haven't had water or electricity since the day before yesterday. We have never had such disruptions under al Qaeda rule."<sup>72</sup> This remains a problem for the government. Their inability to perform basic services enables al-Qaeda to recruit more effectively than any they could do on their own.

Reconnecting basic services is not going to be easy. Towns that AAS formerly controlled suffered tremendously during the war.<sup>73</sup> There has been more than \$2.5 billion in damage to buildings in Abyan.<sup>74</sup> Hundreds of thousands fled the fighting and many of the displaced remain in refugee camps in Aden. Meanwhile, looters have robbed abandoned houses.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, many residents do not want to return to their hometowns for fear of

left behind AAS landmines and IEDs.<sup>76</sup> Some of those who have returned have been killed or maimed by these weapons, as have the soldiers trying to de-mine the streets.<sup>77</sup> The jubilation of those who have made it back to their hometowns can be short-lived. Al-Bashar described the “destruction” in Zinjibar as “unbelievable... I don’t know how they are going to rebuild the city.”<sup>78</sup> Yemeni television has also showed the destruction of Zinjibar. A resident interviewed said that:

The magnitude of destruction is big. This area is entirely destroyed... They put the bombs in the streets so they can destroy and kill the people. You can’t live here... we asked the government to go ahead and fix the water Al-Qaeda destroyed and polluted. They need to be fast because we are homeless with no water, or food or electricity.<sup>79</sup>

A woman interview in Ja’ar said that:

Look at all the buildings and houses, all of them are destroyed. They say they all have mines. I am one of those people who were told to go back home because our houses are clear, and they are in good condition. But where do I go back to? Which house? Look at the destruction! I can’t settle down in my life in a place like this. Not like before.<sup>80</sup>

An Abyan citizen interviewed spelled out these problems, saying that:

After the army won, Hamdillah, we hoped life would come back, especially the necessary services: electricity, water, schools. If you passed by in Zinjibar, you’d see the reality. There are no services. We hope that the services come back, so people come back.<sup>81</sup>

At present, this remains unlikely. Given the significant degree to which Yemenis distrust their government, anger among the population will likely remain widespread. For example, an Abyan citizen interviewed in the wake of AAS’s expulsion blamed AAS, former President Saleh and the local government for their situation:

They are *Ansar Al-Shar* (evil), not *Ansar Al-Sharia*...The infrastructure now needs rebuilding, needs time, needs cooperation of efforts, and all of this is because Ali Abdullah Saleh...[He] is the reason behind the destruction of Abyan and our homelessness, and the leaders of our area are the people who caused us to be homeless.<sup>82</sup>

The government's agriculture department is now surveying the damage in the affected areas. Some electric generators have arrived in Abyan, some water pumps are working in Zinjibar and new electric generators have been installed in Aden in a bid to resolve water supply issues. Deliveries of water are also beginning to increase. Yet al-Bashar acknowledges that this is now a "key moment." If the government does not rebuild and de-mine affected areas in Abyan and Shabwa, then significant problems lie ahead. He states it plainly himself: "What they are saying in Abyan is (1) landmines are killing me. (2) I need electricity. For (1) you can blame Ansar al-Sharia. For (2), you end up blaming the government."<sup>83</sup>

Sana'a has established a fund to help rebuild Abyan; however, it will be impossible to rebuild the areas destroyed in enough time to prevent further humanitarian disaster. In Ambassador Bodine's view, the entire experience of AAS running southern Yemen towns has just "underscored the need for government services in there," and the need for them to be capable of appealing to and responding to the basic needs of the local population.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

AL-BASHAR SAYS THAT ULTIMATELY AAS'S PROVISION OF BASIC SERVICES AMOUNTED to a "few simple projects." He tends to think that AAS's propaganda was extremely effective, stating they were "really good in promoting the little things they've done."<sup>85</sup> To some extent, it is likely that AAS was overstating what services they were able to provide. There will remain some debate over the effectiveness of their governance.

There is no doubt that AAS was more effective than Sana'a had been in a long time at addressing the lack of basic provisions. AAS understood what services were key and exploited them. They proved capable of organizing themselves into an increasingly formidable opponent militarily, but also, politically. Yemen was AQ's most effective political campaign in the Middle East yet. In exploiting key issues in economically deprived, tribal areas, AAS displayed an ability to govern more effectively than AQ had in the past.

At the same time, AAS had many external factors to thank: a pre-existing distrust of central government, security and humanitarian concerns and widespread corruption. Yet despite these factors, support for the group was not widespread in the areas it controlled. Most citizens remained resistant to AQ ideology.

It is possible that AAS's expulsion from the towns it controlled marks the end of

their political agenda. Such is evident in that their fighters have dispersed and reverted to more traditional, hit and run style attacks against military targets. However, there is no guarantee that this will last. In September 2012, reports began to emerge of AAS offering a “Telephone for Help” service in which Abyan citizens suffering from “looting and robbery” at the hands of government forces who were taking the province back were encouraged to report their problems to AAS.<sup>86</sup>

As Ambassador Bodine says, “if we accept that AAS/AQ has learned the lesson of its own past, and is [giving] the perception of providing service and parallel government... then the Yemeni government needs to respond on that level.”<sup>87</sup> Improvements in security will only be effective if the government’s stewardship of the economy and the justice system improves.

AAS’s strategy in Yemen also illustrates a critical aspect of their method: they only target areas where they already enjoy a certain amount of sympathy and political advantage. Ja’ar was a perfect target. Its historical involvement with the Afghan mujahideen and the Aden Abyan Islamic Army ensured that there were already veteran jihadis living in the area who were familiar with its history, culture, traditions, tribal characteristics and who held influence locally. The fact the population ultimately rejected AAS in these towns shows the limits of al-Qaeda’s ideological appeal. However, AAS is proof that al-Qaeda is attempting to develop and adapt as an organization. With instability in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Sinai Peninsula, Syria, Mali and Nigeria, there are a growing number of opportunities for al-Qaeda to apply and improve its political strategy. As in Yemen, its ability to learn from past failures will help shape the group’s success in the future.<sup>88</sup>

## NOTES

1. Iona Craig, “Resistance battles al-Qaeda-linked fighters in Yemen,” *USA Today*, May 25, 2012, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/story/2012-05-24/yemen-al-qaeda/55192744/1>. The idea of Ansar al-Sharia acting as al-Qaeda’s “insurgent wing” was first referred to by British journalist Iona Craig.
2. Barbara Bodine, former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, Interview By the Author, May 21, 2012.
3. “Valediction statement of Ansar Al-Sharia to the people of Waqar,” Ansar al-Mujahideen, June 14, 2012, <http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=41211>.
4. Larry Shaughnessy, “U.S. official: Al Qaeda in Yemen bigger threat than in Pakistan,” *CNN*, December 17, 2010, [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-12-17/us/al.qaeda.yemen\\_1\\_aqap-al-qaeda-yemen?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-12-17/us/al.qaeda.yemen_1_aqap-al-qaeda-yemen?_s=PM:US).

5. United States Department of State, "Terrorist Designations of Ansar al-Sharia as an Alias for Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula," October 4, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/10/198659.htm>.
6. *Al-Qaeda in Yemen*, directed by Safa al Ahmad (May 29, 2012, Frontline PBS), Online Transcript, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/foreign-affairs-defense/al-qaeda-in-yemen/transcript-22/>. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, a journalist who spent time with AAS in Ja'ar recently, found that the two groups operated as one, and saw "how clearly [AAS] referred to themselves as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula."
7. "Online Question and Answer Session with Abu Zubayr Adel al-Abab, Shari'a Official for al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula," April 18, 2012, available at [http://icsr.info/news/attachments/1306407042ICSR\\_Abab\\_\\_Translation.pdf](http://icsr.info/news/attachments/1306407042ICSR_Abab__Translation.pdf).
8. Mohammed al-Bashar, Yemen Embassy Spokesman, Interview by the Author, Washington, D.C., July 3, 2012.
9. *Understanding Yemen's Al Qaeda Threat*, directed by Azmat Kahn (May 29th, 2012, Frontline PBS), Online transcript, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/foreign-affairs-defense/al-qaeda-in-yemen/understanding-yemens-al-qaeda-threat/#hb>.
10. Gregory Johnsen, "Frontline: Al-Qaeda in Yemen," The Big Think Blog, entry posted on May 30, 2012," available at <http://bigthink.com/waq-al-waq/frontline-al-qaeda-in-yemen?page=all>.
11. "Al-Qaeda in Yemen," Frontline, May 29, 2012.
12. Abdulrazaq Al-Jaml, "Interview with Ansar Al-Sharia Leader in Abyan, Jalal Baleedi Al-Murqashi," *Yemen Times*, May 17, 2012, <http://yementimes.com/en/1573/interview/869/Interview-with-Ansar-Al-Sharia-Leader-in-Abyan-Jalal-Baleedi-Al-Murqashi.htm>.
13. Marco Werman, "Frontline: Inside Al-Qaeda's Stronghold in Yemen," *The World*, May 29, 2012, <http://www.theworld.org/2012/05/al-qaeda-stronghold-in-yemen/>.
14. Mohammed al-Bashar, Interview by the Author, July 3, 2012.
15. "Online Question and Answer Session with Abu Zubayr Adel al-Abab," April 18, 2012, available at [http://icsr.info/news/attachments/1306407042ICSR\\_Abab\\_\\_Translation.pdf](http://icsr.info/news/attachments/1306407042ICSR_Abab__Translation.pdf).
16. Yemeni official, *Tribal Dynamics in Yemen*: United States Special Operations Command conference, April 2012.
17. Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Analysis: Battle for Hearts and Minds as Yemen Crisis Deepens," May 30, 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/95554/Analysis-Battle-for-hearts-and-minds-as-Yemen-crisis-deepens>, and Iona Craig, "Toll climbs in Yemen's fight against al-Qaeda," *USA Today*, May 18, 2012, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/story/2012-05-16/yemen-al-qaeda-war/55047454/1?csp=34news>.
18. Marco Werman, "Frontline: Inside Al-Qaeda's Stronghold in Yemen," *The World*, May 29 2012.
19. Madad News Agency presents a new video message from Anṣār al-Sharī'ah in Yemen: "Eyes on the Event #10, Jihadology, April 22, 2012, available at <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=158283>.
20. Iona Craig, "Toll climbs in Yemen's fight against al-Qaeda," *USA Today*, May 18, 2012.
21. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Al-Qaida's wretched utopia and the battle for hearts and minds," *Guardian*, April 30, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/30/alqaida-yemen-jihadis-sharia-law?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>.

22. Dina Temple Raston, "Al-Qaida: Now Vying For Hearts, Minds And Land," *NPR*, July 13, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/07/13/156691199/al-qaida-now-vying-for-hearts-minds-and-land>.
23. Mohammed al-Bashar, Interview by the Author, July 3, 2012.
24. Nadwa al-Dawsari, Director of Partners Yemen, Interview by the Author, July 9, 2012.
25. Mohammed al-Bashar, Interview by the Author, July 3, 2012.
26. Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Yemen: Behind militia lines in Jaar," March 27, 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/95176/YEMEN-Behind-militia-lines-in-Jaar>.
27. "Ansar Al-Shari'a planted landmines to kill Abyan citizens," *Yemen TV*, June 22, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tr3m6-hLBQ>.
28. Nadwa al-Dawsari, Interview by the Author, July 9, 2012.
29. Marco Werman, "Frontline: Inside Al-Qaeda's Stronghold in Yemen," *The World*, May 29, 2012.
30. Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari, July 9, 2012.
31. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad "Al-Qaida's wretched utopia and the battle for hearts and minds," *Guardian*, April 30, 2012.
32. Marco Werman, "Frontline: Inside Al-Qaeda's Stronghold in Yemen," *The World*, May 29, 2012 or Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Analysis: Battle for Hearts and Minds as Yemen Crisis Deepens," May 30, 2012.
33. "Ja'ar experience in living under the rule of Ansar Alshari'a," *Al-Jazeera*, June 22, 2012, available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7b8M\\_0ejQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7b8M_0ejQ).
34. Nadwa al-Dawsari, Interview by the author, July 9, 2012.
35. "As they are confident about the integrity of 'Al-Shari'a' justice system—Al-Ja'adneh tribe in Abyan hands over one of its members to be tried by 'Al-Shari'a' courts," *Marib Press News*, April 4, 2012, [http://www.marebpress.net/news\\_details.php?sid=42263](http://www.marebpress.net/news_details.php?sid=42263).
36. Nadwa al-Dawsari, Interview by the Author, July 9, 2012.
37. Sudarsan Raghavan, "In Yemen, tribal militias in a fierce battle with al-Qaeda wing," *Washington Post*, September 11, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/in-yemen-tribal-militias-in-a-fierce-battle-with-al-qaeda-wing/2012/09/10/0cce6f1e-f2b2-11e1-b74c-84ed55e0300b\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-yemen-tribal-militias-in-a-fierce-battle-with-al-qaeda-wing/2012/09/10/0cce6f1e-f2b2-11e1-b74c-84ed55e0300b_print.html).
38. Casey L Coombs, "Land of the Black Flag," *Foreign Policy*, March 9, 2012, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/03/09/land\\_of\\_the\\_black\\_flag?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/03/09/land_of_the_black_flag?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full).
39. For an overview of Ansar al-Sharia human rights abuses in Abyan, see "Conflict in Yemen: Abyan's Darkest Hour," Amnesty International (December 2012), available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE31/010/2012/en/5c85d728-a9ab-4693-afe9-edec2b8670e/mde310102012en.pdf>.
40. Al-Jazeera, June 22, 2012, available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7b8M\\_0ejQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7b8M_0ejQ).
41. Fuad Mused, "Military Plan to Attack Abyan, Returnees Flee Again," *Yemen Times*, March 1, 2012, <http://yementimes.com/en/1551/news/490/Military-plan-to-attack-Abyan-returnees-flee-again.htm>.
42. Sudarsan Raghavan, "In Yemen, tribal militias in a fierce battle with al-Qaeda wing," *Washington Post*, September 11, 2012.
43. Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Yemen: Behind militia lines in Jaar," March 27, 2012
44. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Al-Qaida's wretched utopia and the battle for hearts and minds," *Guardian*, April 30, 2012.

45. June 24, 2012, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUHpTDLmzMA>.
46. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad "Al-Qaida's wretched utopia and the battle for hearts and minds," *Guardian*, April 30, 2012.
47. Casey L Coombs, "Land of the Black Flag," *Foreign Policy*, March 9, 2012.
48. "Conflict in Yemen: Abyan's Darkest Hour," Amnesty International (December 2012).
49. Khaled Abdallah and Mohammed Mukhashaf "Yemenis say al Qaeda gave town security, at a cost," *Reuters*, June 18, 2012, available at:  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/18/us-yemen-jaar-idUSBRE85H0D120120618>.
50. Sudarsan Raghavan "In Yemen, tribal militias in a fierce battle with al-Qaeda wing," *Washington Post*, September 11, 2012.
51. "Al-Qaeda in Yemen," *Frontline*, 29 May 2012.
52. Khaled Abdallah and Mohammed Mukhashaf "Yemenis say al-Qaeda gave town security, at a cost," *Reuters*, June 18, 2012.
53. Marco Werman, "Frontline: Inside Al-Qaeda's Stronghold in Yemen," *The World*, May 29, 2012
54. Yemeni official, *Tribal Dynamics in Yemen: United States Special Operations Command conference*, April 2012.
55. Nadwa al-Dawsari, Interview by the Author, July 9, 2012
56. Abdulrazaq Al-Jaml, "Interview with Ansar Al-Sharia Leader in Abyan, Jalal Baleedi Al-Murqashi," *Yemen Times*, May 17, 2012.
57. "Ja'ar experience in living under the rule of Ansar Alshari'a," *Al-Jazeera*, June 22, 2012
58. Adam Baron, "Yemen's defense minister visits Zinjibar, Jaar—freed from al Qaida-linked militants' control," *McClatchy*, June 13, 2012,  
<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/06/13/152290/yemens-defense-minister-visits.html>.
59. Adam Baron, "A Hollow Victory," *Foreign Policy*, July 2, 2012,  
[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/07/02/a\\_hollow\\_victory?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/07/02/a_hollow_victory?page=full).
60. "Tears of happiness for Abyan citizens as they defeat Ansar 'Evil,'" *Yemen TV*, June 12, 2012, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvJuldIXQD4>.
61. "Abyan after Victory," *Suhail TV*, June 23, 2012, available at  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVagaQOLi5w>.
62. "Ansar Al-Shari'a planted landmines to kill Abyan citizens," *Yemen TV*, June 22, 2012.
63. Iona Craig, "Toll climbs in Yemen's fight against al-Qaeda," *USA Today*, May 18, 2012.
64. "Jaar after the withdrawal of Ansar al-Sharia," *Sky News Arabia*, June 29 2012,  
<http://www.skynewsarabia.com/web/video/30677>.
65. Sudarsan Raghavan, "In Yemen, tribal militias in a fierce battle with al-Qaeda wing," *Washington Post*, September 11, 2012.
66. Christopher Swift, "Arc of Convergence: AQAP, Ansar al-Shari'a and the Struggle for Yemen, CTC Sentinel," June 21, 2012, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/arc-of-convergence-aqap-ansar-al-sharia-and-the-struggle-for-yemen>.
67. Nadwa al-Dawsari, Interview by the author, July 9, 2012.
68. Ambassador Bodine, Interview by the author, May 21, 2012.
69. John Brennan, "U.S. Policy Toward Yemen," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 8, 2012, available at <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/us-policy-toward-yemen/p28794>.



70. Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, "Yemen," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>.
71. "Abyan after Victory," *Suhail TV*, June 23, 2012.
72. Khaled Abdallah and Mohammed Mukhashaf, "Yemenis say al-Qaeda gave town security, at a cost," *Reuters*, June 18, 2012.
73. For example, see "Abyan after Victory," *Suhail TV*, June 23, 2012, "Air strike against Ansar Al-Shari'a—Abyan images," *Yemen TV*, June 21, 2012, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJR-Qt53mbk>; "Third report on infrastructure," July 7, 2012, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16t3ZNZo8tA&feature=relmfu>; "Al-Qaeda taking control of Yemen," June 3, 2012, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6m6fH4LNDE>; Khaled Abdallah and Mohammed Mukhashaf, "Yemenis say al-Qaeda gave town security, at a cost," *Reuters*, June 18, 2012; Bobby Ghosh, "Where Terrorists Have Tanks: A Ride Through al-Qaeda Country," *Time*, July 25, 2012, <http://world.time.com/2012/07/25/where-terrorists-have-tanks-a-ride-through-al-qaeda-country/#ixzz22JGiDS65>; or "Thousands flee Abyan due to battles," *Sky News Arabia*, June 26, 2012, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqGryyLpvEA>.
74. Adam Baron, "Yemen's defense minister visits Zinjibar, Jaar—freed from al Qaida-linked militants' control," *McClatchy*, June 13, 2012.
75. "Suffering of displaced Yemenis in Aden," *Al-Jazeera*, June 26, 2012, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s335ynukHjg>.
76. Mohammed al-Bashar, Interview by the Author, July 19, 2012.
77. Bobby Ghosh, "Where Terrorists Have Tanks: A Ride Through al-Qaeda Country," *Time*, July 25, 2012; or "Thousands flee Abyan due to battles," *Sky News Arabia*, June 26, displaced Yemenis in Aden," *Al-Jazeera*, June 26, 2012.
78. Mohammed al-Bashar, Interview by the author, July 19, 2012.
79. "Air strike against Ansar Al-Shari'a—Abyan images," *Yemen TV*, June 21, 2012.
80. "Ansar Al-Shari'a planted landmines to kill Abyan citizens," *Yemen TV*, June 22, 2012.
81. "Abyan is a disaster—citizens discuss their demands," *Yemen TV*, June 23, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHSFD7Ghz5s>.
82. "Abyan after Victory," *Suhail TV*, June 23, 2012.
83. Mohammed al-Bashar, Interview by the author, July 19, 2012.
84. Ambassador Bodine, Interview by the author, May 21, 2012.
85. Mohammed al-Bashar, Interview by the Author, July 19, 2012.
86. "Al-Qaeda starts helpline in Abyan," *National Yemen*, September 10, 2012, <http://nationalyemen.com/2012/09/10/al-qaeda-starts-helpline-in-abyan/>.
87. Ambassador Bodine, Interview by the Author, May 21, 2012.

# After Al-Shabaab

*By Ioannis Gatsiounis*

**A**L-SHABAAB'S HASTY RETREAT FROM THE PORT CITY OF KISMAYO IN September 2012 all but ended the militant group's dream of converting Somalia into a utopian Islamist State that forbids soccer, TV and music. But what's good for Somalia may have adverse consequences for the region. Even before African Union troops chased the Islamists from their last stronghold, seizing their main source of supplies and tax revenue, al-Shabaab had begun to forge tactical alliances with other Islamist groups across the East African region. Now the movement's survival and relevancy will depend on them.

Islam reached Africa's Horn more than one thousand years ago from the Arab Peninsula. By the seventeenth century it had spread across much of East Africa. Radical Islam first made contact with the region in the 1950s, when a small number of Muslims returned after studying under Wahhabist teachers at Egypt's Al-Azhar University. At the time, Africans traditionally practiced Sufi or "popular" Islam, and few actively promoted the strict Middle Eastern-infused strains of Islam like Wahhabism and Salafism. Matters changed in the 1970s, however, when Saudi Arabia, plush with petrodollars, began funding mosques, madrassas, social centers, charity groups and educational exchanges through organizations like the Muslim World League. Locals now commonly refer to Wahhabi-Salafism as "purified" or "uncorrupted" Islam.

Other outside influences included Libya under Muammar Gaddafi as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Gaddafi trained and sent abroad Islamic teachers and funded the construction of mosques in order to "make Islam triumph in Africa." The region's

biggest mosque in Kampala, which bears the Libyan dictator's name, is one obvious example of Gaddafi's ideological influence. Many East African Muslims mourned his death, as they considered him a great contributor to Islam in Africa.

Tehran has a minor influence in Africa as well: it has expressed a desire "to restore Islam to its former glory, while attacking satanic forces of imperialism and Zionism" in Kenya. The Iranian regime has established a headquarters for such purposes in Jinja Uganda and Bunju, Tanzania.<sup>1</sup>

Somalia, however, since the collapse of the central government in 1991, has distinguished itself most as an incubator for radical Islam in the region.<sup>2</sup> Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI), or the Islamic Union, was the most prominent movement to rise from the leadership vacuum. Born in the 1990s with Saudi financing, AIAI largely consisted of educated Muslims who had studied in the Middle East and saw political Islam as the solution to the corruption and tribalism plaguing the Siad Barre Regime.<sup>3</sup> After the regime's collapse in 1991, Osama bin Laden sent foreign fighters to train local fighters with the aim of establishing a Horn-wide Islamic State.<sup>4</sup> By 1996, AIAI had taken to exporting terrorism, carrying out assassination attempts and bombings in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. It also succeeded in building ideological and operational connections with Somalis in Kenya and Tanzania.

Domestically, however, Somalia's clan-based social structure and its inherent resistance to foreign and puritanical forms of Islam such as Wahhabism limited AIAI's reach and influence. Reverence for tradition has typically superseded adherence to Islam, which is considered by many to be a form of cultural imperialism, and clan law and norms are viewed as the means to preserving Somali identity. This led AIAI to put a greater focus on indoctrination through Islamic education, which it offered primarily by means of aid from international Islamic charity organizations.<sup>5</sup>

U.S. intelligence officials accused AIAI of being an al-Qaeda cell and cooperating with bin Laden and al-Qaeda in plotting the 1998 United States embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Interference from the outside—mainly from the U.S. and neighboring Ethiopia—has over time, along with the war on terror, helped generate support for radical Islam in Somalia among outsiders, who painted the Americans and Ethiopians as infidel occupiers. The country experienced an uptick in violence targeting foreigners, including suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices, as well as an influx of fighters from foreign countries and the Somali diaspora who are linked with al-Qaeda.

In 2000, a rival group to AIAI emerged that was made up of ten sharia courts. Known as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), or *Ittih d al-Mah kim al-Isl miyya* in Arabic, the group included the former head of AIAI Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, who headed its consultative council. A former army colonel, Aweys reportedly organized the group's military

training and strategy. He was also the group's spiritual leader and helped arrange funding from the government of neighboring Eritrea.<sup>6</sup>

The ICU sought to set up an Islamic government ruled by sharia courts. It demanded strict adherence to Islam, issuing a fatwa in 2004<sup>7</sup> that declared the celebration of the New Year punishable by death and shutting down cinemas showing "immoral" Western fare.<sup>8</sup> The ICU declared sport in general a "satanic act," segregated seating for men and women at sporting events, and constructed mosques on site to ensure that players did not miss prayers. Needless to say, the ICU's rule was unpopular. Several thousand protested in Kismayo. The unpopularity of radical Sharia notwithstanding, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Ethiopian troops clashed with the ICU in various locations across the country in December 2006. The ICU painted Ethiopia's involvement as an attempted foreign takeover, and this invited even greater resentment. The TFG and U.S.-backed Ethiopian troops managed to take back Mogadishu and other key towns and forced the ICU into retreat towards the Kenyan border in late 2006. However, the ICU's youth wing, al-Shabaab, meaning "The Youth," broke away to wage jihad against what it deemed the enemies of Islam and restore the Caliphate.

Like AIAI and the ICU before it, al-Shabaab's ideology is rooted in Wahhabi-Salafism, a puritanical form of Islam that finds inspiration from the way the earliest Muslims practiced the religion; violence and terrorism are essential to its socio-political aims. Al-Shabaab is distinguished, however, in that it relies more heavily on violence and terrorism and has a more regional than global outlook. "Salafi-Jihadist" is how some have described the group.<sup>9 10</sup> Al-Shabaab officially allied itself with al-Qaeda in February of 2012.

Until his death by a U.S. airstrike in May 2008, Adan Hashi Farah Ayro (sometimes spelled "Eyrow") led Al-Shabaab. He was thought to be a Canadian Somali who received military training in Afghanistan before 9/11. He lacked religious credentials, but was nonetheless instrumental in strengthening al-Shabaab's ties with the global jihadist movement. These ties had concrete results: in 2006 Ayro sent 720 Somali volunteers to Lebanon to assist Hezbollah in fighting Israel. In September of that same year, five members of Hezbollah and 20 Somalis who received military training in Lebanon arrived in Somalia.<sup>11</sup>

Al-Shabaab also provided cover to key al-Qaeda operatives in the region. One prominent example is Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, the alleged leader of al-Qaeda in East Africa who was killed at a Somali military checkpoint last year. Al-Shabaab also revered the writings of al-Qaeda senior leaders and clerics such as Abu Qatada and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi; al Shabaab's magazine, "Millat Ibrahim," is named after a book by Maqdisi.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Shabaab uses video, radio and the Internet to bolster support among Somalis and international jihadists. It broadcasts on numerous stations using confiscated equipment,<sup>13</sup>

and uses video and the Internet, including social media platforms like Twitter, to reach fellow jihadists and sympathizers beyond Somalia's borders. It portrayed itself as a restorer of order in a lawless state and a resistor of "foreign occupiers" (namely Western-backed Ethiopian and African peacekeeping troops sent to support the fragile Transitional Federal Government). It employed guerilla tactics, including the use of improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings, to fend off Ethiopia's advance from the north. It also pursued a political strategy: in southern Somalia it won many allies by engaging clan leaders, distributing food and money and settling local disputes swiftly through makeshift courts.<sup>14</sup> Deep clan loyalties in Somalia, however, have prevented al-Shabaab from advancing a unified cause.<sup>15</sup> Al-Shabaab has succeeded where it has convinced clans that its utopian religious aims are compatible with the day-to-day challenges faced by clans. In parts of southern Somalia, for instance, clan leaders lacking institutional capacity welcomed al-Shabaab's assistance to the poor and its meting out of justice to criminals through makeshift sharia courts.<sup>16</sup>

But by 2008, with much of southern Somalia under its control, al-Shabaab's harsh rule inspired by the example of early Islam had begun to alienate many Somalis. The group stoned accused adulterers, declared gold and silver dental fillings un-Islamic, banned women from wearing bras, and beheaded those it accused of embracing Western ideals. Meanwhile, the African Union had begun to beef up troop levels and diminish its territorial control of the south. The rapid loss of territory and popular support that followed may have led the group to shift its focus more to external targets and to establish a formal alliance with al-Qaeda in February of this year.

Al-Shabaab's first major attack outside Somalia was its twin suicide bombing of nightclubs in Kampala, Uganda, during the closing minutes of the 2010 World Cup. Al-Shabaab said the attacks were retaliation for Ugandan troops stationed in Somalia. That conclusion is contestable. In fact, according to Kenyan officials, members of two al-Qaeda-linked groups had reportedly left Somalia for Kenya to set up terrorist cells as far back as 2005.<sup>17</sup> Further investigations into the Kampala bombings revealed al-Shabaab to have stronger ties to neighboring countries than previously estimated. Kenyan and Ugandan authorities arrested suspects of Pakistani, Kenyan, Ugandan and Yemeni in connection with the attacks. Some were later released.

In any case, it stands to reason that al-Shabaab's domestic setbacks hardly signal an end to Islamism in East Africa. It could in fact bolster the cause.

# After al-Shabaab

ISLAMISM IN EAST AFRICA HAS GROWN OVER THE YEARS AMID WEAK INSTITUTIONS, oppression and corruption, rampant poverty, and the perception among many Muslims that the West is waging a war against Islam.

Across the region, disillusionment with the corrupt states has resulted in a growing Islamic consciousness and energized Islamic political movements. There is a growing call across the region for Muslim institutions to run parallel to traditional ones. Kenyan Muslims, for instance, successfully lobbied for the establishment of *Kadhi* courts in the country's new constitution, ratified in 2010. Muslims in Uganda are fighting for similar rights. Tanzanian Muslims are fighting for marriage and other rights specific to Muslims in anticipation of the country's drafting a new constitution.

Over the years, Islamists throughout Africa's Horn have forged temporary alliances with the aim of bringing down governments or repelling external forces.<sup>18</sup> Al-Shabaab has increasingly been tailoring its strategy to this broader cause, seeing it as a means of remaining relevant and advancing Islamism's power regionally. Nowhere is this more evident than in Kenya, where al-Shabaab has conducted a series of bomb and grenade attacks on civilian targets ever since Kenya sent troops into Somalia to fight al-Shabaab October 2011.

In January of this year, it formally linked up with the Muslim Youth Center (MYC, also known as Pumwani Muslim Youth) and which renamed itself al-Hijra, meaning New Year, in early 2012. MYC has reportedly restructured its financing and membership to make it easier for its organization in Nairobi, the Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque Committee, to fund Al-Shabaab.

While African Union troops were closing in on al-Shabaab's last major stronghold, Kismayo, in September, MYC declared in a statement that it would send reinforcements and raise "the flag of Tawheed high over Kenya and East Africa."<sup>19</sup> AU and Somali troops seized the town in early October.

MYC has allegedly funded, recruited and fostered training networks for al-Shabaab recruits in Kenya.<sup>20</sup> According to a UN Report in 2011, Ahmad Imam Ali, the MYC's head, visited Somalia in 2009. The group has cultivated sympathizers and members in Eldoret, Mombasa, Garissa and other Kenyan towns, doing so through the Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque Committee and through ideological leaders like Shaykh Aboud Rogo Mohammed.

Beginning in around 2007, Shaykh Aboud conducted weekly sermons from Masjid Musa in Mombasa, declaring al-Shabaab's war in Somalia the road to martyrdom and insisting that working for the Kenyan government was haram.<sup>21</sup> He rejected all for-

mal learning, inter-religious dialogue, and considered it a duty to wage war against infidels.<sup>22</sup>

Aboud was charged in January of this year with possession of guns and ammunition, and released on bail by a Mombasa court this past July. He has been alleged to have personal links to al-Qaeda's East African chief, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, and to have helped him orchestrate the twin U.S. Embassy Bombings in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. He also allegedly introduced Fazul to Kubwa Mohammed Seif, who helped Fazul mastermind the suicide attack on the Israeli-owned Paradise Mombasa Hotel in 2002. Aboud was shot and killed by unknown assailants as he drove his wife to a hospital on August 27, 2012.

Islamism in Kenya was not diminished with Aboud's death, however. Several thousand Muslims took to the streets in Mombasa, burning vehicles, looting two churches, and firing on police with machine guns during a second day of clashes to protest his murder. Speaking days before his arrest with the newspaper *The Daily Nation* in Kenya, Aboud's close ally Said Abubakar Shariff said, "Al-Shabaab are Somalis. They should be left to rule Somalia." He also accused American, British and Israeli security agencies of forming hit squads to target Muslims in Kenya.

Puritanical interpretations of Islam that condone violence are most acute in the coastal city of Mombasa, where a majority of the population is Muslim (compared to 11 percent nationally), and influence from the Middle East dates back centuries through trade links. Tens of thousands of Muslims of Arab descent in addition to Somalis now live in Mombasa.<sup>23</sup>

It was in Mombasa that Aboud's sermons first found a receptive audience, especially among the youth. The city's high rate of unemployment, combined with the fact that the tourist trade has disproportionately benefited local elites and outsiders from inland Kenya and from overseas, has generated sentiment among the youth and others that non-believers who are against Islam are running the government.<sup>24</sup>

After Aboud's death, MYC delivered the news to the mujahideen in Tanzania and took to Twitter to vow revenge on unbelievers, signaling a possibility that it is looking to strengthen ties regionally. In another Twitter post, dated August 3, 2012, MYC said, "For the privileged brothers and sisters who join jihad they are given training in everything from the true meaning of Islam to using RPGs, AK-47s and other weapons."<sup>25</sup> (The group's Twitter account is MYC\_Press.)

According to local media reports, Masjid Sunna, which is located in the Majengo area of Mombasa, has been the center of the MYC's activities and the base for terrorism in the region. The mosque's imam, Alzadin Muriuki Omar, a Salafist, denies the characterization. Indeed, not all Kenyan Salafists support terrorist methods; however, militant Salafist Somalis have grown in presence and influence in Kenya.<sup>26</sup>

Another group suspected of fanning radicalism is the Mombasa Republican Council. Banned in 1999 for calling for secession, the council re-emerged in 2008 calling for Mombasa's secession from Kenya. Although the council's ties with radical Muslim groups have been unforthcoming, the group's members have drawn attention to land grievances and the fact that outsiders dominate the local economy thus feeding the ire of coastal Muslims. The council's lacking ties with radical Muslim organizations notwithstanding, the majority of its members are Muslim.

Eastleigh, a Somali-dominated suburb of Nairobi and subdivision of Pumwani, has also been a hotbed of Salafism at least since AIAI reached out to Somalis there in the mid 1990s. Al-Shabaab has raised funds and recruited from the neighborhood. Jihadist sermons and propaganda at Salafist mosques in the area have waned of late; however, it's possible that jihadism has merely grown less visible amid greater surveillance from authorities. There are indications that jihadists are conducting lectures and study group sessions in Eastleigh with growing frequency in homes and madrassas.<sup>27</sup>

Some observers say that after al-Shabaab, jihadism may be waning even though adherence to Salafist and Wahhabist strains of Islam may be growing amid relentless teachings. As noted above, extremists are spreading their message through the internet and social media. Al-Shabaab's media wing, the Al-Kata'ib (The Brigades) Media Foundation, has grown significantly since its launch in 2007, producing videos in English, Swahili and Arabic.<sup>28</sup> MYC and Al-Shabaab have used Twitter to inform extremists of leadership changes and to stoke outrage. For instance, MYC's Twitter account featured a picture of radical MYC-connected Kenyan Muslim preacher Samir "Abu Nuseyba" Khan Hussein after he was found dead in a forest in Voi, southern Kenya, in April.<sup>29</sup> With few job prospects, jihadists are having some success in persuading Muslim youths with rewards such as money and prizes to carry out acts of terrorism. A growing number of these recruits are non-Somali converts. Al-Hijra's Ahmad has reportedly recruited up to 500 foreign-born, Arab fighters from the Swahili coast in Kenya and Tanzania. Arab recruits can more easily avoid the detection of the local authorities than Somalis because of the Arab world's historical connection to the Swahili coast, which resulted in inter-marriage and some cultural overlap.<sup>30</sup>

Rights activists claim that the Kenyan police's heavy-handed response to Muslim political activism and extremism, coupled with the country's poor economic prospects and other perceived injustices against Muslims, are fanning radicalization among Muslims. These are surely contributing factors. However, the relentless and increasingly well-organized efforts at ideological outreach by locals and outsiders who preach an us-versus-them, under-siege mentality, suggests that radical Islam is the result of more than economic and political grievances against the government.



# Tanzania

IN MAY 2012, MUSLIM RIOTERS SET TWO CHURCHES ABLAZE ON THE HISTORIC ISLAND chain of Zanzibar a day after the arrest of Shaykh Farid Hadi Ahmed, a leader of the UAMSHO (“Awakening”) group, for participating in an illegal demonstration. UAMSHO, more fully known as Jumikior Jumuiya ya Uamsho na mihadhara ya kiislam (The Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation), began as an Islamic NGO in 2001. More recently it has called for Zanzibar to break away from mainland Tanzania and be ruled by sharia law.<sup>31</sup> Zanzibar’s government says the movement holds strict fundamentalist views. The group has threatened attacks against Christians, including through its Facebook page.<sup>32</sup> A script on the group’s office wall hails the Lebanese militant Islamist group, Hezbollah. The group denies any connection to terrorism,<sup>33</sup> however, and the chairman of UAMSHO’s trustees, Abdulrahim Salim, has insisted the group is peacefully pursuing independence for Zanzibar and dismisses claims that it is looking to impose sharia law.<sup>34</sup>

Authorities brushed off the church violence as an isolated case. But in fact, the seeds of extremism on the tourist islands have been germinating for some time. As with Kenya’s coast, Zanzibar’s contact with the Arab world dates back centuries. While Tanzania is mostly Christian, ninety eight percent of the island is Muslim. Zanzibar’s development lags far behind the mainland, and there is a widely held perception that the island’s tourist trade and other commercial activity have disproportionately benefited non-Muslims.

While mainland authorities blamed the sectarian attacks on UAMSHO, the group has denied involvement. However, local experts say the radical group at least provided the intellectual justification for the attacks. The group has openly protested the construction of more churches on Zanzibar. Since the recent influx of small traders from the mainland has increased the number of island churches, UAMSHO’s protests carry significance with regards to threats of terrorism against Christian houses of worship.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, radical voices have been granted significant air-time at Muslim-owned radio stations, heightening tensions with Christians.<sup>36</sup>

The group has also fed on disillusionment with the island’s main opposition party, the Civic United Front (CUF). CUF and CCM formed a unity government in 2010, which has left many island Muslims feeling unrepresented. The unity government has left Zanzibar with less autonomy to address economic woes, and some island Muslims detect therein an attempt to deprive them of forming viable economic links with other Muslim nations. The unity government, for instance, denied Zanzibar the right to become a member of the Islamic Conference Organization (IOC), which Muslims say

would provide much needed external financing. Zanzibar Muslims also feel that the tourist trade disproportionately benefits mainlanders, and that mainland authorities' leniency toward dress codes, which appeals to foreigners and has been good for business, is disrespectful towards Zanzibar's Islamic cultural norms.

At a press conference in June 2012, Shaykh Farid called for Zanzibar to secede from the mainland, while denying accusations that his group received outside financial support and that he once served as an infantryman in the Oman army.<sup>37</sup> Shaykh Farid has admitted to making frequent trips to Oman.<sup>38</sup> Police suspect UAMSHO is funded by Arab individuals and organizations, and Saudi money reportedly influences the movement. The group has disseminated jihadist training videos and literature and called for the assassination of Tanzanian officials who do not support the implementation of sharia law.<sup>39</sup> Some Western observers have accused the group of plotting terrorist attacks; however, according to the investigations of several Western embassies, the group does not promote violence despite its strict commitment to sharia law.<sup>40</sup>

At the press conference, Shaykh Farid said UAMSHO represents thirty local Muslim communities. UAMSHO's deputy Shaykh Azzani Khalid Hamdan has openly called for sharia law in Zanzibar, stating that "Sharia law is the basis of all law. It allows us to render judgment based on the Koran against those who don't follow the laws of Allah."

Another Islamist group that has risen to prominence is the Ansar Muslim Youth Center, which is based in Tanga along Tanzania's north mainland coast. In January of this year, it announced links to the MYC in Kenya. AMYC has recruited and raised funds for al-Shabaab, and has built linkages with a number of mosques around Tanzania.<sup>41</sup> Shaykh Salim Abdulrahim, who reportedly has been in contact with MYC's Abubakar Shariff, heads the group. MYC's Aboud Rogo has made arrangements for AMYC members to study at radical madrasas in Kenya. Some of AMYC's members have also traveled to Somalia via Mombasa.<sup>42 43</sup> Ten Tanzanians were arrested in November 2011 along with al-Shabaab militants in Mogadishu, and in August 2012 three Tanzanians suspected of al-Shabaab links were arrested trying to sneak into Somalia.

Secretary General of the Association of Muslim Organizations, Shaykh Ponda Issa Ponda, has also gained clout. The Islamist preacher has led calls (with the endorsement of 91 Muslim organizations) for the establishment of *kadhi* courts across Tanzania. He presently heads the influential Council of Imams, along with the Islamist group *Simba wa Mungu* (God's Lion), which is based out of Zanzibar and has reportedly bombed bars, beaten women for dressing "immodestly," taken over mosques, and disseminated literature promoting violence against tourists.<sup>44</sup> Shaykh Ponda was arrested in October this year for allegedly using hate speech toward Christians and the government, after Muslims torched five churches in Dar es Salaam in response to rumors that a 14-year-old boy urinated on a Quran.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, a loose movement called Ansar al-Sunnah has been active in propagating a “purified” Islam, which is rooted in Wahhabi-Salafism. The group has gained influence in towns and cities across the country, as has the Tablighi Jamaat, which has called for greater adherence to sharia.<sup>46</sup> Saudi Arabia spends roughly \$1 million a year on mosques, madrasas, and health centers in Tanzania.<sup>47</sup> Students receive funding to study in Sudan and Medina, Saudi Arabia, while teachers from Pakistan and Sudan have received funding to teach at two Saudi-funded Islamic universities in Dar al Salaam.

Some analysts note that traditional Sufi influence and local customs, including belief in witchcraft, are to some extent checking the spread of Islamic extremism.<sup>48</sup> However, less tolerant and politically activist strains of Islam are gaining ground amid feelings of marginalization, particularly among the young, uneducated and unemployed. The irony is that calls for independence and the imposition of sharia law on Zanzibar would hurt tourism and feed the economic despair that is turning many Muslims away from moderation in the first place. For its part, the government must balance a zero-tolerance approach to radical Islam with a sincere effort to address legitimate Muslim grievances and avoid harsh crackdowns where possible. If government fails at this, it risks feeding the radical tide.

## Uganda

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2010 WORLD CUP BOMBINGS, UGANDA ARRESTED THIRTY suspects, and this raised questions about the extent to which radical Islam had festered undetected in the relatively stable, landlocked East African country. In the end, only two of those arrested, a Ugandan and a Rwandan, were found guilty of terrorism.

Meanwhile, the Ugandan military raised its troop levels in Somalia and took the lead in diminishing al-Shabaab’s influence there so the non-Islamist Transitional Federal Government could restore order to the lawless country. The U.S. committed more equipment and intelligence sharing to fight radical Islam, and it also increased funding to assist marginalized Ugandan Muslims with health and education.

There have been no terrorist attacks on Ugandan soil since the World Cup, and Uganda is now frequently cited in the West and in Africa as a model of what is doable when African governments resolve to tackle Islamic extremism. Despite Uganda’s efforts to combat extremism, however, jihadist groups have been developing a harder line among Ugandan Muslims, and especially among the youth.

Now, radicalized youth increasingly accuse the older generations of not practicing true Islam and of aligning with President Yoweri Museveni’s corrupt government rather

than combating the vice. For instance, Uganda's head mufti, Shaykh Shaban Mubajje, a Museveni appointee, is widely perceived to be corrupt. In April 2012 hundreds of Muslims marched to the country's largest mosque, Gaddafi Mosque in Kampala, to protest his reelection to head Uganda's Muslim Supreme Council. Such outbursts from Muslims have coincided with a growing displeasure with Museveni's increasingly unaccountable rule, which has seen massive youth unemployment, as high as eighty percent by some estimates, crumbling infrastructure and rising inflation.

Muslim youths may be at a double disadvantage in Uganda's inhospitable job market. Many have complained of discrimination, especially if their commitment to their faith is visible in their appearance. They are certainly also underrepresented in government, notably at the policy-making level. Muslims make up 12 percent of the population; however, only one cabinet member is a Muslim. Muslims also complain about the difficulty of registering activist and humanitarian organizations, especially if they do not show strong allegiance to the ruling regime.

Youths in growing numbers are seeking to purify the faith,<sup>49</sup> and many are turning to the Tablighi Jamaat to do so. The Tabligh in Uganda often takes political form, whereas in many other parts of the world the movement self-consciously steers clear of politics and focuses primarily on proselytizing the faith.<sup>50</sup> In 2011, Muslim protests in Kampala over a land wrangle in which Uganda's head mufti and close presidential ally, Shaykh Shaban Mubajje, was accused of illegally selling Muslim property, is an example of the movement's political thrust. Many of the protesters were Tabligh.

Muhammed Yunus Kamoga founded Tabligh in Uganda in 1989. Komoga was deported from Kenya in 2008 on suspicion that he had dealings with Somali Islamists. That being said, the group has generally not been associated with violence. Nor have they found common cause with Uganda's growing Somali community, who generally attend their own mosques and do business among their own.

Tablighs, particularly a small breakaway Salafi sect, have been connected with violent uprisings in the past. Some have moved to western Uganda beginning in 1989 to fight for the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), in an effort to overthrow Museveni's government. The group received support from the government of Sudan in the 1990s, which then sheltered al-Qaeda. Members of the ADF traveled to Afghanistan in the mid-1990s to receive weapons and explosives training. Sudan and Uganda signed a peace accord in 1999 after which Sudan's support of Islamic radicalism reportedly stopped.<sup>51</sup>

The group's founder and leader was Sheikh Jamil Mukulu, an adherent of Salafist Islamism. In 2002, the government had pushed the ADF into the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. The group remains there today in reduced numbers, focusing primarily on resource extraction.<sup>52</sup>

Tablighs were also involved in bombing towns and cities across the country from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s; they also developed ties with Afghan and Sudanese extremists. After 9/11, however, Museveni came down hard on Islamic extremism, resulting in the arrests of hundreds of foreign suspects from Somalia, Asia and the Arab World.

A small number of Salafists are active in the capital, operating through Shaykh Kamoga's Salaf Foundation.<sup>53</sup> The government heavily surveys the foundation's activities, however, and they show few signs of emerging as a violent political force. Their main focus appears to be building mosques, preaching, and teaching. They have also worked with the government to counter violent uprisings among disgruntled Muslims.<sup>55 56</sup>

Saudi money is reportedly gaining influence in Uganda, though exact figures are elusive. Saudis paid to construct King Fahd Plaza in downtown Kampala, home to Ugandan, Arab and South Asian traders, some of whom sell Wahhabist literature. Saudi, as well as Kuwaiti and Egyptian funds, have helped finance Uganda's Islamic University, which, according to the University's vice rector Muhammed Mpezamihigo, seeks out lecturers who studied in Medina and Cairo.

Still, Islamic extremism in Uganda appears to have limited appeal. One reason for this may be that so much of Uganda's post-independence history has been taken up by conflict, and that the last two decades have been generally characterized by relative stability and economic growth.<sup>57</sup> Another reason may be President Museveni's aggressive surveillance of conservative Muslim groups. (Tabligh activities, for instance, are closely monitored.) After 9/11, he became America's staunchest regional ally in the War on Terror, and he has been successful in bringing extremists to justice and forcing them to think twice about pursuing their agenda.

## Conclusion

WITH AL-SHABAAB'S POWER IN SOMALIA NEARLY DISSOLVED, THE FRONTLINES OF THE struggle with radical Islamism have now spilled over into areas beyond Somalia's borders. Today, it appears that the remnants of Al-Shabaab and its loose regional network of allies and ideological sympathizers are actively looking to exploit local grievances and weak governance to advance their utopian aim of a society ruled by a radical understanding of Islamic law.

The Islamist agenda in East Africa is neither driven by nor does it depend on Al-Shabaab, however. Instead, Islamism in the region is largely the product of domestic

and international charities, local firebrands, and immigrant jihadists. However, the Al-Shabaab attacks against civilian targets like bus terminals and bars in Kenya and beyond could, if left unchecked, deliver a message of impunity to other Islamist elements. This, in turn, could serve as a rallying call to those looking to upset the security of local populations and overthrow local governments. At the same time, unnecessarily harsh and erratic responses to Muslim political activities by corrupt governments also have the potential to unify Islamists and generate more popular sympathy for their cause. Indeed, it was this perception which led foreign fighters, some of them Americans of Somali descent, to join ranks with al-Shabaab in Somalia in the first place. More recently, government crackdowns in Kenya and Tanzania have led to riots, louder calls for independence, and even helped to fuel attacks against Christians.

Meanwhile, local religious leaders have become more adept at communicating their agenda, taking to private gatherings amid greater surveillance, and utilizing social media platforms, while working with international backers to promote their agenda in schools and various social services. Moderate variations of Islam combined with traditional beliefs have helped hinder Islamism's reach, as has a shortage of popular support for the Islamist conceit that the West is an enemy of Islam. Muslims across the region have been urging governments to be more accommodating to Muslims, and they argue that this is a means of staving the spread of extremism.

Governments have attempted to encourage moderation by designating their own appointees to key positions in the Muslim community, including the chief *kadhi* judge in Kenya and Uganda's head mufti and head of the Ugandan Muslim Supreme Council. The governments in Tanzania and Kenya handpick the Supreme Muslim. The Kenyan and Ugandan Muslim populations as a whole, however, largely perceive these figures as corrupt government mouthpieces. Other government actions—such as denying the formation of Islamic NGOs—have lent credence to this view.

Government social control has already produced unintended consequences, including by undermining Muslim resistance to Islamism. Indeed, Islamists are showing greater resolve and organization in places like Zanzibar and Mombasa. Islamism's spread comes at a time when East Africa has shown a general trend toward moderately strong economic growth from which many Muslims feel they have been excluded. As long as Muslims feel marginalized economically and politically, security and governance remain weak, and cross-border coordination among Islamists continues to improve, Islamism's influence is likely to grow.

## NOTES

1. Katare Mbashu “Iran Cultural Center Offers Iftar to Dar es Salaam Pupils,” *Tanzania Daily News*, August 19, 2011.
2. East Africa consists of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi though this paper will focus on the three countries with sizable Muslim populations: Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.
3. Ken Menkhaus, *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
4. Joshua Hammer, “The African Front,” *New York Times*, December 23, 2007.
5. Menkhaus, *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*.
6. “Somalia’s Islamist Leader,” BBC, June 30, 2006.
7. Terje Ostebo, “Islamism in the Horn of Africa: Assessing Ideology, Actors, and Objectives,” International Law and Policy Institute, 2010.
8. Shaul Shay, *Somalia Between Jihad and Restoration*, Transaction Publishers, 2008.
9. Abdirahman Ali, “The Anatomy of al-Shabaab,” 2010.
10. Monterey Institute of International Studies blog, <http://blogs.miiis.edu/ipssisrael/files/2012/08/IDEOLOGY-AND-GOALS.pdf>.
11. Monitoring Group on Somalia, letter Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1676, October, 16, 2006 <http://www.offnews.info/downloads/CFRSomalia.pdf>.
12. William McCants, research scientist with CNA’s Center for Naval Analyses, interview by the author.
13. “Al Shabaab’s Media Outlets: Radio and Twitter are Favorites of the Militants,” *Somalia Report*, July 10, 2012.
14. International Crisis Group report, “Somalia: To Move Beyond the Failed State,” 2008.
15. Ali, “The Anatomy of al-Shabaab.”
16. Hanson, Stephanie, “Al Shabaab” (Backgrounder), Council on Foreign Relations, August 10, 2011.
17. Agence France Presse, “U.S., British Spies Hunt Al-Qaeda-Linked Somali Extremists in Kenya,” *Arab News*, June 17, 2005.
18. McCormack, “An African Vortex.”
19. Bill Roggio, “Muslim Youth Center threatens attacks in East Africa,” *Threat Matrix: A Blog of the Long War Journal*, September 20, 2012.
20. *Somalia Report*, Daily Media Roundup, July 28, 2011. [http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/1245/28\\_July\\_2011\\_Daily\\_Media\\_Roundup](http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/1245/28_July_2011_Daily_Media_Roundup).
21. Star Team, “Kenya: Aboud Rogo Fact Box,” *The Star* (Kenya), August 28, 2012.
22. David Ochami, “How Fiery Cleric Rogo Developed, Propagated Extremism,” *The Standard* (Kenya), September 2, 2012.
23. Imam Idi Kasozi, head of the Uganda Muslim Youth Assembly, Interview by the Author.
24. Richard Lough and Joseph Akwiri, “Kenya Muslim riots expose political, economic rifts,” *Reuters*, September 2, 2012.
25. The Sabahi Staff, “Muslim Youth Centre Vows Violent Response to Killing of its Leader Rogo,” *Sabahi Online*, August 27, 2012.
26. William Maclean, “In Africa, a militant group’s growing appeal,” *Reuters*, May 30, 2012.

27. International Crisis Group, "Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalization," January 25, 2012.  
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/kenya/b085-kenyan-somali-islamist-radicalisation.aspx>.
28. Christopher Anzalone, "The Rapid Evolution of Al-Shabab's Media and Insurgent 'Journalism,'" *Open Democracy*, November 16, 2011.
29. Christopher Anzalone, "Kenya's Muslim Youth Center and Al-Shabab's East African Recruitment," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, October 29, 2012.
30. Ibrahim Oruko, "Radical Islam spills into Kenya—report," *The Star* (Kenya), February 1, 2012.
31. Daniel Howden, "Trouble in Paradise as Radical Islam Grows in Zanzibar," *The Independent* (UK), October 30, 2012.
32. "Protests on both Zanzibar and Mainland Threaten Stability," IRIN, October 25, 2012,  
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/96631/TANZANIA-Islamist-riots-threaten-Zanzibar-s-stability>.
33. Drazen Jorgic, "Zanzibar unrest reflects anger along Swahili Coast," *Reuters*, October 25, 2012.
34. "Protests on both Zanzibar and Mainland Threaten Stability," IRIN, October 25, 2012.
35. Dr. Azaveli Lwaitama, associate professor philosophy University of Dar es Salaam, Interview by the Author.
36. International Crisis Group, "Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalization,"  
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/kenya/b085-kenyan-somali-islamist-radicalisation.aspx>.
37. Mwinyi Sadallah, "We are for Zanzibar's sovereignty-Sheikh," IPP Media, June 2, 2012.
38. Drazen Jorgic, "Zanzibar Unrest Reflects Anger Along Swahili Coast," *Reuters*, October 25, 2012.
39. Moshe Terdman, "Factors Facilitating the Rise of Radical Islamism and Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa," the Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM), 2007.
40. Harvey Glickman, "The Threat of Islamism in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Tanzania," Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2011.
41. Letter from Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, July 11, 2012.
42. Dominic Wabala, "Majengo Youth 'Recruiting Terrorists.'" *The Star* (Kenya), July 19, 2012.
43. Letter from UN Monitoring Group.
44. Gørill Husby, "Islamist Ascendancy Threatens Peace," *Inter Press Service*, May 23, 2003.
45. "Tanzanian Muslim Cleric Ponda Issa Ponda Arrested," *BBC News Africa*, October 17, 2012.
46. Glickman, "The Threat of Islamism in Sub-Saharan Africa."  
Simon Turner, "These Young Men Show No Respect for Local Customs—Globalization and Islamic Revival in Zanzibar," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 39, 2009, p. 259.
47. Author's interview with former American ambassador to Tanzania.
48. Sheik Haruna Jemba, professor of religion at Makerere University, Uganda, interview by author.
49. Ibid.
50. Jeffrey Haynes, "Islamic Militancy in East Africa," *Third World Quarterly*, 2007.
51. Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism report, November 9, 2011.
52. Haynes, "Islamic Militancy in East Africa."
53. Sheikh Ibrahim Hassan Kirya, Interim Administrator, Kibuli Mosque, Uganda, interview by author.
54. Sheik Haruna Jemba, interview by author.



55. Interview with Muslim activist, Noor Mosque, William Street, Kampala.
56. Haynes, "Islamic Militancy in East Africa."
57. Major Jodi Vittori, and Kristen Bremer, "Islam in Tanzania and Kenya: Ally or Threat in the War on Terror?" U.S. Air War College, 2009.

# The Gülen Movement in Azerbaijan

*By Fuad Aliyev*

**S**INCE GAINING INDEPENDENCE IN 1991, POST-SOVIET AZERBAIJAN HAS been experiencing a broad-based Islamic revival shaped by both home-grown as well as foreign influences. The clash of these influences has generated an “Islamization” contest for the souls of the country’s population, the majority of whom are Shiite as well as ethnic Turks. This competition has unfolded between Shiite and Sunni preachers as well as between different Sunni movements, including traditional Azeri Shafei movements, Salafi Khanbali (Hambali) streams that have been “imported” from the Arab world, and Turkish Hanafi activists and organizations.

Of all the Sunni movements in Azerbaijan, the most influential is the Turkish *Nurcular* network that is now led by its dominant offshoot known widely as the “Gülen” or “Hizmet” movement. Named for its founder, the Turkish Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen, the movement is a faith-based educational network that is enormously well-resourced and highly active internationally, especially in the Turkic world that stretches from Turkey into Central Asia.

In Azerbaijan, the Gülen movement has succeeded in reaching out to a diverse population, but especially to urban elites. It is different from other Islamic movements in that it promotes its religious teachings not through outright proselytization, but discreetly through its network of secular educational institutions, social media and business associations. Moreover, the movement has not become directly involved in the hotly contested disputes over the place of religion in post-Soviet Azerbaijan

that have been generated by the country's religious revival. Whereas Azeri secularists, Islamic activists and liberal human rights defenders have all traded barbs over Islam and "Muslim rights" including whether the *hijab* can be worn in public spaces, the Gülen movement has largely remained silent on these matters.

Because of the Hizmet movement's political quietism and its appearance of secularism, Sunni Islamists have repeatedly criticized it as "un-Islamic," for introducing "innovations" (*bida*) into Islam, and for ignoring the problems that religious Muslims face. Alternatively, both Azeri secularists and Shia religious activists have accused the Gülen network of promoting a hidden Turkish-Sunni Islamist political agenda, of serving as political agents for Turkey, and of promoting Sunnism against Azerbaijan's native Shiism. Such widely divergent appraisals have given rise to many questions and considerable suspicion about the Gülen movement and its aims. What makes the movement so different from the other Islamic movements operating in Azerbaijan? What is the Gülen movement's agenda in Azerbaijan, and what is its relationship to affiliated Nurcular associations back home in Turkey and elsewhere internationally? Will the movement and its growing network continue to integrate with secular Azeri society, or is it following a hidden agenda with the aim of refashioning Azerbaijani society?

## The Movement Today

THE GÜLEN OR HIZMET MOVEMENT IS A TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK OF INSTITUTIONS and individuals who follow the teachings of the Turkish Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen. Gülen himself is a follower of Said Nursi (1878-1960), a towering figure in modern Turkish Islam who established the *Nurcular* revivalist movement in post-Ottoman Turkey of 1920s. Although Nursi never directly involved himself in political life, he was a hugely influential religious thinker. A fierce opponent of the secularist ideology of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Nursi was officially deemed an enemy of the state in 1935 and spent the next eleven years in prison.<sup>1</sup> Evidently, the Kemalist authorities felt threatened by Nursi's teachings and by the semi-secret, underground network of obedient followers that the preacher came to lead. Known as the *Nur Talebeleri*, or "followers of light," Nursi's followers formed themselves into a hierarchical organization that resembled the structure of a traditional Sufi order and soon became popularly known as the "Nurcu Movement."

Nursi's teachings are collected in his book, the *Risaleyi-Nur*. After his death, Nursi's closest disciples in Turkish cities began to convene courses to study his philosophy. Soon, the movement became split between several of Nursi's disciples, including teachers like Hüsrev Altınbaşak, Mehmet Kayalar, Hulusi Yahyagil, Zübeyr Gündüzalp,

Mustafa Sungur and Mehmet Kurdoglu. These divisions have persisted with time. In 1950, the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed a resolution to rehabilitate the literary heritage of Said Nursi, and this thereby effectively legalized the publication and translation of his works and the movement they inspired. However, official suspicions of the movement remained.

In the 1970s, Gülen Hacı Effendi, a charismatic imam from the city of Izmir, began preaching Nursi's ideas and calling for a revival of Islam in Turkey. Initially, the young imam had supported Zübeyr Gündüzalp's Yeni Asiya movement, but Gülen ultimately broke with that movement, claiming it had become too involved in politics.<sup>2</sup> Gülen's missionary outreach soon attracted a loyal following that began to constitute itself into a close-knit, vertically-structured organization devoted to the study of Nursi's ideas as well as Gülen's written works. Since the early 1970s, this movement has formed a unique network within the broader Nurcular movement that is distinguished from other followers of Nursi's teachings, the majority of whom are now led by another Nurcular teacher, Mustafa Sungur. According to various experts, what makes the Gülen movement different from other Nurcular movements is its clear hierarchical structure, its strict internal discipline, the secrecy of its laws, its openness to capitalism and avowedly pro-business stance, and its focus on working through media associations and businesses to develop the movement.<sup>3</sup>

The rapid emergence of this network in secularist Turkey in the 1970s aroused a great deal of suspicion. Turkish authorities began to scrutinize Gülen's activities, and he subsequently moved to the U.S. where he now lives. His movement, however, remains enormously influential in his native Turkey and abroad. Through its business connections, the movement has accumulated enormous financial resources that it uses to support its social activities and public outreach in Turkey and elsewhere around the world.<sup>4</sup> One analysis that drew from Turkish media resources showed that the Hizmet movement experienced a sharp increase in its total operating capital beginning in the mid-1980s: today, the movement's total worth is estimated to be more than \$50 billion and to comprise about 30 percent of the Turkish economy.<sup>5</sup>

Worldwide, the Gülen network includes branches in 115 countries and features over 500 businesses, 6 universities, over 700 schools, 14 journals, the widely read newspaper *Zaman* ("Time"), the global Samanyolu TV channel (STV), and two radio channels.<sup>6</sup> According to a survey by the Turkish company *Konsensus*, Fethullah Gülen's movement is now the second largest religious community in Turkey after the Alevis.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to the High Command of the Armed Forces of Turkey, the number of Gülen's followers reaches as high as 4 million people in Turkey.<sup>8</sup>

In Turkey, the Gülen movement, as with some other Nurcu movements, is a well-structured, hierarchical organization. Thus, a typical Turkish city-level cell usually

consists of the following levels: *shagirdlar* (students), *uy imams* (groups of five students and their leaders), *semt imams* (an association of fives on the basis of the urban district or educational institution and their leaders), and *bolge imams* (head of district level).<sup>9</sup> Students are recruited and controlled at a local level by Nurcu *abis* (brothers) and by *ablas* (sisters). According to former members of this network, the movement possesses its own security service that is tasked with rooting out moles and agents of national intelligence and law enforcement services.<sup>10</sup> The movement keeps a database of all its members, and the training of each new recruit emphasizes the need to exercise discretion in revealing their involvement with the Gülen network. Students are additionally instructed to respect and obey the network's leadership.<sup>11</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the movement began to focus its international religious outreach and networking efforts in the newly formed republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and among the Muslim populations located in the Russian Federation.<sup>12</sup> Like many other Islamic revivalist movements, the Hizmet movement met with formidable resistance in the secularist environments of post-Soviet countries. In part because of this, the movement has tended to conduct its international outreach in a secretive fashion, much as it did when it first emerged in Kemalist Turkey. Today, some researchers claim that because of governmental scrutiny in Russia and the CIS, the Gülen movement has formed a transnational network of semi-underground cells that are far larger than most estimates.<sup>13</sup>

The secrecy surrounding the movement has aroused considerable suspicion about its activities and ultimate goals. According to Mikhail Davidov, the movement's underground network operates as a sort of intelligence service that collects information on political, economic, confessional and other dynamics in the Turkic-speaking regions and countries where the movement is seeking to spread its influence.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it has been claimed that the Gülen network works surreptitiously to infiltrate communities and the governments of Turkey and the CIS and promote its adherents to positions of power and influence.<sup>15</sup> Because of these and connected fears, the movement has been banned in Russia and Uzbekistan by notoriously anti-Islamic authorities who see it as a subversive threat. Other Central Asian regimes have also been extremely wary of the Hizmet presence.<sup>16</sup> Azerbaijan, by contrast, has always been more open to the movement, and it is in this post-Soviet country where the network has arguably had its greatest success and impact to date.

# The Network in Azerbaijan

THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT ESTABLISHED ITSELF IN AZERBAIJAN SHORTLY AFTER THE country obtained independence from the Soviet Union. In 1992, Azerbaijan became the first country outside of Turkey where the movement opened its schools.<sup>17</sup> The network's first steps into Azerbaijan began with the official visit of the *Zaman* newspaper general manager Mr. İlhan İşbilen, who sought to initiate contact with Baku to launch the movement's activities. Soon thereafter, *Zaman* began circulating in Azerbaijan, and the movement's first school, STV and a number of other companies opened. In the meantime, the movement's Güney-Doğu regional representative, Mr. Ali Bayram, visited the head of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic Mr. Heydar Aliyev, who later became the President of Azerbaijan. Mr. Bayram distinguished himself by supporting the Nakhchivan region, which was then suffering from the Armenian blockade, and was able to gain the sympathy of President H. Aliyev.

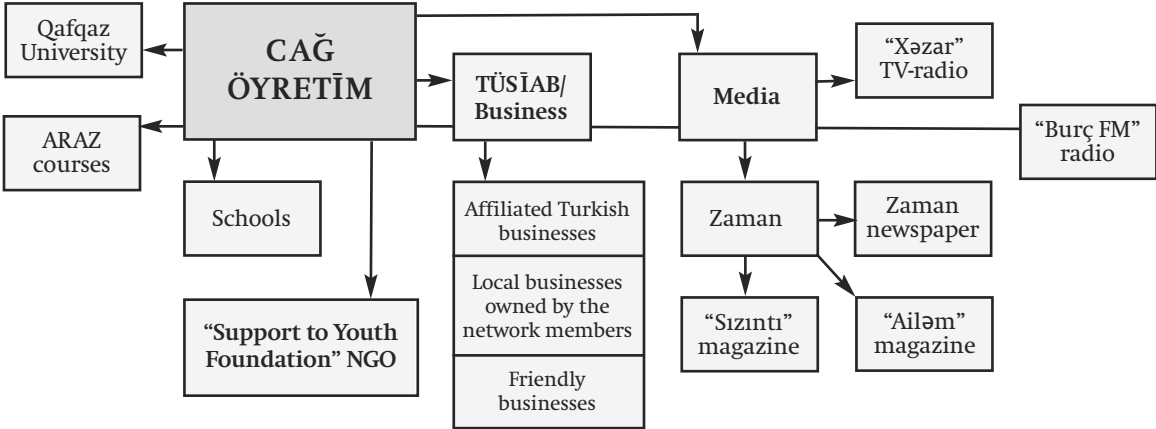
After winning Aliyev's support, the Gülen movement enjoyed real opportunities to expand its activities, and by 1993, the movement had actively begun building a network of educational institutions and businesses. For instance, according to the Islamic scholar Arif Yunus, once the movement "secured itself in the country," it began "establishing a network of commercial entities that directed their revenues to the further propaganda of Nurcu ideas. These include the furniture, clock and confectionery manufacturers: Istigbal, Romanson and Ulker."<sup>18</sup> Today, the movement's business network includes the educational company CAĞ ÖYRETİM A.Ş., "NIL" stationary and book shops, the business association TÛSİAB, the *Zaman* printing house, Burc FM radio station, STV, and the Xazar TV, Support to Youth Foundation.

It should be noted that the movement's media outlets are not explicitly religious. In fact, it is difficult to tell the difference between them and other secular media with an unaided eye. However, the Support to Youth Foundation is relatively more "religious" because besides its charity work and the courses it offers in English, computers and other subjects for children, it holds Arabic and Qur'an recitation courses, has a library full of Islamic religious books, including ones by Said Nursi and Fethullah Gülen, and a prayer room.

The movement's rapid expansion in Azerbaijan and the official support it has enjoyed there has made the secular authorities in nearby Turkey nervous. In 1998-1999, high-ranking Turkish officials openly voiced their displeasure about the movement during a meeting with President Aliyev accusing it of having an Islamist agenda. Aliyev responded forcefully, however, denying the existence of a threat.<sup>19</sup> There are

now fourteen Gülen education institutions, consisting of Qafqaz University, a private school and twelve lyceums in Baku, Sumgayit, Aghdash, Mingachevir, Guba, Lankaran, Sheki, Nakhchevan, Ordubad and Sharur.<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that the head of the movement in any given country is also the head of the movement’s educational institutions; in Azerbaijan, the head is Dr. Enver Özeren, Chairman of the Board of CAĞ ÖYRETİM.

The network in any given country is usually divided into three tiers or groups. The first group includes people who are closest to Gülen and the immediate circle of his most trusted and loyal followers. The second group includes those who work directly for the movement to achieve its larger objectives. The third group includes mainly sympathizers of the movement and they largely consist of journalists, business people, public officials, alumni of Hizmet schools, and friends. While this third grouping is not always formally a part of the network, the network does often mobilize it to pursue various ends.



In Azerbaijan, the central and coordinating point of the Gülen network is CAĞ ÖYRETİM (see diagram above). The business association TÜSİAB *Azərbaycan Türk Sənayeci və İşadamları Beynəlxalq Cəmiyyəti* (Azerbaijan Turkish Industrialists and Business People International Society) is also a focal point for the businesses affiliated with the movement. However, TÜSİAB is first and foremost an association of Turkish businessmen in the Azerbaijan, and it should be noted that not all TÜSİAB members are a part of the Gülen movement.

In 2002, the Türk İş Adamları Dərnəyi (Turkish Business People Club) was established as an alternative non-Gülen business association. In 2004, it was renamed the ATIB (*Azərbaycan Türkiyə İş Adamları Birliyi—Azerbaijan Turkey Business People*

Union) and started operating actively. The main reason for ATIB's creation was that some of the large Turkish businesses not associated with the movement did not feel comfortable associating with the organization. A likely reason for the creation of ATIB was the scandal among non-Gülen Turkish business people in Azerbaijan caused by Prime-Minister Erdogan's visit to Azerbaijan in 2003. The trip was reportedly arranged by Gülen associates without any prior consultation of others and, according to one media report, the movement's involvement deeply upset other unaffiliated Turkish businessmen.<sup>21</sup>

All of the network's Azerbaijan-based institutions and businesses work in a cooperative, mutually supportive fashion. For example, "elder" brothers and sisters encourage all members of the network, especially those who reside in "movement-run student dormitories" (*ishik evleri*), to buy from shops and eat in restaurants that belong to the network. Moreover, they are all also encouraged to watch only *STV* or *Xazar TV*, *Xazar* radio or *Burc FM* radio, and to read *Zaman* publications.<sup>22</sup>

One of the clearest indicators of the movement's overall success is its ownership of television and radio channels. This is an enormous achievement in contemporary Azerbaijan. Since no group aside of the ruling elite has ever acquired as much independent influence in the Azeri media as the Gülen movement through media channels. The fact that the movement has both foreign and religious roots makes its media operations in Azerbaijan's secularist and highly centralized environment all the more remarkable.

Since the arrival of the group in Azerbaijan, it has made a targeted effort to recruit the children of the country's elite into their education institutions. It has also sought to involve young individuals who are likely to become the country's future technocratic, business and political elite; they reportedly have enjoyed many successes in doing this. The Gülen movement's combined message of moderate Islam and pan-Turkic nationalism appeals to many Azeris, especially the younger generation, who see it as an alternative to the secular Baku regime as well as "medieval" Salafi-Wahhabi Islam and Iranian-style Shiite Islamism.<sup>23</sup>

According to a number of sources interviewed for this paper, there are already several members of the Azerbaijani parliament from different parties as well as high-ranking officials in the President's Office and other governmental bodies who are either affiliated or supportive of the movement. In addition to other public officials, the movement has, despite some setbacks, been successful in building a network of former alumni of its schools and friendly businessmen.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, unlike in other CIS countries, Gülen schools have the support of the state in Azerbaijan and there are no official barriers to their activities. Some argue that the official acceptance of Gülen can be attributed to the movement's overall integration into Azerbaijan's secular order



and its economic life, not to mention its clear contributions to Azeri society at large.

Still, official acceptance has not allayed Azerbaijani suspicions and concerns that the Gülen movement is harboring a hidden political agenda. In fact, the rise to power of an Islamist-oriented government in Turkey has stoked these popular fears in Azerbaijan. Many worry that the AKP's success in Turkey, which has clearly been buttressed by the Turkish Nurcular and Gülen movements, could also inspire the movement's Azerbaijan-based adherents. Between 2009 and 2010, several waves of anti-Nurcu media coverage and reports were broadcast in the Azerbaijani media and these were accompanied by several high-profile arrests of Turkish nationals on charges of spreading religious propaganda and extremism. Azerbaijan's Shaykh-ul-Islam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade is also known for his critical statements about Nurcu ideology and its activities in Azerbaijan.<sup>25</sup>

The secularist Azerbaijani media has fiercely criticized the Nurcu network for brainwashing youth.<sup>26</sup> From time to time, the media will feature the "confessions" of former Gülen members that expose what life is like within the movement. The programs show how young people are recruited, manipulated and then subjected to the strict control of *abis* or *ablas*. According to various reports, the movement has tried to bring youngsters studying in their schools into the *ishik evi* or *yurd* houses, which are large communal apartments capable of accommodating more than fifteen students and 3 to 4 *abis* or *ablas*.<sup>27</sup> In these houses, the elder brothers and sisters teach lessons on the fundamentals of Islam and the works of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gülen. Distinguished students get promoted to the level of *agabeys*, or elder brothers, and they are then expected to recruit other young people.<sup>28</sup> In exchange for their obedience and commitment to the movement, media reports indicate that the students have all their financial and career problems solved. The network pays for their education, provides them with housing, and helps to find them a job in Gülen-affiliated companies or in un-affiliated companies where network members are present.

It must be noted that the Nurcu activists who have been arrested in Azerbaijan are typically Turkish or Azeri youth who spread Said Nursi's works; no direct affiliates of Gülen have ever been prosecuted. Furthermore, the Azerbaijani media's coverage of alleged Turkish-Islamist conspiracies are associated largely with the Nurcu movement in general; they are rarely linked to Gülen's network in particular. Indeed, there are other non-Gülen Nurcu activists who are not as well integrated into secular Azeri society and who are actively involved in religious missionary work, especially in the rural areas of Azerbaijan. For example, the Nurcu leader Mustafa Sungur also has a lot of supporters who receive lessons on Said Nursi's works in informal settings at private residences. Some distinguished students and followers of this particular network are sent to Turkey to continue their religious studies.<sup>29</sup>

## Integration or Ulterior Motives?

AZERBAIJAN, LIKE OTHER FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS, HAS YET TO OVERCOME THE Soviet legacy of “militant” secularism and secularism that shapes its official culture and also drives popular, anti-Islamic sentiments. The Islamic revival has thus generated an array of controversies over issues surrounding religion and public life. Given the opposing dogmatic views of religious and anti-religious radicals, Islam has emerged as a central theme of the public discourse over what kind of society Azerbaijan is to become.

Unlike many Islamic revival movements that have clashed with secular Azeri society, the Gülen movement has always portrayed itself principally as a social movement that seeks to integrate with the secular order, not overturn it. Indeed, the movement eschews political confrontation and it rejects pietistic withdrawal from society. Despite this, many Azerbaijanis remain deeply suspicious of the movement. They believe that its claims to seek integration are deceptive, and that the movement’s strategy is to use its financial, political and social capital to acquire more power and influence and then to “Islamize” legislation and civil society.<sup>30</sup> At that point, Gülen leaders could plausibly undertake to change the structure of the regime itself.

In many respects, the secretive nature of the Gülen movement in Azerbaijan, its missionary-style tactics and use of secular schools to promote their teachings, as well as the movement’s disassociation from outright religious and political activism, resembles how it operated when it first emerged in Kemalist Turkey, at a time when it faced constant scrutiny from the government and public at-large. Now that Turkey is governed by an Islamist-oriented party, the Gülen movement has become increasingly politically active in Turkey. Likewise, a number of Azeri experts interviewed for this paper claim that the movement seeks “participation [in society] in the hope of controlling the state or shaping policies.” Moreover, they claim the movement seeks to temporarily “accommodate” the current order rather than to “integrate” with society over the long-term.

Despite such concerns, hard evidence of a hidden political agenda is lacking. Indeed, the movement’s leaders are already drawn from the country’s political elite and they openly support and cooperate with the Aliyev government. The government has little reason now to doubt the movement’s secular-orientation or its political loyalties. Moreover, in light of ongoing controversies generated by the Islamic revival as well as fears over growing Iranian influence and Wahhabi-inspired terrorism, the Gülen movement has successfully presented itself to secularist Azerbaijani officials as the most

moderate and most politically acceptable strain of Islam. Indeed, when it first arrived in Azerbaijan, the movement's faith-based identity was evident. Today, however, the movement's members hardly display their religious agenda in public at all. There is, for example, no Religious Studies Department at Qafqaz University anymore; there isn't even a prayer room. In other Gülen-affiliated institutions, there are no official religious ceremonies or events.

For a number of reasons, it is highly unlikely that Azerbaijani authorities will crack down on the Gülen movement. First, because of the movement's rising influence in AKP-dominated Turkey, a crackdown on the movement in Azerbaijan would likely adversely affect the relationships between the two countries. Second, the movement is becoming more influential even outside of Turkey, influencing the Turkish diaspora in Europe, the U.S. and in other countries. Third, because Azerbaijan is predominantly Shiite, the movement is seen as a natural check on the spread of Shiite Islamism and of Iranian influence. Thus, Bayram Balci and Altay Goyushov have observed that the government consciously "gives its preference to Turkish Islamic influence than to local and Iranian dynamics of revival."<sup>31</sup> It is also seen as a bulwark against radical Sunni influences such as Wahhabism. The fourth reason is that the movement runs a successful network of educational institutions attended by the offspring of Azerbaijan's elite, including influential government officials and oligarchs. Finally, there are substantial business ties between Azerbaijani officials, oligarchs and Gülen-linked enterprises.<sup>32</sup>

Despite Azerbaijani officialdom's reluctance to criticize the movement, a number of independent opposition groups, both secular and religious, have become openly critical of it. Some liberals, for example, have complained about the movement's closeness to the Azerbaijani regime, as well as its anti-democratic tendencies.<sup>33</sup> As the social scientist Eldar Mamedov argues: "Many Azerbaijani liberals also fret about what they see as the Gülen movement's hypocrisy and opportunism: amid an Azerbaijani government clampdown on the freedom of expression and assembly in 2011, the Gülen movement's flagship newspaper, *Zaman*, ran a number of stories praising Azerbaijan's 'visionary leadership.' This struck civil society activists as incongruous given the movement's claims to support democracy in Turkey and elsewhere."<sup>34</sup>

The relationship between the Gülen movement and Azerbaijan's other major religious groups is also frequently tense. Shia activists complain that the movement is too passive and secular. The movement remained silent, for example, when the Shia led protests against the *hijab* ban in schools, and also when the government recently closed several mosques and tried to ban the *athan*, or traditional call to prayer, during the day. Thus, many Shia leaders see the movement as hypocritical and insufficiently pious; they accuse the movement of practicing *taqiyya*, or dissembling, for the sole purpose of acquiring power in Azerbaijan. It is frequently alleged that the pri-

mary motive for this is to advance both movement's sectarian interests as well as the national interests of Turkey among Azerbaijan's Shia majority and in nearby Iran.

Sunni Islamists in Azerbaijan have been especially critical of the Gülen movement. In Salafi-Wahhabi Internet forums, the Nurcu movement and Gülenists in particular are typically attacked as being "people of innovation" and "wrong" Muslims.<sup>35</sup> By the Wahhabi standards of "pure Islam," the movement's Sufi orientation, its increasingly "post-Islamist" appearance and integration into the secularized Azeri society are seen as especially egregious transgressions of Islam. Despite this, the Gülen movement has sometimes been praised by Salafi-Wahhabi actors for spreading Sunni Islam through secular institutions, and thus for challenging the dominance of Shiite notions and traditions. Both Salafism and the Gülen movement are united in being relatively new to Azerbaijan, and surrounded with various stereotypes and myths.<sup>36</sup> However, both trends have become integral parts of Sunni Islam in Azerbaijan displacing traditional "domestic" Sunni Islam of Shafi'i madhab. Moreover, as they both continue to challenge the dominance of Shiism, they are bound to become natural competitors for influence among religious Sunnis of Azerbaijan.

## Conclusion

THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT HAS ARGUABLY EMERGED AS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MOVEMENT in Azerbaijan's unfolding Islamic revival. No other Islamic movement in Azerbaijan can claim such an extensive organization or level of influence in business, charity, lobbying and, above all, in the field of education. Moreover, the movement has managed to acquire this influence without revealing its ideological mission. This has, not surprisingly, generated considerable suspicion of its motives. And despite its reputation as a "post-Islamist" movement that seeks integration with society, it is nonetheless still widely perceived as having a religious-political agenda.

Notwithstanding the Gülen movement's success, its flexibility, and growing prominence in Azerbaijani society, its future expansion in Azerbaijan will face some limits. In the view of the social scientist Eldar Mamedov, "the pluralistic nature of Azerbaijani society, which includes secular liberals, intelligentsia, Shiites, non-Turkic minorities, and, above all, the strong tradition of indigenous secularism..." are both important barriers to the movement's expansion.<sup>37</sup> Mamedov also argues that the movement's emphasis on Turkism and Islam alienates certain groups, including the politically influential Baku-based and Russian-speaking secularized intelligentsia.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, despite Azerbaijan's Soviet past, Islam, and specifically Shiite Islam,

remains an important part of its national and historical identity. This is especially true in the south of the country and in the rural parts of Absheron Peninsula. For the Gülen movement, operating in the more conservative Shia parts of the country is more difficult than in other places. The well-established and politically influential institution of the Spiritual Board of the Caucasus Muslims and Sheikh-ul-Islam is another obstacle that inhibits the operations of all Sunni Islamic movement in the country, including Gülen. In order to gain mass support, the movement will need to facilitate the popular conversion of Shia Muslims to Sunnism and then to Nurcuism. The chances of this occurring are slim.

The Gülen movement's approach of targeting the urban elite also undermines their influence among the rural, poor population, thus reducing the number of its potential supporters and members in Sunni-dominated regions of Azerbaijan.

Therefore, the Gülen movement in Azerbaijan is operating under constant pressure. Various actors with different agendas—some political, others sectarian—are scrutinizing the movement's activities, and many are keen to roll back its influence. Azerbaijani society as a whole remains deeply wary of Islamism. And because of the Gülen movement's secrecy, it is, and will remain, an object of suspicion. In the public's view, the question of whether the movement seeks integration with Azeri society or to transform it from within according to a Turkish-Islamist agenda remains largely unanswered. Given the movement's historical flexibility and its extensive organizational structure in Azerbaijan, it could for the time being seek both ends.

## NOTES

1. Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam," *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31: (2003), No. 2.
2. Fulya Atacan, "A Kurdish Islamist Group in Modern Turkey: Shifting Identities," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 2001).
3. Davidov, M.N., "The Activities of Turkish Religious Sect Nuclear," *Деятельность турецкой религиозной секты «Нурджулар»*, (Russian, blog), November 3, 2007. The Institute of the Near East <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/03-11-07b.htm>. Accessed in July 2012.
4. Ahmet Sık, "Imamın Ordusu," ("The Army of Imam" in Turkish), <http://xeberler.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/51984426-dokunan-yanar.pdf>. Accessed in July 2012.
5. Davidov, M.N., "The Activities of Turkish Religious Sect Nuclear," *Деятельность турецкой*

- религиозной секты «Нурджулар»,» (Russian, blog), November 3, 2007. The Institute of the Near East <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/03-11-07b.html>.
6. Ibid.
  7. Jeyhun Alekperov, "The Turkish Gambit" and the view from over the ocean. Турецкий гамбит» и взгляд из-за океана,» (Russian), *The First News Azerbaijan*, June 20, 2012, <http://1news.az/authors/130/20120620030903621.html#page999>.
  8. Ibid.
  9. Davidov, M.N., "The Activities of Turkish Religious Sect Nucular," Деятельность турецкой религиозной секты «Нурджулар»,» (Russian, blog), November 3, 2007. The Institute of the Near East <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/03-11-07b.html>.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Turan 2009.
  12. Arif Yunus, *Islamic Palette in Azerbaijan*, Adiloglu, Baku 2012.
  13. Ibid.
  14. Davidov, M.N., "The Activities of Turkish Religious Sect Nucular," 2007.
  15. Ibid or Ahmet Sik, "The Army of the Imam."
  16. Balci 2008.
  17. Goksel, Nigar, "Religiously-Inspired Bonding: Changing Soft Power Elements in Turkey's Relations with Azerbaijan," Vol. 4, N. 8, 2011.
  18. Hakan Yavuz, "Opportunity Spaces, Identity, and Islamic Meaning in Turkey," in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. by Quintain Wiktorowicz (Bloomington ID: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 40.
  19. Arif Yunus, *Islamic Palette in Azerbaijan*, Adiloglu, Baku 2012.
  20. Ibid
  21. Khadija Ismaylova, "Nurchular" era in Turkey-Azerbaijan relations, Newspaper *Ekho*, January 18, 2003 (in Russian).
  22. Turkan and Telmanqizi, "Incredible Enticement Operations of Baku Nurcus," 2009.
  23. Nigar Goksel, 2011.
  24. Eldar Mamedov, "Azerbaijan: Evaluating Baku's Attitude toward the Gülen Movement," February 16, 2012, Eurasia.net 16.02.1012: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65013>.
  25. Pashazade: *Radical Wahabbis and nurcus damage Islam by their activities (in Azeri)*, <http://az.trend.az/news/society/1077128.html>.
  26. Turkan Turan and Sevinc Telmanqızı, "Incredible Enticement Operations of Baku Nurcus," "Baki Nurçularinin Tükürpədicı Cəlbətmə Əməliyyatları," (Azeri), *Yeni Müsavat*, June 2, 2009, [http://www.musavat.com/new/%C3%96lk%C9%99/54103%C3%82%C2%ABNUR%C3%87U%C3%82%C2%BBlar%C4%B1n\\_T%C6%8FL%C6%8FS%C4%B0N%C6%8F\\_D%C3%9C%C5%9E%C6%8FN\\_DAH\\_A\\_B%C4%B0R\\_G%C6%8FNC%C4%B0N\\_HEKAY%C6%8FS%C4%B0](http://www.musavat.com/new/%C3%96lk%C9%99/54103%C3%82%C2%ABNUR%C3%87U%C3%82%C2%BBlar%C4%B1n_T%C6%8FL%C6%8FS%C4%B0N%C6%8F_D%C3%9C%C5%9E%C6%8FN_DAH_A_B%C4%B0R_G%C6%8FNC%C4%B0N_HEKAY%C6%8FS%C4%B0). Accessed in August 2012.
  27. Ibid.
  28. Arif Yunus, *Islamic Palette in Azerbaijan*, Adiloglu, Baku 2012.
  29. Ibid.
  30. Mamedov 2012.
  31. Balci, Bayram & Goyushov, Altay, "Changing Islam in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan and its impact on the

Sunni-Shia cleavage,” in: Maréchal, Brigitte & Zemni, Sami, *Contemporary Sunni-Shia relationships*, Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2012).

32. Mamedov 2012.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Mamedov 2012.

36. Bayram Balci and Altay Goyushev 2012.

37. Mamedov 2012.

38. Ibid.

# Contributors

FUAD ALIYEV

is an adjunct professor at Azerbaijan University.

JACOB AMIS

is a freelance writer and researcher.

IOANNIS GATSIOUNIS

is an East Africa-based journalist and author.

ROBIN SIMCOX

is a research fellow at the Henry Jackson Society.

SAMUEL TADROS

is a research fellow at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and a guest lecturer at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

ERIC TRAGER

is a Next Generation fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.





\$12.95



CENTER ON ISLAM, DEMOCRACY, AND  
THE FUTURE OF THE MUSLIM WORLD  
[www.CurrentTrends.org](http://www.CurrentTrends.org)

**HUDSON**  
I N S T I T U T E