Current Trends
IN ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY

VOLUME 17
August, 2014

- THE SALAFI DAWA OF ALEXANDRIA
  Mokhtar Awad

- REINVENTING SUNNI IDENTITY IN IRAQ AFTER 2003
  Fanar Haddad

- IRAQ’S SECOND SUNNI INSURGENCY
  Kirk H. Sowell

- REFUTING JIHADISM: CAN JIHAD BE RECLAIMED?
  Rashad Ali and Hannah Stuart

- REPRESSSION IN CHINA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN XINJIANG
  Kilic Kanat

- TURKEY’S DECLINING DEMOCRACY
  Banu Eligür

Hudson Institute
Center on Islam, Democracy, and the Future of the Muslim World
Current Trends
IN ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY

VOLUME 17

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

Hudson Institute
Center on Islam, Democracy, and the Future of the Muslim World
For more information about obtaining additional copies of this or other Hudson Institute publications, please visit Hudson’s website at 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 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
Contents

The Salafi Dawa of Alexandria / 5
Mokhtar Awad

Iraq’s Second Sunni Insurgency / 39
Kirk H. Sowell

The Sunni Sectarian Awakening in Iraq / 70
Fanar Haddad

Refuting Jihadism: Can Jihad Be Reclaimed? / 102
Rashad Ali and Hannah Stuart

Repression in China and Its Consequences in Xinjiang / 132
Kilic Kanat

Turkey’s Declining Democracy / 151
Banu Eligür
From his cluttered, rundown clinic in Alexandria, Egypt, the 55-year-old pediatrician Sheikh Yassir Burhami holds court a few nights a week to manage the affairs of his three and a half decade old organization: Ad-Da’wa al-Salafiyya, or “the Salafi Dawa” for short. Patients with screaming babies often interrupt these late night meetings for a free diagnosis from Dr. Burhami. A block away the mosque he frequents is little more than part of the ground floor of an apartment building. But this ostensibly humble man and his at first unassuming infrastructure has perhaps been one of Egypt’s shrewdest politicians in the country’s ongoing political transition. Burhami’s calculated pragmatism maneuvered his ultraorthodox organization, which has played a key role in instigating the polarization that still grips Egyptian society along ideological and sectarian lines, away from the line of fire unleashed against the Muslim Brotherhood and its Salafi allies. The Dawa may rely on Shura or deliberation among movement principals for its major decisions, but Burhami, who is officially the Dawa’s vice-president, is in practice its true leader and policymaker.

The Dawa is Egypt’s largest, most organized group of politicized Salafis. Its roots are in the ‘ilmīyya, or scientific, school of Salafism, which is historically characterized by its insistence on a traditional and rigidly scriptural non-violent approach.
to proselytizing that also generally shuns organized political participation. Yet the Dawa was also born out of the student movements of the 1970s, and despite its historical eschewal political participation, it has also embraced organization for the purposes of spreading its message. It was this tradition of organized work and proselytization that facilitated the Dawa’s foray into organized political work and its founding of a political party following the January 2011 revolution.

The Dawa’s unexpected successes in the 2011–2012 parliamentary elections, when it won nearly a quarter of the seats, was only the first sign of the group’s strength and aspiration to effect change in Egypt. Salafist ideology has not predetermined the Dawa’s post-revolutionary political calculations. If it had, the Dawa would have likely come to the defense of the Muslim Brotherhood just as Egypt’s other Salafis have done. Instead, the Dawa’s prime motivation is the survival of its message and reason for existing, which is to guide Egypt to true Islam in a hostile environment of rival Islamists and godless secularists wishing to eradicate the messengers. The Dawa fears in particular its biggest competitor, the Muslim Brotherhood. Dawa Sheikhs believe the Brotherhood actively seeks to undermine them, that it is willing to engage Shiites, and most importantly, that the Brotherhood is not the true vanguard of Islam. The Dawa also holds a paranoid fear that secularists allied with the Coptic Church wish to eradicate Egypt’s Islamic identity and Sharia law.

As a result of these existential fears and sense of holy mission, the Dawa does not settle for being second to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt’s Islamist landscape. So it has opportunistically struck a tactical and unholy alliance with the military and state institutions. The collaboration has insulated the Dawa from the worst of government attacks that the Muslim Brotherhood has faced while the Dawa bides its time in the certainty that its religious beliefs ultimately will prevail. In doing so, it sacrifices much of its credibility and in the process faces grave challenges from establishment institutions, such as al-Azhar and Ministry of Religious Endowments,‡

† THE FIVE SHEIKHS OF SALAFI DAWA
Mohamed Ismail El-Moqadem (61 years old): Founder of the Dawa and member of its general secretariat. He refused any administrative duties in the post-January 2011 revolution organizational restructuring.
Mohamed Abdel Fatah AKA Abu Idris (60 years old): Elected president of the Dawa since 1979 and re-elected by its Shura Council in 2011.
Saeed Abdel Azeem (61 years old): Member of the Dawa’s general secretariat and elected as its second vice president in 2011. He has effectively left the Dawa in 2013 following strong disagreements with Burhami and his anti-Muslim Brotherhood policies.
Ahmed Fareed (61 years old): Member of the Dawa’s general secretariat. He refused any administrative duties in the post-January 2011 revolution organizational restructuring.
Ahmed Hotayba (55 years old): Member of the Dawa’s general secretariat. He refused any administrative duties in the post-January 2011 revolution organizational restructuring.

9 CURRENT TRENDS IN ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY / VOL. 17
that are actively seeking to degrade the Dawa’s capacity to instruct the faithful.

Burhami is the mastermind of this strategy. He holds significant influence over the Dawa’s other five founding Sheikhs. These scholars are largely disinterested in the Dawa’s administration and, to avoid fitna, have no truck with Burhami’s political exploits. Those who know the Dawa’s religious position are confused that the al-Nour Party stands as the political Islamist “odd one out” in first abandoning the Muslim Brotherhood and then entrenching itself in the camp of Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi and his government’s relentless campaign against dissenting Islamists.

The confusion clears when one understands that Burhami and the Dawa will adopt virtually any means to achieve their movement’s ends: safeguarding the Dawa, its network, and its young cadres, which Burhami has largely developed. The Dawa believes its mission is that of teaching the true word of God and readying Egypt for its predestined reversion to an Islamic state implementing all of God’s laws and punishments. Everything else comes second. Understanding the historical development of the Dawa, the impact of revolutionary politics, and the worldview of the Dawa, especially that of Burhami vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood, are key to understanding the Dawa’s positions today and its future.

Dawa’s History

Salafism in Egypt had its roots in the crisis of modernity Muslim ideologues have grappled with since the late 19th century. To Salafis, the answer lies, in its simplest explanation, in returning to the purest roots of Islam and the strict emulation of its prophet and his companions. Such a society, in their view, would be able to focus on the development of the spiritual, economic, and military with God’s blessing in the same way that Islam enabled the early Muslims to conquer much of the known world. In Egypt, purist groups such as al-Jam’ya al-Sharia and Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiya were founded in 1912 and 1926, respectively. They were concerned with the diminishing role of Sharia in their society and predominance of Sufism at the height of British influence.

Decades later, another crisis influenced the future Sheikhs of the Salafi Dawa and sent them searching for the solution to their country’s condition. They grew up in Nasser’s Egypt and witnessed its crushing defeat at the hands of Israel. In the following decade, campus activism raged across Egypt. University students heatedly debated ideas on Islam and politics. The would-be Salafi students were
frustrated with established Islamist groups such as Ansar al-Sunnah and the Muslim Brotherhood and the values of Egyptian society. The Salafi students thought established Islamist groups were unable to nurture and develop the youth cadres that the achievement of their vision required.

Mohamed Ismail el-Moqadem, the Dawa’s founder, first encountered Salafism with Ansar al-Sunnah and later became exposed to Salafi scholars from Saudi Arabia during pilgrimage trips to Mecca. El-Moqadem linked up with Abu Idris, who was his friend from high school. They went to different colleges but soon started preaching their Salafi message in 1972. Eventually they joined the growing Islamic Groups across Egypt’s campuses, which included figures such as future Brotherhood leader Abdel Monem Abul Futuh. The Salafi students, however, formally founded the Salafi School in 1977 to preach their distinct manhaj.¹

What further distinguished them was their refusal to join the Muslim Brotherhood. This is especially curious considering Burhami’s own father and uncle were Muslim Brothers and were detained by Nasser. El-Moqadem refused to give up his burgeoning dawa. He and other Salafi students didn’t trust the Brotherhood, which they believed sought to destroy them to dominate the Islamist movement and its message. Furthermore, the identity of the Brotherhood’s murshid was kept secret at the time, and the Salafi students refused to swear blind allegiance to a man they did not know.²

A formative experience for many of the future Dawa Sheikhs occurred in 1977 when then Minister of Religious Endowments, Sheikh Muhammad al-Zahabi, was kidnapped and brutally murdered by a newly born jihadi group. In response, the Salafi students went out to the street wearing t-shirts with slogans condemning the act.³ Since then the Dawa has consistently rejected violent jihadism. This refusal to engage in violence helped feed conspiracy theories that it was doing so at the behest of the domestic State Security Intelligence (SSI) apparatus. Although Burhami admits that the Dawa’s interests might have intersected with the SSI’s, he stresses that the confrontation with jihadists started well before the Islamist insurgency under Mubarak due to the barbarism of the violent methods employed by Egyptian jihadists.

In 1982, the group formally began calling itself “The Salafi Dawa,” to differentiate itself further. At one point, differences between the Dawa and the Muslim Brotherhood boiled over into violent clashes between supporters of the two groups.⁴ According to the Dawa’s narrative, their members had ignored the Brotherhood’s demand for it to not speak at a forum and MB cadres came at them with chains to teach them a lesson. The Brotherhood actively applied pressure against Dawa Sheikhs and made it difficult for them to preach. Burhami often relays a
personal experience of his when he was thrown out of a mosque by Muslim Brothers. But against these odds, the Sheikhs institutionalized their work and presented themselves as a serious contender among Egypt’s Islamist currents.

The Dawa worked slowly to force itself onto the Islamist scene, gradually building its infrastructure. In 1985, the Dawa founded the al-Furqan Institute to prepare new preachers who follow their Salafi creed. The institute, which teaches out of mosques, proliferated into 25 branches across Egypt after the 2011 revolution, with about 6,000 students. The Dawa later founded a Zakat Committee, which eventually spread across Alexandria and provided relief to needy families. The group also published a monthly magazine, Sawt al-Dawa. To manage the sprawling activities of the nascent group, it formed an Executive Council, which managed the Dawa’s affairs nationwide from a central office.

The steady progress of the Dawa soon attracted the attention of the authorities. In 1994, the government detained El-Moqadem and Saeed Abdel Azeem and shut down Sawt al-Dawa and the al-Furqan Institute and froze its administrative operations. The details of the charges levied against the Dawa remain unclear. Burhami later explained that under an agreement, the government allowed the Dawa to continue proselytizing on campuses and keep its Vanguards of the Dawa, which were its young recruits who operated much like the Brotherhood’s ‘Ashbal or cubs. The Sheikh’s travel inside and outside Egypt was greatly restricted.

Eight years later came another crushing blow from the authorities. This time the government accused some of the Dawa Sheikhs and their students of receiving foreign financing and spreading radical thought. The timing of the accusations, one year after the attacks of September 11, 2011, convinced the Dawa that the charges and subsequent detentions were part of an effort by the Egyptian government to appease the United States. Facing the threat of completely losing the freedom to preach, the Dawa grudgingly agreed to SSI demands to abandon its university networks and freeze the Vanguards of the Dawa in exchange for retaining the ability to preach in their mosques. Any activity outside the borders of the Alexandria governorate was strictly forbidden. Salafi preachers from outside of Alexandria could not travel there. Burhami was especially targeted for his initial rejection of the deal offered by the authorities. During the proceedings, the other Sheikhs learned the full extent of the campus networks Burhami had helped establish for aggressive recruitment of young cadres loyal to him.

Burhami faced considerable restrictions. He was first confined to one mosque, and SSI futilely attempted to oversee his sermons. He was even forbidden from leading prayers for a short period of time. Burhami was also attacked with an energetic and vicious smear campaign led by Madkhali Salafis, who oppose organized work.
According to the Dawa, dozens of cassette tapes and books smearing Burhami and the Dawa suddenly were in wide circulation.\(^{12}\) The most outspoken were Sheikhs Saeed Raslan and Talaat Zahran. The latter was a former student of Burhami’s but later turned Madkhali.

The constant fear of a surprise crackdown by authorities had an understandable impact on the way the Dawa operated in the years before the January 2011 revolution. It still faced a threat from authorities even though it discouraged and avoided direct violent confrontation with the state. And unlike the jihadists and Brotherhood, Dawa leaders stayed away from what they called “the politics game.” SSI had taken a peculiar interest in the Dawa due to what security officials rightly recognized as its potential to expand. What distinguished the Dawa from other Salafis, especially the Madkhalis, was its organizational work, which the government has always viewed with suspicion. The SSI had constantly attempted to restrict the work of the Dawa inside Alexandria, carefully planning the mosques and neighborhoods the Dawa Sheikhs could frequent. Much of the Dawa’s activities had to occur in secret, especially its outreach and development of young cadres. Some individual cadres, usually those hailing from wealthy families, even hid from their own family the fact that they attended Dawa lessons.

The competitive nature of the Islamist environment and lingering suspicion of the Muslim Brotherhood pushed the Dawa to develop a distinctive identity. It also made the Dawa suspicious of others. It believed that no one would come to its aid if the SSI ever decided to exterminate the only successful model of organized Salafism in Egypt. A critical part of the Dawa’s curriculum in al-Furqan to this day is teaching cadres what distinguishes the Dawa from Egypt’s other Islamist currents and why those groups have gone astray, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. In Dawa lectures today in al-Furqan, it is common to come across discussions of the Brotherhood’s “secret history” and the work of its secret apparatus to discourage cadres from sympathizing with them.

The Dawa’s suspicions were confirmed only weeks before the January 2011 revolution when a Coptic church in Alexandria was bombed on New Year’s Day 2011. Immediately, dozens of Salafis across Alexandria were rounded up and tortured, and the Dawa itself was under siege. The Dawa was an easy target largely due to its sectarian rhetoric towards Christians. The SSI-directed weekly magazine Rose al-Yusuf ran a feature story, “The most dangerous man against Egypt: Yassir Burhami and Alexandrian Salafism.”\(^{13}\) The tabloid al-Fajr ran a sensational story titled, “The relationship between al-Qaeda and the Salafi Dawa.”\(^{14}\) The Dawa was viewed with suspicion by locals who viewed all Salafis as jihadists. The government could act with impunity because the other segments of Egyptian society,
and even the Muslim Brotherhood, viewed Salafis as ultraorthodox outcasts. No one was going to risk defending them following a sectarian terrorist attack. A follower of the Dawa, 30-year old Sayyid Belal, was tortured to death in his interrogation only days before the outbreak of the revolution. SSI was poised to escalate its crackdown; however, the start of the January 2011 revolution saved the Dawa from the full attention of SSI. To this day it remains unclear who was responsible for the attacks, but there is no evidence to confirm the Dawa was involved.

The Dawa in Revolutionary Egypt

The Dawa had long discouraged political participation. It taught that protests are permissible but futile. And it deemed democracy an apostate form of government. Some confuse this as a rejection of organized political work or pursuing rule, as Madkhalis do. But in reality, the Dawa’s core objection was to the balance of power in Egypt, which it believed will never yield success for Islamists in open competition against the secular state. Furthermore, the rejection of democracy by some Sheikhs, specifically Burhami, was absolute and ideologically uncompromising on all levels. Others, such as Dawa spokesperson Sheikh Abdel Monem El-Shahat, added a conspiratorial twist, believing that the West encouraged Islamists to participate in politics to force them toward violence and “wear them down.” In 2012, Burhami summed up the sense of frustration the Dawa felt when he said, “Our reality is smaller than our creed.” He meant that the full extent of what the Dawa hopes to accomplish and change remains restricted by the political and social conditions of Egypt.

When the call for rebellion was sounded, the Dawa was uncertain what to do and initially did not participate. As events accelerated, the Dawa fell back on its core rallying cries of entrenching Sharia in Egypt and defending its “Islamic identity.” On February 8, 2011, three days before Mubarak was even removed, the Dawa held a massive rally warning worshipers of the threat to Article 2 in the constitution, which stated in part, “the principles of Islamic Sharia are the principle source of legislation.” The speakers warned secularists of the consequences of their challenging Egypt’s “Islamic identity.” There was also a marked shift in rhetoric evidenced toward the growing rebellion by el-Moqadem, who thanked the “efforts of the protesting youth.”
Immediately after Mubarak’s fall, the Dawa began to realize the historic opportunity that was presented to them. But the movement was still limited by its suspicion of outsiders and uncertainty over the true fate of the Mubarak regime and his security apparatus. In a surprising move, one of the Dawa’s first actions was to seek legal registration as a charity organization. The government’s ministry of social solidarity refused to license a charity with the word “Salafi” in its name. Eventually the Dawa was granted a license under the name of The Charitable Preachers Organization on June 15, 2011.

A decision that was far more controversial was to found a political party and participate in the political process. The calculation used by Dawa Sheikhs in making decisions or forming opinions is to balance the maslaha or benefit against the potential mafsadah or harm in accordance with Sharia.

The issue of whether or not to engage on political issues following the revolution was settled quickly, with the Dawa issuing a statement on March 7, 2011 that urged its followers to vote yes on the upcoming constitutional referendum. Already the Dawa had tied itself to the fate of the Sharia article, article 2. The Dawa believed that secularists and Christians were in a grand conspiracy to remove all references to Sharia from the constitution’s text. The Salafis were soon confronted with the benefits of acting as the poll drew near. The Dawa made its first calculation related to politics: that the maslaha from participation and helping enshrine Sharia far outweighs the mafsadah of letting secularists and Christians decide the fate of the country’s “Islamic identity.” With a poll showing a landslide victory ratifying the amendments, which the Salafis saw as a vote for Sharia, the Dawa warmed to the idea of winning at politics. One day later, the Dawa officially decided to participate in the political process. The straightforward 38-word communique reversed dense volumes the Dawa had written rejecting political participation.

Yet the Dawa was apprehensive about throwing its weight behind a political party. This concern at the time was more political than religious in nature for the Sheikhs feared the consequence of the party failing and exposing the Dawa to risk. Some individuals, especially Emad Abdel Ghafour, strongly advocated founding a party. Abdel Ghafour had been with the Dawa for decades, but his travel overseas, especially to Turkey, inspired him to pursue politics. That made the more conservative Sheikhs suspect his dedication to their ultraorthodox views. The Sheikhs agreed to let Abdel Ghafour found the party, al-Nour, and become its president. They also agreed that the party would be his portfolio, and he had the responsibility to shield the Dawa from any fallout. Sure enough, the initial press reports about the party referred to “Salafi youth” who wished to found a party. A press report quoted a founding member as saying that the Sheikhs of the Dawa will focus...
only on their preaching. Ultimately, even Burhami, the staunchest opponent of democracy, warmed to the idea of founding a party and gave the nod.

Al-Nour was officially granted a government license in June 2011, but it was not the only Salafi voice on the scene. Soon parties such as al-Asala and al-Fadeela popped up. They were much smaller and weaker in comparison and represented the largely unorganized Salafi movements in the Cairo metropolitan area, the lower Delta, and Central Egypt. The Islamic Group, based in Upper Egypt, also found its own party called the Construction and Development party.

In reality, there were and still are deep ideological divisions among most of these groups. Although the Islamic Group is closer to the Dawa, they have historically differed on the issue of violence and jihad. The larger swath of Egyptian Salafis who entered politics hailed from a strand of Salafism usually influenced by a single Sheikh (such as al-Asalah and its Sheikh Mohamed Abdel Maqsoud). The other type of Salafis were the so-called “revolutionary Salafis,” who often lacked any serious religious training and are confrontational, such as the Salafi Front or former presidential candidate Hazem Salah Abu Ismail and his fanatical supporters.

The Dawa frowned on this type of revolutionary activism. The Dawa viewed itself as the true vanguard not only of Salafism but also of Islam in Egypt. But events in Egypt were moving too fast for such divisions to materialize. For the most part, these Salafis agreed to work together on most issues. This naturally allowed the media and most of Egyptian society to lump all Salafis together. That created a conventional wisdom that all Salafis thought and acted the same; this negatively affected the Dawa’s image by association.

However, due to the Dawa’s complete and total rejection of violence, it can be cautiously considered “moderate” compared with Egypt’s other Salafis. However, its sectarian rhetoric and regressive views on basic freedoms—stances the movement refuses to abandon as a principle of faith—has allowed many to make the case that the Dawa foments a polarizing environment that encourages violence against minorities.

That violence became a reality in 2011. In March of that year, men described as Salafis by the media attacked a Christian man and cut off his ear. The media sensationalized the event and focused their attentions on the Dawa. During the summer, Egypt was rife with acts of vandalism, political violence, and thievery. Salafis—though not necessarily Dawa rank and file—along with other Islamists attacked dozens of churches across the country. Salafi satellite channels unaffiliated with the Dawa turned political and polarizing. It seemed as if Egypt was burning, and the Salafis were making sure it would turn medieval. Dawa Sheikhs interviewed last year for this research categorically denied any connection to these
attacks but were unapologetic about theirdistinctively polarizing rhetoric about Copts and other minorities. Though their lack of involvement might technically be true, they were riding a wave of unprecedented freedom with no checks on their rhetoric, which fanned the flames.

The best example of the Dawa flexing its street muscles and confrontational rhetoric was a massive rally held on July 29, 2011. Alarmed secularists dubbed the demonstration “Kandahar Friday” because of the thousands of thick-bearded and white-robed Salafis who had replaced the usual activists. The objectives of the rally highlighted the polarizing state of Islamist discourse during this period. The Salafis wanted to kill efforts to write the constitution before parliamentary elections and adopt supra-constitutional principles enshrining personal rights that would limit the ability to impose Sharia.

In an official statement issued by the Dawa before the rally, it declared its rejection of, “[The] will imposed by a minority known for its secularist and liberal affliction against the aspirations of the people.” The reference to this “minority” is understood to mean the country’s Christians and Western-educated elite. In the rally, Salafis largely affiliated with the Dawa not only embraced Tahrir activism, but also registered their staunch support for the then-ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and its president, Mohamed Tantawi. The Dawa was happy to support the military, which was mostly criticized by secular activists, to win its favor and avoid its wrath. More importantly, the Dawa mobilized because of its overwhelming fear of the country’s secularists and the Coptic Church and the alleged conspiracy to expunge Sharia from the constitution. Dawa-style activism was in full swing and its perceived fear of an attack on Sharia quickly led to its embrace of collective street action and voicing of political demands. The only instances of Dawa Salafis holding protests in the past was in 2010 and also was largely due to their conspiratorial conviction that the Church was imprisoning Christian women after they had converted to Islam.

**The Dawa Today**

ALTHOUGH THE DAWA IS EGYPT’S LARGEST SALAFI MOVEMENT, FEW DETAILS HAVE been published about its financing, structure, and operations.

...
Finance and Communications: Perhaps one of the most widely held conventional wisdoms about the Dawa is its alleged financing from the Gulf. In reality, there is no evidence to prove this. And Dawa Sheikhs vehemently dismiss this notion as baseless.

Although it is feasible that donations from private foreign individuals sympathetic to the Dawa’s brand of Islam may have helped finance its operations, this sort of funding is neither continuous nor does it keep the Dawa afloat. In reality, the Dawa as a body is not wealthy and never was. Instead, it primarily relies on technology and piggybacking off private and state-built mosques to hold its network together.

The Dawa’s primary media operation is its website Ana al-Salafy (launched in 2007) along with Sawt al-Salaf (launched in 2006). Ana al-Salafy is meticulously updated with the Dawa’s latest sermons and includes everything from fatwas to the Friday schedule for the Dawa’s different Sheikhs. The early reliance on the internet enabled the Dawa’s message to be disseminated worldwide. The wealth of content made it a hard-to-ignore resource for Salafis. The workforce is largely volunteer or paid nominal fees since they see it as a religious duty. This enables the Dawa to have a strong communications platform reaching its base with minimal costs. Following the 2011 revolution, al-Nour launched its own, largely unsuccessful, newspaper al-Fath, and an online news portal called Akher al-Anba.

Amazingly, the Dawa lacks the single most critical outreach tool in Egypt, its own satellite channel. The dozens of Salafi channels and televangelists naturally led people to simply lump the Dawa into this media operation. This generalization has hurt the Dawa as stated earlier because the Egyptian Salafi channels have long been notorious for divisive rhetoric and sensationalism.

Despite recognizing the critical need for a channel propagating its message and distinguishing itself from that of the other Salafis, the Dawa cannot muster the necessary funds. A senior al-Nour party official responsible for exploring the possibility of launching a channel explained to me in detail that the Dawa lacks the liquidity to maintain daily operations of a channel. Burhami told me a satellite operation is a financial black hole.

Another Dawa practice that significantly cuts down the organization’s operational costs is its unrestricted use of mosques that fall under its control. The Dawa’s al-Furqan Institute, which boasts 25 branches on its website, in reality, operates mostly out of mosques, which the organization often uses as training camps for cadres. The Dawa’s network also benefits from equipment and furniture found in mosques, which are usually donated. It is not clear that the Dawa actually pays the operating costs of these mosques since the government and/or locals usually service mosques. However, the Dawa may no longer have the ability to freely
access this infrastructure in the future as the Sisi government seeks to enforce government control over Egypt’s mosques.

The Dawa’s financial instability stems from the absence of obligatory dues from members. Those who do pay are asked for a minimum of only 10 Egyptian pounds or less than $1.50. To finance the 2011–2012 parliament election campaign, al-Nour piled on debt by borrowing from sympathetic business owners.26 Many of the candidates largely funded their own campaigns or donated apartments that served as headquarters. Volunteers and donations also enable al-Nour to campaign. Many contributors believed that their largesse counted as good deeds.

To understand the power of such a phenomenon, one needs only to look at the meteoric rise of former Salafi presidential candidate Hazem Salah Abu Ismail. His face was plastered all over Egypt’s walls in what many believed to be a well-funded and organized campaign. In reality, inspired Salafis, especially the business owners, would simply print the posters out of their own initiative. For reasons that need further study, Salafis of different stripes are disproportionately represented in Egypt’s technology and electronics sales and in so-called “technology malls,” which sell computers and other parts. This existing infrastructure meant that hundreds of tech-savvy Salafis could cheaply create digital content online in support of Abu Ismail. The volunteer efforts gave the impression that Abu Ismail was a serious contender. The benefits of such a phenomena are multiplied for the Dawa as it organizes this type of volunteer work. For instance, a Dawa cadre interviewed showed me how his tech start-up volunteered designing much of al-Nour’s early posters and the production of a famous song advertising the party.

To improve its financial situation, the Dawa founded the House of Business (HOB) in the fall of 2012. It describes the venture as a “non-profit economic organization”27 whose purpose is to function as an association for more than 160 businessmen and entrepreneurs to found Sharia-compliant small and medium size enterprises (SMEs). The businessmen, many of whom are Salafi, pool their capital to establish these SMEs. They are attracted to the model because they become shareholders with other trusted God-fearing businessmen in ventures with diversified risk. The model for this is the Brotherhood’s Ibdā association, which attracted many businessmen who were excited at the opportunity to invest their money with the then-ruling Brotherhood. HOB’s secretariat is headed by the Dawa’s president, Abu Idris, and includes senior members of al-Nour. A former al-Nour party member involved with HOB explained that shareholders in SMEs founded with HOB members’ capital donate a variable portion of their profits to charities in their communities. In practice, the charities operated by Dawa members or those close to the movement are the favorites. This is how the Dawa can benefit from the venture
without having to funnel funds directly to its accounts and rousing suspicion. The money spent by HOB in financing Dawa charity organizations means more funds can be allocated for its administrative purposes and other ventures. The work of these various charities help the Dawa reach new constituencies and encourage them to support the Dawa and its party, and follow its Sheikhs in return.

The true success of the venture is yet to be determined but it has attracted tens of millions of dollars’ worth of investments thus far. The Sharia-compliant SMEs range from tourism companies to a part-café, part workshop for freelancers on the Alexandrian corniche called Grenada. HOB founded its own House of Investments, which claims to have capital stock of $20 million. There are no restrictions on Gulf businessmen financing these ventures, but no evidence thus far of their involvement. The Dawa’s capacity to found HOB and find capital for its Sharia-compliant vision of the economy shows potential. More importantly, it proves the critical importance of sympathetic Salafi businessmen in the Dawa’s operations. This largely local business network can launch companies with capital worth millions of dollars in less than a year and can be called upon to finance political campaigns. However, as explained earlier, the current business model does not allow a way to directly exploit the funds so as to provide a continual source of finance for the Dawa’s and al-Nour’s daily administrative operations.

Dawa’s Organizational Structure: The Dawa’s embrace of organizational work has long set it apart. Since its founding, a leadership hierarchy of some form has been in place, but repeated crackdowns dismantled such structures. Recognizing the importance of having a hierarchy, the Dawa moved to make its organizational structure permanent following the 2011 revolution.

As early as March 13, 2011, the Dawa organized a temporary presidential council comprising El-Moqadem, Abu Idris, and Burhami. The Dawa also established an administrative council of 15 members. Three months later, the Dawa held its first Shura Council, and 179 of 203 members attended. The Dawa also founded the Dawa Secretariat, composed of the six founding Sheikhs. During the meeting, Sheikhs El-Moaqdem, Fareed, and Hotayba said that they would not run for any administrative positions in the new Dawa structure. The Shura selected a 13-member administrative council. They selected Abu Idris as president, Burhami as first vice-president, and Abdel Azeem as second vice-president. This meant that only three of the Dawa’s top Sheikhs were involved in the day-to-day affairs of the Dawa, which also included the politics of al-Nour.

This new configuration was significant since it naturally pitted Burhami against
Abdel Azeem. They each had their own style in preaching, but Abdel Azeem is folksy and media savvy, having hosted his own television show. Abu Idris may have been selected as president for his quiet and reserved demeanor. Since the revolution, Abu Idris has given perhaps less than a dozen interviews and, after the coup, it became clear that he was aligned with Burhami’s anti-Brotherhood politics when he publicly voted for Sisi in the May 2014 presidential elections.

The Dawa has not shared its internal bylaws with outsiders; however, the general outlines of the hierarchical structures are clear. The Dawa Secretariat is the senior-most body. It is not directly involved in implementing policy or decisions, but rather setting strategy and giving general direction. Symbolically it functions to represent Dawa unity, although Abdel Azeem is no longer an active member due to his support for the Muslim Brotherhood. The Secretariat seems to have unrestricted freedom to do whatever it pleases. For instance, it directly appointed Cairo-based Sheikh Mohamed Yousri Ibrahim to preside over its Shura Council even though he was not a Dawa cadre.

The Dawa’s administrative council implements decisions and policy throughout Egypt and delivers directives to governorate-level administrative councils to carry out. The Shura Council has allotted seats for 203 Dawa Sheikhs and cadres from across Egypt. The body meets bi-annually or in emergencies such as choosing candidates to support in elections or what position to take in referenda. Members vote in a secret direct ballot, and the majority decision becomes the Dawa’s. The Shura Council is also responsible in monitoring the administrative council’s performance during its meetings. However, it is unclear to what extent the Shura Council can influence the administrative council.

There are governorate-level Shura Councils that monitor the activity of the governorate-level administrative councils and nominate local cadres to the general Shura Council. Each governorate is divided into sectors (if the governorate is large), districts, and mosques. In meeting with Dawa cadres in Alexandria, I learned of leaders who are considered responsible for certain districts and mosques. This extends to other governorates, but little is known about the extent of horizontal coordination between the different sector leaders and what function they serve. A diagram of the aforementioned structure looks similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood’s.

In practice, the Dawa’s vertical structure (Figure 1) might function in the implementation of top-level decisions, but there is no evidence to suggest it has the same level of cohesiveness and organizational discipline as the Brotherhood’s network. The culture of the Dawa encourages loyalty to the Sheikhs, but it has traditionally discouraged blind obedience in favor of instilling in cadres the need to inquire about
the religious justifications for orders. Lately, because of the pressures exerted against the Dawa by rivals as well as many defections, movement leaders responsible for developing cadres insist on unquestioned loyalty to preserve the Dawa.

Understanding Dawa Decision-Making

THE DAWA’S SUSPICION THAT THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD WISHED TO UNDERMINE and destroy it has played a disproportionate role in shaping the Dawa’s decision-making calculus. While the rest of Egypt’s non-Dawa Salafis looked up to the Brotherhood as more experienced in the realm of politics, the Dawa’s suspicions of the group actually motivated it to participate in politics to serve as a counterweight.

The Secretariat

Administrative Council

Monitors work

Shura Council

Governorate Administrative Council

Monitors work

Governorate Shura Council

Sector

District

Mosque

Figure 1. The Organizational Structure of the Salafi Dawa
In multiple interviews with Burhami and other Dawa figures over the course of the past year, their disdain for the Brotherhood was palpable. Following the July 2013 coup, I asked an al-Nour party official close to Burhami if he felt the Brotherhood deserved the intensity of the crackdown, and he said it did. I started to ask him if the Brotherhood now “knows its place,” and he finished my question for me while nodding and agreeing with the provocative proposition. The Dawa had reached this level of contempt for the Brotherhood because it was convinced that the Brotherhood was plotting its undoing. Burhami has largely led this thinking since he was the primary Sheikh responsible for the politics portfolio. His own prejudices against the Brotherhood influenced many of his decisions and his ability to convince most of the Dawa Sheikhs to adopt his line.

Burhami points to several political experiences with the Brotherhood in justifying the Dawa’s unorthodox alignment with the military, which has sealed its political course for the foreseeable future. Focusing on these events from the Dawa’s point of view reveals how the group has viewed the past few years as a struggle for survival with no allies to count on. Understanding this history and the Dawa’s narrative about it is crucial for understanding the actions and behavior of the Dawa and Burhami in Egypt’s anti-Islamist political environment today.

The 2011–2012 Parliament: The earliest experience that contributed to developing the Dawa’s political acumen was the 2011–2012 parliamentary elections and the movement’s subsequent experience in the parliament.

Al-Nour had refused to join the Brotherhood in its Democratic Coalition for it included non-Islamist parties. Instead, it formed the Islamist Bloc with the much smaller al-Asala and Building and Development parties. Al-Nour won the overwhelming majority share in its bloc and nearly a quarter of the seats in the parliament’s lower and upper house.

The elections themselves, however, exposed dormant rifts between the Dawa and the Brotherhood. The old fear that the Brotherhood sought to dominate the Islamist landscape at the expense of the Dawa crept back. According to the Dawa, the Brotherhood used every dirty trick possible to limit the Dawa’s gains and punish it for its decision to contest nearly one hundred percent of the seats in the elections.

The most irritating case for the Dawa was the electoral defeat of the Dawa’s own spokesperson, Abdel Monem al-Shahat, in his district by a Brotherhood-backed candidate. With his frequent television appearances, the uncompromising and prickly Al-Shahat had become the face of the Salafi Dawa and al-Nour Party. He was infamous for declaring in televised interviews that God has forbidden
 democracy and for going on tirades against novelists such as Egyptian Nobel Laureate Neguib Mahfouz. Al-Shahat was perhaps the easiest man to hate in Egypt during this time. The Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of this. Al-Shahat, who is close to Burhami, competed against a Brotherhood-backed candidate in the run-off election for the al-Montazah district in Alexandria—and lost.

The Dawa strongly believed that non-Islamists and, allegedly, Christians voted for the Brotherhood candidate to ensure al-Shahat’s defeat. The competition was fierce, and the Brotherhood benefited from the alleged secular boost which put its candidate a little over 28,000 votes ahead of al-Shahat. In response to this, Sheikh Ahmad Fareed said, “If they wanted to implement Sharia, then how did they [the Muslim Brotherhood] ally with the Church and the Egyptian bloc [a secular coalition] to beat someone like Sheikh Abdel Monem [al-Shahat]?”

According to the Dawa, the Brotherhood targeted the Salafi voter base and exploited people’s ignorance. Fareed alleged in December 2011 on a live television segment that the Brotherhood directed illiterate voters wishing to vote for al-Nour to vote for the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party instead. He further alleged that the Brotherhood “terrorized” illiterate voters by telling them their vote would be wasted on inexperienced and ignorant Salafis.

The deeper issue observed during the time was the Brotherhood’s exploitation of poor families historically helped by the Dawa. Al-Nour members interviewed at the time explained how they were frustrated to find that the Brotherhood reached these needy families first to secure voter pledges even though the Dawa had invested more money in developing them as a constituency. Fareed alluded to this when he said the Brotherhood received many votes that it didn’t “deserve.” He went on to say on the live segment,

“Lying is not permissible according to Sharia. If they [Muslim Brotherhood] can’t abide by Sharia in elections, how can they be entrusted with its implementation?”

Most of the alleged incidents were uncovered following the coup, however, as Dawa Sheikhs sought to prove to their followers the Brotherhood’s deceit and justify their support for the coup. Sheikh Alaa Amer, based in the Delta governorate of Beheira, explained some of the election abuses in a lecture titled, “Did we betray the Brotherhood?” Most were personal. In the lecture, Amer said that the Brotherhood spread rumors about his alleged marital impropriety in an attempt at character assassination. He listed political and doctrinal differences with the Brotherhood to his followers in justifying the Dawa’s stance on the coup and asked
rhetorically, “After all of this you [the Brotherhood] are still not convinced that I am different than you?” Burhami, also in a lesson after the coup, said he regretted not advertising the extent of what he alleged to be vote rigging by the Brotherhood and its attempt to “completely exclude al-Nour.” He called on his followers to start a hashtag on Twitter documenting their stories of Brotherhood vote rigging. Burhami pointed to an elections “code of honor,” signed and breached by the Brotherhood a month before the election. Burhami rejected the accusation that al-Nour refused to coordinate with the Brotherhood during the elections. He explained to the faithful that when he brought up the subject days before the elections in a meeting with then-president of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) Mohamed Morsi, Morsi patronizingly told Burhami, in English, that it was “too late.”

In the short-lived 2012 parliament, relations between al-Nour and the FJP were at best dysfunctional. Al-Nour greatly contributed to this with its incompetent stock of parliamentarians, who themselves became a focus of public attention and scrutiny. One was caught in a lie about a nose job masquerading as an assault injury. Another was arrested with a woman in a car on the side of a road. Al-Nour failed to pass any piece of legislation it can claim as its own. Instead, its members’ antics and propositions for socially conservative measures provided entertainment for numerous news cycles.

The Brotherhood found al-Nour at best a nuisance and attempted to limit its representation in parliamentary committees. The often unfiltered press comments made by Salafi MPs, al-Nour or not, reflected on the Dawa. The Brotherhood benefited from this for it made the Brotherhood appear moderate in comparison. During this time, al-Nour was constantly targeted for ridicule by the media and others who wished to attribute al-Nour’s ultraconservatism to the Islamist current in general. The Brotherhood rarely if ever defended al-Nour.

The Presidential Elections: Divisions between the Dawa and the Brotherhood grew as presidential elections neared, and brewing disagreements inside the senior Dawa leadership started to come to light.

Early on, the Sheikhs of the Dawa became largely united in their opposition to Salafi contender Hazem Salah Abu Ismail. Burhami, largely due to his management of political affairs, was the most vocal critic inside Dawa deliberations. To the Dawa, Abu Ismail was not only unfit for the job due to his lack of experience but also because his brand of so-called “Revolutionary Salafism” posed a serious risk to the Dawa’s model. Abu Ismail’s rhetoric was too confrontational and his brand did not
substantively contribute to spreading Islam or providing charity in Egypt. Many of the Dawa youth were attracted to Abu Ismail’s lofty rhetoric and belief that he could found an Islamic state. Abu Ismail had started campaigning well before anyone else in the summer of 2011. Abu Ismail was not integrated in any organized Salafi network, nor was he close to the Dawa’s manhaj or expected to abide by its decisions. Abu Ismail was also a polarizing figure, and his often silly presentation of what an “Islamic Egypt” would be like under his rule worried the Dawa. Already the Sheikhs were beginning to understand the harm that might befall the Islamist project in Egypt should polarizing and inexperienced Islamist figures take the lead.

Fearing the worst, some Sheikhs in the Dawa, especially Sheikh Saeed Abdel Azeem, grew warm to the idea of supporting Brotherhood strongman Khairat al-Shater in place of Abu Ismail, whom they rightly feared would lose a national poll to a non-Islamist. Al-Shater’s presentation and history impressed many of Egypt’s Salafis, and Saeed Abdel Azeem had personally urged the Brotherhood to let al-Shater run despite the Brotherhood’s decision at the time not to participate in elections. Although Burhami now points to the decision of the Muslim Brotherhood to run a candidate for office as a breach of a promise, in reality the Dawa announced what it described as an initiative to urge for a consensus Islamist presidential candidate in March 2012. A week later, the Brotherhood replied with al-Shater, and the Dawa released an official statement saying that al-Shater was under consideration.

Abdel Azeem’s perceived proximity to al-Shater and by extension the Brotherhood was worrisome for Burhami and other Dawa figures. Both Abdel Azeem and al-Shater were senior members of a new Islamist organization called Islamic Legitimate Body for Rights and Reformation (ILBRR). ILBRR presented itself as a coordinating body to unite many of Egypt’s Islamist figures to counter non-Islamist political forces. Burhami, Fareed, and others in the Dawa were also members of the body. Al-Shater, who at the time was Egypt’s man of mystery, invited many conspiracies about the true aims of ILBRR and the extent of Brotherhood manipulation of its decisions since he was a member of its secretariat.

ILBRR could claim to speak for the largest association of Sheikhs. It was only natural that if al-Shater, or any Brotherhood candidate, would run for president, he would become ILBRR’s candidate. The Dawa, which saw itself as the vanguard of Salafism, made an unusual move early in 2011 in appointing ILBRR’s secretary general, Mohamed Yousri Ibrahim, as president of its Shura Council to demonstrate the Dawa’s own broad appeal. During this short-lived period of intra-Salafi integration, the Dawa moved in the direction of supporting al-Shater. It is unclear how Burhami received the idea, but a near-certain confrontation between him and Abdel Azeem was averted when al-Shater was disqualified from running.
With the Dawa back at the drawing board, Burhami could make a stronger case for not supporting the Brotherhood’s alternate candidate, Morsi. However, as the Dawa was deciding whom to pick, it was surprised to find Abdel Azeem voting with ILBRR to support Morsi for president. This was the first time since the revolution when a conflict in the most senior Dawa leadership was observed.

The Dawa eventually surprised everyone, and especially irritated the Brotherhood, by supporting ex-Brotherhood member Abdel Monem Abul Futuh. Abul Futuh inflamed matters further by presenting himself as a liberal Islamist, which went against Dawa criteria for its ideal, Sharia-compliant candidate.

The Dawa’s decision on whom to support in the election was one of the clearest examples of Burhami’s shrewd pragmatism and his decision-making calculus. Burhami had initially supported an Islamist thinker, Mohamed Selim El-Awa, but did not make the strongest case for him. Burhami worried that El-Awa was not presidential material despite having what Burhami acknowledged were the appropriate religious credentials. In justifying the insistence on not supporting Morsi in the first round of elections, Burhami said in May 2012 before the first round:

“[A questioner asks] ‘We heard from you that if the Brotherhood takes control, they’ll destroy the Salafi Dawa?’ [Yes] This is from experience, their method that we suffered from a lot. One time I was thrown out of a mosque. They picked me up and threw me outside. I have not forgotten. They certainly regret that now for creating such a powerful incident that has left its mark on me...at the time they were violating an agreement [to let Burhami preach at the mosque] ...The best way to have a good relationship with the Brotherhood is to have a strong presence, then the relationship will be excellent.”

With Morsi’s victory, it was clear the Dawa had made the wrong bet. There were already some rumblings inside with the Burhami-Abdel Azeem split and also discontent from al-Nour’s president, Emad Abdel Ghafour, who objected to Burhami’s influence in his party.

The Morsi Presidency: After Morsi’s victory, al-Nour tried to realign itself. According to Burhami, the Dawa suggested to Morsi that at least seven ministries be allotted to al-Nour since it was the second largest bloc in parliament. Al-Nour also requested that Morsi appoint a Salafi vice-president and review major decisions with an informal council of Islamist leaders. Morsi ignored all of the requests.
The only tangible gain for the Dawa was its representation in the drafting committee for the deeply polarizing December 2012 constitution. Burhami infamously engineered article 219, which “defined the principles of Islamic Sharia.” In a lecture to followers in November 2012, Burhami explained that he slipped the language in to limit freedoms that can breach Sharia and apologized to followers that he was unable to block an article making al-Azhar’s grand imam, who is openly hostile towards Salafis, immune from removal. Yet despite this achievement, Burhami teaches his followers today that the Brotherhood was not to thank for the article’s inclusion but rather that the Brotherhood had instead sold them out and framed it to non-Islamists as a “Salafi issue.”

During that fall, the most serious challenges to the Dawa’s unity and Burhami’s hold over it appeared. Dissent from al-Nour’s president, Abdel Ghafour, who rejected Burhami’s influence over al-Nour, came to the surface. Rumors circulated that Abdel Ghafour had been kicked out from al-Nour, but they later were denied. The discontent was real. In December 2012, Abdel Ghafour declared his resignation and intention to found a party. He formally launched Al-Watan in January 2013. The party’s launch event signaled to Burhami who his enemies were. Abdel Azeem spoke at the event. Other figures detested by Burhami such as Hazem Salah Abu Ismail were also in attendance. Al-Watan’s split was not civil. The new party converted al-Nour party offices and even took over al-Nour’s twitter account.

For Burhami, the gloves had to come off. In the following months, the Dawa stepped up its public criticisms of Morsi and his presidency. By the end of January of that year, al-Nour met with the Brotherhood’s secular opposition represented in the National Salvation Front (NSF) to ostensibly pursue national reconciliation. The irony was that the country needed such reconciliation because of a divisive constitution al-Nour was instrumental in engineering. The Brotherhood worried about opponents of its autocratic and expansionist aims. But when it came to the fundamental clash of ideologies and cultures, al-Nour embodied the most activist strand of Islamism. Yet the party recalibrated its strategy and found that working with secularists is a lesser mafsadah than allowing the Brotherhood to consolidate its rule over Egypt, and in its view, destroy the Dawa.

Dawa leaders point to a recent leaked secret recording of al-Shater discussing Brotherhood electoral strategy during the 2011–2012 parliamentary elections as proof of the Brotherhood’s designs in action. In it, al-Shater explains that the Brotherhood supported ILBRR’s Mohamed Yousri Ibrahim in his parliamentary campaign for being a reasonable Salafi compared with the Dawa and that the Dawa had frustrated the Brotherhood. Sure enough, following Morsi’s victory, Ibrahim was nominated for the post of Minister of Religious Endowments. But he
did not get the job due to a public outcry over allegations that Ibrahim was picked because of his connection to al-Shater.

The Dawa’s accusations that ILBRR was a tool of the Brotherhood to provide influence over Salafis came to light following an escalation by the Brotherhood. Morsi’s office fired an al-Nour party presidential adviser, Khalid Alim ad-Din, from his post and accused him of misconduct. The Dawa was furious because it found the Brotherhood publicly humiliating its member. Immediately, the Dawa Sheikhs resigned in protest from ILBRR and demanded that the Brotherhood apologize for its firing of ad-Din. Al-Shater refused. As a sign of the growing rift between Burhami and Abdel Azeem, the latter had refused to resign from ILBRR and in fact was promoted. In retaliation, Burhami and al-Nour’s new president, Youness Makhioun, began to speak of Brotherhood nepotism and the “Ikhwanization” of the state.49

In the months before the coup, the mutual hostility only increased.

The Dawa’s conviction that it was on the right path in confronting Morsi received further confirmation after his Iran rapprochement. Initially, one of the reasons el-Moqadem drifted away from the Brotherhood in 1979 was the group’s admiration of the Islamic Revolution there, which the young Salafis at the time saw as a threat of expanding Shiism in the region. Other Dawa Sheikhs who may have objected to Burhami’s earlier political moves were on board with the anti-Shiite campaign. For instance, Fareed headed the Dawa’s own “Committee to Defend against Shiism in Egypt.” The Brotherhood’s Iran policy provided Burhami with almost a godsend case to exemplify to followers the danger the Brothers posed to Egypt’s religion. Shiites, to whom Burhami constantly says Salafis are “allergic,” are not only a religious threat but also a threat to the homeland for their loyalty to Iran. Al-Nour now argues that it zealously guards the interests of the homeland. In an interview Burhami explained,

“Egypt enjoys Sunni unity. This protects it from the dangers of inter-ethnic strife like that in Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere. Opening the gates to the spread of Shiism in Egypt threatens this unity and undermines the collective peace.”50

As dissent grew against the Brotherhood, the Dawa rightly feared that a backlash against the Brotherhood would mean one against Islamists at large. There were many incidents of men with beards verbally attacked by regular Egyptians who had come to hate the Brotherhood and blame them for their living conditions. The Dawa was not ready to forget what it viewed as a campaign by the Brotherhood to infiltrate it and destroy it. After all, the political process in itself was an experiment.
in the “game of politics.” The Dawa still holds this mentality despite the new challenges and threats it faces. When I asked Burhami after the coup if he believed that his foray into politics put the Dawa in this situation, he insisted that,

“The same would’ve happened even if the party wasn’t founded. Because the other currents who are trying to monopolize representing Islam [the Muslim Brotherhood] would have still clashed with the Salafi Dawa even if it was just a pressure group in society.”51

The Future of the Dawa Under Sisi

The significant backlash against the Dawa following its support for the July 2013 coup only served to reinforce the suspicions that informed its decisions following the revolution. The Dawa is convinced today that the Brotherhood is actively trying to destroy it and points to incidents of violence against its cadres and a systematic campaign to undermine Burhami. Despite keeping the Brothers at bay, the Dawa believes that it faces an Egyptian deep state that is in league with the Church and secularists who are actively working to marginalize it. The Dawa points to how this camp tried yet again to marginalize Sharia in the 2014 constitution and a litany of recently passed laws designed to limit al-Nour’s representation in the coming parliament.

It is important to analyze three factors to assess the future of the Dawa under Sisi. First, the experiences of the past three years have helped develop a type of Sharia-compliant pragmatism, which explains how the Dawa views its place in the Egyptian political landscape. Second, the Dawa’s relationship with the military convinces it that it will be immune from attacks by secularists. Finally, without internal cohesiveness, the Dawa’s effectiveness could be limited.

... 

The Dawa’s Sharia-Compliant Pragmatism: The Dawa views politics as simply a game. It abandoned its long-held apprehensions about political participation virtually overnight due to the Dawa’s fear that secularists and Christians would challenge Egypt’s so-called Islamic identity. The Dawa fought to keep Article 2 in the constitution even though it has fundamental issues accepting a man-made
constitution replacing the Qur’an in the first place. It does not believe that the Egyptian state is ruling by Sharia yet considers an article in the constitution of a modern nation-state will protect Egypt’s Islamic identity. Finally, it refuses to accept that sovereignty is derived from the people. In reality, the Dawa wishes to see Egypt as an Islamic state. However, it does not believe that anyone in Egypt has the appropriate qualifications to properly Islamize Egypt and rule by God’s Sharia. Still, a senior al-Nour party official interviewed explained that an Islamic Egypt would come no matter what; it is a matter of fate. He asked me rhetorically, “What would people have called you if you said in the 50s and 60s Socialism won’t take hold in Egypt? Nothing is impossible.” Therefore, the Dawa believes that it must navigate Egypt’s toxic political and social landscape as it waits for God’s deliverance. Burhami explained to me the Dawa’s calculation in justifying tactical measures while believing it is still staying true to its core beliefs:

“There is a difference between abandoning ideological principles and tactics. For instance, when I say that we did not promise we would implement Sharia [the Dawa refuses to acknowledge that it said it will implement Sharia once in parliament but rather that it said it will protect Egypt’s Islamic identity]. It is not because I do not believe in the importance of implementing it, but rather it is about what I am capable and not capable of. There are practical calculations and then there are foundational principles that remain unchanged. If I am able to stick to the foundational principles and move around with the practical calculations, then we will have the ability to survive while sticking to our principles.”

In this context, it becomes clear that the Dawa sees that it finds itself in a precarious situation that it hates. It is too weak to enforce change but is convinced by faith that it is predestined to victory. On this path toward an Islamic Egypt, those who oppose the creed can be dealt with in whichever way is most feasible. As Burhami explained to me, he does not believe that Islam teaches Muslims to risk their lives needlessly, and this extends to politics, in that you gain nothing from being the hero. The Muslim Brotherhood was and still is an enemy to the Dawa, and the sacrifice of one Salafi cadre is not worth siding with the Brotherhood. Burhami explained:

“For them [the Muslim Brotherhood] to say, ‘I’ll either get all that I want or I die, or sacrifice myself, or my group, or my party’ then this
is a problem because some think that this is what Islam teaches: that regardless of what the situation is I must be able to sacrifice, and with this, one would be sticking to his principles... As a group and as a society I should say that ‘I will do all that I am capable of doing and seek to do what I am incapable of doing.’ Meaning that I should proceed where I am able to [that is within the boundaries of what is allowed] with my eye on my ultimate desire...Some might describe what I just said as pragmatism, but in reality, these are Sharia-based calculations. Moreover, in real life these are the calculations of any sane person, for Sharia does not tell us to confront this steel wall [the deep state] that I can’t change now. All previous prophets, for instance, continued to spread their message and took account of the calculations I previously highlighted. God himself says, ‘Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope.'"

On the other hand, the Dawa knows that it will still be viewed with suspicion by other segments of society. The Dawa, which now engages in pro-regime rhetoric, is still attacked by Egypt’s secularists. For instance, after recently showing that it was the most active campaigner for Sisi, al-Nour officials had to defend accusations that they were deceitfully guiding their followers to void their ballots. And as if on auto-pilot, a television host on Egyptian State TV in February of 2014 simultaneously mocked Burhami on live TV for his forbidding the celebration of Valentine’s Day while seemingly oblivious to the Dawa’s fierce defense of the Egyptian state. The Dawa’s critics may say that its actions are what brought it to this state of no allies to count on, but as the Dawa’s earlier history shows, it has never had to rely on allies to survive.

•••

Salafi-Military Relations: When it comes to the military that the Dawa now defends against the Brotherhood, the Dawa is also not naïve. According to Burhami’s calculus, the military’s overthrow of the Brotherhood may simply be a direction in the step towards strengthening the Dawa’s hand. Burhami sincerely believes that the ideologically shallow and insincere actions of the Brotherhood in office harmed the image of Islamists and the Dawa sustained collateral damage. Therefore, it became prudent to strengthen the Dawa’s alliance with the military.

The Salafis espouse an understanding of Islam that is contrary to what most of the pious officer corps practices, but this does not stop Burhami from justifying rapprochement. He explained,
“The military is of the nationalist school of thought, and is of course different than the Islamist school of thought. The version of religiousness it is presenting is what is present amongst the masses, which is praying, fasting, going to hajj, reading Quran. This is a level that is of course better than no religiousness at all, and this puts the national school closer to the Islamic school to some extent.”

The Dawa also presents itself as an asset to the military. Although the Dawa’s rhetoric further polarized society and encouraged marginalization of Christians, they were ironically the most relied upon by the military to settle communal disputes. Salafis, and often Burhami himself, crisscrossed the country to “reconcile” local Salafis and their Christian victims. The Salafis also resolved many tribal and clan disputes, relying on their religious credibility. Following the January 2011 revolution and subsequent major incidents of violence, Salafi Sheikhs, many times affiliated or close to the Dawa, were used by authorities to convince families of victims killed by the police and army to accept blood money. The Dawa is also active in “periphery governorates” such as Marsa Matruh and North Sinai, which are under the direct supervision of military intelligence. In these areas, Salafis were—and still are—used by the military to settle disputes and gather intelligence.

Mersa Matruh serves as an example of how the military uses the Dawa as a tool for social stability and even economic profit. As a periphery governorate, Matruh is an area where military intelligence has free reign to interact directly with local communities for purported national security purposes. Following the July 2013 coup, the Dawa helped neutralize a burgeoning rebellion encouraged by its own representative in the governorate, Sheikh Ali Ghalab. Ghalab had stood before a crowd and threatened violent retribution following the August 14, 2013, Rabaa square massacre of Brotherhood supporters. Ghalab had resigned from the Dawa in protest over its support of the coup as some other Sheikhs across the country did. The Dawa’s senior leadership in lock step with military intelligence worked to exert pressure on Ghalab to stop supporting protests in the region. Four locals were killed in violent clashes with the military following the August 14, 2013, massacre at Raba square.

In an unexpected turn of events a few weeks later at a “national reconciliation” ceremony, Ghalab not only changed his rhetoric but also stood before the most senior intelligence and military leadership in the region pledging his support and called the military intelligence liaison his son. Ghalab explained to followers that military intelligence had convinced him the Brotherhood sought to turn
Matruh into another terrorist hot zone like Sinai and that if blood is spilled, it would be on his hands. The Dawa and Ghalab had done what they do best and convinced the families of the victims following the August 14 clashes to accept blood money and free pilgrimage to Mecca offered by the military as compensation. Military intelligence also promised to release detained protesters, but still holds on to a few for leverage.

The Dawa also helped serve the military’s economic interests in Dabaa, Marsa Matruh, where locals had rejected plans to build a nuclear power plant they felt endangered their lives. They vandalized the building site at a cost to the government of millions of pounds. Following the 2013 coup, the Dawa helped convince locals to let the military take over the land from the government and develop it on its own. The locals came to believe that the military was a more trustworthy custodian of the safety of the project than the Egyptian bureaucracy was.

To win further favor with the military, the Dawa worked to solidify its already strong position as a nationalist actor. The Dawa’s professed goal is to defend Egypt and its Islamic identity from Iranian Shiism and Western secularism. Like its Brotherhood counterparts and other segments in Egyptian society, including the military, the Dawa buys in to widely held conspiracy theories that the West led by the United States and in league with Israel wants to undermine Islam and destabilize Egypt. For instance, in May 2010, Dawa spokesperson al-Shahat wrote an article titled “Fifteen centuries of the Islamic, Western, Israeli conflict.”

Despite writing volumes that have previously railed against the secular foundations of the modern state and its military, Burhami has pragmatically shifted his actions. To him the justification is quite simple. What he wrote in the past was in regards to tyrant regimes and so long as Sisi does not follow their footsteps, Burhami cannot pass judgment. Burhami recognizes that the military is the dominant force in Egyptian politics, and if need be, the Dawa can adjust to blows directed at it as was the case under Mubarak. To drive the point that his objectives go beyond the political party and how the state may crackdown, Burhami responded to critics by saying:

“If the alternative is the loss of two and a half million citizens as was the case in other countries, or the failure of the state, or to enter into a conflict, then I do not mind [the authorities] dissolving or restricting al-Nour in order to protect [the lives of Muslims].”

The Dawa’s close relationship with the military and its Islamic-nationalist rhetoric led it to believe that it will not be in Sisi’s crosshairs. Although the Dawa has
grown significantly unpopular in many Islamist circles due to its decisions, it can still have influence in impoverished and conflicted communities and thus remains valuable to the military. This might help keep the Dawa shielded from the security establishment and from the brunt of the government’s recent measures seeking to consolidate mosques. Yet the government recently passed legislation requiring a minimum number of Copts to be included in party lists. The Dawa has voiced its opposition to this law, which will greatly prohibit its ability to contest seats nationwide, but it is unlikely to take drastic measures such as street protests or strikes. In an interview, Burhami completely dismissed the notion that the military will move against the Dawa itself or seek to destroy its networks, emphatically declaring that “nothing will happen.”

The Future of the Dawa’s Organization

Today, the Dawa is exposed, and its internal cohesiveness is in serious jeopardy. The desperate calls for obedience referenced in the earlier section are a result of a breakdown in trust among the Dawa’s cadres and supporters. The Dawa’s support of the July 2013 coup and road map have sealed its fate with its Islamist brethren and many of its members. If that was not enough, the Dawa has been vocal in its criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood and in sounding alarm bells that the Brothers are leading their youth to takfiri ideology. Finally, the Dawa was not simply content with announcing its support of Sisi, but al-Nour was in fact the most active political party campaigning in the streets.

Burhami is keenly aware of the criticism leveled against his organization. His goal is proselytization and spreading Islam, yet the Dawa engages in politics, alienating followers. In the eyes of many, Burhami has completely deviated from everything that he stood for. He now jumps from one TV interview to the next speaking of how the Dawa fears the breakdown of the Egyptian state—which to Burhami was always anathema because it has long embodied the rule of tyranny. Indeed, he had told followers not to join its police force.

In attempting to understand how the Dawa came to its state today, it became clear that the answer lied in Burhami. Burhami is generally unfazed by the controversy and criticism of inconsistency. He maintains that engaging in politics was the right decision. He explained:
“The relative weaker state of proselytization is not due to our preoccupation with politics but rather the revolutionary state of society that preoccupies young and old. Many may skip religious lessons and instead prefer following political events. This is a revolutionary state that is expected after a revolution in any society and for us to ignore this is to ignore reality.”

Burhami’s pragmatism may have served to ward off fatal attacks from the outside, but it may have aggravated internal challenges. Indeed, the focus on external threats may have diverted time and attention from developing an internal blueprint for healing rifts and building a succession plan. There has been no clear vision for how to ensure the Dawa’s leadership can pass over to the second-level leadership. The Dawa’s Sheikhs are old and despite having a time-tested friendship, they still can disagree, as was the case with Saeed Abdel Azeem after he supported the Brotherhood.

In the Dawa’s own Alexandria, it has been unable to manage the rise of dissenting Sheikhs. Sheikh Abdel Azeem will prove to be a challenge as there are no indications that he has given up his claim to the Dawa. Despite showing support for the splinter al-Watan Party, Abdel Azeem largely refrained from publicly voicing his discontent until Burhami placed the Dawa squarely in the anti-Brotherhood camp.

Another sign of threats to the Dawa’s cohesiveness closer to home come from former Dawa cadres such as Sheikh Ahmad el-Sisi. Sheikh el-Sisi has long railed against the policies of the Dawa and al-Nour and attracted many Dawa students. El-Sisi is a formidable opponent for he has long been among the Dawa’s most successful cadres and rising leaders. Even at the height of his anti-Burhami vitriol, a senior al-Nour official praised el-Sisi’s strong credentials and explained that he was consistently at the top of his class in al-Furqan. The senior official simply stated that he hoped el-Sisi would realize that he has erred. The tolerance of el-Sisi in the Dawa’s own territory is a sign of the Dawa’s rational behavior towards dissenters. However, the Dawa fails to address the concerns raised by former cadre members such as el-Sisi and is instead content to explain to followers that there is a conspiracy against the Dawa and its Sheikhs and people like el-Sisi are simply astray.

The Dawa is also still struggling to shield itself from the Brotherhood’s agitation of its cadres. In its multi-layered struggle to topple the current order, the Brotherhood is in open battle with the Dawa. The Brotherhood seeks to undermine Burhami and usually Brotherhood members and sympathizers crash Burhami’s lessons to shame him for his pro-government stances. The unquenched thirst of Sisi’s government for more Brotherhood blood makes it difficult for Burhami to convince
his followers that supporting the coup was the right move. Egypt’s secularists are more vitriolic than ever, and some of the actions taken by public intellectuals and the government seem anti-Islam. For instance, the Ministry of Interior, at the behest of secular commentators, declared war on posters across Egypt that asked people if they praised the Prophet Muhammad.

An example of the impact of Brotherhood agitation came to light on the first anniversary of the coup this year when the Salafi Dawa in Mersa Matruh and its leader, Ali Ghalab, both of whom had sympathized with the Brotherhood early on, issued a damning statement refusing to engage in politics and upcoming parliamentary elections. The Dawa’s efforts highlighted in an earlier section to force the Mersa chapter to follow its orders have largely failed. The public move to denounce political participation ironically borrowed from the Dawa leaders’ own rhetoric in the past discouraging political participation. The Dawa’s chapter in Matruh has not mobilized in a meaningful way over the past year during the 2014 constitutional referendum and the presidential election. The rejection of the political process from Sheikhs such as Ghalab, who called for rebellion following the coup, sends an unsettling message of Brotherhood involvement in playing on Salafis’ religious emotions to persuade them not to support the current anti-Islamist order. In response to this unanticipated development, Burhami claimed it to be a pity move and promised that the Dawa will expel any member sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood across Egypt.

What remains as the Dawa’s biggest adversary, however, is the very state it supports. The Ministry of Religious Endowments has recently challenged Salafi control over mosques, stressing that it will implement long-ignored laws enforcing state control of Egypt’s mosques. The ministry has also drafted a preacher code of honor that forbids the discussion of politics by preachers. The zeal in the ministry’s moves come from its new post-coup minister, Mohamed Mokhtar Gomaa, who has repeatedly said in public that no group will be exempt from the recent directives. The most important one permits only licensed preachers to climb the pulpit. He has played a game of chicken with the Dawa, effectively daring its largely unlicensed and non-Azhari leaders to disobey the directives.

Despite some rhetoric of defiance by Dawa cadres, their leaders largely conceded. In the most important holy month in Islam, Ramadan of this year, many Dawa Sheikhs did not preach to avoid a confrontation with the state. Despite the Dawa signing a protocol with the ministry to license preachers, it did not expect the ministry would move to enforce its directives this fast nor did it anticipate the daring rhetoric of its minister. Even though the Dawa has sided with the state, the state’s own religious establishment still distrusts the Salafis who, along with the
Muslim Brotherhood, discredited al-Azhar and the ministry of religious endowments for decades by deriding them as the “Sheikhs of the Sultan.”

In a telling move for what to expect in the future, Burhami caved to the ministry’s demands and humiliatingly accepted that he and the other Sheikhs must take licensing tests to prove their knowledge and compliance with government standards. Although it will largely be seen as the biggest sign of Dawa weakness in the face of the new regime, the Dawa defends their actions. It claims that had it not negotiated with the minister, who initially insisted that only al-Azhar graduates be allowed to preach, then Dawa cadres would have been forbidden to preach even with a license. Importantly, it is a lesson for the Dawa that it cannot count on the military to step in on issues such as this, and it is unclear if the military would care to do so. The post-coup regime that the Dawa has helped grant legitimacy to is still very much unpredictable. And now, after it received the necessary support from the Salafis early on, the regime may be itching to find an excuse to drive them underground.

For all its liabilities and vulnerabilities, the Dawa is far from dead. It relies on its core of dedicated followers who see in their Sheiks no wrong. In my interviews with Burhami, he was always keen to explain that the Salafi dissenters the media often cites are not “ours.” In Egypt’s current political environment, success should not be measured against the former organizational might of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Dawa’s al-Nour party is the political arm of a three-decade-old religious and social movement that is operating all across Egypt. The Dawa lacks the discipline found in the pre-coup Brotherhood. But the dedication of its core followers surpasses the organizational capacity of Egypt’s other non-Islamic parties as was evident during Sisi’s presidential campaign. Dawa cadres, even if only in the dozens, walked the streets and energetically campaigned for Sisi. This latest effort showed the Dawa’s desire to continue to remain relevant and strike back at critics who claim the Dawa has lost its cadres and support.

Burhami’s dominance in the Dawa will likely continue for the long term. Sheikhs Ahmad Fareed and Abu Idris are squarely on his side as was evident in their voting for Sisi. Sheikh El-Moqadem and Hotayba have largely stayed quiet, likely because they object to some of Burhami’s decisions. But they will keep out of the way to guarantee the greater maslaha of Dawa unity. In the process of its political evolution, the Dawa under the leadership of Burhami has defied long-held presumptions about Salafis’ acceptance of change. Its many enemies, both perceived and real, help guarantee a continued sense of purpose and unity as it cautiously seeks to fill the spiritual vacuum left by the alienated Brotherhood. To Burhami, the Dawa represents the legitimate manifestation of an Egyptian-born
religious movement with a mission to bring an Islamist state to a society whose values and practices are a still long way from meeting Salafi standards. The experience of the Brotherhood enabled Burhami to realize the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the larger population. The Dawa’s relationship with the military and full embrace of Sisi’s roadmap may have alienated Islamists. But the Dawa now can look to develop its own cadres and to the larger task of winning over ordinary, pious Egyptians.

The author thanks Alexandrian journalist Abdel Rahma nYoussef for his assistance and insights, and Nathan J. Brown for his mentorship and encouragement to pursue the topic.

NOTES

3. Author’s interview with Sheikh Yassir Burhami, August 2013, Alexandria, Egypt.
5. Al-Salafyyun fi Misr ma-bad al-Thawra, p. 44.
6. The website of al-Furqan institute is available at http://www elforqan.org/%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%AF/%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%AF.
7. Al-Salafyyun fi Misr ma-bad al-Thawra, p. 44.
8. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Author’s interview with Egyptian analyst covering the Salafi Dawa, December 2013, Alexandria, Egypt.
25. Lacroix.
26. Author’s interview with Egyptian analyst and journalist covering the Salafi Dawa, April 2014, Alexandria, Egypt, via Skype.
33. Author’s interview with al-Nour party official based in Abu Qeer, August 2013, Alexandria, Egypt.
34. Al-Khalejiyya TV.
35. Ibid.
36. Lesson delivered by Sheikh Alaa Amer, January 2014, available at
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_PdAaDY9Do.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rulvnxy7Dts.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rulvnxy7Dts.
42. Segment of lesson delivered by Sheikh Yassir Burhami, May 2012, available at
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2lnstFfAgc.
43. Sheikh Yassir Burhami delivering remarks in rally, December 2012, available at
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGbOM_4TJh4.
44. Al-Arabiya English, December 2012, available at
   http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/25/256924.html.
50. Michael Barak, The Salafist Al-Nour Party and the Muslim Brotherhood: The End of the Affair?,
    Moshe Dayan Center, April 2013, available at
    http://www.dayan.org/sites/default/files/Barak_Michael_TA_NOTES_Al-Nour_Brotherhood_Alliance_250413_0.pdf.
52. Author’s interview with Sheikh Yassir Burhami, August 2013, Alexandria, Egypt.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
56. Video of Ghalab’s remarks, August 2013, available at
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R53B71zVqhU.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMPNgx8OM0s.
61. Sheikh Sheriff al-Hawary advice to Sisi, June 2014, available at
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0P4t5U94ec.
63. Sheikh Yassir Burhami remarks, available at,
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOGs1k6nru0.
64. Author’s interview with Sheikh Yassir Burhami, December 2013, Alexandria, Egypt.
THE STATE OF IRAQ IN 2014 REPRESENTS A DRAMATIC REVERSAL WHEN compared with four years earlier. National elections in March 2010 took place during a period when the Sunni insurgency, having reached its peak in 2006, was at a low ebb, and key political leaders were making an effort to mold a nationally-unifying coalition. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki had resisted Iranian efforts to form a united Shia bloc. He led his own State of Law Coalition (SLC), a predominately Shia Islamist bloc with substantial secular elements. It competed against both the Iranian-aligned Iraqi National Alliance (INA) and the Iraqi National Movement, or Iraqiya coalition, a mixture of Sunnis and secular Shia nominally headed by former prime minister Iyad Allawi. Voters endorsed the most non-sectarian options—Iraqiya came in first with 91 seats, Maliki’s SLC a narrow second with 89, and the INA farther behind, with 70.

The situation today is quite different. By the beginning of 2014, a new insurgency had engulfed Sunni Iraq. With the nation’s security services floundering and Iran-backed Shia militias playing an increasing role, the national elections of April 30 took place in the worst environment possible. Unsurprisingly, the voting was overwhelmingly sectarian: Shia Islamists had an outright majority for the first time—moving from 159 of 325 seats in 2010 to 181 of 328 in 2014. Losses by secular Shia blocs and a decline in Sunni votes meant a corresponding decline in those blocs from 101 seats in 2010 to 76 in 2014. (There had been 10 Sunni
Arab seats outside Iraqiya in 2010.) To a stalemate in Anbar was added the fall of Mosul, Iraq’s largest Sunni-majority city in the northwestern province of Ninawa, in early June 2014, at the hands of the jihadist Islamic State and a mix of nationalist insurgent groups. In response, Shia Iraq transformed into a garrison state, with civilian leaders wearing uniforms. Shia militias openly mobilized to face the Sunni challenge, taking over the role of official security in many areas. How did things go so wrong?

Broadly speaking, Iraq’s Second Sunni Insurgency is the result of the interplay of two dynamics. On the one hand were expansive Sunni demands based on legitimate grievances relating to illegal arrests and mistreatment by the legal system. Sunnis also deluded themselves with excessive expectations about Sunni power in the new Iraq. On the other hand, the inability or unwillingness of the Shia-dominated political system to find a middle ground on Sunni aspirations exacerbated matters. This started with the formation of the 2010 government itself; unwilling to allow power to slip into the hands of Allawi’s base—which included many unreconstructed Baathists, both Shia and Sunni, and Sunni Islamists—the Shia Islamist blocs merged into the National Alliance (NA). Maliki’s own SLC later took on more sectarian elements, in particular the Badr Organization, a militia proxy of Iran. Allawi’s base was wrong in expecting to hold power—Shia Islamist blocs had 159 combined seats in parliament compared with 101 for the Sunni Arab—secular Shia factions, with the remainder of the 325 seats mostly held by Kurds, who allied with the Shia because they considered the Sunni driven by ethnic nationalism. But the Sunnis were right in concluding they had lost out, as Maliki and his Shia Islamist allies controlled all key security posts and the vital energy sector.

This paper charts efforts by Iraq’s Sunni Arabs to achieve what they view as their legitimate place in Iraq through six sections. The first two sections relate to a failure of politics: the government’s suppression of Sunni efforts to form autonomous regions through a legal process in late 2011 and the political system’s failure to accommodate legitimate Sunni demands during the early stage of the protest movement, which began in December 2012 and ran through December 2013. In regard to the former, Shia leaders may have had legitimate concerns about the Sunni region agenda. Since the Kurds had an autonomous region with its own independent military and energy policy, a Sunni Arab effort to do the same would have led to the country’s breakup. Nonetheless, Sunni regionalists pushed their agenda through a legal process. Aside from Maliki’s rhetoric about decentralizing governance outside of core areas such as foreign policy, security, and energy, little was done to address Sunni concerns. Indeed, Maliki flagrantly violated a 2008 statute giving governors total control over security units other than the army by maintaining
a statutorily-unfounded federal police force whose power vastly exceeded that of local police. Parliament passed another decentralization law in June 2013, the security provisions of which Maliki also ignored. In February 2014, Maliki withdrew a constitutional challenge to the law under political pressure, but many of its provisions remain unenforced.¹

A second political failure involved the protests that began in December 2012 in Anbar. Threats of arrest against Finance Minister Rafia al-Isawi sparked the protests, which quickly spread to Sunni areas of other provinces. While early 2013 was still the beginning of this movement, it was in a sense an end to political efforts to resolve the conflict. Between January and mid-April, there was a window in which the Maliki government, pressed by Shia clerical authorities, began offering moderate concessions to Sunnis on issues of legal abuses and de-Baathification. The reasons the effort failed are multifaceted. The concessions were well short of what Sunnis demanded; Maliki’s Shia Islamist rivals attacked his de-Baathification compromises, leading him to lose seats in the April 2013 provincial elections; and Sunni political and protest leaders themselves sabotaged the compromise. For protest leaders, no negotiations by Sunni ministers with Maliki could be legitimate, and for Speaker Osama al-Nujayfi’s Mutahidun, the fact that Deputy Prime Minister Salih al-Mutlak, a Sunni rival, could have benefited politically from the compromise appeared to be reason enough to sink it.

However one lays blame for the failure, two events in late April 2013 ended all efforts at compromise: Maliki’s loss of seats in the elections, which took place on April 20, and the massacre of more than 40 unarmed protesters at the hands of special forces in Huwija, Kirkuk, on April 23. Maliki concluded that compromising with Sunnis only brought political loss, and many Sunnis concluded that the only way to deal with his government was through force. What might have happened had Sunni leaders tried to meet Maliki halfway can never be known, and he never tried again. Sections three through five trace the transformation of the protest movement into insurgency, from the movement’s beginnings to its end on December 30, 2013, when Maliki forced the closure of the symbolically central protest site near Ramadi, Anbar. The predominant wing of the protest movement, that associated with Mutahidun and the clerical establishment, focused on achieving what the 2011 region movement failed to do: address Sunni grievances over government treatment and establish an autonomous Sunni region. There were also other protest sites controlled by fronts for insurgent groups, the most important being the neo-Baathist Jaysh Rijal al-‘Taraqa al-Naqshbandia (JRTN). The Islamist Muslim Scholars’ Association (MSA) and a political front for the Islamic Army also became active.
Section four addresses the period of transformation following the failure of political compromise and the massacre at Huwija, both of which took place in April 2013. The mainstream protest movements’ demands were too expansive for either Maliki or any elected Shia leader to agree to, but up to this point they were framed in a peaceable manner. After Huwija, the mainstream groups in Ramadi began forming militias and converging in views with the pro-insurgency groups. Despite lethal attacks by the jihadist Islamist State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) (which changed its name to the Islamic State (IS) in June 2014) and continued provocation by the JRTN, Iraq managed to avoid a full-blown insurgency in mid-2013 as cool heads in both Baghdad and Ramadi pulled back from the brink.

Section five covers the period from July to the end of 2013, a period which is now identifiable as a countdown to insurgency. The Maliki government increasingly resorted to arrest warrants—valid or not—as a way of intimidating Sunni protest leaders. This drove the mainstream clerical movement toward insurgency. It was during this period that Shaykh Muhammad Taha Hamdun of Samarra came to be the dominant figure in what remained of the protest movement, as earlier protest leaders such as Ahmad Abu Risha and Ali Hatem Sulayman abandoned the movement. The former reconciled with Maliki, the latter opted for insurgency. And the clerics subordinated those political actors who remained to their leadership. While Hamdun’s absolutist political stands were part of the movement’s failure, he resisted the turn to insurgency until the end of the year, when Maliki moved against Ramadi protesters as part of his reelection campaign.

The last section of this paper outlines the Second Sunni Insurgency as it developed following the failure of the politics of Iraqi nationalism. While most international media have understandably focused on the jihadist wing of the insurgency, represented by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his Islamic State, nationalist insurgents have played an indispensable role in the insurgency’s success. The JRTN has experienced a revival, using front groups to build an insurgent coalition around military councils of “tribal revolutionaries.” Shaykh Hamdun and his clerical allies have played a key role in Sunni media, supporting the insurgency as nationalist “revolutionaries” and downplaying the jihadist role. While there is no reason to think the insurgents will actually achieve their ends—retaking Baghdad or forming a Sunni region funded by the federal budget—they have built broad legitimacy among the Sunni population through years of activism.
MALIKI’S SECOND GOVERNMENT WAS ONLY MONTHS OLD WHEN MANY SUNNIS began looking for a way to have a stronger say over their destiny as a Shia-led government in Baghdad appeared to be impossible to dislodge. Ironically this came through a dramatic reversal in thinking among Sunnis over a highly controversial issue—the formation of autonomous regions. While the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) sprang fully-formed into being in the new Iraq from an autonomous administration existing since 1991, the 2005 constitution, which was drafted by Shia and Kurdish leaders and passed over Sunni opposition, provided for a right to form new regions.

By mid-2011 some Sunnis reversed course and began moving toward support. Perhaps their vision of reclaiming the power of a strong central authority in Baghdad was waning. Most controversially, Speaker Nujayfi first raised the issue himself in June during a trip to the United States when he said Sunnis might seek “secession” if Baghdad’s policies did not change. Allies quickly denied that he was seeking to form a “Sunni region,” but the impression stuck. Maliki and his allies criticized Nujayfi, but in doing so notably affirmed the right to form a region within Iraq’s unified state. Indeed Anbar MP Ahmad al-Alwani, an Islamic Party leader and Nujayfi ally later to play a key role in the 2013 protests, played down the idea by saying that Sunnis in Anbar wanted only to use the region process to promote decentralization, not secession.

The idea was more controversial because the Arab Gulf states, in particular Qatar, were viewed as being behind the move. For example, the Shia news site al-Nakhil reacted to Nujayfi’s statements by linking them to Qatar’s regional support for Sunni Islamists and a picture of Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi meeting with Qatar leaders in an article about Nujayfi. Buratha News, published by the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), framed Nujayfi’s statements similarly, claiming there was evidence that Saudi Arabia and Qatar were funding the formation of a Sunni region independent from Baghdad, like the Kurdish region.

Then, on October 27, the Salah al-Din Provincial Council voted to initiate the formation of an autonomous region. The immediate cause was a move by Higher Education Minister Ali al-Adib to remove about 1,200 state employees in Salah al-Din and Ninawa, including 140 teachers at the University of Tikrit, for Baathist
affiliation. Adib is a member of Maliki’s Dawa Party and close to Iran, so the move caused outrage.

The region push was also based on more long-standing complaints, including the arrest of a series of prominent citizens without any clear legal charge and the arrest that month of 650 Sunnis from various provinces based on an alleged Baathist coup. Also specific to Salah al-Din are long-standing allegations by Sunnis of conscious efforts to change the demography of Samarra, a predominately Sunni city just north of Baghdad and the site of the historically-sacred Shia shrine of Hassan al-Askari, whom Shia consider to have been the 11th Imam. These efforts, local Sunnis alleged, involved pressured sales of property and in-migration by Shia.

Maliki’s reaction was immediate, condemning the move by arguing that the constitution did not allow regions to be formed “on a sectarian basis,” claiming that it would be a base for Baathists and foreign terrorists. The week following the vote, Maliki rallied sectarian allies, meeting with Shia tribesmen from the south of the province. He then traveled to the southern province of Dhi Qar, where he gave a speech warning that Salah al-Din could become “a haven for Baathists.” And ISCI, the strongest supporter of a nine-province Shia autonomous region during the previous parliament, now opposed a new region given that Sunnis backed one.

Neither the constitution nor the law contains any qualification to the right to form a region related to the motives of its founders, but Maliki made it clear he would use all means at his disposal to stop the effort. And when on December 12, Diyala’s Sunni councilmen issued a similar demand, he made good on it. Both federal security services and Shia militias sprung into action, blocking roads between the provincial capital of Baquba and Baghdad and between it and the rest of the province and taking the provincial council building by force. Contemporaneous news reports and videos showed a total collapse of provincial police authority as irregulars, including armed men dressed in black, worked hand-in-glove with security forces. Within three days, a full state of martial law was in place. Land Forces Commander Ali Ghaydan had taken direct control of provincial security, a permanent sit-in blocked use of the provincial council, and Governor Abd al-Nasir al-Mahdawi and pro-region councilmen had fled to Kurdish-controlled Khaniqin in the north of the province.

The sectarian nature of the Diyala region divide was increased by the activation of Shia militiamen. And leaders of two Shia districts threatened to secede from Diyala itself rather than live under Sunni rule. These were Khalis, in western Diyala, which would have merged with Baghdad, and Baldruz, in the south, which threatened to join the homogenous Shia province of Wasit.

Once the move against Diyala was complete, on December 17 news broke of an
arrest warrant for Vice-President Hashemi. The announcement was from the spokesman for the Baghdad Operations Command, Qasim Atta, an officer close to Maliki. For days the only public statements by officials on the warrant were by Maliki appointees or members of his bloc, not judicial or legal officials. Two days later, Hashimi was allowed to board a plane and escape from Baghdad, although his bodyguards were detained.

The problem with the Hashemi prosecution is not the improbability of his guilt, but the timing and selective application of prosecution. The Islamic Party, in which Hashemi was a leader until he formed his own party in 2009, had its own militia, and there are so many IP members who have been involved in violent activity that the accusations against Hashemi are not farfetched. Yet Transportation Minister Hadi al-Ameri, for example, actually headed a Shia militia created by Iran, the Badr Corps, which was heavily involved in death squad activity in the 2005-2006 period. So between the forceful suppression of Sunni autonomy efforts and the Hashemi prosecution, the Iraqi state had become an instrument of Shia power. Sectarian Shia leaders held key positions of power, and Sunnis who were in the political process and supported Sunni empowerment were on the receiving end of the security apparatus.

The Sunni Protest Movement and a Failure of Politics

WHAT I WILL REFER TO AS THE “SUNNI PROTEST MOVEMENT” BEGAN IN DECEMBER 2012 following the government’s arrest of several aides to Finance Minister Rafia al-Isawi and threats that Isawi himself, a native of Fallujah, Anbar, would soon be targeted. This provided impetus for passionate protests in Ramadi, Anbar’s provincial capital, and Fallujah. A near simultaneous event to the north in Ninawa, the raping of a local girl by an army officer, helped give impetus to protests there. Ramadi’s protesters met at a site north of the city and set up an encampment astride the international highway that connects Baghdad to Jordan and Syria. In what was to become a landmark statement, on December 26, Isawi stood below the highway sign in front of a large crowd and gave an iconic summary of the protest movement’s demands: “…detainees, political targeting, marginalization, exclusion, debaathification, sectarianism, Counterterrorism Law Article 4, secret informers, bring them all down under your feet!”

46 CURRENT TRENDS IN ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY / VOL. 17
While the protests had the flavor of a spontaneous outburst of popular anger, and for many participants they indeed were that, protest sites were controlled by specific organizations. The sites were divided into two categories. One is the more mainstream movement associated with Mutahidun, a political bloc of Sunni parties created by the debris of the Iraqiya coalition for the provincial elections scheduled for April. The other category were those controlled by groups outside the political process, some of them fronts for armed insurgent groups which had been active in 2003–2007 but had largely gone inactive. Once Anbar and Ninawa’s sit-in encampments were established, groups aligned with each of these two wings set up similar sites in Sunni areas of Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, and Baghdad.

The Ramadi protest site, dubbed “Pride and Dignity Square,” became the symbolic center of the movement and the focus of both national and pan-Arab media attention. It was controlled by two groups, the “Anbar Coordination Committee,” headed by MP Ahmad al-Alwani of the Islamic Party, and the “Popular Committees,” headed by Ahmad Abu Risha, leader of the Iraqi Awakening Conference (or “Sahwa”). Both were leaders within Nujayfi’s Mutahidun. In Mosul, Ninawa’s provincial capital, Nujayfi’s local party directly controlled one of the two main sites in the city.

The Mutahidun’s alliance with the mainstream Sunni clerical establishment was a key factor in the credibility of its protest sites. A week after the protests started, Shaykh Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, a revered senior cleric, visited the Ramadi site. Saadi had been a pillar of the nationalist insurgency a few years earlier and one of Iraq’s most influential Sunni clerics under the Baath. But Saadi has lived in Jordan since 2001 and lacks an institutional role; inside the country, the Iraqi Ulema Council (IUC) is most influential, and it became even more closely aligned with the Mutahidun. Its clerics, who act independently of the state’s waqf leadership, worked with Mutahidun leaders to close other mosques around the protest sites to encourage attendance at the sit-ins. And when Ramadi-aligned protest sites arose in other provinces, those controlled by clerics were allied with the Mutahidun—the most prominent being Muhammad Taha al-Hamdun in Samarra, Salah al-Din, and Ahmad Said in Baquba, Diyala.

Yet there was also a wing of the movement not associated with the political process. Of those the largest group was controlled by the “Free Iraq Intifada” (FII), a front group for the neo-Baathist insurgents in the JRTN. The JRTN, led by former Saddam Hussein deputy Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, used the FII to establish protest sites in Mosul, Huwija, Kirkuk, and Tikrit, Salah al-Din. The Popular Sunni Hirak, a front for the Islamic Army insurgent group, was weaker but also had a presence at multiple sites, especially in Fallujah.
Beyond the division between the Mutahidun-aligned protests, which engaged with the political process and the insurgent fronts, there was another key division based on the autonomous Sunni region agenda. While Mutahidun and the IUC backed regionalism, Shaykh Saadi opposed it, and for this reason a Sunni region was not within the Ramadi protesters’ list of formal demands. The insurgent wing was also split, with the Sunni Hirak backing regionalism and the JRTN/FII pushing for the restoration of a centralized Baathist state.

The Maliki government’s response to the Sunni protests waxed back and forth between violent overreaction and modest reconciliation. Maliki’s initial reaction was to tell the Anbar protesters, “Bring it to an end, before it is brought to an end before you,” calling them “putrid... empty bubbles” and threatening to suppress the movement. But Shia clerical authorities intervened, warning security forces not to clash with protesters and telling Maliki to meet protester demands “consistent with the law and the constitution.” So Maliki softened his tone, and a ministerial committee headed by Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Shahristani began ordering the release of prisoners, most of them Sunni, who were being held illegally either because their terms had ended or they were held for a long period without trial.

A more significant opportunity for reform arose in March when Maliki and Deputy Prime Minister Salih al-Mutlak, a Sunni from Anbar, reached a deal to soften de-Baathification in exchange for a statute formally criminalizing the Baath Party (Article 7 of the constitution bans the Baath but no law does). This was a rare moment in politics when leaders reached across the sectarian divide on a controversial compromise. The result was that their sectarian rivals united to kill the deal. Maliki’s Shia Islamist rivals, the Sadrists and ISCI, portrayed the deal as an effort to bring back the Baath, and used it against him in the provincial electoral campaign set for April. On the other side, many Sunnis rejected the deal both because it failed to totally repeal de-Baathification and because many were unwilling to ban the Baath.

Then two events in April brought the opening for compromise to a close. One was the result of the elections—Maliki’s SLC lost seats heavily, with its share of Shia-area seats falling from about half in 2010 to one-third. ISCI, which had been most uncompromising on the Sunni protests, gained the most.

The other event, more portentous for the Sunni insurgency itself, was the massacre of more than 40 civilians at a protest site in Huwija, Kirkuk. The killings took place after a tense but non-violent five-day siege by a local army division, when special forces sent from Baghdad stormed the site with live fire against what appear to have been entirely unarmed activists. While the site was indeed controlled by the JRTN’s protest front, there were no armed militants. Video released by the
local army unit showing them helping some civilians flee the site helped save the regular army’s reputation. But it convinced more Sunnis the government could only be dealt with through force. After April there would be no further legislative initiatives to resolve Sunni grievances, only threats and incentives to win over Sunni political leaders, as the Sunni insurgency began to pick up steam.

Protest Factions and the Origins of Insurgency

BETWEEN THE FAILURE OF IRAQI LEADERS TO RESOLVE DISPUTES THROUGH THE political system—represented by the region formation crisis of November–December 2011 and the failed effort at reform in March–April 2013—and the full-blown insurgency of 2014 lay the factional evolution during the Sunni protest movement. It lasted from Maliki’s threats against Rafia al-Isawi in December 2012 to Maliki’s closing of Ramadi’s symbolic protest site on December 30, 2013.

In evaluating statements by Sunni leaders, two points of reference must be borne in mind. One is that despite rhetoric about non-sectarianism and coexistence with Shia, the Sunni protest movement was an explicitly Sunni one. Even its more moderate forms blamed the Shia-led “sectarian government” for all ills with no recognition Shia had suffered under the Baath or from Sunni insurgents. A sermon in Ramadi on December 28, 2012 was representative: with three-star Baathist flags flying, the speaker raged against “this oppressive sectarian government, whose nature is clear from its marginalization, and violations. Yes, we, Sunnis, challenge violations of sacred things [reference to Sunni women arrested and allegedly raped in prisons], customs and identity... we do not fear death... for religion, and demand the immediate release of all freemen of Iraq...” 20 (ahrar al-iraq could refer to insurgents, i.e. “freedom fighters,” though there was no explicit reference to armed insurgency).

This was the “moderate” face of the protests. While Friday sermons like this were kept free of anti-Shia epithets—such as references to “Safavids” or “majus,” derogatory terms tying Iraqi Shia to Iran—such inflammatory language could be heard from other protest sites from the beginning. So it is not surprising that by December 2013, when Maliki decided to move against the Ramadi site, the Shia street supported him.

Two, Sunnis’ sense of marginalization was framed around the lingering belief
held over from the Saddam era that Sunnis were the demographic majority in Iraq. In most cases, this belief comes across implicitly, as Sunnis speak with the assumption that having “balance” in the state would involve having Sunni Arab government representation make up much more than the roughly 25 percent of the population that they in fact do make up.

Despite these commonalities, Sunni factions contained an array of faces. Perhaps it is best to start with a January 10 interview program on al-Jazeera with Muthanna al-Dhari and Yahya al-Kubaysi, representing the polar opposites of the respectable Sunni community—i.e., figures who can appear on mainstream television programs. Dhari’s Muslim Scholars Association (MSA) is behind the rabidly pro-insurgency al-Rafidyan television channel. It always retained an armed wing, the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades, one of the key nationalist insurgents of the first insurgency.21 Here Dhari presented a relatively moderate face, saying he was open to working with those in the political process even while insisting on “revolution” and the need for “regime change.”

Kubaysi, a fellow at the Amman-based Iraqi Institute for Strategic Studies, represented the opposite pole, warning that the fact that the protests were explicitly Sunni would doom them, and their rhetoric would be an impediment to success. More importantly, Kubaysi presciently predicted that calls for changing the regime, as opposed to demands for just treatment within it, “will lead to militarization of the other side to defend the regime” and catastrophe. Kubaysi failed to win a seat in Baghdad as a candidate in the April 2014 parliamentary elections, but his prediction turned out to be true.

The Sunni center ground, however, would be held by the aforementioned collection of pro-Sunni autonomous region factions associated with Nujayfi’s Mutahidun and the clerical establishment. They would coalesce into something called the “Hirak,” which is Arabic for “movement.” Sometimes called the “Popular Hirak” or the “Six Provinces Hirak,” the clerics’ group, unlike Dhari’s MSA, actually controlled the mosques. While riven by personality and leadership disputes, the two wings of this current would work in complementary fashion, with the Mutahidun acting on the political scene and the Hirak the religious scene.

The Hirak and Mutahidun began with control of separate protest sites, with the Hirak controlling protests in Samarra, Salah al-Din22 and the Mutahidun having the symbolically central “Pride & Dignity Square” sit-in site in Ramadi and notable sites in Mosul, Ninawa and Tirkrit, Salah al-Din. (The JRTN had a large site in Mosul, Ahrar Square, and one in Tikrit; its presence in Anbar was limited to Fallujah.) Initially the Samarra group worked under the name of the “Samarra Coordination Committee,” with Abu Abayd al-Samarrai as its initial spokesman.23
It was shortly after this that Shaykh Muhammad Taha Hamdun, imam of the mosque at al-Haq Square in Samarra, began being quoted as the face of the clerical wing. At the time he was a member of the Samarra Ulema Council.24

The Samarra group assumed a position of strength vis-à-vis Baghdad immediately. On Jan 15, the Samarra protesters refused to meet with a Maliki emissary, Salam al-Zoubai. This was a crucial point, as it came just days after Shahristani’s being charged with meeting protest demands. Shaykh Hamdun explained the refusal by saying that they would present their demands only to Maliki or Shahristani directly, not to an intermediary.25 Although there is no reporting of either refusing to meet with Hamdun, this implies that part of the breakdown at this early stage came from Hamdun’s insistence on being able to negotiate as an equal with senior Shia leaders and their refusal to countenance such an idea.

Either way, Zoubai’s mandate ended soon with sectarian controversy. A week after Hamdun’s refusal to meet with him, Zoubai gave a lecture at the University of Samarra in which he offended students by asking why there was no one there with a distinctively Shia name (e.g., “Who among you is named Abd al-Hussein?”).26 When students started walking out, he threatened to not let them leave, and then he got into an argument with professors, and the incident went viral on social media and made the national news.27

On March 22, federal SWAT forces—special forces reporting directly to Maliki—reportedly raided Hamdun’s office.28 Throughout the year security forces would harass clerical leaders by either raiding their offices, detaining them briefly and releasing them, or just by announcing an arrest warrant for unclear reasons; on April 30 they briefly detained Hamdun.29 The government never explained the legal basis for these threats, but given threats of insurgency in sermons, “incitement” would presumably have been the basis. Targeting Hamdun may have helped him consolidate his leadership position.

On March 24, Hamdun explained the development of Sunni protests, which began as isolated protests and moved to sit-ins and common Friday prayers (clerics closed other mosques to increase the size of crowds at protest-focused mosques in each area). Notably, Hamdun framed the movement as an explicitly Sunni movement, persecuted by the government, and described Sunnis as “the primary component in building this country” (the word used for “component,” mukawin, in this context refers to a sectarian group). On this occasion Hamdun said the country faced four choices, of which two were Maliki’s resignation or a change in policy, and the latter two being a Sunni region or insurgency. Hamdun framed the insurgency option as “withdrawal of the clerics [i.e. Hamdun’s group] to open the way for the revolutionaries.”30
The first joint appearance of leaders of the mainstream current together helped sink the Maliki-Mutlak compromise on debaathification (discussed above). On March 27 they met as leaders of the “Six Provinces” as Hamdun appeared on stage in Ramadi with figures such as Ahmad Abu Risha, Said al-Lafi and Ali Hatem Sulayman, to issue “Statement No. 1” of the “Popular Committees of the Six Provinces.” Both the group’s statement and Hamdun’s evinced the same assumption of self-evident rightness that required no elaborate defense. Its key point of substance was to reject negotiations between Sunni ministers and Maliki, insisting that only protest leaders had legitimacy to negotiate with the government.

This coincided with an effort by Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, the Jordan-based senior cleric, to regain relevance by proposing negotiations with the government. Despite Saadi’s revered status as the leading Sunni cleric under both the old regime and during the first Sunni insurgency, Saadi was struggling to affect events. Aside from his continued exile, on January 24 Saadi issued a fatwa condemning the Sunni autonomous region agenda central to both the Mutahidun and Hamdun’s group. He also seems to have had an even more exaggerated sense of Sunni weight in the country than others. Until March Saadi had viewed it as sufficient to simply make demands and expect them to be fulfilled. One signature initiative of his was to have the Sunni and Shia waqfs reunited, apparently unaware that such an institution would necessarily be Shia-dominated.

Saadi’s initiative was first announced on March 3, but took three weeks to crystallize. On March 24 al-Sharq al-Awsat quoted leaders as saying a 26-member commission including eight tribal shaykhs and six each of clerics, intellectuals and youth leaders, would lead negotiations. Ahmad al-Saadi, the cleric’s son, would head the delegation. But then the effort seemed to stall and nothing more was heard for Saadi’s initiative for weeks.

The JRTN and its protest front, the Free Iraqi Intifada (FII), were simultaneously pushing for war. FII protests were always strident affairs. One sermon from Tikrit, coinciding with the push to negotiations, insisted “we reject all negotiations with this government... [and call for an end to] this constitution written by Bremer, Zionists, Crusaders and Masons.” Its protest songs, were released on Youtube as if they were a record label as “the Free Iraq Intifada Division presents ‘Songs of the Revolutionaries.’” As early as February 7, a FII spokesman appeared on al-Sharqiya and explained that “the government has rejected protesters’ legitimate demands, so now we demand the government be brought down and the constitution voided.”

On March 9, following the arrest of an FII activist in Ninawa, their spokesman, Ghazi al-Faysal, gave the government a 24-ultimatum, saying “protesters will take
to the streets in arms...we will never negotiate with the government.” He apparently hoped this would lead to an uprising, but it did not. Furthermore, it is notable that at this point the FII was still maintaining the fiction of being an independent entity. Faysal denied the arrested activist was a JRTN member, “despite our pride in the Naqshbandia Army.” But the façade was thin; FII statements were being released on JRTN websites, and the two groups had similar logos, with the FII using a Baathist flag rising up from a green-colored picture of Iraq instead of the entire Arab world.

So even as Ramadi protest leaders were drawing a line in the sand and rejecting compromises by Sunni ministers, they found themselves having to hold back a push from the pro-insurgency wing. On March 24, the JRTN sent a crowd gathered from Fallujah to Ramadi to rush the protest site and demand war. They appear to have hoped they would sway the crowd and push political process-linked protest leaders out. And indeed Lafi, the Ramadi spokesman, and Ali Hatem briefly left the stage. But they came back on after regaining their composure and began to urge peacefulness. The March 27 statement noted above also included a call for peacefulness. The call for insurgency failed, at least for a time.

Huwija: A Turning Point

A MASSACRE IN HUWIJA, KIRKUK ON APRIL 23 CHANGED THE ENVIRONMENT significantly. The siege of a protest site controlled by the JRTN’s Free Iraq Intifada began on April 19, the day before provincial elections. After a typically inflammatory sermon—e.g., referring to protesters as “jihadists-in-garrison”—there was an attack on a local security checkpoint that killed a soldier. A unit of the 12th Division—which is locally-recruited and thus Sunni Arab—surrounded the protest site and maintained a four-day siege without killing anyone. Protesters who submitted to a search for weapons were allowed to leave, and at one point a video captures an officer pleading to protesters to just surrender the site, saying “You are our people, we don’t want to hurt you!”

Conflict came to a head the morning of April 23, when Maliki’s “SWAT” forces took over. They opened fire on the site and continued shooting for several minutes. A video released by a local army unit shows soldiers helping unarmed protesters flee. At least 44 people were killed, and while they were undoubtedly supporters of an insurgent group, none appear to have been armed. Another video leaked after the raid showed security personnel walking through the scene immediately
after the shooting stopped, mocking people who were wounded, some of them elderly. The videos saved the reputation of the local army unit, but the killings hugely enflamed Sunni passions against the federal government.

The pivotal impact of Huwija was to militarize the mainstream protest movement. The evening of April 23, Qusay al-Janabi, a popular Ramadi protest speaker, issued what can best be described as a declaration of war on Baghdad. Beside him wearing a military-style vest stood Muhammad Khamis Abu Risha, the nephew of Ahmad Abu Risha, the tribal Awakening leader who headed the “Popular Committees” (al-la'jan al-shaabiya). Janabi called on “all tribes and armed factions” (al-fasail al-musalaha, meaning insurgents) to mobilize, sparing “local police,” and demanding “the Safavid government, which gets its direction from Qom and Tehran,” withdraw army and federal police units from Sunni cities in 48 hours.

Ali Hatem, a tribal leader who had some experience leading a militia tribal force from the 2007 turn against al-Qaeda by Anbari tribes, quickly set about touting himself as the leader of the “Army of Pride and Dignity (APD),” a make-shift militia of local tribesmen named after the site itself (“Pride & Dignity Square”). The group put out videos of masked men with rifles who looked more like a village militia than an army, and Hatem unabashedly told al-Hayat he had recruited them from former army soldiers and Saddam Fayadin, a brutal Saddamist militia force formed shortly before the 2003 war. Muhammad Khamis was also organizing his own force, and there is a video of him from this time pledging to fight “the dogs ...the time for peace is over” in the name of the “Popular Committees”—his protest group. He also mentioned killings attributed to the Iranian-backed Shia militia Asaib Ahl al-Haq, which was by this point an open ally of Maliki.

Hatem’s militancy was not entirely created by Huwija; his rhetoric has been sufficiently vitriolic that the electoral commission had already struck his name from the provincial election candidate list. Furthermore, on April 12 he and the embryonic APD had conducted an unarmed march in fatigues. Janabi had also participated; he had preached the Friday sermon that day, during which he grandly stopped in the middle to don a white burial shroud, signifying his willingness to die.

The movement’s clerical authorities gave clear blessing to the shift from protest to a war-footing. On April 26, Saadi authorized the formation of a Sunni “defense army.” On the same day in Samarra, Shaykh Hamdun gave an angry sermon on government repression, concluding tribes from all Sunni provinces had to form their own “tribal army,” with protesters holding signs, “We are all part of the Army of the Tribes.” Three days later Hamdun explained in an interview that Salah al-Din protest leaders had taken up procedures to form an autonomous region,
which had been initiated a year and a half earlier, and that the formation of a tribal army to defend Sunnis was now essential. The process would take months more to fully develop, but this was the starting point for the mainstream Sunni clerics going over to the insurgency.

An incident on April 27 caused some pullback in the meantime. Under circumstances which remain unclear, five soldiers from Ramadi—meaning they were Sunni—were visiting on leave when they were murdered near the protest site. The killings were widely condemned, and Saadi issued another statement clarifying “I never called for jihad,” just Sunni self-defense. Whether protest leaders were responsible or not, Maliki pinned it on them, and personally attended the burial service. Arrests warrants for these killings, valid or not, would be important in the drama of the months to come.

Hamdun’s rise to national leadership began at this time. On May 2, the Six Provinces Popular Committees chose Hamdun as spokesman and thus effective figurehead. On May 18, Hamdun announced following a gathering in Samarra that the committees had formally decided to pursue the formation of a Sunni region, but that they would postpone formal measures—such as distributing referendum materials—for a week to lessen tensions. Three days later, speaking from Samarra after a meeting with other protest leaders in Ramadi on May 20, Hamdun released a video statement in which he escalated by saying that Sunnis faced two choices: armed conflict or an autonomous region. He qualified the first point by saying it was “what the government wants,” suggesting they were being forced into war. But this didn’t last long; on May 30 Hamdun told al-Sumaria television that protest leaders had met and rejected the insurgency option.

Ramadi’s local tribal and political leaders were not willing to be entirely subsumed within a cleric-led organization though. On May 14 they met at Ali Hatem’s farmhouse for the “Anbar Tribes Conference to Support Pride & Dignity Square,” though the statement at times tried to speak for “the Six Provinces” as well. The meeting was attended by leaders of both the Abu Risha and Islamic Party “Coordination Committee” sides of the Ramadi leadership. Aside from reiterating standard demands—withdrawal of the army from cities, abolition of Shia militias—they condemned arrest warrants that had now been issued for Lafi, Zayn, and the younger Abu Risha.

It is notable that in his speech, Ali Hatem warned Governor Qasim al-Fahdawi against negotiating with the government over the close of the protest site; notable because this precise issue would lead to the confrontation in December. Two days later the government raided the farmhouse, so Ramadi’s Popular Committees
issued statement No. 45, condemning a government raid that day against the Ali Hatem’s property, as well as the arrest the night before of a prominent activist.\(^{58}\)

Saadi also renewed his negotiation initiative. On May 13 a statement from his website and further statements by representatives put forward a “Good Faith Initiative”\(^{59}\)—a delegation of Sunnis to be announced would meet with the government at the Shia shrine in Samarra, a Sunni-majority city holy to the Shia, and seek to resolve the conflict. The Maliki government initially said they were “studying the issue,”\(^{60}\) then had the Shia waqf effectively reject it by saying a shrine should not be politicized. In subsequent interviews Maliki would say there was never a formal proposal. He insisted he heard about Saadi’s initiative in the media but there was nothing specific. It would be Saadi’s last effort to engage with the political process.

Another group originally focused on Fallujah that became prominent in Ramadi in April–May was the Popular Sunni Movement, or Sunni Hirak. (Confusingly, the cleric-led group headed by Hamdun increasingly called itself “the Hirak,” and sometimes the “Popular Hirak,” though these are entirely separate groups despite having similar views.) Focused on promoting a Sunni autonomous region, the Sunni Hirak appears to have been a thinly-veiled front for the Islamic Army. Statements from the IA single out the Sunni Hirak for praise and there is a total overlap between their ideologies.\(^{61}\) The IA is one of the armed groups left over from the previous insurgency. Fronted by a cleric calling himself Faruq al-Thufayri,\(^{62}\) the Sunni Hirak frequently used its social media to promote the work of Shaykh Taha Hameed al-Dulaymi, a Saudi-backed cleric who frequently appeared on the Salafist al-Wisal television channel. Its constant reference to sectarian frames of reference matched the slogan on Dulaymi’s website: “Devoted to the Best Means of Confronting the Shia Threat.”

The group first made a visible appearance in Ramadi on March 29, when its representative, Hussein al-Dulaymi, gave the Friday sermon. He began appearing in Ramadi frequently afterward.\(^{63}\) Ramadi leaders never explained why they chose to include the Sunni Hirak. They simply began working together, but Huwija seems to have been key. The Sunni Hirak was always an insurgent front, whereas the Ramadi groups were fronts for political and tribal actors. Once the two Ramadi groups began moving toward insurgency after Huwija, the coincidence of their political ideologies made cooperation natural.
A New Governor, and a Reprieve

Despite deteriorating security conditions brought on by the increasing lethality of attacks by the jihadist Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, an al-Qaeda offshoot which had become an independent organization, Iraq avoided a full-blown insurgency in April–May when cool heads prevailed despite tensions. Provincial elections had been postponed in both Anbar and Ninawa for “security reasons,” but went forward on June 20.

The delay probably helped factions favoring closer cooperation with Baghdad. Mutahidun won eight of 29 seats in Anbar, enough for a plurality but a rather weak one considering that the Anbar Mutahidun included the Islamic Party and Rafia al-Isawi and his Fallujah base and was the only bloc running associated with the protests. Overall, blocs favoring an autonomous region won about half the seats, and those opposing the other half. The vote may not have been an accurate poll of public opinion given that many hard-core pro-insurgency Anbaris would not have voted. But still it was an underwhelming result given the protesters’ claim to represent the entire province.

The post-election wrangling was tougher than Mutahidun expected, but still it was able to elect a protest organizer it trusted, Ahmad Khalaf al-Dhiyabi. (Immediately after taking office, he dropped “al-Dhiyabi,” his tribal name, and began going by “al-Dulaymi,” the province’s tribal confederation.) Ahmad Khalaf bested the incumbent governor, Qasim al-Fahdawi, who was closer to Maliki, but among the protest-supported candidates he was the moderate. Protest leaders advocated Mutahidun nominate Zaydan al-Jabiri, a prominent tribal leader known for his hardline rhetoric. Jabiri would go on to become a key figure in the insurgency in 2014.

No sooner had Governor Dulaymi been sworn in that he began looking for a way to reconcile with Maliki. Part of what motivated him was self-preservation—after his election on July 31, Maliki unveiled an arrest warrant, declaring that he was one of the protest leaders implicated in the April 27 killings. But on October 7 Dulaymi visited Baghdad and met with Maliki, supposedly to talk about protester demands. Then he stopped criticizing Maliki and the arrest warrant went away. The governor explained in an interview that day with al-Arabiya that it had just been a “misunderstanding,” and there had never been a valid arrest warrant anyway.

Another protest leader whose anti-Maliki fire had died out was Ahmad Abu Risha. And the reason appears to be the same as that for the governor. Even before
his nephew Muhammad Khamis began talking about Persian dogs and forming a militia, Babil Province’s Counterterrorism Investigative Office told the media in March that terrorists from the al-Qaeda-linked Fatah al-Mubin Battalion had “confessed” receiving support from both Abu Risha and Ali Hatem. Since then Abu Risha had gone silent, even during the midst of the Huwija uproar. By July media reports began appearing about his reconciliation with Maliki, although it would be December before he openly flipped. And so the evidence tying Abu Risha to terrorism went away, but Ali Hatem kept course.

It was in this context in August that the clerical establishment executed what was essentially a “soft coup” in the protest movement, with the Iraqi Ulema Council and its pointman, Shaykh Hamdun, at the head. Hamdun organized a conference in Ramadi August 3–4, which featured both clerical leaders and what remained of protest leaders tied to the political process. Hamdun both opened the conference and gave the final statement, with political and tribal figures—including Ahmad al-Alwani and Muhammad Khamis Abu Risha—playing a supporting role. The purpose of the conference, as Hamdun explained it, was to reorganize the protest movement and emphasize the Hirak—meaning the cleric-led movement—as “the sole legal and political representatives of Iraqi Sunnis.” Explaining disingenuously that the movement had “lacked organization,” Hamdun announced there would be a new structure in each province, organized with groups for clerics, tribes, youth and academics and with “crisis cells” and centralized committees. This was disingenuous because the Ramadi site and others were quite well-organized before. They were just organized under someone other than Hamdun. The intention to subordinate political actors, whether Speaker Nujayfi or Governor Dulaymi, was unmistakable.

By September the protest movement was clearly struggling. Attendance at events had peaked early, began to decline, peaked again after Huwija, but then began to decline again. Some leading protest sites, those controlled by the JRTN’s protest front, were empty, and Free Iraq Intifada social media was now simply posting news reports about attacks on the Iraqi army. In Anbar the governor they elected, Ahmad Khalaf al-Dulaymi, had betrayed them. And the Mutahidun itself was strained, with Abu Risha out of the picture and its leader, Speaker Osama al-Nujayfi, seemingly more focused on whether he would be Iraq’s next president than anything else. Nujayfi even made a trip to Tehran in mid-September in what was widely viewed—and attacked among Sunnis—as being a kind of campaign swing for the post. Adding insult to injury, Nujayfi attended a memorial service in Iran for the mother of Iran’s infamous special operations head, Qasim Sulaymani, and then gave a very Iran-friendly interview on *al-Sharqiya* when he returned.
On November 25, Governor Dulaymi led a delegation to Baghdad to meet with Maliki, reaching a deal which would help lead to the outbreak of full insurgency a month later. Although Dulaymi and Provincial Council Chairman Sabah al-Halbusi presented the meeting as focusing on “the demands of the protesters,” it appears in fact to have been a quid pro quo under which provincial authorities agreed to support closure of the “Pride and Dignity” protest site, which at this point remained the symbolic center of the nationwide Sunni protest movement, in exchange for concessions from Maliki which mainly benefited Anbar officials.

According to news reports following the meeting, the deal included some economic elements, including projects for an oil refinery, an airport, and irrigation. Such projects might have benefited residents in general beyond the opportunities for patronage which normally attend them, but the protests were not about economics. More crucially for the governor, Maliki reportedly agreed to allow Dulaymi to replace both Anbar’s police chief and counterterror chief, to augment police personnel under Dulaymi’s command, and even give Dulaymi some say regarding activities of the army commands in Anbar. Given Maliki’s highly centralized style, these concessions were highly unusual, especially in dealing with a Sunni governor.

As Dulaymi moved to fulfill his part of the deal, meeting with tribal leaders to try to persuade them to go along with closing the Ramadi sit-in, it immediately escalated tensions between him and what was now an accelerating push for insurgency. On December 6, the Friday sermon at the Ramadi site by Shaykh Mustapha Ghalib called for the immediate formation of “popular committees from our heroic youth to defend our honor and our land,” or as everyone understood it, a nationwide Sunni militia. This and the assassination of Khalid al-Jumayli, a leading organizer, his killing blamed on Shia militias, created an internal crisis. Abd al-Razzaq al-Shamari, the leading remaining member of the original protest leadership for whom there was not an arrest warrant, issued a clarification, saying that Ghalib’s statement represented the tribes, but that protest leaders were still “studying the issue” of the formation of an army.

Despite months of threats, it appears that by this point of all the original protest organizations, only the JRTN’s protest front, which was never a real protest movement to begin with, had fully joined the insurgency. The “1920s Revolution Brigades,” the armed wing of Harith al-Dhari’s MSA, was nominally active, but they don’t appear to have been engaged in any serious military operations in 2013. They had only been active at the sidelines of the protest movement, mainly using daily broadcasts from their al-Rafidayn television to incite anger toward the government and lay the groundwork for insurgency.

Yet Maliki was determined to force the issue, and despite the failure of the gov-
ernor and other officials to persuade Anbar tribal leaders to support a shut-down of the Ramadi “Pride & Dignity Square,” he indicated in a December 22 speech following the loss of a senior commander in an operation that he planned to shut it down. On December 25, Maliki gave a now famous Christmas Day speech declaring the Ramadi site to be “an al-Qaeda headquarters.” Early in the morning on December 28, security forces arrested parliamentarian Ahmad al-Alwani, the Islamic Party leader who headed one of the two main Ramadi protest groups (the “Coordinating Committee”). The forces killed al-Alwani’s brother and sister. The government claimed Alwani’s guards resisted a warrant for his brother’s arrest, while the Alwani family claimed they were executed in cold blood. Later that evening, the government ran a propagandistic “confessions” video on state television which claimed that Muhammad Khamis Abu Risha, who headed the other main Ramadi protest group, was an “emir” of the jihadist Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham.

An undeclared state of martial law also went into effect in Ramadi the same day, with roads blocks imposing a curfew and cell phone communication shut down. Hamdun and other protest leaders issued a press statement on December 29 to say these actions showed that the government was determined to stir conflict but the Hirak urged “reasonable minds” to find a peaceful solution. But Maliki was determined. On December 30, security forces bulldozed the “Pride & Dignity” encampment. The same day insurgents launched an all-out assault on federal security forces as the call went out to challenge the curfew. Sunni parties threatened to withdraw from the political process if Maliki did not pull back the army from Anbar’s cities, thus throwing the country into insurgency. When Maliki did so, both jihadist and nationalist insurgents took over, seizing control of Fallujah and parts of other cities. At that point it was too late and Iraq’s second Sunni insurgency had arrived.

It may be debatable whether this new insurgency was inevitable. Despite talk of negotiations at various points throughout the year, there does not appear to have ever been any arms-length talks. Maliki’s tactic with Sunni leaders was to always co-opt some of them, either through legal threat or patronage, and then engage in “negotiations” with those compromised individuals. Nonetheless, even had the government been run in a more sensible manner, there is no reason to believe it could have satisfied Sunni protest leaders, as no elected Shia leader would ever have agreed to a Sunni region with its own army funded by the national budget.

What might have worked would have been unilateral government concessions on issues such as legal justice reform, prison conditions, and de-Baathification. Even talk of de-Baathification reform prior to the April provincial elections brought Maliki criticism from his Shia rivals, and protest leaders would not likely have repaid moderate concessions with gratitude. But such reforms, justifiable on their
own terms, might have fatally undermined Sunni public support for a protest movement struggling with attendance by mid-year anyway. And Hamdun’s December 29 call for peace, despite his previous threats, suggested no pre-determined plan for insurgency. Yet Maliki had his eyes on national elections four months away, and Hamdun would soon head to Kurdistan to support the newborn insurgency out of the reach of Maliki’s arrest warrants.

The Second Insurgency in Full Bloom

Following the collapse of security in Anbar, most international media attention understandably focused on the arrival of the jihadist ISIS in Ramadi and Fallujah, dramatically advertised by their parades of men in black with guns riding through the streets in pick-up trucks. Although ISIS quickly found it difficult to maintain a settled presence in Ramadi, at most contesting government control in neighborhoods such as Malaab and al-Bu Farraj, it quickly established itself as the strongest group in Fallujah. There it periodically demonstrated his preeminence by parading its black flag.

Yet alongside the jihadists a series of “military councils” sprang up, claiming to be “tribal revolutionaries.” The names of the groups differed and in many cases claimed to be the local “military council” of a given city or district. Many of these groups were solely fronts for the JRTN. None of them directly claimed to be JRTN or used the term “Baath,” but those groups who were first announced on JRTN-linked social media—and by no other—and use their rhetorical style may be assumed to be either fronts or tied in some way. Numerous groups like this appeared after the beginning of the year in Anbar and in scattered locations throughout the country.

A typical example would be a video published by the FII’s YouTube account called the “Military Council of Tribal Revolutionaries in Karma,” an east Anbar town near Fallujah. The men were masked but wore various types of quasi-military clothing. They claimed to be former regime army officers. They made a reference to “Qadisiya,” the name of an early Islamic battle which the Baath took to rename the Shia province of Diwaniya. The group claimed to have responsibility for the area between Abu Ghrayb and Fallujah and enjoined other “revolutionary” groups to join under their wing.
JRTN’s Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, the former vice-president under Saddam Hussein, made appearances only by audio, first in early January and then again in April and July, after the fall of Mosul. Duri’s voice is weak, and he is now in his 70s. He speaks as head of the Baath Party and as the “Commander-in-Chief” of the “Higher Command for Jihad & Liberation” (HCJL), a group first established in October 2007 as an attempt to create an umbrella organization. It includes individuals who are not “card-carrying” Baathists (the name was amended to “Jihad, Liberation and National Salvation” in 2009 but Duri doesn’t use the term in statements). JRTN statements, including Duri’s own, typically speak as if the HCJL were leading the entire insurgency. What made Duri’s speech on Mosul notable was that he mentioned several other groups by name, including the Islamic Army, the 1920s Brigades, the Jaysh al-Mujahidun and, “above all, the Islamic State.” Then he thanked its leader (without mentioning his name), Abu Bakr, for issuing a pardon to all Iraqi soldiers and police who defected from the government.

The breadth of the JRTN’s network is illustrated by two individuals heading linked organizations, Zaydan al-Jabiri, who announced the “General Political Council of Iraqi Revolutionaries” on March 4, and Abd al-Nasser al-Janabi, a Salafist who recently returned from exile in Qatar to be Duri’s deputy in the HCJL. Jabiri was involved with the Ramadi protests but mainly behind the scenes, and as noted, was a potential candidate for governor of Anbar last year. Although Jabiri does not openly call himself a Baathist, his group’s insignia mimics that of the JRTN, and Jabiri himself stated that Baath Party was one of the council’s main components. As for Janabi, he played no role in the protests and only returned from Qatar in February. The very fact that Duri would take a Salafist as his deputy — albeit for an umbrella group, not the Baath — says much about their ideological flexibility.

The 1920s Revolutionary Brigades, which remained largely in the shadows during the protest movement, has become more prominent. The 1920s Brigades, the armed wing of Harith al-Dhari’s MSA, appears to be working in close conjunction with the JRTN. The MSA even issued a public letter of guidance in January to the “General Military Council of Iraq,” which appears to be a joint project of the two. (This should not be confused with Fallujah’s well-known “military council” headed by the Salafist cleric Abdullah al-Janabi, which included these groups and others, but is now largely defunct due to a conflict with IS which IS has gradually won.)

Ali Hatem Sulayman has also returned to the fore, having spent most of the latter half of 2013 in the shadows. He now heads a group called the Anbar Tribes Military Council (ATRC). While he normally appears in media alone and often
simply speaks as an individual, on January 13 his group held a rare press conference in Ramadi to declare their revolt to be solely in self-defense to protest Sunni rights. Ali Hatem makes frequent appearances on both Iraqi and pan-Arab television, and is probably the most widely interviewed insurgent leader. Yet it is not all clear what if any fighting forces his group commands. Unlike with Duri’s JRTN or Dhari’s MSA, there are no armed groups with identifiable ties to Hatem that undertake combat operations. Moreover, his many appearances are rambling repetitions of the same catch-phrases with no detailed explanation of how insurgents might achieve their goals. In a July 23 interview with al-Arabiya, for example, Ali Hatem admitted that there were jihadist foreign fighters and insisted that he and his allies rejected the Islamic State’s expulsion of Christians from Mosul. But then he went on to talk about Shia militias without explaining how he could be taken seriously when the Islamic State seems so much more powerful than whatever forces, if any, he actually controls.

Muhammad Taha Hamdun has now relocated to Kurdistan, as have other key clerical leaders, and is doing interviews openly from Irbil in the name of the insurgency. He regularly appears on mainstream Sunni television channels, including Baghdad TV, a channel aligned with the Mutahidun and owned by the Islamic Party, to which the recently elected new speaker, Salim al-Jiburi of Diyala, belongs. Like Ali Hatem he frequently speaks as if he were the spokesman for the entire insurgency. Unlike Hatem, he has a recognizable organization behind him. In a June 16 interview from Irbil, shortly after the jihadist-led offensive that took Mosul, Hamdun spoke of “the revolutionaries” taking Mosul and Talafar, referring to the Islamic State as “imaginary.”

A point of continuity between the protest movement and the insurgency is the complex relationship between Hamdun’s organization and now-former speaker Nujayfi’s. When appearing on a recent program on Baghdad TV, the presenter asked Hamdun a loaded question as to why Sunnis hadn’t rallied around their leaders, meaning Nujayfi. Hamdun responded that Sunnis were rallying around their leaders, and then began to list who those leaders were—the Iraqi Ulema Council (for which Hamdun’s Hirak is a front), other senior clerical leaders, Harith al-Dhari and other “groups that fought the occupier.” Even now the clerics are determined to bring the politicians to heel.

Nujayfi himself has moved rhetorically closer to the insurgency as Sunni Iraq has radicalized under his feet. He tried to woo Shia support for a shot at the presidency last fall. But after the insurgency began he swung the other way, running Mutahidun’s electoral campaign for the April 30 parliament elections on a platform that accused the Shia-led government of waging war against Sunnis. He even
claimed in a party conference in March that Maliki’s reelection would lead to “genocide” against Sunni Arabs.94

This language put him firmly in line with the language used by insurgent leaders. Following the fall of Mosul—and his own family estate in Ninawa—to their control, Nujayfi became more explicit about his relationship to the nationalist insurgency. In an interview on July 13, three days after Mosul’s fall, Nujayfi declared the Islamic State to be the enemy, but also described nationalist insurgents as “having a just cause” resulting from the government’s failure to meet the demands of peaceful Sunni protests.95 Nujayfi has repeated this theme subsequently, including in an interview with Sky News on July 2.96 So has his brother, Ninawa Governor Uthil al-Nujayfi, who since the fall of Ninawa has spoken openly for the first time of the JRTN as a partner. In a July 13 interview with the mainstream television channel al-Sumaria, he even implied he might resign as governor as part of a deal with the insurgents.97 What is most baffling is why Nujayfi has convinced himself that any elected Shia leader would fund a government run by Saddam Hussein’s former deputy.

On July 16, insurgent political forces were for the first time able to hold an open conference in Amman, Jordan entitled, “Conference of Iraqi Revolutionary Forces.” The conference was held under the auspices of the Amman-based Shaykh Saadi, who since issuing a fatwa endorsing the insurgency after the December 30 Ramadi raid had largely remained behind the scenes. The conference’s concluding statement was vague, avoided the autonomous region issue, and in defense to Jordanian authorities, did not even make a direct reference to Maliki. The façade of unity was marred by some high-profile non-attenders, including Ali Hatem, and by an interview by the Sunni Hirak’s Faruq al-Thufayri, who sat behind the speaker as the final statement was read but gave an interview afterward attacking other participants. According to Thufayri, the statement’s failure to mention “Sunnis” by name was because the JRTN and the MSA wanted to present the movement as non-sectarian. The JRTN, Thufayri asserted, had a few token Shia members who meant nothing, and the MSA was a Sunni organization so, he said, it should just admit being so.98

Interestingly, the Baath Party attended in its own capacity, and associated groups attended at the same time. In statements after the conference, which might spoil Nujayfi’s plan and perhaps embarrass the Jordanian government, Janabi made statements endorsing the role of the Islamic State.99 Despite clear tensions, the jihadist-nationalist insurgent alliance may not be broken so easily.
Conclusion

The second Sunni insurgency was not easy to start. Following the defeat of the first insurgency in 2007–2008, it took the remnants of that conflict years to recompose themselves. Then it also took an extensive period of provocation on behalf of those groups determined to start a new war. But that alone was not enough; it took years of abuses and a handful of egregiously bad decisions at the highest political levels in Baghdad to give the insurgency the boost it needed to ensure it had take-off speed. Yet now, combined with a rejuvenated jihadist movement in the form of the Islamic State, safe in its base in eastern Syria, it has “liberated” much of the country and brought the wages of years of bad governance to Baghdad.

We may expect Sunni Iraqis will suffer enormously from not only the violence but the economic collapse slowly descending on their areas as the federal government stops paying salaries to territories lost. Yet Sunni insurgents, in particular the jihadist and Baathist elements among them, have received a huge boost. The JTJN in particular has proven especially adept the past 18 months in harnessing the evolving environment from protest to insurgency to its advantage. It may be hoping that the jihadists, who are taking the brunt of the fighting with security forces, will wear themselves thin, allowing the Baath and its allies to fill the void.

Whether more mainstream groups will gain anything from the conflict is more doubtful. The clerics may be taking center stage in Sunni media, but there is no reason to believe they will secure their ambition of a Sunni autonomous region. Similarly, the Nujayfis and their political bloc, who seek the same end, are in a much weakened position following their loss of seats in the election followed by their loss of their own home to the insurgents. While the Nujayfi brothers seem to put much stock in their ability to work with the JTJN and other nationalist insurgents, if anything it seems that the JTJN is exploiting them to gain political legitimacy.

A question of greater importance for the country and the region as a whole is the relationship between the nationalist insurgency and the jihadist Islamic State. There have been scattered reports of clashes between IS fighters and other insurgents, but broadly they have cooperated operationally and avoided confrontation in public. In areas in which IS becomes strong enough to begin demanding loyalty oaths, as it has in Syria, the greatest potential for anti-jihadist Sunni rebellion exists. But as long as the government continues to rely on Shia militias to the extent that it is now, it will be hard for such a reaction to gain momentum.
Ultimately whatever happens on the ground, Shia Islamists dominate the government, have a huge demographic and material advantage, and control the bulk of Iraq’s resource wealth. A movement based on Sunni identity and empowerment has only isolated Sunnis thus far. There is every reason to think that will continue to be the case.

NOTES

3. Examples of both statements may be found in Al-Arabiya’s “From Iraq” program, July 15, 2011. At the time of Nujayfi’s statement Maliki himself made a similar statement, confirming the right to form a region, not promote secession, on the Shia al-Fayha.
5. “Sunni Region has Arisen from the Grave of Fisal al-Ka’ud to Tikrit to Um al-Rabain,” Buratha News, July 4, 2011.
7. IIP 26.
8. IIP 27/6-7.
10. IIP 26/3.
12. IIP 30/5-11.
13. IIP 52/2-4.
14. IIP 61/4-7.
15. IIP 53/4-5.
16. IIP 60/6-9.
17. I have translated this document, mostly of the demands are reflected in Isawi’s statement quoted above.
18. Dec. 31 interview on state TV Full Maliki interview This excerpt has the relevant portion with Ali Hatem’s response.
19. IIP 53/2, 54/3.
22. The statement is put forward in this video and Hamdun’s appearance is included here.
27. For example, see “Salam al-Zoubai Threatens Students at University of Samarra and Teachers Reject Meeting,” Chackooch, January 25, 2013.
30. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEXW0q1gDdE.
33. IIP 54/7-8.
34. IIP 58 7/8.
35. Free Iraq Intifada sermon, April 12, 2013, Youtube.
36. For an example, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj4kTUb2as.
38. IIP 60/4-5. This is the interview on al-Sharqiya.
40. April 19, 2013 Sermon by Free Iraq Intifada Preacher, Youtube.
41. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tZrVvhgJyM.
42. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHHtImPzxLw.
43. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x KMhKbOduo.
44. April 23 “Declaration of War” Statement No. 35
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nxyiy3GCjIA.
46. May 18, 2013 Interview, May 28, 2013 interview.
47. Sermon by Qusay al-Janabi, Youtube, April 12, 2013.
50. Interview with Muhammad Taha Hamdun April 29, 2013
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AIOT_P6Zas.
52. “Popular Committees of the Six Provinces Choose Shaykh Muhammad Taha Hamdun as
53. “Samarra Protesters: A Region is First Layer of Defense to Repeated Crises with the Govern-
54. Video of Muhammad Taha Hamdun statement from May 21, 2013.
55. “Protest Leaders: We Reject Armed Conflict, Our Choice is a Region,” al-Sumaria, May 30,
   2013.
56. IIP 61/5-6.
57. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWGmniu9FIk.
58. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Wf8iP0RyJs.
61. They usually maintained a veneer, but this is probably the most direct statement linking the
two; April 15, 2013 Statement by Imad al-Din Abdullah.
62. This is a video of Thufayri later in the year explaining that his "Hirak" was always a separate
group. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR7bLwQgUVE.
63. IIP 61/6-7.
65. IIP 67/2-3.
66. IIP 71/2.
67. http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/programs/specialInterview/2013/10/07/%D9%85%D9%82%A9%D8%AE%D8%A7% D8%B5%D8%A9%D8%A3%D8%AD%9%85%AF%D8%98%4%D9%81% D8%A7%9%84%D8%AF%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%8C%D8%AD%D8%A7% D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7%9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%8%A7% D8%B1.html.
70. IIP 67/3. These two videos include much of the conference:
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1IYZhu_Khk&feature=player_detailpage
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OThqX9bcvGU.
71. IIP 70/4.
75. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYJVatfJ-0.
76. An ISIS parade on January 1, 2014 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxGdBS6qMLk.
77. An example from April: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrKKsjnpi5Q.
78. For examples beyond Karma as below, see also Rutba, Anbar
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGNqmkqEes and Hamdaniya, Ninawa
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6e0rSYcPc.
80. “Speech of Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri on the Commemoration of the Founding of the Iraqi Army,”
    YouTube, January 6, 2014.
83. For general background on this group and the JRTN as a whole, see Michael Knights, “The JRTN Movement and Iraq’s Next Insurgency,” CTC Sentinel (July 2011).
87. http://www.almadapaper.net/ar/news/465147/%D9%85%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%E7%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D9%A8%D8%A9%D9%8DA7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A7%3.
92. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bg_k27dPSjs.
93. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ee647s5C_hI.
94. http://www.almadapress.com/Ar/news/29256/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AC%D9A7%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%8AD%B1%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A9%D8%A7.
95. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAgdlAVwOk0.
96. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NBuZ8LZq68.
97. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0j4uJeEVM.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pYRWx_N8ZY
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_Ka2sRsavg.
98. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stRoI6cs7Y.
A Sectarian Awakening: Reinventing Sunni Identity in Iraq After 2003

By Fanar Haddad

Since 2003, sectarian identities and sectarian relations in Iraq and the broader Arab world have undergone previously unimaginable changes. New realities have been created and a key question is whether this is a temporary quagmire awaiting resolution or a new socio-political reality that needs to be recognized and managed accordingly. This essay is concerned with the emergence among the Arab Sunnis of Iraq of a clearer sense of themselves as a sectarian group. To understand this phenomenon, one first has to understand sectarian relations before 2003 and by extension the implications of 2003 for Sunni and Shia identities in Iraq and sectarian relations in the region generally.
The Definitional Free-For-All

One of the most widely peddled fallacies regarding Iraq and the Arab world is that they were strangers to “sectarianism” before 2003. Here, a definitional problem presents itself. If by “sectarianism” we mean violent sectarian conflict, widespread sectarian hate, or the empowerment of sect-centric political actors, then, yes, 2003 undoubtedly becomes the moment separating a “sectarian” Middle East from a “non-sectarian” one. However, “sectarianism” can entail much more than just these extreme manifestations of sectarian dynamics. To illustrate, if we take “sectarianism” to mean, alongside sectarian hate and violence, sect-centric bias, prejudice, or stereotypes, then “sectarianism” in Iraq and the Arab world dates to far earlier than 2003. Hence, in the case of Iraq, Shia activists felt the need to mobilize, as Shias, for Shia rights and better Shia representation since the establishment of the modern state. It makes little sense, therefore, to restrict our understanding of “sectarianism” to the sectarian violence witnessed in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere, or to the radical preacher ranting about the evils of sect $a$ or $b$, or to the enshrinement of sectarian identities in national politics.

The term “sectarianism” and its Arabic equivalent, ta’iyyiyah, are so ill-defined and so loosely used that, depending on one’s whims, they can cover just about anything relating to sectarian identity. As a result, commentary on the subject has turned into a definitional free-for-all. For many people, “sectarianism” basically refers to manifestations of sectarian hate. But this has proven unhelpful as it ends up criminalizing all manner of sectarian expression. Indeed both “sectarian” and “sectarianism” have often been used as synonyms for sectarian hate. Given the relevance of sectarian identities and hence the prevalence of sectarian discourse today, should we not take “sectarian” to mean that which relates to a sect(s) or that which is sect-specific—sectarian symbol, sectarian speech, sectarian hate, sectarian ritual? And should we not, by extension, discard the term “sectarianism” altogether? At the very least we would then have a vocabulary that allows for legitimate forms of sectarian expression rather than clinging to the pre-2003 legacy that impractically vilifies most if not all assertions of sectarian identity.

Indeed one of the problems with this legacy is that an illusory a-sectarian ideal was upheld by successive regimes that sought to transcend sectarian identities not through inclusion but through negation. In many ways, the ostensibly a-sectarian ideal was not restricted to the withering away of sectarian identity’s relevance in the mid-20th century. It also entailed the suppression, censorship, and margin-
alization of such identities and of sectarian expression wherever they persisted. It can therefore be argued that the post-2003 environment is linked to the cumulative effect of decades of mismanaging sectarian relations. It is similar to any number of pent up social tensions across the Arab world that were suddenly given voice after the Arab uprisings starting in 2011. The increased sectarian entrenchment of post-2003 Iraq and the broader Middle East was in no small part the cumulative result of two legacy issues. The first was failed nation-building. The second, a counterproductive and ultimately futile attempt to negate sectarian identities in the name of coercively enforced and restrictively defined notions of national unity. This partially explains how places such as Iraq have seen multiplicity—something that exists the world over—turn into division. Different imaginations of what “we the people” represent inhere on individual political and social perceptions to the extent that clearly identifiable and politically relevant opposing narratives of state, society, politics and history become salient enough to be easily activated and utilized in politics.

Sectarian Relations in Pre-2003 Iraq

Throughout much of the 20th century, whatever political zeitgeist existed in Iraq did not seem too perturbed by sectarian identities. Anyone subscribing to such a zeitgeist was similarly oblivious to, unconcerned by, or dismissive of the issue of sectarian relations. However, this should not be taken to mean that there was no “sectarian issue,” or that the past was simply “a-sectarian.” Instead, and particularly in the latter half of the century, this issue was easily marginalized because, in Iraq and the Arab world, it was an issue of the marginalized: namely, Shias and more specifically those among them whose lives and identities are embedded in Shia social and religious structures. What those who dwell on the supposedly a-sectarian past overlook is that while sectarian identities were indeed barely relevant for much of 20th century Iraq, there nevertheless existed a differentiated Shia Iraqi identity that grated against the nation-state’s homogenizing tendencies and increasing authoritarianism. In many ways, therefore, “sectarianism” in pre-2003 Iraq was an issue of state-Shia relations rather than one of Sunni-Shia relations. Put differently, prior to 2003, Iraqi governments never had to contend with a Sunni identity or autonomous Sunni social or religious
structures simply because there was no such thing as an Iraqi Sunni identity in any meaningful sense. In contrast, there was, since modern Iraq’s establishment, a Shia identity and Shia structures that struggled for inclusion or autonomy rather than dilution in a state-sponsored, homogenizing, a-sectarian national project. Herein lies the crux of the matter: prior to 2003, Sunnis did not see themselves as a sect or as a differentiated group whereas many Shias did; therefore, censoring sectarian identity and sectarian expression—even if carried out with the best of intentions such as upholding an a-sectarian ideal—was inevitably seen as more coercive to Shias than to Sunnis. More tangibly, the paraphernalia of sects—symbols, leaders, rituals, myths and so forth—barely existed among Sunnis whereas they were to be found in abundance among Shias; hence, in the 20th century, to control or subvert these in the name of secularism or “anti-sectarianism” was not to equally censor Sunnis and Shias.

Three inferences can be made at this point. First, as a result of the foregoing and many other deeper historical reasons, Iraqi Shias had a more developed sense of themselves as a sect that required consideration as such, with no discernible Sunni equivalent. As a result of the latter, there was a common and reductive conflation of Sunni identity with the pre-2003 state. Second, prior to 2003, the contentious subject of “sectarianism” and the vocabulary of sects came to be associated in Iraqi politics with the Shia. That stands to reason given that, in Iraq at least, the subject had little to do with Sunni-Shia relations and everything to do with state-Shia relations. Finally, given that Iraqis have been so thoroughly socialized into viewing “sectarianism” in irredeemably negative terms, the term’s association with Shia activism lent Shia identity an at times apologetic bent borne out of the need to deflect accusations of “sectarianism.” This was in stark contrast to Shia activism and Shia politics since 2003. Underlining and perpetuating these dynamics was a system of power relations that lasted until 2003. Its violent demise fundamentally changed how sectarian identities and sectarian relations were framed. Most noticeably it ushered in a more assertive Shia identity and led to the emergence, as well, of a distinct Sunni sectarian identity.

An illustrative parallel that highlights the importance of power relations in identity and inter-group relations and explains the invisibility of Sunni identity in Iraq prior to 2003 can be found in the study of “whiteness” in race relations. It has been argued that previously white identity was “raceless” in that white people did not see themselves as having a race but, rather, they were “simply people.” They believed that their viewpoint was not a white one but a “universally valid one—‘the truth’—what everyone knows.” As such, white becomes the standard, the norm so to speak, against which all others are differentiated. This phenomenon is the
result of relative empowerment that enables dominant groups to influence what is regarded as “the norm;” this in turn blinds them to the facts of their own empowerment and the realities of the other’s marginalization. Furthermore, the reification of a dominant group as “the norm” can be internalized by outgroups who, more often than not, will seek approval and acceptance by trying to measure up to society’s standards of acceptability as influenced by the dominant group.6

The parallels with sectarian relations are clear: given that, prior to 2003, Sunni Arabs did not perceive themselves to be victimized on the basis of their sectarian identity and barely had a sense of themselves as a sectarian group, there was little awareness of, or concern for, issues relating to sectarian identity among them. In the 20th century, many Sunni Arab Iraqis saw themselves as “simply Iraqis” whose viewpoint, like the white one alluded to above, was not that of a Sunni Arab one but rather a universally valid one. In other words, they were “sectless” in a manner similar to the “raceless” whites.7 It is crucial to note that the empowerment that causes this is not necessarily direct material or political power. How much of either do working-class whites or Iraqis have? It is more a sense of identity-security that arises from the conviction that “we” are the Staatsvolk whose identity is validated in the daily reproduction of power relations.8

These dynamics were not exclusive to Iraq but can be glimpsed across parts of the Arab world. Prior to 2003, Sunni identity was only relevant in Iraq and the broader Arab world in so far as it was the taken-for-granted underpinning of an Islamic identity and in some cases the assumed marker of national identity. Its centrality to widespread conceptions of what it meant to be a part of the Arab and Muslim worlds was such that it required neither representation nor validation. As such, the Afghan jihad for example was an Islamic cause rather than a Sunni one and the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) was framed by the Iraqi regime and was perceived by many as a national and ethnic cause rather than a sectarian one. One of the reasons that this remained the case until 2003 was that the relations of power underpinning relations between the sects were never seriously contested.9 As a result, there was rarely a need to formulate, assert, or dwell on a distinct Sunni identity. As far as one’s own identity is concerned, dominance brings transparency, and it is only “others” who are, depending on the context, tribalized, ethnicized, racialized, or indeed “sectarianized.”10 Hence, the otherness of Shia Arabs and the entrenchment of skewed, unfavorable power relations meant that Shia identity prior to 2003 was the exact opposite of its Sunni counterpart in terms of its social and political relevance, capacity to be mobilized, content, visibility, and expressiveness.
Regime Change and Sectarian Politics

Since 2003, Sunni Arab Iraqis, like other Iraqis besides them, have struggled to square their generations-old aversion to anything that can be labelled as “sectarianism” with the inescapably sectarian reality of post-2003 Iraq. The centrality of communal identity to the very foundations of the new Iraq meant that it was always going to be difficult to separate ethno-sectarian identity from political interest after 2003. What may have begun as a phenomenon of elite politics with a residual popular echo has metastasized over the past 11 years into the most inescapable and defining feature of the new Iraq. Whatever their personal preferences, Arab Iraqis today simply cannot ignore the sectarian prism due to its centrality to social and political life. They have to either perpetuate or, far more challengingly, confront a socio-political environment built around a narrative of sect-centricity that all too easily intrudes upon many aspects of daily life. Existential fear, the ongoing cycle of violence and revenge, the increasingly sectarian character of politics and security, and the weight of 11 years of violence and division have effectively forced Arab Iraqis to view themselves primarily as members of sect a or b for practical reasons of self-interest and self-preservation if for no other.

The elevation of sectarian identity in post-2003 Iraq as a defining feature of politics disadvantaged Sunnis vis-a-vis their Shia counterparts. Obviously one reason for this was demographics. But the Sunnis also lacked the sect-specific institutions, representation, imagination, political consciousness, and sense of themselves that Shias had long before 2003. Upon regime change, Sunnis were simply not equipped to participate or compete in the politics of communal victimhood because they did not yet have a sense of themselves as a distinct communal group, much less as a uniquely victimized one.

More profound, the ethno-sectarian nature of the major oppositional forces that came to be empowered after 2003 affected views toward the legitimacy of the entire post-Saddam order. This order from its earliest days had a distinct sense of Shia ownership, at least in Arab Iraq. The legacies of the Ba’ath and the profound sense of Shia victimhood (real or perceived) under Saddam Hussein meant that Shias regarded the downfall of the Ba’ath as their salvation as a sectarian group as much as it was Iraq’s. Conversely, there was no element of sub-national communal identity in whatever desire existed among Sunnis to be rid of Saddam
Hussein. Even if they were glad to see the former regime’s demise, Sunni Arabs were hardly likely to subscribe to a celebration so heavily tinged with someone else’s feeling of victimhood and entitlement—and especially since the logic of “the Shia revival” often held Sunnis to be guilty by association.

Thus a divergence in historical memories regarding the Ba’ath manifested itself as a divergence in views towards the downfall of the regime, the occupation, and the legitimacy (not to be confused with popularity) of the entire post-2003 order. This divergence has been one of the drivers of identity politics and of the sectarianization of post-2003 Iraq. Little has happened since 2003 to assuage this divergence or the suspicion that the new Arab Iraq is essentially a Shia Arab Iraq.

The Emergence of Sunni Identity

UNSURPRISINGLY, THE PAST 11 YEARS HAVE MANDATED THE HISTORICALLY NOVEL emergence of an explicitly “Sunni” mass-group identity. In Iraq, Sunni Arabs were compelled to reinvent themselves as a sectarian group because of the empowerment of Shia-centric political actors, the institutionalization of identity politics, and the fixation of both the Coalition and most of its Iraqi interlocutors on ethno-sectarian identities. There were other factors as well, including the assertion of a triumphalist Shia identity and a distinctly Shia brand of Iraqi nationalism. In the words of one Sunni politician: “we awoke one day and suddenly discovered that we are all Sunnis.” In short, Sunnis had to develop a politicized sense of themselves as Sunnis to be relevant in a system that was fundamentally based on identity politics.

Yet “Sunni identity” is no more a fixed or all-encompassing concept than “Shia identity” or any other mass-group identity is. Whatever observations we may make about Sunnis or Shias, it bears emphasizing that nothing can be said about all Sunnis or all Shias. Like any collective, Sunni Arab Iraqis are never any one thing and, whatever the issue at hand, they will form a spectrum of views, attitudes, and behavior. Nevertheless, as with any group with a salient sense of itself, one can identify common points of reference and shared group-specific issues that nourish a sense of “we-ness.” At heart, the emergent and still evolving sense of Sunni identity is rooted in the dislocation and disenfranchisement felt by Sunni Arabs in 2003 and, consequently, in a sense of ambivalence toward the legitimacy of the
entire post-2003 order. Generally speaking, this manifests itself in a spectrum from begrudging acceptance to armed insurgency with the balance between the two being influenced by perceptions regarding the stability and permanence of the state and perceptions regarding the prospects for political reform and progress. Even among those who have chosen to work within the system, there exists a latent resentment toward the post-2003 order that Baghdad has done little to alleviate. This latent resentment is central to Sunni Iraqi conceptions of self and is the bedrock of many of the definitional aspects of emergent Sunni identity, not least of which is a profound sense of communal victimhood.

Through much of the past 11 years, Sunnis have been plagued by the twin pressures of needing to accept political realities on the one hand and on the other, having to struggle against a political order that often seems stacked against them and which they consider illegitimate.

Underlining these contradictions has been a sporadic effort to discard the pre-2003 legacy and its now seemingly out-dated and redundant conceptions of Iraq and Iraqi nationalism. While this is a process all Iraqis have had to undergo, it has been particularly slow and painstaking amongst many Sunnis due to the resentment that underlines their views towards regime change and the post-2003 state. The particulars of Sunni rejection and political participation over the past 11 years need not detain us here just as the intricacies of Sunni politics and the intense divisions that so characterize them are beyond the scope of this essay. Rather than attempting a detailed history of post-2003 Sunni politics, our focus on Sunni identity is better served by trying to identify key features of the emergent Sunni sense of self, be it during periods of widespread rejection, boycott, and insurgency such as in the years 2003–2008, and unfortunately at the time of writing as well, or during the period marked by widespread acceptance, no matter how begrudging, of the political order from 2009 to 2011 or during the Sunni protest movement of 2012–2013.

To state the obvious, a pronounced sense of victimhood is perhaps the most clearly discernible and most defining feature of Iraqi Sunni identity. In many ways, the Iraqi state that was born in 2003 was one based on communal victimhood wherein the more the claimed suffering, the more the sense of political entitlement. Although Sunnis were late entrants, they are today capable contestants in the Olympics of suffering (to borrow a phrase from Ian Buruma) that so characterize Iraqi sectarian relations.12

The root of Iraqi Sunnis’ newly found politicized sense of self is the conviction that the post-2003 order came and now exists at their expense. This Sunni sense of victimhood is juxtaposed against Iraqi Shias, and this leads to a dynamic of...
competing victimhoods: Shias and Sunnis each consider themselves to be the prime victim of the tragedies of the past decade and hence the most deserving of the political capital that is presumed to accrue from unique suffering. As such, Sunnis will often claim that the violence of the past 11 years has disproportionately targeted their community and that all the violence against civilians is sponsored by Iran, the Iraqi government, and Shia militias. While there is no denying that Sunnis have been the victims of political and even social marginalization in the new Shia-dominated system, feelings of communal victimhood are seldom free from exaggeration, particularly when they are so directly related to demands for political entitlement and when they dominate the self-perception of a group.

With hindsight it is difficult to see how the ascendancy of identity politics could have been avoided or how Sunni suspicions could have been assuaged given the manner in which the new order was born and given the caliber and political predispositions of much of the newly empowered political elites. The ethno-sectarian basis of the new state was something that aroused deep concern among Sunnis, who feared that the politics of unique communal victimhood implicitly vilified them. For example, according to Yehia al Kubaisi of the Iraqi Center for Strategic Studies, the first draft of the Iraqi constitution presented to the National Assembly on August 15, 2005 mirrored the sentiments expressed in the highly sect-centric “Declaration of the Shia of Iraq” of 2002, which many post-2003 Shia politicians had signed. To illustrate, Kubaisi notes that the first draft included an article that implicitly vilified Iraq’s Sunni Arabs in the following terms: “remembering the pains of the despotic clique’s sectarian oppression of the majority.” While the drafters may well protest that the intended majority could mean the majority of all Iraqis, Kubaisi is correct in pointing out that the ethno-sectarian basis of the new Iraq leaves little doubt about what is implied by minorities and majorities in the heated context of 2005.

The Paradoxes of Sunni Identity

BEYOND THE CORE SENSE OF VICTIMHOOD WITHIN SUNNI SECTARIAN IDENTITY, the emergence of Sunni identity since 2003 has been animated by several inner paradoxes or tensions relating to the difficulties that Sunnis have faced in trying to deal with and adapt to the unfavorable political realities of post-2003 Iraq.
Between Accepting and Rejecting the New Iraq

As already mentioned, there is a latent resentment underlining views towards the post-2003 order among a considerable body of Sunni opinion. As a result, Sunnis have struggled with the paradox of needing to work within a system that they regard as broadly illegitimate. Early on, this led to a division in overall Sunni Arab political opinion that still persists on whether to participate at all in the political system or to reject it outright through either boycott or insurgency. Even those Sunni politicians participating in national or regional politics have had to be mindful of Sunni grievances and, particularly in times of heightened tension, have had to balance their role in government against their constituency’s disdain of the government.16

Some argue that a significant body of Sunni opinion has simply not been willing to accept the post-2003 order. The criminal negligence and the discriminatory and heavy-handed policies of post-2003 governments have rightly been highlighted in many a commentary on Iraqi politics. The marginalization that Sunnis so often complain of is undoubtedly real and inevitably serves to perpetuate Sunni alienation from the state. However, an overlooked feature of Sunni politics has been the predisposition of a considerable body of Sunni opinion to reject the new order and deny it any legitimacy whatsoever. As one commentary recently put it:

The most significant factor behind Iraq’s problems has been the inability of Iraq’s Sunni Arabs and its Sunni neighbors to come to terms with a government in which the Shias... hold the leading role. This inability was displayed early on, when Iraq’s Sunnis refused to take part in Iraq’s first parliamentary elections, and resorted to insurgency almost immediately after the US invasion and fall of Saddam Hussein. All along, the goal of Iraqi Sunnis has been to prove that the Shias are not capable of governing Iraq.17

In effect, Shia political actors—through their incompetence and their own sectarianism—validated many preexisting Sunni prejudices that made them distrustful of the post-2003 order. This saw some Sunni political actors working towards or aiding the failure of the post-2003 order, thereby accentuating the already severe shortcomings of the newly empowered non-Sunni political elites. It also
nurtured an ambivalent relationship between Sunnis and anti-state violence. As is evident now in the ongoing crisis, many Sunni leaders, even those who are personally involved in the political process, are nevertheless prone to voice their support to anti-state (and not just anti-government) insurgents.

In many ways the sectarian divide in post-2003 Iraq and the emergence of Sunni identity are issues rooted in the controversy surrounding the legitimacy of the state. Both Shia and Sunni politicians have supported violent non-state actors—except that in the case of the former, these actors have been aligned with, or at least were not in opposition to, the state whereas in the case of the latter these have been anti-state actors. This unfortunate equation reflects the broader divide over views regarding the legitimacy of the post-2003 order. The point to make is that for Sunnis and particularly for Sunni leaders and representatives this presents an inescapable contradiction: how do you seek greater representation in or fairer treatment from a state that is deemed illegitimate and rejected by many Sunnis? This leads to a vicious cycle that shows no sign of abating: anti-state sentiment among Sunnis feeds into anti-state insurgency that then nourishes the discriminatory, heavy-handed, and sect-centric aspects of post-2003 governance. This further exacerbates anti-state sentiment among Sunnis by again validating widespread Sunni grievances (real or perceived).

The drastic disconnect of Sunnis today from the Maliki government and from the state more generally is the result of a cumulative process going back to 2003 and the establishment of the new Iraq’s first institutions. A pertinent illustration comes by way of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) appointed in July 2003, shortly after regime change. In the name of creating a representative Iraqi governing body, the composition of the IGC was strictly based on the assumed demographic weight of Iraq’s ethno-sectarian communities; hence, 13 Shia Arabs, 5 Sunni Arabs, 5 Kurds, a Turkoman, and a Christian were appointed. Regardless of intentions, this crystallized and reinforced identity politics (which naturally disadvantaged Sunnis circa 2003) as the basis for the new Iraq. Second, intentionally or otherwise, this overlooked how contentious Iraqi demographics would prove to be in the absence of a reliable census. As the foundation of the ethno-sectarian apportionment that Sunnis feel has disenfranchised them, demographics have become a common point of reference in the new Sunni sense of victimhood. From the earliest days of the new Iraq, many Sunnis have rejected the notion that they are a numerical minority. This by extension meant rejecting many of the foundational bases of the new Iraq. Until a census is conducted—and assuming that all sides accept its results—this issue will remain a contentious one. For the Shia, their majority status is the bedrock of their sense of political entitlement and
a central component of the Shia sense of victimhood as the long-suffering majority. Sunnis on the other hand seem ever more resistant to any notion that they are a minority, thus nourishing their own sense of victimhood as a people who have essentially been cheated into second-class status by nothing more than a lie.

The practical implications of the controversies surrounding demographics are obvious. Sunnis who subscribe to the idea that Sunnis are not a minority will have unrealistic expectations that, when not met, will only deepen their sense of injustice and victimization. This applies, among other things, to electoral politics, elite bargaining positions, popular expectations, and political demands. Nowhere is this more relevant than in the question of sectarian balance within state institutions, long a grievance of Sunni activists and politicians. Yet to take sectarian balance to mean Sunnis should have 42 percent representation in higher offices is impractical, given current configurations that are based on the assumption that Shias alone are anywhere between 55-65 percent of the population.

The controversy over demographics is one example of issues that prolong Sunni resentment against the post-2003 order and deepen their sense of victimhood. To many Sunnis, the new Iraq was first an American-occupied and subsequently an Iranian-occupied one that targets them as a community. Whatever the validity of such views, the inability to accept the political realities of the post-2003 order have led Sunni leaders to adopt positions that have often done more harm than good to the cause of easing the undeniable, even if sometimes exaggerated, marginalization of Sunni Arabs and the sectarian discrimination they face. The most notable examples would include their boycott of the 2005 elections and the constitutional drafting process and, more damagingly, their ambivalent stand on Sunni militancy. The state’s continued failures and its endemic weaknesses have encouraged the rejectionist trend, particularly when recurrent crises make the state seem fragile to the point of transience.

**Between Being Sunni and Being Non-Sectarian**

THROUGHOUT THE 20TH CENTURY, IRAQI ARABS WERE THOROUGHLY SOCIALIZED into rejecting “sectarianism.” Even today, outside militant circles, it is not easy to find Iraqis expressing unambiguous sectarian hate. For Sunnis, the aversion to “sectarianism” has often entailed an aversion to the mere expression of sectarian
identity. Indeed, until recently, Sunni leaders have seemed loathe to make reference to “Sunnis” in public discourse, opting instead to use easily decoded metaphors such as “mukawin” (component) or “shariha mu’ayanah” (a certain section). The past 11 years have seen a gradual easing away from this now dated political correctness, and today Sunni politicians and Sunnis in general are less likely to show such impractical aversions to using the political vocabulary of the day. This is the result of a reactive process triggered in 2003 by the political empowerment of an assertive brand of Iraqi Shiism and the consequent sectarian coding of the previously “sectless” Sunnis.

After the 2003 regime change, the Sunni Arab allergy to even the vocabulary of sects clashed with the need to find themselves as a sectarian group and compete in a system defined by ethno-sectarian politics. As others have noted, there were two broad tendencies within the Sunni Arab community: one that held on to the sect-averse political frames of the pre-2003 world and another that essentially tried to catch up with Shias in terms of building a sectarian political identity. In other words, the former tried to, “de-confessionalize the political system,” while the latter, “sought to confessionalize the community itself through the assertion of its identity.” Although this divergence still exists to some degree, the latter trend very quickly gained ground. The Sunni vote in the December 2005 elections was an early indication that a considerable body of Sunni opinion was quickly forming a politicized sense of themselves as a sectarian group. As should be clear by now, it could scarcely have been otherwise given the domination of Shia-centric political actors in the state, the realities of identity politics, and the ever-rising tenor of sectarian entrenchment and sectarian violence.

Today, Iraqi Sunni leaders rarely shy away from speaking as Sunnis and in the name of Sunnis. The past decade has seen a gradual and unmistakable shift away from earlier forms of political correctness that deemed references to sectarian identity unacceptable. So while such statements may have been unlikely from Sunni leaders in 2003, it was perfectly natural and on par with broader Sunni political discourse in 2013 for Osama al Nujaifi to say that, “victimhood has been concentrated in particular provinces and on a particular component and that is the Arab Sunnis.” By the time the Sunni protest movements of 2012–2013 had emerged, the taboos surrounding sectarian expression had all but vanished as a result of the events of the preceding nine years. Since 2003, Sunni political actors have had to be seen to be standing for Sunnis and Sunni issues and in this they have had to compete against each other and against their militant and their more openly sect-centric opponents for popular Sunni support. Thus, in the elections of 2014, most Sunni candidates campaigned on little else besides Sunni identity
and Sunni victimhood. Candidates and their media outlets incessantly pushed the line that Sunni Arabs faced an existential threat in Iraq with phrases such as “ethnlicit cleansing” and “genocide” typically punctuating Sunni electoral campaigning. This trend has only been augmented by the renewed insurgency in 2013 and the fall of Sunni provinces out of government control beginning in June 2014.

Consciously or not, Sunnis have in effect had to mimic their Shia competitors to confront the assertion of a distinctly Shia Iraqi nationalism, Shia symbolism, Shia victimhood, and ultimately a politicized Shia sense of self. In the realm of symbolism, Sunnis were at a distinct disadvantage in 2003 and lacked anything resembling the rich pantheon of symbols and icons that the Shias have both as Shias and as specifically Iraqi Shias. Since then, with the waxing of a politicized Sunni Iraqi sense of self, and the development of a narrative of Sunni victimhood no less potent than its much older Shia counterpart, Sunni Iraqis today have discovered and created symbols from Iraqi and Islamic history with which to assert themselves and formulate frames of Sunni Iraqi nationalism unknown in pre-2003 Iraq.

Often this has been done in direct juxtaposition to Shia symbolism and in some cases there is an element of borrowing, intentional or otherwise, from Shia practices. For example, just as Shias have long framed their Imams and the House of the Prophet as group-defining symbols or icons, Sunni Iraqis have begun doing the same with regard to the Prophet’s Companions. One can find many instances of poems and odes dedicated to Omar ibn al Khattab to rival the long tradition of such practices among the Shia with regards to Ali ibn abi Talib or Hussein ibn Ali. In addition to that, many Sunni Iraqi groups, from Facebook groups to individuals on Twitter to militant groups, name themselves after the Companions and particularly the first two Caliphs as a way of signifying and asserting a Sunni identity. Today, one often comes across instances of Iraqi Sunni activists referring to themselves as “the sons of Omar” in response to the more familiar term of Shia self-reference “sons of Haidar.” It is also interesting to note that just as Shias have blended Shia Islamic symbolism with Iraqi symbolism to assert a sect-centric Iraqi nationalism, Sunnis in post-2003 Iraq have often done the same.

The creation of group-specific symbols is essential to group coherence, particularly when faced with a competitor with an elaborate iconography. It is interesting to note in that regard that this is hardly without precedent. In the 1980s, for instance, Pakistani Sunni militants are reported to have actively sought the creation of new symbols and rituals to rival Shiism’s rich symbolism. An interesting medieval parallel comes from Basra in the year 998, when Sunnis invented a mourning ritual mimicking and coinciding with the most important date on the Shia religious calendar, Ashura. As 14th century chronicler Ibn al Kathir informs
us, in that year, Sunnis confronted Shia mourners with a mourning ceremony of their own for Mus’ab bin al Zubair, alleging he was killed on the 12th of the Islamic month of Muharram (meaning two days after the date of Ashura), “and this was in the name of confronting an innovation with an innovation similar to it.” In a similar vein, to counter the assertion of Shia iconography on the streets of Baghdad and elsewhere, Sunnis now have banners of their own such as the ones displaying the “Muhammad is our role-model” logo that can be seen in Sunni areas of Baghdad. Such symbolism—and this applies equally to most Shia symbolism—is meant neither to disparage nor attack the other; rather, it is a means of defining the group by clarifying the boundary separating “us” from “them.” While some symbols are more explicitly aggressive and are designed to accentuate, rather than simply highlight, the divide between “us” and “them,” in general symbols serve as “border guards” of a group’s identity; they are instruments of differentiation, cohesion, and reproduction. The appearance of such Sunni “border guards” highlights the fact that a politicized Sunni sense of self has emerged in Iraq in recent years. Today there are Sunni issues, Sunni causes, Sunni organizations, and Sunni constituencies that do not fit the pre-2003 aversion to the sectarian prism.

Importantly, neither the emergence of a Sunni identity nor the adoption of sectarian issues by Sunni politicians is a negative development in and of itself. These developments may be novel in the modern history of Sunni Iraqis, but there is nothing inherently nefarious in embracing or asserting a sectarian identity. Unfortunately, the manner in which this has unfolded in post-2003 Iraq—one of assertion and counter-assertion, belligerence and counter-belligerence—has proven destructive and divisive to Arab Iraq and recalls Buruma’s observation that communal victimhood “becomes questionable when a cultural, ethnic, religious, or national community bases its communal identity almost entirely on the sentimental solidarity of remembered victimhood. For that way lies historical myopia and, in extreme circumstances, even vendetta.”

Between an A-Sectarian Tradition and Anti-Shiism

ANOTHER PARADOX FACING SUNNI CONCEPTIONS OF SELF IS THE BALANCE between opposition to the post-2003 order and sectarian hatred. After all, the notion of a united, pluralistic Iraq is still one that carries weight in the Arab Iraqi
imagination and one to which almost all political actors and leaders at least have to pay lip service. The centrality of anti-state sentiment to Sunni sectarian identity and the sect-centric nature of much of the new Shia political elite mean that it is often difficult to separate assertions of Sunni identity from perceived anti-Shiism. Successive Shia-dominated governments in Baghdad have manipulated this feature of post-2003 Iraqi political life to their advantage.

The inescapable fact is that the post-2003 state has often carried, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, a Shia identity. As such, opposition to the state can very easily be framed as anti-Shiism (be it of the secular or the religious variety) and indeed it sometimes is. Furthermore, the violence that engulfs Iraq after 2003 quickly acquired a sectarian element. In the early days, to fight the occupation necessarily entailed fighting the Shia-dominated state; indeed, above all it entailed ensuring the failure of the new state. To vilify the state was to vilify its supporters and, as already discussed, a considerable body of Shia opinion accorded the post-2003 order a measure of legitimacy whatever their views were on the occupation and on the dismal performance of Iraq’s new political elites. Just as in many Shia minds Sunnis came to be associated with the Ba’ath, terrorism, and extremist Islamism, in many Sunni minds—in Iraq and beyond—the Shia came to be associated with the occupation, the post-2003 state, and sectarian oppression. The cycle of violence, mobilization, fear, and revenge that unfolded after 2003 created a reality of sectarian division that has been deepening ever since with only brief periods of respite.

As is often the case with inter-group relations, perceptions can count more than reality. For example, is accusing the post-2003 state of being a “Safavid state” or calling Shia politicians “Majus” a form of anti-Shiism? For most Shias it undoubtedly is. But some of the Sunnis who use these terms make the rather trite argument that these terms apply only to pro-Iranian and Iranian Shias thereby excluding “patriotic” Arab Shias. The fact is that the charge against Iraqi Shias of having Iranian sympathies or of being Iranian was one used by successive Iraqi regimes in the 20th century to silence opposition and neutralize threats emanating from Shia quarters; hence, to Shias this smacks of an all-too-familiar elitism and oppression. It combines class-based prejudice with regional discrimination that excludes rank and file Shias, who are denigrated en masse with terms like shroog and mi’dan from the upper echelons of state and society. Regardless of whether religion and sectarian dogma are the driver, there is an historical context that makes the empowerment of Shia Iraqis on the one hand and the conflation of Shia Iraqis with Iran on the other profoundly sectarian issues.

We can see this twin dynamic at play with the Sunni rejection of the state as an
Iranian puppet. From the beginning, extremist Sunni Islamist insurgents attacked Shias in word and deed on the basis of religious dogma. But perhaps more widespread was the opposition to the state on the basis that it was, and still is, widely seen as an Iranian proxy. The insurgency eventually became more openly anti-state and anti-Shia with one insurgent commander telling the Guardian in 2007, “There is a new jihad now. The jihad is against the Shias, not the Americans.”

That was in the context of the civil war following which Iraq saw a short period in which identity politics seemed to be in decline; unfortunately, the retreat of sectarian politics and sectarian entrenchment around 2009 was derailed by the controversial elections of 2010 that saw a reformulation of sectarian alliances. This was followed by Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki’s disastrous second term in office, which did anything but allay Sunni resentment against the state and his government. By the time of the Sunni protest movements of 2012–2013, anti-state sentiment and Sunni entrenchment were perhaps at an all-time high, with the line separating anti-Shia from anti-Iranian sentiment becoming thinner than ever. This has presented Sunnis with a problem in that the inescapably sectarian cast of Sunni activism has repeatedly clashed with Arab Iraqis’ sincere desire for a non-sectarian pluralistic Iraq.

Another cause of anti-Shia sentiment among Sunni opponents of the regime is Salafism. In the face of an aggressive, empowered, triumphalist, politicized Shiism, Salafism with its ingrained visceral hatred of all things Shia may seem particularly attractive to Sunni opponents of the new order, particularly those with a religious bent. This does not necessarily mean that Sunnis have turned into card-carrying Salafists en masse, but the anti-Shia vocabulary of Salafism has clearly made some headway in Iraq and indeed beyond. This is only to be expected given that Salafism offers one of the few explicitly Sunni and unabashedly anti-Shia options for Sunnis resentful of Shia power or of Sunni marginalization. As Harith al Qarawee argues: “Following the Iraq War and as a result of the heightening sectarian hostilities in the region, Sunni identity has been subject to a process of “reinvention” that evoked some Salafist beliefs, especially those that deemed Shiism as “deviance” and a major enemy.”

One new conundrum for Sunnis therefore is how to frame their opposition to a system that, openly or not, is rooted in Shia identity without being anti-Shia and thus carrying on the a-sectarian tradition that frowns on “sectarianism.” Complicating matters further is the fact that, in terms of military strength, it is jihadi Salafism with its genocidal stance toward Shias in the form of Al Qaeda in Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq, the Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham, or today’s Islamic State that have proved most effective against Iraqi forces. Sunni opponents of the Iraqi state have often had to balance the military and mobilization effectiveness
of jihadi Salafists on the one hand and jihadi Salafism’s decidedly anti-Shia and anti-nationalist positions on the other. This contradiction was perhaps best captured in the comments of one former Iraqi officer-turned-insurgent who found himself having to work with, as it was then called, the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham. Speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*, he proclaimed: “I’m not exaggerating when I say I’m a living schizophrenia case. On the one side, I refuse Al Qaeda’s ideology, but on the other I miss military life and hate the government that commands this army.” He went on to proclaim: “today I will prove to Maliki... that I deserve to be an army commander. Today I am absolutely with Al Qaeda.”

As with the paradox of needing to “be Sunni” while respecting the ideal of the non-sectarian tradition, the relationship with and distance from anti-Shiism presents Sunnis with a clash between the frames of social and political reference inherited from pre-2003 Iraq and the realities and exigencies of the past 11 years. If the enemy frames one in sectarian terms, then the enemy automatically sectarianizes itself. If the enemy in question happens to be Shia, and if the most effective counterweight to them is the rabid anti-Shiism of Salafists, completely avoiding the perception of anti-Shiism becomes exceedingly difficult.

**Between Centrifugal Tendencies and the Central State**

SUNNI OPINIONS ON FEDERALISM PERFECTLY ILLUSTRATE THE ISSUE OF INGRAINED paradoxes in emergent Sunni identity and the struggle to shed dated frames of reference. It remains a divisive issue among Sunnis, but over the past 11 years we see an easing of the restraints that were so much stronger in the early years following regime change.

Leaving the Kurdish case aside, Arab Iraqis have had a meandering relationship with the concept of federalism. To begin with, federalism was viewed with suspicion by many Arab Iraqis who feared it to be a precursor, if not a byword, for Iraq’s division. Despite that, there were many Arab Shia Iraqis who championed a federal Iraq: Shia politicians helped enshrine federalism in the Iraqi constitution in 2005, plans for a Basra region have been unsuccessfully floated by some Basrawi politicians since 2003, and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq pursued a nine-governorate super-region referred to as the “region of the center and the south” that likewise failed to materialize.
Initially, Sunni opinion was vehemently against federalism. Whether this was a rejection of federalism itself or whether it was part of a broader rejection of all things associated with the new Iraq is open to debate. Either way, by 2005 Sunni leaders were framing federalism as an existential threat to Iraq; unsurprisingly, Sunni majority provinces voted against the constitution in the constitutional referendum of 2005 with Sunni leaders citing federalism, and a host of other issues, among their reasons for doing so. Regardless of whether this reflected an attachment to the centralized state of the 20th century or a distrust of the post-2003 order as a whole, it showed an inability to grasp the significance and permanence of regime change and an inability to accept new political realities and the redundancy of old ones. As in the case of the other paradoxes discussed here, Sunni Arabs to their detriment have been much too slow in accepting the federal framework—(particularly beyond the broadly recognized “special case” of the Kurdistan Regional Government.)

Since at least 2011, however, there has been a marked shift amongst Sunnis, or at the very least among some Sunni political leaders, toward a pro-federal stance. In the summer of 2011, for example, Osama al Nujaifi, the then-Speaker of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, alluded to the possibility of Sunni federalism and even separatism if progress was not achieved on a number of political issues. That a mainstream Sunni politician was openly speaking in such terms was unprecedented. Later that year, Iraq saw three Sunni majority provinces (Salah al Din, Anbar, and Diyala) calling for federal status. But these calls were unconstitutionally blocked by the central government. Among the most important reasons behind the growing Sunni Arab calls were budgetary matters, services, and security issues underlined by a perception that these provinces were the victims of sectarian neglect and oppression. That sectarian element was inflated by the central government’s refusal to implement its own laws and constitutional procedures, opting instead to obstruct what were perfectly legal political ambitions and thereby nourishing Sunni feelings of sectarian marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion. This was a major miscalculation on the part of the Maliki government and a wasted opportunity. He could have helped further integrate Sunni Iraqis into the state and strengthen the legitimacy of the post-2003 order by taking advantage of a Sunni willingness to accept the state and resort to official channels to address grievances. As Najih al Mizan, the then-head of the Committee for the Formation of Federal Regions in Salah al Din, put it: “We, the provinces that rejected the constitution and who fought the government, now resort to their own rules and their own constitution and they close the door on us. What are we supposed to do?”
The idea of Sunni federal regions has continued to gain traction as relations between the Maliki government and Sunni leaders and Sunni provinces have deteriorated. In 2012–2013, federalism emerged as something of a cause célèbre among some sections of the Sunni protest movement, though by no means all. There seemed to have been a sense that having failed with boycotts, taking up arms, and participation, the time had come for Sunnis to administer their own regions. However, there remains considerable opposition to the idea of Sunni federalism from within the Sunni Arab communities, and it is a rejection rooted in the same dated frames of reference that formed the basis of Sunni rejection of the idea in 2003–2005. Nevertheless, even if it has taken up to 11 years, taboos are being broken by the urgency of Iraq’s recurring crises and by the demands that these have imposed upon all Iraqis, including the Sunni communities and their political leaders. Where it was once nationalistic heresy to speak of federalism, today some of the previously most ardent opponents of the federal framework have openly begun advocating federal regions for Sunni majority provinces as the only solution left for Sunni Iraqis and for Iraq itself. This may signal the beginning of a much-delayed, and no doubt much-reluctant, Sunni acceptance of the irretrievable demise of the ideal of a strong central state in 2003.

The spectacular downturn of events beginning in June 2014 with the fall of entire Sunni-majority provinces to a new insurgency and the Islamic State has only strengthened the case for Sunni federal regions. Given all that has happened since 2003, advocating a strong centralized and sect-blind state is, in the short term at least, simply absurd. The increasing willingness to accept the idea of Sunni federal regions shows that even the need to pay lip service to the ideal of a centralized government has begun to wane. With the events of the summer of 2014, some analysts have argued that stitching Iraq back together in any shape or form will be difficult, let alone an Iraq with a centralized state. Indeed, the levels of mutual mistrust, suspicion, and resentment between Sunni and Shia political leaders and between significant sections of their constituencies seems to mandate far-reaching decentralization if Arab Iraq is to continue as a unified state. In the immediate aftermath of the fall of Mosul, the governor of Ninewa, Atheel al Nujaifi, expressed a fairly familiar position but one that seems to have received a boost of support—at least if judging by social media—namely, the formation of either a single Sunni region or multiple Sunni regions based on current provincial boundaries. Indeed, there seems to be a growing sense that something fundamental changed in June 2014; as Atheel al Nujaifi put it: “the project [federalism in Sunni areas] has become an urgent need for the region and Sunnis cannot stay within the previous contexts anymore.”

One Iraqi commentator
affiliated with the Sunni Popular Movement put it more bluntly: “We want to rule ourselves... I don’t want a Shia to rule me.” This openly pro-federal stance was unheard of in the early years following regime change and such a blunt assertion of a Sunni sectarian identity and the rejection of the sectarian other were likewise considered taboo.

The Iraq Contagion

IRAQ TODAY IS IN LIMBO: IN ADDITION TO RESURGENT MILITANCY AND THE STATE’S loss of control of vast swaths of territory and major urban centers, a new government has yet to be formed following the elections of April 30, 2014. With regard to the future of Iraq’s Sunnis, their role in Iraq, and indeed the future of the Iraqi state, much will depend on the nature of the next government, on its composition, its policy toward the current crisis, and the vision that it ultimately attempts to implement for Iraq. The emergence of a Sunni Iraqi identity need not be detrimental to sectarian relations or to state-Sunni relations. As evidenced by the widespread Sunni participation in the elections of 2010, it is the context that dictates the nature of sectarian relations and how sectarian identity is manifested at any given time. External pressures, the weight of the past 11 years and a host of other issues mean that there will be no quick fixes for the impasse that Sunnis—and Iraq more broadly—find themselves in today. Nevertheless, a successful elite bargain with broad popular support on all sides will at least have a chance of beginning the long process of remedying Iraqi governance and politics and, by extension, remedying Iraqi sectarian relations.

Having said that, identity is not something that can be switched off at the signing of an inclusive deal: sectarian identity, be it Sunni or Shia, will continue to be a salient factor in Iraqi politics and society for the foreseeable future. What makes this worrying is not that sectarian identities are inherently poisonous; rather, it is the domestic and regional contexts in which sectarian relations are playing out that should give cause for alarm. 2003 was pivotal not just for Iraq but for the region. Many of the processes that have been witnessed in Iraq have had a significant echo in the Arab world, and this is particularly relevant to the changes that have happened to Sunni Arab conceptions of self since 2003.

The Sunni-Shia divide and the awakening of a distinctly Sunni sense of themselves have shaped, and been shaped by, regional dynamics far beyond Iraq. Regional state actors have exacerbated Sunni-Shia tensions in Iraq and beyond due
to worries about the extension of Iranian power triggered by the empowerment of Shia and Shia-centric political actors in Iraq. As noted by Mari Luomi, regional powers have reinforced the sectarian divide primarily due to geopolitical considerations. They want to contain Iranian power and manage domestic distributions of power. They also want to address external and internal security concerns, not the least of which are those relating to domestic Shia populations in some Sunni controlled states.\(^{54}\) While regional powers have exploited the sectarian divide as a foreign and domestic policy tool, this has been facilitated by the fact that it also feeds off latent but nevertheless extant sectarian fears and prejudices. As such, events in Iraq have triggered a Sunni identity-awakening of sorts that has aligned with the policy prerogatives of regional powers; in the process, Sunni identity at the societal level and the use of sectarian identity at the state level have acted in a mutually reinforcing and cyclical way. As Heiko Wimmen puts it in his study of sectarian relations and the Arab Spring: “While leaders certainly worked hard and in some cases applied brute force to herd their wayward flocks back into sectarian corrals, the quick and resounding success of these efforts relied on dispositions and dynamics already present in these societies.”\(^{55}\)

Since the shock of 2003 and the rewriting of the balance of sectarian power relations in Iraq, a variety of factors has contributed to the normative effect that sectarian politics have had across the region. The factors include the cumulative effect of Iraqi sectarian politics, Hezbollah’s more robust stance post-2008, the unrest in Bahrain, and above all the civil war in Syria. Sectarian identities, both Sunni and Shia, are undeniably a salient factor in society and politics in Iraq and parts of the Arab world in a manner not seen in modern history. The reinvention of Sunni identity in Iraq has reverberated throughout the Arab world with transnational links and solidarities being strengthened and has augmented the salience of Sunni identity and its importance to conceptions of self among significant sections of Arab societies.

The sectarian prism’s ability to color perceptions regarding regional events today can scarcely be exaggerated. Fears of sectarian encirclement are so easily aroused that there have been instances of the Sunni-Shia divide becoming a contentious issue, even to the point of lethal violence, in some unlikely places. For example, in 2013 Egyptian Salafists embarked on a campaign to counter the “spread of Shiism” in Egypt despite the country having a minuscule Shia population.

The Syrian civil war has had a devastating effect on sectarian relations and has further radicalized segments of Sunni and Shia societies—not just in the Arab world but beyond as well.\(^{56}\) Jihadi groups, who thanks to the ever-increasingly intertwined conflicts in Iraq and Syria are unfortunately enjoying an unprecedented
Golden Age, seem far more focused on fighting sectarian war than with fighting Israel or “the West” and its Muslim allies. To a large extent, sectarian hate has displaced anti-Americanism or anti-Israeli sentiment in jihadi circles in the Arab world.\(^57\) Once again this has highlighted the rise of a salient Sunni identity in the Arab world and the spreading influence of Salafist frames of anti-Shiism.\(^58\) For example, Salafism in Lebanon has been making much headway among Lebanese Sunnis resentful of an empowered Hezbollah and concerned about developments in the Syrian civil war.\(^59\) As has been noticed among some Sunnis across the region, many Lebanese Sunnis see their fate in Lebanon tied to the fate of Sunnis in Syria and elsewhere as they try to resist what they fear will be encirclement by an Iranian-led coalition of Shia forces. As discussed in the case of Iraq, militant Salafism is seen as one of the more effective counterweights to any threats posed by Shia actors. Needless to say, this entails a Sunni sectarian self-conception that is overwhelmingly defined by its opposition to the Shia.

The inflammation of sectarian identities in Iraq quickly spread across the region with the aid of new forms of technology and communication, most notably social media and private satellite channels. They helped set a backdrop of toxic sectarian relations for subsequent developments in Lebanon, Bahrain, Syria and elsewhere. Bizarrely, the accentuated Sunni sectarian identity that this helped create can be witnessed as far as Southeast Asia. In the autumn of 2013, the Universiti Sains Malaysian held a seminar entitled “confronting the Shia virus”—this in a country where the Shia population officially stands at about 1 percent of Malaysian Muslims.\(^60\) This was followed by a similar public event in nearby Indonesia a few months later where a call for an anti-Shia jihad was made.\(^61\) Analysts believe that this was related to the electioneering that was underway at the time; however, it speaks volumes about the salience and transnationalism of Sunni identity today that anti-Shiism passes as a populist message in a country where Shias form less than 1 percent of the population. It is a sect-centric Islamic identity that is juxtaposed against the sectarian other as much as the religious other. In the Arab world, this sect-centric Islamic identity that appeals to transnational Sunni solidarity was, for example, very much in evidence at a conference held in Doha in support of the Syrian people in early 2013, where Sa’eed al Lafi, a spokesman of the then-ongoing Iraqi protests declared: “with this slogan \textit{[Allahu Akbar]} we inaugurated a revolution in Iraq that completes what our brothers started in Syria. We say to them: we are not a sect, we are a nation \textit{[ummah]}.” As if to underline the point, this was met with chants of, “one, one, one, Sunni blood is one.”\(^62\)

Yearning for a supposedly a-sectarian pre-2003 past is futile in the short-term. What is required is, first, an acceptance and recognition of sectarian identities
and the legitimacy of embracing a non-belligerent sectarian identity within the national framework. Secondly, the more regional powers are able to decouple geopolitical interest from the prism of “sectarianism”, the more benign sectarian relations will become. Third, the more sect-neutral a state appears, the more society can divorce sectarian identity from political interest thereby sapping the politicization of sectarian identities that has been underway for some time. Finally, there are sectarian grievances and competing forms of sectarian victimhood at play in several countries relating to contentious national historical memories and perceptions of sectarian oppression and entitlement. The means with which these can be addressed will differ according to context but will never be easy. And yet, without resolving these long-standing and group-defining differences, communal relations will always be flammable. As Steven Pinker argues with regard to violence and ethnic coexistence, communal relations get ugly when inter-mingled groups “keep long memories of harms committed by their neighbors’ ancestors while being unrepentant for harms committed by their own, and live under crappy governments that mythologize one group’s glorious history while excluding others from the social contract.”

Meeting these requirements, and any others that have been suggested elsewhere, is exceedingly difficult in today’s Middle East. The sectarian climate in Iraq and parts of the Arab world is an inescapable, though not an all-encompassing fact. Unfortunately, in the places where it matters most, moderate or a-sectarian voices have become increasingly marginalized. This is not because they lack popular appeal but because the empowerment of sect-centric forces has proven self-perpetuating in that it has created the fear upon which it thrives. This cycle may eventually be broken, but it will take time and, given the gravity of the crises that it has spawned, may even require a generational change. Until then, the prism of sectarian identities will continue to be an era-defining feature of Iraq and other nations in the region.

NOTES

1. Throughout this essay, “sectarian relations” will be used to refer specifically to Sunni-Shia relations. Rather than a definitional stance, this merely reflects my research interests and the subject at hand. The term “sectarianism” appears in quotation marks throughout, the reason being that the term has no definitive meaning. Until we are able to define “sectarianism,” a
more coherent way of addressing the issue would be to use the term “sectarian” followed by
the appropriate suffix: sectarian hate; sectarian unity; sectarian discrimination, and so forth.

2. Commenting on secular Shias in pre-2003 Iraq—though I would extend this to Shias more
broadly—Hasan al Alawi remarked: “A secular Shia is likely to accept any accusation except
this one [sectarianism]. He may boast of his leaving the Islamic fold, of his atheism and sin-
ful conduct... however at the accusation of sectarianism he will stand terrified. He may even
assume contradictory characteristics to prove the opposite whereas the sectarian Sunni can
play his role under the shadow of the state and its administrative norms and values calmly
and with confidence in a kind of normative right.” Hasan Al Alawi, Al Shia wal Dawla al
Qawmiya fi al Iraq 1914–1990 (The Shia and the National State in Iraq 1914–1990), self-

3. Visitors to Baghdad will be immediately struck by the forceful assertion of Shia symbolism
throughout the city. More broadly, as a result of Shia empowerment and the violent backlash
that this empowerment elicited, one can see this assertive, sometimes aggressive, Shism in
the songs and poetry of various Shia groups, the proliferation of transnational Shia militancy
and even the discourse used by Shia politicians in Iraq—for an egregious example of the lat-
ter see some of Hanan al Fatlawi MP’s more controversial comments available on YouTube.


ample that perfectly illustrates the point regarding identity, dominance, and discourse: “An
old-style white comedian will often start a joke: “there’s this bloke walking down the street
and he meets this black geezer,’ never thinking to race the bloke as well as the geezer.”

6. Similarly Fanon argued: “When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sen-
sitizing action takes place ... The black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of
his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give
119.

7. This can very well be expanded and applied to sectarian identity on the transnational, reli-
gious level: for the most part, Sunni Muslims may see themselves as “simply Muslims.” They
are the ingroup who have no need to validate their Islamic identity and who have rarely felt
the need to formulate and assert a Sunni identity. By contrast, Shia identity (or indeed any Is-
lamic outgroup’s identity) is far more aware of its own otherness within the Islamic world.

8. As a result, one is far more likely to hear of a “sectarian issue” in pre-2003 Iraq from a Shia
Iraqi, just as one is far more likely to hear of a “sectarian issue” in post-2003 Iraq from a
Sunni Iraqi.

9. The Iranian revolution of 1979 is perhaps the most prominent exception. It would be difficult
to think of another instance in the 20th century where Sunni Arabs had reason to dwell upon their sectarian identity. Indeed the Arab response to the challenge presented by the Iranian revolution included a rise in the publication of sectarian polemics aimed at undermining Shi'ism's Islamic credentials and by extension the credibility of the Iranian revolution. See Ali al Mu'min, Min al Mathhabiyah ila al Ta’ifiyyah: Al Mas’ala al Ta’ifiyyah fil Waqui’i al Islami, (From Schools of Thought to Sectarianism: the Sectarian Question in Islamic Reality), Beirut: Dar al Kawakib, 2007, pp. 128. For the effects of the Iranian revolution on sectarian relations in Pakistan see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shia and Sunni Identities.” Modern Asian Studies, vol. 32, no. 3, Jul. 1998, pp. 689–716.


16. Recently the term “Maliki Sunnis” has emerged to denote those Sunni figures who are deemed too close to the government of Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki and who are perceived to have “sold out” to the Prime Minister.


18. A renewed insurgency has been underway since spring 2013 and more so since December 2013 when the Prime Minister ordered the shut down of the Sunni protest camps in Fallujah
and elsewhere. Since then the state has had only partial control of Anbar. In June 2014, insurgents led by the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, as they were then known, took over Mosul after which the government lost control of most of Ninewa, Salah al Din and Anbar provinces to a patchwork of insurgent groups. The fall of Mosul is likely a turning point in the renewed insurgency and may be the most critical crisis faced by the crisis-ridden post-2003 state.

19. As was common in 2003–2008, Sunni figures often distinguish between what they regard as legitimate (even if violent) resistance to the state and “terrorism.” As such anti-government outlets such as Baghdad television (which is associated with former Speaker of Parliament Osama al Nujaifi’s Mutahidun political bloc) describes those fighting the Iraqi security forces as “tribal revolutionaries.” Nujaifi himself uses the term “revolution” to describe the renewed insurgency while accepting that, “terrorists are taking advantage of it.” See http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/07/12/iraqs-crisis-wont-be-resolved-by-fighting-sunni-leader-says/?post+generic=%3Ftid%3Dsm_twitter_washingtonpost. Similarly, the Grand Mufti of Iraq, Sunni cleric Rafi’i al Rifai’i rejected the label of “terrorist” referring instead to “rebels” or “revolutionaries.” See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KL9XO63TGAM. Interestingly Rafai’i was incensed by the Shia clerical establishment’s call for Iraqis to join the armed forces following the fall of Mosul and other areas north of Baghdad. This illustrates how many Shias view the state as somewhat legitimate whatever the shortcomings of the government of the day and that staving off an existential threat to the state is a “national duty”—much to the chagrin of many Sunnis. Ironically the exact reverse happened in 2003: whatever their displeasure with Saddam’s regime, opposing the invasion was a national duty to many Sunnis whereas for many Shias who accorded the state no legitimacy whatsoever, its demise was welcomed even if it was at the cost of an invasion.

20. There are no reliable figures available and population breakdowns are based on extrapolations from outdated censuses that themselves did not accurately measure the demographic weight of sects.

21. The argument commonly made by Sunni Arabs is that they constitute 42 percent of the Iraqi population while the Shia account for 41 percent; hence, according to this logic, alongside the mostly Sunni Kurdish north, Iraq is a Sunni-majority country. Sunni Arab Iraqis all too commonly reject any suggestion that they constitute a numerical minority. Public pronouncements to that effect have been made by Sunni figures from religious leaders such as Harith al Dhari (general secretary of the Association of Muslim Scholars) to politicians such as Khalaf al Ulayan, Muhsin Abd al Hamid (former head of the Iraqi Islamic Party) and Osama al Nujaifi to extremists such as Taha al Dulaimi. In fact, as early as August 2003 Dulaimi was calling the idea that Sunnis are a minority a lie. See http://www.islmamemo.cc/2003/10/02/2626.html.

22. Commenting on the Sunni protest movement of 2012–2013, one protestor said, “We see in these protests a chance to liberate Iraq from Iran.” Quoted in “Make or Break,” ICG, pp. 23.
More recently, in July 2014, a tribal leader at the inaugural conference of the “Tribal Sheikhs of the Iraqi Revolution” spoke of the ongoing insurgency’s aims in similar terms: “our joint fate is to move on Baghdad and liberate Baghdad from Iran and from the Safavids...” See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59oWfxORGIA. Intentionally or not, for Shias this in itself raises sectarian connotations building on a long tradition of excluding Iraqi Shias by questioning their Iraqi and Arab credentials.

23. This should not be confused with being a-sectarian or with Iraqi society not having a sectarian issue. It is precisely in the ambiguity where much of the trouble lies: alongside class and regional prejudices that are easily construed as sectarian prejudice, there is far too much that is expressed by far too many Iraqis that is perceived as sectarian by one side or the other. Unfortunately, the past eleven years have often seen perception validated by political and consequently social realities.

24. “Make or Break,” ICG, pp. 5.

25. Stephen Wicken, “Iraq’s Sunnis in Crisis,” Institute for the Study of War, Middle East Security Report II, May 2013, pp. 36. The realistic choice for Sunni voters in 2005 was between the now defunct Tawafuq, a Sunni-Islamist coalition led by the Iraqi Islamic Party, and Jabhat al Hiwar led by Saleh al Mutlag who portrayed themselves as non-sectarian but were nevertheless an implicitly Sunni entity. Tawafuq won 44 seats to Hiwar’s 11.


27. Some militant movements from the 2003-2008 period reinvented themselves or formed front organisations during the Sunni protest movement. One of the more notable examples is the Herak al Sha’abi al Sunni fil Iraq (The Sunni Popular Movement in Iraq) which is believed to be a front for insurgent groups like the Islamic Army.


29. Omar ibn al Khattab was the second of the four “Rightly Guided Caliphs” that led the Islamic community following the Prophet’s death. Shias reject the legitimacy of the first three. The first two Caliphs in particular, Abu Bakr and Omar, have been used as symbols of Sunni self-definition.

30. For examples of Iraqi Sunni poetry glorifying Omar ibn al Khattab and the Companions see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPmmhl4MgV8 and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atCKUZ60vHo. On a more profane level, even the Shia-centric and often offensive comic poetry of Riyadh al Wadi has resulted in the emergence of Sunni poets using the same blend of comedy and provocative sect-centricity in response to him. See for example http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoJ8539ushk.

31. For example, in western Baghdad, in late 2013, at the funeral procession of an assassinated
cleric-activist associated with the Sunni Popular Movement, the procession chanted: “We are the sons of this land, the sons of Omar and Qa’qa’.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B25545n0h60. Qa’qa’ is a reference to Al Qa’aqa’ bin Amro al Timeemi: an early Islamic figure (some believe he was one of the Prophet’s Companion) who fought in several battles including, most importantly in the Iraqi context, the 7th century Battle of Qadissiya between the Muslims and the Sassanid Persians.


33. Ashura (the tenth) is the tenth of the month of Muharram and marks the death of Hussein ibn Ali at the Battle of Karbala. Hussein was the Prophet’s grandson, and third of Shiism’s 12 Imams. His death is a formative event in the history of Shiism. The veneration of Hussein and the annual commemoration of his death are central to Shia identity.

34. A son of one of the Prophet’s Companions and ruler of Basra; he is viewed with disdain in Shia historiography for his role in the death of Al Mukhtar al Thaqafi who led a movement ostensibly avenging the death of Hussein ibn Ali.

35. Quoted in George Tarabishi, Hartaqat II (Heresies II), Beirut: Dar al Saqi, 2008, pp. 16.

36. “Muhammad is our role-model” emanated from a campaign by the same name that was first organized in 2010 by several Sunni Islamic organizations including the Sunni Endowments. The campaign’s climax is during the Mawlid (the commemoration of the birth of the prophet and the closest thing to an annual Sunni ritual in Iraq) and its stated aim is to familiarize the believer with the example of the Prophet Muhammad. However, in addition to the stated aims, intentionally or not, it also serves an urgent need for Sunni identity-formation and Sunni identity-expression by providing symbols and rituals of identity.


39. It is by no means the earliest example of sectarian violence after 2003 but perhaps the first spectacular sectarian attack came less than a year after regime change in March 2004 when Ashura processions were attacked in Karbala and Kadhimiya killing approximately 180 people. In early 2004 there were already reports of Shia drivers being killed on the highways running through the western provinces. See Nir Rosen, “Radicals in the Ashes of Democracy,” Asia Times Online, July 2004. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/FG24Ak01.html. Conversely, well-placed sources and eyewitnesses have consistently reported that Shia death squads were targeting selected Ba’athists almost immediately after regime change—something that
was read as the beginning of sectarian cleansing. There are also documented cases of Sunni mosques being taken over by Shia forces in Shia majority areas soon after regime change.

40. “Majus” is the Arabic for Zoroastrians. It has long been used as a derogatory term for Iranians and/or Shias.

41. Shroog (singular shroogi) originally referred to those from the east of the Tigris river specifically those from southeastern Iraq. The term has acquired a derogatory association with the working class, particularly those with links to or who are from the southern provinces generally. Mi’dan originally referred to the people of the marshes. Like shroog, it has over time acquired derogatory connotations indicating uncouthness, poverty and ignorance.


43. Having turned his back on a grand Shia alliance, Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki ran the 2010 electoral campaign under his own list, the now infamous State of Law. He sought to project himself as a nationalist and as a political strong man. His main competitor in those elections was Ayad Allawi’s Iraqiyyah list which represented, to a significant extent, the Sunni vote (despite it being ubiquitously labelled as the non-sectarian option). Maliki narrowly lost to Iraqiyyah but was nevertheless able to secure a second term in office by taking advantage of the constitutional ambiguity surrounding election results and whether government is to be formed by the largest electoral bloc or largest post-ballot coalition. More importantly, having secured a legal judgment favouring the latter stance, sectarian alliances were reformulated to ensure that Maliki could head the largest post-ballot bloc.

44. Some protestors who spoke to the International Crisis Group perfectly embodied this. A young protestor in Ramadi said, “we [Sunnis] share more with Christians than we do with Shi’ites. We cannot live with them. We refuse to leave the country under the control of Shi’ites or to toe Iran’s line.” A former army officer from Fallujah said, “the resistance did not achieve its goals. America handed over Iraq to Iran and the Shi’ites. Today we must seize the opportunity to liberate Iraq from the Iranian presence once and for all.” A fighter from Fallujah said, “What passes for an Iraqi army in fact is not; it is an Iranian army fighting with U.S. weapons. I took up weapons in defence of the Sunnis that Maliki wants to wipe out.” See International Crisis Group, “Iraq: Fallujah’s Faustian Bargain,” ICG Middle East Report No. 150, 28 April 2014. “Make or Break,” ICG.

45. Despite all the depth of division characterising sectarian relations in Arab Iraq, the ideal of a united Iraq is still popular amongst Arab Iraqis hence the absence of secessionist movements in Arab Iraq. While this may change in the future, the Iraqi nation-state continues to act as the canvass against which political imaginations are formulated in Arab Iraq. See Fanar Haddad, “Why Arab Iraq Survives,” Foreign Policy, 7 November, 2013. Available on http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/11/07/why_arab_iraq_survives

46. Harith al Qarawee, “Iraq’s Sunni divide may be too great,” Al-Monitor, 13 June, 2014. Avail-


49. The justifications given by the central government for this unconstitutional stance varied. On some occasions the arguments put forth revolved around the “readiness” of the provinces in question for federal status (the constitution makes no stipulations in that regard). On other occasions government officials accused federal projects in Sunni areas of being secret plans with which to harbour Ba’athists from the law. Indeed this charge was made by Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki himself. See Laith Hammudi, “Iraq’s Maliki lashes out at Sunni province Seeking Autonomy,” McClatchy Newspapers, 31 Oct. 2011.


51. For example, in addition to Osama al Nujaifi, the Sunni Popular Movement has advocated region formation for Sunni provinces, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR6SZgmZYZ4&list=PLOfjBLMEQFIyIWCNupRgz7frSo5oiG. Likewise the Council of Iraqi Scholars has also supported the idea as the only alternative to civil war, see http://www.majlis-iq.com/details-794.html. Examples of previously prominent Sunni figures who strongly opposed federalism until recently include former Vice President Tariq al Hashimi and former head of the now defunct Tawafuq Adnan al Dulaimi. For an example of Hashimi’s opposition to federalism in 2009 see http://classic.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11021&article=505040#.U8pa01aQd38 and for an example of his support for federalism in 2013 see http://www.skynewsarabia.com/web/article/204126/نيجحاويلا-ةرخآ-رايخ-ةللارخفاملا-كبساملا. For an example of Dulaimi’s opposition in 2005 see http://classic.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10261&article=408139#.U8nNUlaQd39 and for his support in 2013 see http://www.albayan.co.uk/article2.aspx?ID=3327.


56. The militants of the Islamic State for example comprise nationals from up to 81 countries.

57. This is clearly evident in jihadi discourse and jihadi online activism and is something other analysts have noted. See for example, Daniel Byman, “The Resurgence of Al Qaeda in Iraq.” Testimony before the joint hearing of the Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade Subcommittee and the Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Available on http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2013/12/12-resurgence-al-qaeda-iraq-byman#_ftnref13.

58. For a brief examination of how this has been reflected in sectarian discourse see Fanar Hadid, “The Language of Anti-Shiism,” Foreign Policy, August 9, 2013. http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/08/09/the_language_of_anti_shiism#.UgVn23eARiw.twitter.


62. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGX104w50H0.

Refuting Jihadism: Can Jihad Be Reclaimed?

By Rashad Ali and Hannah Stuart

Western policy-makers and academics have focused in recent years on the need to provide an effective counter-narrative to the global jihadist movement.1,2 The common threads in radicalization literature suggest a critical element of the counter-narrative should be undermining the theological authenticity of jihadist ideology. A recent literature review highlighted the role misinterpreted religious authority can play in justifying violence, reducing “moral inhibitors,” and displacing personal responsibility.3 Furthermore, it emphasized some central themes in the extremist narrative: re-conceptualizing radicalization as ideological socialization away from the mainstream, dividing the world starkly into Islamic and non-Islamic lands, and de-legitimizing the existing political order.4

In practice, many Muslim interventionists working in de-radicalization programs in community and custodial environments in the United Kingdom (UK) believe that challenging the perceived religious authenticity of the global jihad narrative is integral to their work.5 Our aim in this paper is to describe and respond to the typical theological reasoning advanced by jihadists in support of their extremist political ideology and violent activities to demonstrate that their arguments are not,
as they claim, based on Islamic consensus or traditionally recognized interpretations of classical Islamic sources.6

We analyze concepts critical to the worldview espoused by the global jihadist group al-Qaeda and the irredentist groups Hamas and Lashkar-e-Ta’iba to illustrate the typical arguments advanced by proponents of jihadist ideology as a whole. Identification of key tenets is based on their significance in framing and popularizing an extremist worldview and in efforts to legitimize violent jihadist tactics. As such, they can be found across the groups’ foundational literature and are repeated by leading ideologues as well as echoed by other individuals or groups. This leads to a self-reinforcing of the movement’s core messaging and explains, in part, the durability of the extremist narrative. The theological counter-arguments put forward in this paper are based on alternative readings of scripture citing mainstream scholars from the four medieval Sunni schools and their authorities in Islamic law7 and are informed by study at al-Azhar University in Cairo.8 We rebut major claims made by jihadists as a whole and, where possible, cite major scholars respected across the Islamist spectrum.9

Understanding the Extremist Narrative

Dar al-Harb

Central to the jihadist worldview is the binary division of the world. On one side is Dar al-Islam (“lands of Islam”), land under Muslim control that implements the religious principles of shari’a (“Islamic principles and law”) as divine law. On the other is Dar al-Harb (“lands of war”) or Dar al-Kufr (“lands of disbelief”), land that is not governed by an Islamist state. Jihadist cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (1959–present), the “most influential living Jihadi Theorist,”10 claims juridical authority for the designation of states where perceived non-Islamic rules are dominant as Dar al-Kufr:

And we hold the view of the jurists regarding the dar wherein if the laws of kufr were uppermost and the dominance therein was for the kuffar [“unbelievers”] and their legislations then it is dar al-kufr. [...] just as the term dar al-Islam is applied upon the abode in which
the laws of Islam are uppermost, even if the majority of its inhabitants are *kuffar* as long as they are submitting to the rule of Islam. Al-Maqdisi believes that no state currently meets the criteria for *Dar al-Islam*. Pre-dominant throughout al-Qaeda literature, therefore, is the corresponding claim that Muslim leaders submit to the West, do not adhere to the *shari'a* correctly, and are, therefore, legitimate enemies. Furthermore, his assertion that the implementation of *shari'a* as state law is a precondition for *Dar al-Islam* enables jihadist groups to declare war on the leaders of Muslim-majority countries without castigating the Muslim citizens they must draw on for support. The result: the whole world is a site for potential conflict.

This cornerstone of modern jihadism has endured for 30 years, in part because it co-opts widely held grievances within Muslim-majority countries and in part because its simplicity enables jihadist groups to adapt their messaging to changing political circumstances. For example, al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden’s (1957–2011) early 1996 statement on the perceived war between the “Zionist-Crusaders alliance” and global Muslims denounced the Saudi regime as “collaborators” for permitting a United States (US) military presence in the Arabian Peninsula, an issue which continues to find significant support within Sunni Muslim-majority countries. In 2011, with the world’s attention focused on the burgeoning “Arab Spring,” current al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri’s statement of support deliberately aligned the protesters’ actions with his group’s long-standing fight against “these corrupt and corruptive rulers, the Arab Zionists.”

**Muslim Land**

THE CONCEPT OF RECLAIMING OR LIBERATING PERCEIVED MUSLIM LAND—AND RETURNING IT TO *Dar al-Islam*—IS A COMMON DENOMINATOR AMONG JIHADIST GROUPS. REGARDLESS OF GEOGRAPHICAL PRIORITY, THE UNDERLYING CONCEPT IS THE SAME: WHETHER THE TERRITORIES WERE HISTORICALLY ISLAMIZED THROUGH *fath* (“conquest”) OR THROUGH *da'wa* (“proselytization”), ANY LAND PREVIOUSLY CONQUERED BY MUSLIMS OR FORMING A PART OF HISTORIC MUSLIM EMPIRES IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE MUSLIM LAND BY RELIGIOUS LAW, AND SO, ISLAMIC LAND FOREVER.

Bin Laden’s World Islamic Front 1998 manifesto, for example, further developed the rationale for “kill[ing] the Americans and their allies” with all three stated grievances a variation on reclaiming Muslim land. While the South Asian group Lashkar-e-Ta’iba focuses predominantly on Kashmir, the group’s foundational
literature displays an ideological affinity with the global jihadist outlook. Among the eight reasons listed in the pamphlet *Why Are We Waging Jihad?* is the desire to return previously conquered land to Muslim control:

Muslims ruled Andalusia (Spain) for 800 years but they were finished to the last man. Christians now rule (Spain) and we must wrest it back from them. All of India [...] were part of the Muslim empire that was lost because Muslims gave up jihad. Palestine is occupied by the Jews. The Holy Qibla-e-Awwal (First Center of Prayer) in Jerusalem is under Jewish control. Several countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Cyprus, Sicily, Ethiopia, Russian Turkistan and Chinese Turkistan...were Muslim lands and it is our duty to get these back from unbelievers.

As a result of the jihadist definition of Muslim land, three conditions apply: that such land must always be ruled over by an Islamist government at whatever cost, including warfare and terrorism; that it is forbidden to relinquish any part; and that Muslims must fight perpetually to reclaim it. Peace treaties thus are an act of religious betrayal and *jihad* a religious duty, or *fard*.

The Hamas Charter describes historic Palestine as “an Islamic Waqf [endowment] consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgment Day,” explaining that “neither a single Arab country nor all Arab countries, neither any king or president, nor all the kings and presidents, neither any organization nor all of them, be they Palestinian or Arab” has the legitimacy to give up “any part of it.”

Just as Lashkar-e-Ta’iba lists historic Muslim empires, the Hamas Charter explains that “the same goes for any land the Moslems have conquered by force.” Hamas echoes the architect of al-Qaeda’s ideology and former mentor to bin Laden, Abd Allah Yusuf ‘Azzam, who wrote in one of the earliest jihadist texts that:

> It is not permitted to include a condition in the treaty that relinquishes even a hand span of Muslim land to the Kuffar. Because, the land of Islam belongs to no one, therefore none can make negotiations over it.

The Hamas Charter further states that “any procedure in contradiction to Islamic Shari’a, where Palestine is concerned, is null and void.” This statement unilaterally precludes peace with Israel.
The Caliphate

As well as popularizing the religious necessity of re-conquering and repelling infidels from all Muslim lands, jihadists mandate the restoration of a Caliphate, conceived as an expansionist Islamic state under a single leader, or Caliph, from which to recover Muslim land and unite Muslims globally under one interpretation of shari’a. Jihadists claim evidence from Prophetic tradition obligates the necessity of one Caliph and forbids multiple rulers. They further believe that such evidence is definitive (qat‘i), and permits no other interpretations. The relevant hadith (“reported speech of the Prophet”) are:

It has been narrated on the authority of ‘Arfaja who said: I have heard the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) say: Different evils will make their appearance in the near future. Anyone who tries to disrupt the affairs of this Umma while they are united you should strike him with the sword, whoever he be. (If remonstrance does not prevail with him and he does not desist from his disruptive activities, he is to be killed). (20:4565)26

It has been narrated on the authority of Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: When oath of allegiance has been taken for two caliphs, kill the one for whom the oath was taken later. (20:4568)27

Jihadist ideologues further maintain that only an Islamist state—one that implements shari’a, and rejects cooperation with non-Muslim states—can provide the necessary security and legitimacy for its Muslim residents. For jihadists, rejection of the perceived doctrinal injunction for a Caliphate constitutes rejection of an essential aspect of Muslim belief; as such, Muslims who disagree are charged with unbelief and then declared apostates from Islam, a practice known as takfir. As a result of their dichotomous understanding of Dar al-Islam, the religious duties to reclaim Muslim land and to establish an expansionist Caliphate seeking to take Islam to all parts of the world are enduring priorities for jihadists.
Jihad Against Non-Believers

Jihadist ideologues popularize their message by misappropriating fundamental theological principles concerning jihad, specifically by advocating offensive jihad as a collective obligation until all citizens worldwide either convert to Islam or submit to Islamic rule. This was most succinctly expressed by ‘Abd Allah Yusuf ‘Azzam:

The scholars of the principles of religion have also said: “Jihad is Daw’ah [“proselytisation”] with a force, and is obligatory to perform with all available capabilities, until there remains only Muslims or people who submit to Islam.”

Targeting Civilians

Jihadists have developed theological arguments for who constitutes a legitimate target and whether targets need to be differentiated at all to circumvent the general Islamic prohibition on killing non-combatants. Significant internal debate over certain actions (i.e. the high civilian and Muslim casualties in the 9/11 attacks and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s brutal campaign in Iraq) notwithstanding, three inter-linked lines of argument for limiting or disregarding the general prohibition have emerged: reciprocity, necessity, and collectivity. The idea that jihad is a legitimate response to attacks against Muslims is central to the jihadist narrative, which advocates argue is made permissible by the Qur’anic verse, “Then whoever transgresses upon you then transgress likewise against them” (2:194). Saudi jihadist cleric Faris Ahmed Jamaan al-Showeel al-Zahrani, for example, argues:

So it is permissible for the Muslims to treat their enemies with the likeness of everything they perpetrate against the Muslims. [...] if they target our women and children—then it is the right of the Muslims to equally retaliate by targeting their women and children—and this is because of the generality of the Verses.

Lashkar-e-Ta’iba includes, “to avenge the blood of Muslims killed by unbelievers” among its eight reasons for engaging in jihad, while Hamas leaders have argued reciprocity for attacks against civilian targets. In 2002, for example, former Hamas
leader Isma'il Abu Shanab (1950–2003) stated: “It’s not targeting civilians. It is saying that if you attack mine I’ll attack yours.”

The doctrine of necessity—al-darura tubih al-mahzurat ("necessity makes permissible the prohibited")—is a well-established principle of Islamic jurisprudence. One of the best-known and most misappropriated classical invocations of military necessity is Shafi'i scholar Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali’s (1058–1111) disputed edict that, in a situation of vital necessity, universal benefit and certainty of outcome, Muslim armies are permitted to sacrifice prisoners of war from their own army who are being used as a human shield by the enemy.

In his 2003 fatwa ("religious edict") on weapons of mass destruction, al-Qaeda-linked Saudi cleric Nasir bin Hamad al-Fahd (1968–present) invoked human shields to authorize their use, when necessary in a defensive war, even if the casualties include Muslims:

Similarly, killing a Muslim is forbidden and not permitted; but if those engaged in jihad are forced to kill him because they cannot repel the infidels or fight them otherwise, it is permitted, as when the Muslim is being used as a living shield.

Collective guilt was central to bin Laden’s early declaration of war against the US. The 1998 fatwa invoked the Qur’an when stating that it was permissible to target American civilians indiscriminately in retaliation for the US seeking regional support for air strikes against Iraq:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies [...] is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, “and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,” [...]

Hamas founder Ahmad Yassin (1937–2004) said in 2001: “The Geneva Convention protects civilians in occupied territories, not civilians who are in fact occupiers. All of Israel, Tel Aviv included, is occupied Palestine. So we’re not actually targeting civilians that would go against Islam.”
Suicide Attacks

ONE OF THE TACTICS MOST POPULARLY ASSOCIATED WITH JIHADIST VIOLENCE IS the use of suicide bombings. Among the most detailed defenses of the indiscriminate nature of jihadist suicide attacks from al-Qaeda ideologues is the pamphlet, “The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations,” attributed to the influential former leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia Yusuf al-Uhayri (1973-2003). Using the doctrine of necessity, al-Uhayri asserts that suicide attacks are legitimate not only because they are a necessary response to superior military forces, but also because of the perceived benefit they bring to Muslims and Islam:

As for the effects of these [suicide] operations on the enemy, we have found, through the course of our experience that there is no other technique which strikes as much terror into their hearts, and which shatters their spirit as much. [...] On the material level, these operations inflict the heaviest losses on the enemy, and are lowest in cost to us.

The subjective nature of necessity and benefit, however, has precipitated a breadth of responses regarding permissibility. There is significant debate among contemporary clerics over which circumstances permit such attacks. For example, while the influential Qatar-based Egyptian Islamist theologian al-Qaradawi strongly criticised the targeting of American civilians in the 9/11 attacks, he had previously issued a fatwa in 1997 permitting suicide bombings in Israel due to military necessity:

The Israeli society is militaristic in nature. Both men and women serve in the army and can be drafted at any moment. On the other hand, if a child or an elderly person is killed in such an [suicide] operation, he is not killed on purpose, but by mistake, and as a result of military necessity. Necessity justifies the forbidden.

Central to the jihadist defence and propagation of suicide operations is the widening of the Islamic tradition of shahada (“bearing witness;” also “martyrdom”). This traditionally has applied to soldiers who die in the battlefield at the hands of their enemy. Now it is used to justify the killing not only of the intended targets but also of the attacker(s), innovating the term istishhad (“the act of deliberately killing oneself with the intent of seeking martyrdom”). The most detailed exposition of this
comes from al-Uwayri, who cites evidence in support of self-sacrifice for the benefit of Islam to circumvent the Qur’anic injunction against suicide. He references a hadith about a disbelieving King and a boy who refuses to renounce his faith even when faced with certain death, stating that it “is the strongest of evidences for this issue [permissibility of suicide operations].” He relates the hadith in full as follows:

In the hadith in Sahih Muslim [...] we find that the unbelieving king tried various means to kill the believing boy, failing each time. Eventually, the boy told him, “You will not be able to kill me until ... you gather people on one plateau, hang me on a palm-trunk, take an arrow from my quiver, place it in the bow, say, “In the name of Allah, the Lord of the boy,” and shoot me.” The king did this, and thereby managed to kill the boy as predicted, but the people who had gathered began saying, “We believe in Allah, the Lord of the boy!”

Al-Uwayri argues that because “the boy [...] ordered the king to kill him in the interest of the religion [...] is legitimate, and not considered suicide.” He further cites more than 40 narrations that he argues support the seeking of martyrdom in the battlefield. He focuses on an individual fighter breaking through the frontline and risking certain death to kill as many from the enemy’s forces as possible, stating:

Abu Ayyub explained that the verse [“And spend in the Path of Allah, and do not contribute to your own destruction” Qur’an 2:195] does not apply to one who plunges into the enemy ranks alone, even though it may seem to people that he is destroying himself.

Al-Uwayri concludes that willingly embracing one’s inevitable death in the furtherance of Islam—either to inflict heavy casualties against enemy forces or to strengthen the steadfastness of Muslims—is self-sacrifice and presents suicide bombers as a contemporary manifestation of this tradition.

**Treachery Towards One’s Country**

FINALLY, JIHADIST IDEOLOGUES ADVOCATE LOYALTY TO THE UMMA (“TRANSNATIONAL Muslim community”) to the exclusion of any other communal or national loyalty, the most extreme endpoint of which is inciting Muslims living in Western coun-
tries to perform acts of terrorism against their fellow citizens. Yemeni-American al-Qaeda cleric Anwar al-Awlaki (1971–2011), who played a prominent role in radicalizing and recruiting Western Muslims, regularly preached that there was a war between the West and Islam, and that, for Western Muslims, loyalty was to their religion rather than their country. In his 2010 online statement, titled “Message to the American people,” he said:

To the Muslims in America […] How can you have your loyalty to a government that is leading the war against Islam and Muslims? […] Don’t be deceived by the promises of preserving your rights from a government that is right now killing your own brothers and sisters. […] The West will eventually turn against its Muslim citizens!47

This notion of loyalty to Islam is entwined with the jihadist conception of Muslim lands. Jihadists express it as solidarity with the citizens of Muslim-majority countries perceived to be at the forefront of jihad, either by virtue of occupation (i.e., the Palestinian Territories and Kashmir) or oppression (i.e., Syria) or by the presence or recent presence of Western forces (i.e., Iraq and Afghanistan).

The theological arguments offered by jihadists are fundamental to the resultant act of terrorism, not only in the ways the perpetrators frame the world and their aims, but also in the ways they justify the violent acts they commit to achieve them. Understanding this—and their claim to exclusive truth—is essential to challenging the ideology which inspires acts of religious violence.

Introducing Alternative Narratives

The World: Dar al-Islam or Dar al-Harb?

Jihadist groups claim that their understanding of Muslim lands is based on the four medieval schools and their authorities in Islamic law. The Islamist definition of Dar al-Islam, however, is anachronistic, since the concepts of the modern nation state and state law post-date the primary sources of shari’a. According to traditional scholarship, the normative values exhibited in Dar al-Islam are the right
to practice Islamic rules and the free exhibition of the symbols of Islam (for example, the ritual prayer; the annual fast; the building of mosques; the call to prayer; the wearing of Islamic dress; and the performance of Muslim marriage).

This is exemplified by the Iraqi judge and scholar of Muslim polity and law, Abu'l-Hasan al-Mawardi (d. 1058), and the Syrian scholar, Imam Abu Zakariyya Muhyi'l-Din al-Nawawi (1233–1277). In his work on the ordinances of government, for example, al-Mawardi states:

The public acts of worship (sha’a’ir) of Islam such as group prayers in mosques and calls for prayers are the criteria by which the Prophet, peace be upon him, differentiated between the Land of Islam and the Land of Disbelief.48

In his major legal work, rawda al-talibin, al-Nawawi cites al-Mawardi’s definition of Dar al-Islam approvingly:

If a Muslim is able to declare his Islam openly and living therein (in a land dominated by non-Muslims), it is better for him to do so […] because by this it becomes Dar al-Islam […]49

The criterion adopted by al-Mawardi and al-Nawawi, therefore, was that the open practice of Islamic acts was sufficient for the land to be considered Islamic land.

In his work on Shafi'i jurisprudential doctrine, al-hawi al-kabir, al-Mawardi further states:

Where a Muslim is able to protect and isolate himself, even if he is not able to proselytize and engage in combat, in such case it would be incumbent upon him to remain in this place and not emigrate. For such a place, by the fact that he is able to isolate himself, has become a dar Islam.50

Al-Mawardi, therefore, considered living safely in non-Muslim-majority land as preferable to emigration to a Muslim land, hoping that Islam would spread by proselytization and virtue of the good example of Muslims residing there. For both al-Mawardi and al-Nawawi, emigration was considered a religious duty only when Muslims were persecuted, prevented from practicing their faith, and if it was practical to do so.51

The Shafi’i position was based upon a Prophetic practice (sunna)52 that no jihad
or fighting should take place in a region where the call to prayer (*adhan*) was heard, as the free practice of Islam indicated that the land in general was not hostile to Muslims and Islam. This is found in a *hadith* from the *al-jami’ al-sahih* (also known as the *Sahih Bukhari*) of Muhammad al-Bukhari (d. 870), and in a *hadith* from the *Sahih Muslim* of Imam Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 875). Both texts are considered, by all Sunni scholars, to be the soundest of the six main *hadith* collections and equal in authenticity:

> Whenever Allah’s Apostle attacked some people, he would never attack them till it was dawn. If he heard the Adhan (i.e. call for prayer) he would delay the fight, and if he did not hear the Adhan, he would attack them immediately after dawn.
>
> *Sahih Bukhari* (4:52:193)

The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) used to attack the enemy when it was dawn. He would listen to the Adhan; so if he heard an Adhan, he stopped, otherwise made an attack.

*Sahih Muslim* (4:745)

In *al-minhaj bi-sharh sahih muslim*, al-Nawawi’s respected thirteenth-century commentary on *Sahih Muslim*, he interprets the *hadith* as follows:

> In this narration is evidence that verily the call to prayer forbids invading (*yamna’*) a people of that area, and this is an evidence of their Islam.

Al-Nawawi further argues that this evidence of Islam can be met by as few as one individual praying.

Modern Islamic scholars have sought to reclaim this traditional understanding of *Dar al-Islam*. In his work on the influences of war in Islamic jurisprudence, the chair of Islamic jurisprudence in the College of Shari’a at Damascus University, Sheikh Wahbah Mustafa al-Zuhayli (1932–present), says:

> As for safety, it is attained in most of the places of the world today for any citizen... This opinion is shared by most of the jurists of the Maliki and Shafi’i schools of thought. They believe that when the symbols of Islam are established in a land, then that land should be considered Dar al-Islam [...]
Since the *Dar al-Islam/Dar al-Harb* paradigm has no scriptural basis, al-Zuhayli argues that it was a paralegal description of the reality of medieval international relations. As such, he believes that the descriptions resemble contemporary categories of international relations more than they constitute any theological tenet:

> It is common among Muslim legal scholars to divide the world into two abodes: the *abode of Islam* (*dar al-islam*) and that of *war* (*dar al-harb*); some scholars add a third one, the *abode of covenant* (*dar al-‘ahd* or *dar as-sulh*). [...] In fact, this division has no textual support, for no provision is made for it either in the Qur’an or in the Hadith. It is instead a transient description of what happens when war flares up between Muslims and others. It is a narration of facts, similar to those confirmed by scholars of international law, namely that war splits the international community into two parties: belligerents, in particular the States involved in war; and non-belligerents and neutrals, which comprise the remaining members of the international community.58

The political description of *Dar al-Islam* at the center of jihadist ideology is, therefore, not grounded in religious scripture. Positive definitions from the past should not be applied in a normative manner today, and the Islamist understanding should have no religious relevance in defining the nature of relationships between states in the modern world.

**Hamas and Peace with Israel**

Islamic jurists have long considered the acceptance of treaties to be a legitimate form of recognition (both of the validity of their own polity to others, and of the polities with which they are dealing). The earliest example is the Treaty of Hudaibiyya, signed in 628, between the Prophet Muhammad (on behalf of the Muslim state of Medina) and Suhayl ibn Amr, the envoy of the Quraish tribe which controlled Mecca (the city from which Muhammad had been forced to flee in 622).

The Treaty of Hudaibiyya, however, was controversial among the Medinan Muslims. The Quraish did not accept Muhammad’s description as the Messenger of God; neither did they permit those Muslims living in hard conditions in Mecca to migrate to Medina, where the Prophet and other Muslims were living safely.
While, to many of Muhammad’s followers, the treaty appeared humiliating and a sign of weakness, the Qur’an refers to the treaty as a “manifest victory” (48:1). It argued that the greater benefits facilitated by this agreement outweighed the drawbacks. The benefits included a 10-year peace, recognition of the Muslim polity, the opportunity to visit, and propagate the faith in Mecca, the political removal of any justification for Muslim persecution, and the abolition of propaganda against the Prophet.

Integral, therefore, to the discussion of peace treaties is the Islamic doctrine of necessity or benefit, which renders normally prohibited actions permissible if they are in the best interests of a community. The Treaty of Hudaibiyya also engenders discussion over whether Islamic international relations are predicated on perpetual war or peace, and, as such, whether peace treaties should be subjected to time-limits. The Shafi’i scholar, al-Nawawi, for example, believed that the Treaty of Hudaibiyya demonstrated the doctrine of need or benefit:

In this [Treaty of Hudaibiyya] there is evidence for the permissibility of making treaties with non-Muslims if there is an interest or benefit (maslaha) in doing so. There is a consensus on this (majma‘alayhi) when there is a need (haja) […] In our opinion, this should not exceed 10 years, but there is a sound view (qawl) that it is allowed without a time restriction. And Malik said there is no limit at all and it is allowed for a short time or protracted period according to the opinion of the ruler.

Al-Nawawi explained that such treaties were permissible according to whatever the rulers viewed to be in the interest of the people while acknowledging that these interests may be disputed. He further believed that, in certain circumstances, certain evils may be accepted to repel greater evils (ihtimal mafsada yasiru li daf‘ a’zam minha).

Al-Nawawi also acknowledged the lack of consensus on time limits. The plurality of thought on this issue is demonstrated further by Cordoban exegete Abu ‘Abd Allah al-Qurtubi (1214-1273), a Maliki scholar widely cited across the spectrum of Islamic and Islamist thought. Explaining the verse, “If they incline towards peace then you must incline towards it,” (8:61) al-Qurtubi states that peace treaties were acceptable for a range of time frames and in a range of circumstances:

Ibn Habib narrated from Imam Malik: “It is permitted to have treaties with polytheists for a year, two years, three years, or with-
out any time restriction (ghayr mudda)”—this can take place when the ruler deems fit. It can also take place without winning anything from the enemy and, in fact, when there is a need (haja), even by handing over properties (amwal) belonging to the Muslims, as the Prophet did.”62

One contemporary example is the 1979 Egypt–Israel Peace Treaty. The leading Mufti of al-Azhar at the time, Jad al-Haqq ‘Ali Jad al-Haqq (1917–1996), issued a detailed fatwa justifying the treaty according to shari‘a and emphasising the benefit that peace would bring to Islam and Muslims.63 Jad al-Haqq’s long declaration, published in a national newspaper, explained that peace was the primary basis of Islamic international relations. As such, treaties should be made in the best interests of the people, and, if necessary, can draw upon other principles established in Islamic law (for example, permitting the lesser of two evils for a greater benefit). He cited al-Qurtubi to substantiate his position.64

Likewise, the Salafist state Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz bin Baz (1910–1999), produced an edict—one on the permissibility of both a peace that was time-limited (muwaqqata), as well as one that was not (mutlaqa)—which also referred to the criterion of best interests. Furthermore, he referenced the Qur’anic injunction, “If they incline towards peace then you must incline towards it” (8:61), and cited the Treaty of Hudaibiyya as precedent.65 Bin Baz’s fatwa has legal precedent. There is a strong legal tradition of upholding a peace treaty even if the other party is at war with another Muslim state. This is based on the Qur’anic injunction: “But if they seek your help in religion, it is your duty to help them except against a people with whom you have a treaty of mutual alliance, and Allah is the All-Seer of what you do” (8:72).

North African Maliki scholar Abul-Abbas Ahmed al-Wanshirisi (1430/31–1508) supported this principle in his collection of North African and Andalusian fatwa, the multi-volume al-miyar al-murib, which is widely considered a primary source on the social, cultural, economic, and juridical practices of medieval al-Andalus and the Maghreb. In answer to an abstract question about the legitimacy of a Muslim empire or state having relations with another state with whom other Muslim states are at war, Imam Wanshirisi answered affirmatively, and the principle is mainstream within the Maliki School.66

The function of treaties as a legitimate Islamic mechanism for recognizing the sovereignty of other states, therefore, has a long history. It is based on Prophetic practice and is recognized by classical scholars from the four Sunni schools of law. Furthermore, neither Prophetic practice nor Sunni jurisprudence prevents a
Muslim state from entering into a peace treaty with Israel while other Muslim states choose not to.

**The Realities of the Caliphate**

Muslim scholars have differed over the necessity of having a single political leadership. For some, the *hadith* forbidding multiple rulers should be interpreted as meaning Muslims must prevent schisms when they are already united under a single leadership, not necessarily when there are already many different states and leaderships. Prominent thirteenth-century Maliki scholar al-Qurtubi, for example, stated that, “if the lands are distant and far from each other, such as Khurasan [modern Afghanistan] and Andalusia, then it is allowed [to appoint more than one leader].” A later Maliki scholar from Granada, Abu’l Hasan Ali Bin Muhammad bin Ali al-Qurashi al-Qalsadi (1412–1486), stated in his commentary on *anwar al-sunniyah*, the *hadith* collection of Ibn al-Juzay al-Kalbi al-Ghirmati (d. 1340), that the *hadith* meant it was not correct to have more than one leader in any one country.

Al-Nawawi further states that while, in general, scholars have agreed that there should not be two leaders at one time, there is the possibility of different opinions, and that this issue is “outside the definitive matters (*kharij min al-qawati’*).” Al-Nawawi then refers to the Arab jurist Muhammad Ali al-Mazari (1058–1141) and the Shafi’i Imam, al-Haramayn al-Juwayni (1028–1085), as evidence of those who accepted the permissibility of multiple political leaders. In his text on the rights and responsibilities of the rulers, *ghiyath al-umam*, al-Juwayni says:

> I do not deny the permissibility of appointing (two leaders) according to need (*haja*) and enforcing both of their executive decisions as a religious duty. But this is only permitted when there is no Imam with overall authority. [...] If they agree to appoint an Imam over them, it is a right for the two leaders to submit to the decisions of this Imam in a manner he deems appropriate.

For al-Juwayni, therefore, the division of authority is according to need. Discussing the question of two imams in two separate countries, he concluded that neither could lay claim to the leadership of all Muslims.

The issue of the Caliphate, it can be argued, is greatly exaggerated by Islamists. In fact, making political leadership a central aspect of faith and declaring Muslims...
who accepted multiple leaders to be unbelievers were traditionally considered characteristics of extremists. Shafi‘i scholar al-Ghazali, for example, stated:

Know, however, that error regarding the status of the Caliphate, whether or not establishing this office is a (communal) obligation, who qualifies for it, and related matters, cannot serve as grounds for condemning people as unbelievers. Indeed Ibn al-Kaysan denied that there was any religious obligation to have a Caliphate at all; but this does not mean that he must be branded an unbeliever. Nor do we pay any attention to those who exaggerate the matter of Imamate and equate recognition of the Imam with faith in God and His Messenger. Nor do we pay any attention to those people who oppose these people and brand them unbelievers simply on the basis of their doctrine on the Imamate. Both of these positions are extreme. For neither of the doctrines in question entails any claim that the Prophet perpetrated lies.\(^7^2\)

Al-Ghazali believed, therefore, that while a Muslim denying the recognition of political leadership would be considered mistaken by mainstream scholars, they should not be considered as outside the community of believers, and that to do so is extreme.\(^7^3\)

**Civilian Lives are Sacred**

Islamic legal tradition has consistently advocated the protection of life. According to the *hadith*, the killing of women and children is forbidden:

It is narrated by Ibn ‘Umar that a woman was found killed in one of these battles; so the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) forbade the killing of women and children.

*Sahih Muslim* (19:4320)\(^7^4\)

Narrated By Ibn ‘Umar: During some of the Ghazawat of Allah’s Apostle a woman was found killed, so Allah’s Apostle forbade the killing of women and children.

*Sahih Bukhari* (4:52:258)\(^7^5\)
Moreover, the protection of life is classically understood on the basis of humanity, and not on the basis of creed, race, or other considerations. Fourteenth-century Somali jurist and scholar Uthman bin Ali Zayla’i (d. 1342), for example, wrote: “We do not accept that the basis of moral inviolability is Islam, rather it is humanity.”

The sanctity of life unites Islamic scholars past and present and the prohibition on the killing of women and children is one of the few areas upon which there is consensus. In his commentary on umdat al-ahkam, a respected hadith collection by Hafiz ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Maqdisi (d. 1203), for example, Shafi’i scholar Ibn Daqiq al-‘Id (d. 1303) states that the hadith prohibiting the killing of women and children during war are muttafaq ‘alayhi (“agreed upon”), meaning that the two foremost hadith compilers, al-Bukhari and Muslim, agreed on its authenticity:

This is a ruling that is well known and agreed upon with regard to civilians. The hadith is understood in this way since women and children are not combatants.

It could be said that the essence of this rule (hukm) is that the basic principle is the sanctity of human life, and that taking life is only permitted if it is done to repel harm. So those who are not combatants, and are not people who normally take part in combat, are not going to cause harm (darar) in a manner similar to combatants, hence one resorts to the original rule regarding them, and that is one of prohibition.

Suicide Attacks Are Not Martyrdom

Suicide attacks, like conventional attacks, contravene the consensus prohibiting the killing of women and children and the sanctity of life that runs throughout the primary sources of shari’a. Despite claims to the contrary, neither the exhortation of suicide operations displayed by jihadist ideologues nor the qualified support offered by Islamist clerics is endorsed by classical Islamic jurisprudence on warfare. In fact, traditional rulings on the behavior of those undertaking jihad—specifically the injunction to protect life (both their own and others) and the requisite criteria for permitting the killing of Muslim prisoners—fail to support either the jihadists’ conflation of suicide and martyrdom or their use of the “human shield” defence.

In classical Islamic literature there is no explicit discussion of suicide missions.
Relevant rulings, however, can be found in the context of women on the battlefield. In his collection of North African and Andalusian fatawa, fifteenth-century Maliki scholar al-Wanshirisi, for example, answers a question about the legitimacy of those undertaking jihad attacking women. Assuming the legitimacy of warfare had been established, the majority view among classical jurists was that women could only be attacked if they were actively involved in combat on the battlefield. Part of al-Wanshirisi’s explanation for this is used by modern scholars to forbid suicide operations.

Specifically, al-Wanshirisi cited an edict from an earlier Maliki jurist, Abu’l Abbas al-Amareedh. It stated that a Muslim soldier is prohibited from fighting women and children unless they were physically attacking him and he was likely to lose his life if he refrained. If, in the course of defending himself, al-Amareedh explained, the women or children are killed then “there is no censure.” It would not be permissible, however, for a Muslim soldier not to defend himself when capable and die as a result, because “being the cause (mutasabbib) of one’s own death is haram (forbidden).” From this and similar edicts regarding conduct on the battlefield, contemporary scholars have concluded that the act of self-detonation can never be permitted, a position which excludes the jihadist equivalence to martyrdom.

Contrary to al-Qaradawi’s exhortations of the “human shield” defence in relation to suicide attacks in Israel, the majority position of the four Sunni schools is that attacking a human shield is never permissible. In his commentary on the Hanbali scholar Majd ul-Din Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 1255) hadith collection muntaqa al-akhbar, al-Shawkani states:

The ahadith [on the prohibition of killing non-combatants] in this chapter clearly indicate it is not allowed to kill women and children, as was stated by Malik and Awza’i: it is not allowed in any circumstance whatsoever, even if the enemy used them as shields or surrounded themselves with them in forts or on a ship, it would not be permitted to fire upon them or set them on fire. Shafi and the Kufans [Hanafi scholars] reconciled the traditions stating it was [only] allowed to fight them [the human shields] if they fought you. Ibn Habib from the Maliki scholars stated it was not allowed to target them even when they were fighting unless they were first to kill or trying to do so.

The use of al-Ghazali’s edict on human shields to support suicide bombings, therefore, diverges from classical sources of Islamic law and does not conform
to the cultural heritage within the four traditional schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence.

**Treachery is Prohibited in Islamic Law**

While Jihadists misappropriate Muslim loyalty to their religion, Islamic law traditionally does not permit Muslims to engage in hostile acts against the land in which they live, regardless of whether that country is Muslim-majority or not. For example, classical Islamic scholars recognised that, in lands where people’s security was granted by law, there was a social contract or covenant between the people and the state. From that covenant followed an agreement among the Sunni and Shi’i schools that breaking the laws of the land is forbidden.

The mutual recognition of rights and responsibilities accorded by a covenant was advocated by one of the most respected authorities on the Zaydi-Shi’i School, Imam Ahmad bin Yahya al-Murtadha (1362–1436). In his seminal work on *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *matn al-azhar fi fiqh al-a’immah al-athar* (commonly known as *kitab al-azhar*), al-Murtadha stated that the granting of *aman* (“safe passage”) through hostile territory to a Muslim and his property obliges Muslims to grant the same for members of that community and that any property taken by force should be returned. He further stated that as part of the covenant it is *mahdhur* (“forbidden”) to violate the *shurut* (“conditions”; sing. *shart*) of that territory.

The founders of the Shafi’i and Hanafi’i schools, Imam al-Shafi’i (767–820) and Abu Hanifa, also advocated *aman* and the concept is considered mainstream within their respective schools. In his legal text *al-muhadhab*, for example, eleventh century Shafi’i Imam, and legal specialist Abu Ishaq ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi (1003–1083) wrote:

> If a Muslim enters enemy lands with *aman* and steals or borrows money and returns to *Dar al-Islam* and the owners [...] demand it back, he is obliged to return the wealth because safe passage necessitates the guarantee of people’s wealth.

In his work on al-Nawawi’s famous commentary on *al-muhadhab*, contemporary scholar Muhammad Najib al-Muti’i states that this view was shared by Imam al-Shafi’i. Al-Muti’i further states that while Abu Hanifa also forbade the violation of property rights afforded to an individual by *aman* and referred to such violation as a religious sin, he did not legally oblige that the wealth be returned.
The sixteenth-century Shafi’i jurisprudent, Ibn Hajar al-Haythami (1504-1567), also understood that such protection is mutual and, therefore, obliges Muslims to protect non-Muslims with whom they have a covenant. When Muslims are given freedom to practice their faith and live freely within non-Muslim-majority countries or under non-Muslim rule, for example, they are obliged to defend the resident country in the event of attack. Moreover, all Muslims around the world are obliged as well. In *fath al-jawwad*, for example, al-Haythami writes:

So we would have to defend any non-Muslim with a treaty of protection (*dhimma*) as a necessary part of such a contract (*muqtada ul-aqd*), as we would even in enemy territory if there is a Muslim living therein, or a neighbouring country as opposed to any country not like this unless specified in a treaty.\(^8\)

He further states that this is *wajib* (“a necessary part of the shar’ia”\(^9\)).

Many contemporary Islamic scholars apply the classical position regarding oaths to the situation of all Muslims living in non-Muslim-majority countries today. Mauritanian Mufti bin Bayyah, for example, argues that Muslim citizens of European states benefit from religious freedom, and are obliged to adhere to the social contract (including obeying state law), as evidenced by the Qur’anic verse, “O you who have attained faith! Fulfil your agreements” (5:1). Bin Bayyah states that these rules also extend to Muslim residents, insofar as: they have chosen to enter and live in non-Muslim-majority countries under a covenant or agreement, and God has “obliged us with obedience to the law.”\(^9\)

Conclusion

The ideas outlined in this paper are intended to show the type of arguments that can be used to refute the claims made by Islamist militants and extremists. They have been well-received in both progressive and conservative political and religious circles, as well as among activists and scholars. The original report published by the Henry Jackson Society (UK) on which this paper is based received endorsements from Muslim scholars in the UK, former leaders of European jihadist networks, and academics and security experts across Europe. All focused on the importance of work in which, as one Muslim legal specialist
stated, “the views of the ‘Islamists’ are systematically shown to be perversions and distortions of the traditional positions of Islam.” Moreover, Sheikh Khalid Abdul Aziz Omran, the head of training for the Global Network for Al-Azhar Graduates, stated his hopes that the arguments would prove useful “in correcting the thinking of extremist groups that have misunderstood Jihad in Islam, thus harming themselves, their religion and humanity in general.”

Understanding the traditional plurality of views and interpretations of the primary sources of Islamic law is crucial to undermining the present-day legitimacy of jihadist ideology. The purpose is to demonstrate that jihadist claims to represent “authentic Islam” as it is found in the traditional sources and interpretations of Islamic law are false. In fact, as many scholars have argued, the jihadist understanding of Islam and edicts on warfare are actually heterodox innovations. Traditional legal opinions directly refute the jihadist movement’s claim to represent the only acceptable theological approach to these issues just as they challenge the extremist idea that traditional Islam mandates or requires jihadist struggle against modernity. Most important, this helps to undermine the main source of jihadism’s current ideological and religious strength—that is, the extremist claim to be the “true Muslims” who are fighting modernity—and it helps to show that the jihadists are, in fact, heretics.

The counter-arguments to modern jihadism described in this paper are not themselves based on new ideas. In fact, many of these arguments against religious extremism are rooted in classical Muslim scholarly discussions. We have presented some of these arguments here in the hope they will provide insights into jihadist narratives and their claims to represent “authentic Islam” and also to help empower those who wish to challenge such extremism. These arguments against the narrative of global jihad have already received much attention, for example, within Islamic centers in Denmark, where counter-terrorism practitioners, activists and radicalization academics have noted their effect. And while some extremists and critics have attempted to impugn our intentions and others for publishing the ideas presented here, these critics have not attempted to challenge the soundness of the counter-arguments to jihadism that we have presented. The fact that leading Muslim scholars have endorsed the counter-arguments to extremism in this paper may be partly responsible for this. So far, the extremists have not sought to refute these traditional arguments against them, and we believe this is because jihadism rests on a deeply flawed religious and intellectual footing. Should, however, the extremists ever decide to take on this challenge, it may become the start of a larger debate within Islam whose outcome will concern Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

2. For the purposes of this paper jihad is defined as “religiously sanctioned warfare.”

3. Dr. Alex P. Schmid, Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review, pp. 21, 24-25, 28.

4. Ibid. p. 18.

5. Author observation based on interactions with practitioners.


7. There are four enduring law schools (madhhab; pl. madhahib) in Sunni Islam: 1) the Hanafi School, founded by Abu Hanifa (699–767); mainly followed in Turkey, the countries of the Fertile Crescent, Lower Egypt, and India; 2) the Maliki School, founded by Imam Malik ibn Anas (712–795); predominant across North Africa; 3) the Shafi’i School, founded by Imam al-Shafi’i (d. 820); predominant in Egypt, Eastern Africa, and South-East Asia; and 4) the Hanbali School, founded by the Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.855); found in Saudi Arabia.
Within Sunni Islam, there is also the smaller Zahiri School; within Shia Islam, the primary law school is the Ja'fari School, followed by the Zaidi School; and, distinct from the Sunni and Shia denominations, there is also the Ibadi School. The scope of this report, however, is limited primarily to the four primary Sunni schools. See: Aisha Bewley, *Glossary of Islamic Terms*, (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1998), pp.161-178.

8. Co-author Rashad Ali has studied Islam both in traditional and modern forms and classical texts. He studied aspects of Islamic Jurisprudence at al-Azhar, in Cairo, and read Islamic Studies at Markfield.

9. Translations from Arabic sources are the author’s own. Quotations from English-language sources have been transcribed exactly as found, and include any spelling or grammatical mistakes.


13. For example, al-Maqdisi goes on to say: “However, we believe that this term has no bearing upon the inhabitants of the abodes in light of the absence of the Islamic state and its power and the domination of the apostates and their control of the reigns of rule in the lands of the Muslims.” See Al-Maqdisi, *This is Our Aqidah*, 2nd ed. (n.d.), p.62.


23. Ibid.


28. Fard al-kifaya, a communal obligation, satisfied if a sufficient number of adults perform it. See Bewley, Glossary of Islamic Terms, p.117.


42. “Destroy not yourselves. Surely Allah is ever merciful to you,” (4:29); “And spend in the Path of Allah, and do not contribute to your own destruction,” (2:195)
44. Ibid., p. 4.
45. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
46. Ibid., p. 6.
52. *Sunna*: the customary practice of a person or a group of people; it has come to refer almost exclusively to the practice of the Messenger of Allah and to the first generation of Muslims. See: Bewley, *Glossary of Islamic Terms*, p. 22.


61. Ibid.


71. Ibid.


80. Grandfather of Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya.


84. Ibid.


88. Ibid.


94. See, the following blogpost, written 10 days after the public launch of the report, as an example of UK-based extremist responses: http://mushypeas.org/harry-met-lucy/.
A series of violent incidents in China involving Uyghurs has focused increasing attention on the Turkic Muslim minority group and on the religious and political situation in their homeland, China’s vast northwestern province known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR or East Turkistan). The incidents have included an increasing number of ethnic clashes between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, explosions and Chinese military operations in XUAR, and a number of high-profile incidents involving Uyghurs. The attacks include a car attack at Tiananmen Square in 2013 as well as a violent knife attack in 2014 on passersby at the train station in Kunming that left 29 dead and 100 injured. A number of observers have seen in these attacks evidence of growing radicalization among Uyghurs.

There is no dispute that the Uyghurs as a people have grown increasingly disgruntled and shown their anger and resentment toward the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) and its policies. Some marginal groups even started to resort to violence. The question is why. For many years, PRC authorities painted Uyghur political activism and the growing unrest in the XUAR as the work of radical groups.
However, such claims have historically rested on dubious evidence. Moreover, there has always been a compelling case that it is Beijing’s repressive policies—not the transnational jihadist movement or the extremist ideology that drives it—that is the primary cause of the tensions and conflict in Xinjiang today.

Since coming to power, President Xi Jinping has deepened the PRC’s crackdown on Uyghurs in a variety of ways. For years, the PRC’s “Western Development” projects have marginalized the indigenous Uyghur populations of East Turkistan by inviting large-scale Han Chinese migration, forcing the Uyghurs’ cultural assimilation, and placing restrictions on religious and political freedoms. Meanwhile, PRC authorities have prosecuted Uyghur dissent and activism as manifestations of extremism, separatism, or terrorism. Even the moderate dissenter Ilham Tohti, a professor of economics and a winner of the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award, was jailed by the PRC on charges of inciting separatism, mostly because of his work and public statements that focused attention on the social and economic dimensions of the conflict in XUAR. The Chinese government, moreover, has systematically curtailed freedom of the press and basic liberties for Uyghurs. The government has controlled all information coming out of XUAR, including information about the violent incidents that have racked the region. Without an opportunity for political dissent, Uyghurs have come to feel more disenfranchised and pessimistic about their future in China. The absence of any political space or platform to express their legitimate grievances combined with the deterioration of economic and political conditions in XUAR are marginalizing increasing numbers of Uyghur youth and, in some instances, motivating their radicalization.

The purpose of this study is to show that the deteriorating situation in Xinjiang and rising rates of violence involving Uyghurs have been primarily the result of Chinese policies. In particular, the PRC’s policies have stamped out religious freedom and weakened indigenous and moderate religious practices among the Uyghurs. This, in turn, has been radicalizing conservative Muslims in the XUAR and leaving others who would like to leave but cannot vulnerable to exploitation by radical groups. The aggressive responses of the Chinese government to religious movements and growing grievances in the region have further fueled the conflict. Nor has the Chinese government shown any intention to take a different approach to resolving the problem. As a result, Beijing’s repressive policies combined with its intransigence and refusal to address the religious, economic, and cultural causes of the unrest in XUAR are likely to contribute to greater radicalization among Uyghurs. This will, among other things, continue to create opportunities for radical groups to penetrate and take root in the region and this could make the PRC’s fears over radicalization among Uyghurs in XUAR a self-fulfilling prophesy.
The Urumqi Riots and Their Impact

Although the conflict between Uyghurs and Han Chinese has persisted for decades, international attention to the problem has been scant. The last time the XUAR, the home of more than 10 million Uyghur Muslims, captured international headlines was during the July 2009 clashes that broke out in Urumqi, the regional capital. The clashes started as a protest about authorities’ indifference to the Han lynching of Uyghur factory workers. The incidents quickly became a violent confrontation when security forces used excessive force against Uyghurs with the help of Han Chinese civilians. The official number of fatalities from the incident varies from 192 to several hundred, and we may never know for certain how many people died. However, the sheer number of documented Uyghur round-ups and forced disappearances after the incident demonstrates that the PRC’s flagrant abuse of power is ongoing. Furthermore, the degree of top-down discrimination against Uyghurs in their own homeland was made clear by the fact that most Uyghurs allegedly involved in the ethnic clashes were given criminal sentences without due process while only a few Han Chinese received the same treatment in the aftermath of the events.

During and after the clashes, the government closed off the region to international observers for months. Officials expelled foreign journalists, disrupted Internet access and cellphone reception, and limited news from the region to the PRC’s state-run media. The Chinese government spokespeople blamed events on the so-called “three evil forces” (separatism, terrorism, and religious radicalism) and they said “radicals and separatists” were responsible for causing the clashes. Instead of investigating the local sources of the conflict, the media coverage inside the PRC blamed the clashes on the insidious involvement of the “external separatist forces.” In fact, in the post-9/11 world, the PRC has repeatedly blamed the growing unrest in XUAR on radical groups—a stance that in the post 9/11 climate, other governments have not sought to challenge.

But the social media and YouTube footage of the 2009 clashes that spread across the world shattered the PRC’s claims that jihadism was the source of the conflict. The media provided instead evidence of large-scale police brutality and revealed the social and economic roots of the conflict. For starters, there was no sign of religiously-driven radicalism during the demonstrations. The incidents took place in the northern, provincial capital of Urumqi—not in the countryside or the Southern provinces of Xinjiang where religiosity and conservatism are more
prevalent. Uyghur Muslims constitute only 10 percent of Urumqi’s population, which is largely secular. Nor was there a religious symbol or slogan that revealed a connection between the demonstrations and any external organization or network. Subsequent interviews of those involved in the clashes found that most of the participants were not members or sympathizers of radical organizations, as China claimed, but primarily educated, young people of the most Westernized city of Xinjiang. Finally, the Beijing government has provided no evidence to support its earlier claims that the protests were motivated by radical groups. Instead, interviews in the XUAR proved that the demonstrations were mostly local expressions of political and economic grievances. Protesters cited the high unemployment rate, the destruction of historic cities, increasing Han urban migration to XUAR, and the cultural assimilation policies of the Chinese government as the causes of their discontent.

Attentive observers of the conflict reject the oversimplification of the government’s narrative, instead putting forth a complex mélange of causes that stem from social and economic discrimination, forced assimilation, and religious repression at the hands of the government. Their analysis, however, has not led to any revision of Chinese policies. The Chinese regional and central governments continue to regard the issue primarily as an “Islamic threat,” and they maintain their heavy-handed policies to address the problem. Moreover, because the government tends to see religion as the only variable that explains the problem in the XUAR and terrorism as the only tactic used for redress, the religious freedom of conservative Muslims has become the primary target of repressive Chinese policies.

The Repression of Religious Freedom

EAST TURKISTAN HAS NEVER BEEN RELIGIOUSLY FREE UNDER MODERN CHINESE rule. Since the establishment of PRC rule in the region in 1949, Beijing has followed a policy of religious repression that has aimed to encourage the full assimilation of Uyghurs with the Han Chinese migrants. A major report produced by Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China documents the Chinese policies:

Documents obtained and interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch reveal a multi-tiered system of surveillance, control, and suppression of religious activity aimed at Xinjiang’s Uyghurs. At its most extreme, peaceful activists who practice their religion in a manner
deemed unacceptable by state authorities or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials are arrested, tortured, and at times executed. The harshest punishments are meted out to those accused of involvement in separatist activity, which is increasingly equated by officials with “terrorism.” Because of fears in Beijing of the power of separatist messages, independent religious activity or dissent is at times arbitrarily equated with a breach of state security, a serious crime in China and one that is frequently prosecuted.

At a more mundane and routine level, many Uyghurs experience harassment in their daily lives. Celebrating religious holidays, studying religious texts, or showing one’s religion through personal appearance are strictly forbidden at state schools. The Chinese government has instituted controls over who can be a cleric, what version of the Koran may be used, where religious gatherings may be held, and what may be said on religious occasions.

The report further revealed the problems with China’s broad legal definitions of “religious crimes” and the harsh, indiscriminate punishments for those convicted of “illegal religious activity” in the region. With the implementation of a 2005 Religious Affairs Regulation, the PRC took religious repression to a new level. The Uyghur Human Rights Project outlined the practical ramifications of this directive in a report and argued that of the 56 officially recognized ethnic groups in China, the Uyghur people face the most severe restrictions. According to this report:

Religious leaders, such as imams, are required to attend political education classes to ensure compliance with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regulations and policies; only state-approved versions of the Koran and sermons are permitted, with all unapproved religious texts treated as “illegal” publications liable to confiscation and criminal charges against whoever was found in possession of them; any outward expression of faith in government workplaces, hospitals and some private businesses, such as men wearing beards or women wearing headscarves, is forbidden; no state employees and no one under the age of 18 can enter a mosque, a measure not in force in the rest of China; organized private religious education is proscribed and facilitators of private classes in Islam are frequently charged with conducting “illegal” religious
activities; and students, teachers and government workers are prohibited from fasting during Ramadan. In addition, Uyghurs are not permitted to undertake Hajj, unless it is with an expensive official tour, in which state officials carefully vet applicants.9

The government has adopted these policies mostly out of its belief that the way to generate “social harmony” in XUAR is to stop the practice of religious freedom. Islam and its rituals—especially dietary restrictions—have drawn important divides between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, just as they have helped protect and reinforce the Uyghurs’ sense of themselves as a separate nation within China. Most significant, the religious revivals that have periodically emerged in the region have adopted a culturalist character. They have attempted to preserve, promote, and protect Muslim Uyghur identity from the impact of globalization and the PRC’s state-led campaigns to Sinicize them. Most of these movements had local Islamic roots and native-born religious leaders who were educated and trained in East Turkistan. In the past, the leaders of these revival movements had been careful to remain unassociated with external groups and not to get involved in political matters.

Most of the Uyghur revivals in East Turkistan—for example, the Meshrep movement, a cultural gathering of Uyghur youth—began not as political movements but as moral reform movements that aimed to improve the ethics of the society and encourage the revitalization of Uyghur social codes and traditions. Historically, another significant goal of Uyghur Islamic movements has been to provide basic religious education to Uyghur youth in the absence of any formal religious institutions. These efforts to promote religious education became popular among Uyghurs starting in the mid-1980s and ultimately turned into a target for the Chinese government in the 1990s. The PRC’s subsequent attacks on and repression of local religious leaders, their institutions, and their students contributed to the increasing politicization of religious movements.

During the PRC’s campaign against religious education in the 1990s, Islamic scholarship started to go underground in East Turkistan. The crackdown on Uyghur religious leaders and institutions in particular created a vacuum of religious authority in the region. The persecution of local leaders sparked small-scale protests and clashes that Chinese authorities then blamed on “radical groups.” The central government reacted to these incidents by further limiting religious freedoms. In response, demands for religious freedom increased even among the secular segments of Uyghur society.

While religious repression of Uyghurs intensified, Chinese policies in the region exacerbated other grievances. For example, the relentless Han migration to the
XUAR combined with the preferential treatment that these newcomers received from local PRC administrators magnified a growing rift between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. In the late 1980s, this added a new dimension to the conflict that generated a new wave of Uyghur opposition to Chinese rule. Instead of trying to understand the local sources of the conflict, however, the Chinese government stifled all forms of opposition. It feared that it was losing control of strategically vital territory to a rising tide of Uyghur irredentism. The PRC’s fears only worsened when the Central Asian Republics became independent from Russia in 1991 and, after this, ethnic conflict erupted in the Balkans. Fearing the “Balkanization” of its own territory, the PRC took measures to prevent the proliferation of any religious and political activity in the XUAR that might challenge its rule.

Fears of ethnic irredentism and disintegration led the Chinese government to perceive Uyghur demonstrations as an existential threat to China’s territorial integrity. Xinjiang thus came to occupy a central role in the PRC’s national security agenda. Anti-terror and anti-separatist operations became the backbone of handling the Uyghur question, and this only incited ethnic hatreds and made it easier for Beijing to ignore more sensible calls for social and economic reform. The government’s actions only further radicalized Uyghur dissent groups, which then began to question the effectiveness of peaceful strategies such as non-violent protest or formal communication with the Chinese government.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, religious repression in Xinjiang caused many Uyghur youth to leave the region and seek religious education from external sources. Initially, there were only a few destinations outside the XUAR for those who wished to receive religious education. As there was no religious educational infrastructure in post-Soviet Central Asia, the Uyghurs’ only real viable options were Turkey and Pakistan. Some of the Uyghurs who went to study in these countries came back to East Turkistan with a different set of attitudes toward the nexus of state, society, and religion. Many of these new Uyghur approaches reflected the outlooks of the foreign countries in which their advocates studied. In the 1990s, the Chinese government increasingly came to fear Uyghurs who pursued study in Turkey, a country where there is both an active network of Uyghur nationalist diaspora organizations and a tradition of reconciling Islam with secular-civic democracy. Simultaneously, many of the Uyghurs who left for Pakistan returned to Xinjiang more radicalized. Their influence, however, was minimal in Xinjiang because they lacked support among ordinary Uyghurs. But the radical agenda of these returnees made an impact on a segment of society that was increasingly pessimistic the PRC regime would pursue a more just and equitable policy in the XUAR.

These new dynamics began to create new rifts among the Islamic scholars in
East Turkistan. For instance, disputes began to emerge between different Uyghur groups in regard to religious practices, such as nezir, which is a “feast organized to commemorate the dead and regular attendance at the cemetery to pray on behalf of the deceased.” The disputes that emerged over these practices reflected the deepening theological divisions between the adherents of indigenous Uyghur Islam, which is a version of Sunni Islam heavily influenced by Sufi brotherhoods and local traditions, and the increasingly Salafist-influenced versions of Islam that came from outside East Turkistan. Importantly, the repressive policies of the Chinese government have aimed to uproot the traditional Islamic infrastructure and movements, and this has done more than anything to weaken the capacity of indigenous Islam to resist penetration from abroad. Furthermore, despite the emergence of important religious and political differences among the Xinjiang Muslim population, the PRC’s response to the “Uyghur Question” has been uniform and systematic; it has moved to suppress all expressions of Uyghur religiosity as one in the same. In fact, the Chinese government has continued to target all groups working on religious education in the region, regardless of their overall societal or political goals.

The PRC’s aggressive policy of restricting religious freedom has in turn generated a large-scale reaction within Uyghur society. In the 1990s, the amalgamation of ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious grievances within Uyghur society created the foundations for widespread unrest in the XUAR. In reality, the rapid spread of unrest across different regions and city centers of the XUAR was the result of many factors and localized struggles; they did not stem from any single centrally-organized movement, whether nationalist or religious. As a whole, however, Uyghurs from all segments of society and walks of life came to express in the 1990s their political frustrations with Chinese rule much more vocally than previous generations did.

Notwithstanding the number of violent clashes in the XUAR in the 1990s, radicalization remained a largely marginal phenomenon in Uyghur society. It certainly paled in comparison with the radicalizing trends that took root in nearby countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan. Generally speaking, mainstream Uyghur groups were peaceful and avoided any form of violent confrontation with Chinese authorities. In fact, many of the incidents that the Beijing government portrayed as religious-inspired violence were instead driven by police brutality. For instance, in two major incidents—the 1991 protests led by Zeynidin Yusuf in Baren Township of Akto County, and the 1995 demonstrations in Hotan—Uyghurs assembled to demand greater religious freedom, but PRC security forces responded with cruelty. When the international media learned of the incidents,
the PRC blamed the clashes on “religious zealots who wanted to establish an Islamic state inside Chinese territory.” But a little more digging would have uncovered that the major cause of these riots was local dynamics, including increasing government repression of religious freedoms.12

The Ghulja Incident

ETHNIC TENSIONS IN EAST TURKISTAN TOOK A FURTHER TURN FOR THE WORSE in February 1997, when Chinese security forces raided the mosques and houses of the city of Ghulja on the holiest day of the Muslim year and detained dozens of Uyghur women. The following day, the Meshrep, or traditional gathering of Uyghur youth, organized a protest in the city center against the detentions. The demonstrations turned violent when Chinese authorities once again used excessive force and arrested protesters. Many protesters were systematically tortured and executed in detention without due process of law.13 When the international media picked up the news of the violent crackdown, Chinese authorities tried once again to portray the events as a fundamentalist uprising against the PRC itself. After the fact, the PRC has officially described the Ghulja events as a terrorist action perpetrated by “Eastern Turkistani Terrorist Forces.”14 The subsequent crackdown in the area and witch-hunts led to the death and flight of many Uyghur youth. Major human rights organizations such as Amnesty International released reports that documented the gross human rights violations that had essentially turned the city into an open-air prison. According to Amnesty International:

Since 1996, the government has launched an extensive campaign against “ethnic separatists,” imposing new restrictions on religious and cultural rights and resorting increasingly to executions, arbitrary detention and show trials, and to silence real and suspected opponents.

The official reports about “separatists and terrorists” obscure a more complex reality in which many people who are not involved in violence have become the victims of human rights violations. Over the years, attempts by Uyghurs to air their views or grievances and peacefully exercise their most fundamental human rights have been met with repression. The denial of legitimate channels
for expressing grievances and discontent has led to outbursts of violence, including by people who are not involved in political opposition activities.\textsuperscript{15}

According to this report, thousands of Uyghurs were rounded up after Ghulja incident, and those detained were:

- tortured, some with particularly cruel methods which, to Amnesty International’s knowledge, are not being used elsewhere in the People’s Republic of China. Political prisoners held in prisons or labour camps are reported to be frequently subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. Some have reportedly died of ill-treatment or neglect in detention.\textsuperscript{16}

The PRC’s crackdown in Ghulja spread to other cities and towns of Xinjiang in the final years of the 1990s. Fearing government retribution, many Uyghur youth tried to flee the country, but they had few options for asylum abroad. A few hundred of these Uyghurs were able to cross the border to the newly independent Central Asian states. The influx of political refugees from China impacted the development of Uyghur nationalism in these countries. In Kazakhstan, for example, there is a sizable Uyghur population, and the arrival of Uyghurs from Xinjiang spurred a cultural and ethnic revival among Uyghur minorities. The Uyghur nationalist movements that arose in Kazakhstan had in common a secular and more inclusive tone that invited the participation of other ethnic groups, such as Kazakhs.

The growing Uyghur nationalist movement in Central Asia also began making connections with the Uyghur diaspora groups in Western countries and in Turkey during this period. Despite their best efforts, the movement initially failed to develop a strong presence in Western countries—in part because of the small size of the diaspora in the West, but also because of the limited communication between the Uyghurs of Central Asia and Western Europe. During the mid-1990s, however, some activists in Germany launched a new organization, the Eastern Turkistan European Union, which provided a good bridge between Uyghur organizations and human rights groups in the West and began to act as a major hub for Uyghur refugees seeking asylum. The German Uyghur group provided more prompt and accurate information to human rights organizations and the international media. As a result of these increasing connections between Uyghurs based in Central Asia and Europe, Central Asia also became a major center for information about Xinjiang.

At the same time, a second group of Uyghurs from East Turkistan found their
way to Turkey, where there was an existing diaspora of around five thousand Uyghurs. Uyghurs who fled to Turkey from Xinjiang became exposed to a pan-Turkic form of nationalism. Although the Uyghur connection to Turkey was weaker than and not as well-organized as the one formed with Europe, the Chinese government came to perceive it as a unique threat. Indeed, PRC officials had not forgotten that the founders of the Eastern Turkistan Republic of 1944 were mostly Uyghurs who had been educated in Turkey and who had brought their vision of pan-Turkism back to East Turkistan. The PRC’s fears were compounded by the widespread public support that the Uyghur struggle enjoyed in Turkey. It is important to remember, however, that these pro-Uyghur groups were politically moderate. Moreover, these Turks strongly opposed the use of violence to achieve these political ends.

Nevertheless, the PRC’s growing fears of the “Uyghur Threat” led Beijing to seek to export its repressive policies to its Central Asian neighbors. After the fall of the Soviet Union, China’s increasing economic and political power in the region provided it with an opportunity to project its power deeper onto the Eurasian landmass. Through bilateral agreements and, later, through the multilateral framework provided by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (the “Shanghai Five”), the Chinese government secured the cooperation of Central Asian governments in a bid to suppress Uyghur nationalism. Authorities from Bishkek to Astana cooperated with the PRC in forcibly limiting the activities of Uyghur groups and, under certain circumstances, they allowed for the extradition of refugees back to China. As a result, most Uyghur organizations in these countries were forced to close, and their members fled to evade persecution by regional authoritarian regimes. Thus, through political pressure and economic incentives, China succeeded in cracking down on Uyghur movements in Central Asia.

In the aftermath of the Ghulja incident, when pressure on Uyghurs in Central Asia was high and migration to Turkey was cumbersome because of the geographical distance, some Xinjiang Uyghurs chose to move to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The harsh terrain that these countries share with the western reaches of China made passage to them difficult for asylum seekers, but it also meant the refugees were protected from the Chinese security forces that pursued them. Those who escaped to Afghanistan found themselves under the rule of the Taliban, which in general allowed Uyghur groups to stay in Afghanistan as long as they abided by the rules of the regime. In due course, some Uyghurs from East Turkistan became more exposed to the radical ideology of the numerous criminal and terrorist organizations that had taken up residence in Afghanistan. The most prominent of these groups was the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which was
Discord Between Al-Qaeda and Uyghur Groups

AUTHORITIES IN THE PRC MAKE THE CLAIM THAT ETIM AND CONNECTED UYGHUR groups who oppose Chinese rule in East Turkistan share deep ideological and organizational linkages to Al-Qaeda and similar terrorist networks. As a result, Beijing has appealed to the international community to help thwart the activities of these Uyghur organizations. However, contrary to the claims of the PRC regime, there is evidence to suggest that Uyghurs actually had no affiliation with Al-Qaeda before the September 11 attacks. Indeed, the Uyghurs who fled to Afghanistan from China were considered outsiders by the radical groups there. In addition, most Uyghurs did not receive the same Salafist religious education that others in Afghanistan received. Those Uyghurs who were indoctrinated were relative newcomers to radical Salafist ideology, and they never advanced to leadership positions in the movement. In a 2003 interview, deputy chairman of ETIM Ablajan Kariaji revealed the sharp disagreement that emerged between Uyghurs and Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda:

In 1999, Mr. Kariaji says he and a half-dozen others went to Kandahar for an audience with Mr. bin Laden. In a lengthy speech, the Saudi militant spoke about oppression of Muslims in Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Chechnya. He didn’t mention Xinjiang, Mr. Kariaji recalls. Mr. Kariaji says he went away disappointed. “We had deep differences with the Arab fighters,” he says.

The Uyghurs’ focus on the liberation of East Turkistan made them an almost unwanted presence in the camps of Afghanistan. Moreover, the Uyghur groups that were in Afghanistan did not participate in a single attack—not even one for their own nationalistic cause—from the late 1990s until the fall of the Taliban regime. Indeed, the Public Security Department of the PRC has never accused ETIM or any Afghanistan-trained fighters of any attacks during this period.

After September 11, the Uyghur-Al-Qaeda split became more pronounced when
Uyghur groups, especially ETIM, denounced the event as an unjustified attack on innocent civilians. In a rare interview, ETIM leader Hasan Mahsum responded to questions by condemning the 9/11 attacks. Hasan Mahsum furthermore denied any form of relations with the Taliban. He said, “The East Turkistan Islamic Party hasn’t received any financial assistance from Osama Bin Laden or his Al-Qaeda organization. We don’t have any kind of organizational links with Al-Qaeda or the Taliban.”

Mahsum distinguished his organization from the other groups operating in Afghanistan by arguing that ETIM’s goal was to end tyranny and repression in the Uyghur region of China. In the interview, Mahsum claimed that the real terrorists are those who oppress and kill their own citizens, and he explicitly accused the Chinese state of this crime, citing the Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989 and the PRC’s systematic attacks against Uyghurs.

Mahsum’s statements were reiterated by other ETIM leaders and together these represented a clear effort to distinguish ETIM from other radical and jihadist groups operating in Central Asia. However, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, these differences were largely ignored by international media and by foreign governments. In fact, the PRC was quick to declare ETIM a terrorist organization, and the US and the UN followed suit in return for Beijing’s support for the Global War on Terror. The PRC initially saw this decision by the West as a green light to ramp-up not only its efforts to crush Uyghur nationalism, but also to silence prominent Uyghur activists both at home and abroad.

In reports prepared by the Chinese government, a number of human rights organizations based in Western countries were added to the official terrorist list. For instance, the PRC report called “Eastern Turkistani Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity” included such mainstream human rights organizations as the World Uyghur Youth Congress, headquartered in Germany, and some prominent Uyghur human rights activists, such as Dolkun Isa and Omer Kanat. Later on, the Bush administration emended its approach and tried to clarify the distinction between terrorists and peaceful protesters in Xinjiang, but this had little effect on PRC or its policy.

Before 9/11, in 1996 the Chinese government had launched a “strike hard” campaign against the so-called “three evil forces” of separatism, fundamentalism, and terrorism. The definitions of these three evils, however, were kept so broad that they allowed Beijing to persecute any Uyghurs who dared to call for more rights or who refused the forced assimilationist policies propagated by Beijing. The international environment and paranoia over jihadism in the aftermath of 9/11 helped the PRC to frame the conflict and unrest in the XUAR as a struggle against religious radicalism instead of a conflict created by PRC’s own repressive
policies. In one of the PRC Propaganda Department’s better-known efforts to sway international public opinion, it released an English-language video called “The Sinful Faces of East Turkistani Terrorist Forces.” In the video, detained ETIM members admit to seeing Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. However, the video fails to provide any evidence of the ETIM’s connections with al-Qaeda.27

Since 9/11, the PRC’s definition of “religious extremism” has in practice come to be broadened in XUAR to include almost all forms of religious activity. For instance, a new law in 2014 prohibits Uyghur men from having beards, and another law bars Uyghur women from wearing headscarves in public.28 Yet another law encourages citizens to inform on their neighbors to the authorities. As the prominent expert on the region Nicholas Becquelin has stated, the Chinese government’s audacity to maintain these policies publicly demonstrates its resolve to restrict basic freedoms and liberties.29

In a recent report, the Norwegian Peacebuilding Research Center mentioned some of these restrictions and their effect on ethnic relations in China. According to this report, the PRC-imposed restrictions include:

- increased surveillance of Muslims during Ramadan (especially of students and those who work in state institutions, who are prohibited from fasting or attending mosques) and the banning or heavy policing of cultural events with a religious component (such as the festivals that occur at the shrines of local saints). There are also arrests of imams, closures of mosques, and, recently, prosecutions for spreading material promoting ‘religious extremism’ on the Internet.30

As the PRC has tightened its grip across Xinjiang, it has simultaneously deepened its efforts to suppress Uyghur activism in other countries, most prominently by strengthening its ties to Central Asia and Pakistan. Those who have found asylum in neighboring countries through official channels have often been captured and detained. As a result, Uyghur refugees who have already fled have tried to avoid extradition by depending on shadowy organizations. This has created a population of thousands who wish to flee but have nowhere to run. Most of these Uyghurs are stuck in authoritarian countries between XUAR and the more democratic countries that they are striving to reach. With few options to choose from, many Uyghurs have paid exorbitant fees to be smuggled out of these countries while others have been recruited by radical organizations. Likewise, those who were smuggled out of China to other Asian countries, such as Cambodia and Vietnam, were often sent
back by local authorities for fear of Chinese reprisals. Those Uyghurs who have been unable to escape the PRC’s crackdown now face a dire and worsening situation. In addition to political and religious restrictions, the deteriorating social and economic conditions in the XuAR have led many Uyghurs to abandon hope that they will find a political solution with Beijing to their plight.

**Conclusion**

Violent clashes between Chinese government forces and Uyghur activists in the XuAR and elsewhere have increased dramatically over the last year. Three incidents in particular have become the subject of some international attention, although to this day the Chinese government has failed to make public what it knows about them. The incidents included the 2013 attack in Tiananmen Square in Beijing perpetrated by a Uyghur family (husband, wife, and mother of husband; the family’s motivations have never been clarified); a Uyghur-led attack on the train station in Kunming for which we have only the account of the Chinese security forces and which left 29 innocent dead and more than 100 injured; and a recent bomb attack in Urumqi market, which killed 31 and wounded more than 90 people, the biggest of such incidents in the XuAR itself.

The Chinese government does not deny the growing trend of violence. But it has consistently conflated these attacks and the growing instances of demonstrations against state-sponsored repression with transnational terrorist activities. Indeed, the PRC has tried to link each of these attacks to international networks of terrorism and ETIM. But evidence for such claims is presently lacking. Rather than being spurred by radical ideology, it appears the main motivation for these attacks is the anger that many ordinary Uyghurs experience living in China and the growing despair they feel in knowing that the PRC will not reform its policies. At the same time, the lack of any hard evidence proving these attacks were premeditated and inspired by transnational terrorism raises questions about the truthfulness of Chinese officials’ claims.

Since the Chinese government has suppressed and tightly controlled information about these incidents, it has been difficult for independent researchers to discern the real motivations behind these attacks. What is clear is that the PRC’s repressive policies have alienated and marginalized more conservative segments of Uyghur society, all while Beijing’s discriminatory economic and cultural practices further aggrieve secular Uyghurs. Because of their international isolation, and
with little recourse to secular politics based on nationalism or human rights, larger
cumbers of Uyghur youth have become more susceptible to radicalization emana-
ting from abroad. Nevertheless, though some radicalization of Uyghur society
has evidently occurred, the Chinese government has actively inflated this threat
to justify suppression of Uyghur national identity and politics.

The PRC’s repressive measures have tightened once again during the month of
Ramadan in 2014, as Chinese authorities told Uyghurs to ignore religious customs
and demanded that all party members, civil servants, students, and teachers not
observe Ramadan. Officials also forced Muslim restaurant owners to remain open
and reminded state-run media that observing Ramadan was a violation of Com-
munist Party discipline.35 Once Ramadan began, several Uyghur students told the
BBC that they were forced to eat meals with their professors to demonstrate they
were not observing Islamic dietary restrictions.36 This situation has only further
increased the tension in the region.

Because of the dearth of reliable information, it is difficult to assess the degree
to which radicalism could come to transform the conflict between Uyghurs and
the Chinese government in the future. However, the lack of external Western sup-
port for Uyghur rights and the absence of any meaningful pressure on the Chinese
government has meant the Uyghurs are increasingly isolated and alone.37 More-
over, the failures of the Western democracies to speak against the injustice in the
XUAR is emboldening the PRC to continue its “strike hard” policies and also con-
tributing to the growing disillusionment within Uyghur society. With no options
for making a better future for themselves in their homeland, a new generation of
Uyghurs will increasingly find themselves squeezed between a repressive Chinese
government and the temptations of radicalism.

NOTES

1. Andrew Jacobs. “China Charges Scholar with Inciting Separatism,” The New York Times, Feb-


2. Human Rights Watch, “We Are Afraid to Even Look For Them”: Enforced Disappearances in the
Wake of Xinjiang’s Protests, 2009,


3. Uyghur Human Rights Project, Can Anyone Hear Us?: Voices from the 2009 Unrest in Urumchi,


16. Ibid.


19. Ibid.


22. Later the leader of another organization listed as terrorist organization by the Chinese government Mehmet Emin Hazret gave an interview reiterating same position in regards to the conflict with China. He said “The Chinese people are not our enemy. Our problem is with the Chinese government, which violates the human rights of the Uyghur people...We have not been and will not be involved in any kind of terrorist action inside or outside China...We have been trying to solve the East Turkistan problem through peaceful means. But the Chinese government’s brutality in East Turkistan may have forced some individuals to resort to violence.” See “Separatist Leader Vows to Target Chinese Government,” Radio Free Asia, January 29, 2003, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/97878-20030129.html.


29. The Uyghur population feels increasingly alienated from Beijing, not only because of language barriers and economic underdevelopment but also because of outright discrimination in cultural and religious policies. Exclusion from China’s burgeoning economy and strict religious policies push Uyghurs to resent the Chinese government and some to pursue fundamentalist Wahhabism as a way to confront the government and own their Muslim identity. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/world/asia/20Uyghur.html.


Turkey’s Declining Democracy

By Banu Eligür

The politics of Turkey have been transformed in profound ways during the rule of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), or, as it is also commonly known, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP). The party, which has roots in the Turkish Islamist movement, first came to power in 2002. Especially since the start of its second term in 2007, the JDP has been mobilizing its followers against the institutions of Turkey’s secular democratic state and, through this, the party has exerted enormous power over the country’s executive, legislative, and the judiciary branches. Moreover, as the party’s popular support and influence has increased through the 2007 and 2011 general elections, it has steadily abandoned its earlier support for Turkey’s European Union (EU) membership process. The party has since begun to reveal its authoritarian tendencies and, by infiltrating Islamists into the state bureaucracy, it also has made efforts to impose Islamist values on Turkish society. Islamic brotherhoods and Islamist businessmen have strengthened their organizational and financial capabilities, while the JDP government has severely curtailed media and academic freedom and acted to redesign Turkey’s education system in ways that promote political Islam.

As the JDP has reshaped Turkey’s domestic politics, it also has reformulated the country’s foreign policy according to its Islamist worldview and conception of the essential “brotherhood” of all Islamic countries. As its power has grown, the JDP has abandoned Turkey’s historically balanced Middle East policy, which had
been characterized by a conservative reluctance to involve Turkey in the region’s many conflicts and a clear stance against terrorist groups. Even before the Arab Spring of 2011, the JDP actively pursued “rapprochement” and common ground with the region’s radical forces—including Iran, Syria, Hamas, and Hezbollah. In doing this, the JDP government aimed to establish Turkey as a regional “Muslim” power, and it became a vocal defender of the region’s radical forces against the West and Israel. With the start of the Arab Spring, the JDP has further modified its foreign policy along sectarian lines. It has formally sided with an emerging Sunni Islamist axis, including Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Egypt when it was under Muslim Brotherhood rule, and Hamas against a Shi’a Islamist axis represented by Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. As Turkey’s foreign policy has increasingly been defined by Islamist ideology, the common perceptions and strategic interests once shared by Turkey and its former NATO allies have been eroding. Tellingly, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated in February 2013 that EU membership “is not a must for Turkey.”

As the JDP’s power has grown, various international organizations’ reports have described the general decline of Turkish democracy, including the deterioration of press freedom, human rights, and gender equality. Freedom House, for example, in its 2014 Press Freedom report, downgraded Turkey from “partly free” to “not free” by ranking it 134th out of 197 countries, behind countries such as Nigeria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Kenya, Liberia, Uganda, Algeria, and Kuwait. (In 2013, Turkey had been ranked at 120.) Likewise, the Reporters Without Borders’ January 2014 report documented the declining press freedom in Turkey under JDP rule: Turkey’s ranking in worldwide press freedom, which was 116th in 2003, declined to 154th out of 179 countries, behind countries such as Qatar, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Libya, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Iraq. The report additionally observed that Turkey “continues to be the world’s biggest prison for journalists.”

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Index of Democracy for the year 2012 defined Turkey as a “hybrid” regime by ranking it 88th out of 167 countries, behind countries such as Bangladesh, Tanzania, Malawi, and Zambia. A hybrid regime has the trappings of democracy and holds elections but is in fact authoritarian, with little opportunity to oust the ruling party. Meanwhile, the Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) 2014 World Report noted that the JDP “has demonstrated a growing intolerance of political opposition, public protest, and critical media” and called Prime Minister Erdoğan’s method of ruling “increasingly autocratic.” Likewise, the HRW’s 2012 World Report argued that after winning the general elections for the third term in 2011, the JDP government took increasing steps to abridge rights in Turkey. “The government has not prioritized human rights
reforms since 2005,” the report stated, adding that the JDP “has restricted freedom of expression, association and assembly with laws that allow authorities to jail its critics for many months or years while they stand trial for alleged terrorism offenses on the basis of flimsy evidence.” Furthermore, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) found that Turkey followed Russia with the greatest number of violations of ECHR standards in 2013 and 2012. In 2011, Turkey was in fact the country with the highest number of violations of the ECHR.

The treatment of women in Turkey is taking a conservative Islamic tilt as well. The World Economic Forum’s 2013 Global Gender Gap Index ranked Turkey 120 out of 136 countries, behind countries such as Jordan, Ethiopia, Kuwait, Zambia, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates. This represents a further decline from 2006, when Turkey’s ranking was 105. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) 2013 report found that Turkey’s 28.7 percent employment rate for women is the lowest among 34 OECD member countries. Moreover, the JDP Justice Ministry disclosed in February 2011 that the murder rate of women in Turkey increased by 1,400 percent between 2002 and 2009. The rise of violence against women may be a reflection of the greater Islamization in Turkish society. In Islamism, the position of women is secondary given their supposed physical, mental, and moral inferiority vis-à-vis men. Prime Minister Erdoğan, while condemning the violence against women, has stated that he does not believe in equality between men and women. Moreover, even though the JDP government asserts that it has taken the necessary steps to protect women’s rights in Turkey, the law and law enforcement mechanism in the country continues to be weak.

The Political Rise of the JDP

The JDP’s power has been built around a hierarchically structured and country-wide organizational network, which includes a strong Islamist and religiously conservative constituency that is composed of a wealthy business class, civil society associations, significant media and publishing houses, periodicals, newspapers, and labor unions. Diligent party workers distribute material incentives (e.g., coal, food, healthcare, financial assistance, and scholarships) to poorly educated low-income voters in shantytowns and rural areas, and this largesse helps build loyalty to the JDP that has translated into electoral success. The JDP thus has controlled the Grand National Assembly since late 2002. The party has since
increased its votes in three consecutive general elections: from 34.3 percent in 2002, to 46.6 percent in 2007, and to 49.8 percent in 2011. In the 2007 general elections, the JDP candidate Abdullah Gül won the presidency of Turkey, and this has enabled the party to exercise unprecedented control over the executive and legislative branches of Turkish government.

During its first term (2002–2007), the JDP sought to portray itself as a pro-Western party of democratization. It downplayed its Islamist roots while it regularly took pro-EU positions and actively courted the support of Europe and the U.S. as it strove to limit the power of Turkey’s staunchly secular state establishment in the military and the judiciary. Importantly, the EU and the West more generally supported the JDP’s effort to reduce the role of the military in Turkish politics, as this was seen as an important step for EU membership. In a similar vein, the party pursued a common agenda with Turkish liberals, including the pro-Western businessmen’s association TÜSİAD (the Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association) and the secular-oriented media. As a result of this, many Western analysts regarded the JDP as an essentially democratic party that stood for pluralism and toleration. By extension, Turkey under JDP rule was seen as a model for the Muslim world.

In hindsight, it appears that the party successfully exploited Turkey’s longtime quest for EU membership to advance its own authoritarian agenda. In August 2005, Prime Minister Erdoğan pointed out that his government’s “democratic reforms” came as a result of the EU reform packages and said that the JDP has initiated “a silent revolution” in the country. Yet overall, the JDP did not increase democratization. While the JDP effectively diminished the military’s power and political influence, it also increased the power of the police, a force which is now widely seen as loyal to the JDP. While in office, the JDP has increased the total size of the police force, which Erdoğan has described as “the assurance of the regime in Turkey.”

Moreover, in January 2010 the JDP-dominated Parliament Internal Affairs Subcommittee passed an amendment in the weapons law to allow the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Industry and Commerce to import heavy weapons and equipment such as missiles, tanks, artillery, warplanes, and submarines for the police and the National Intelligence Organization. Before the amendment, the Ministry of Defense had the sole authority to import heavy weapons and only for the military. The new law, which entered into force in January 2011, is widely seen as an effort to militarily strengthen the police as a force loyal to the party. More recently, Erdoğan has praised the police officers for their “heroic” service during the crackdown on the anti-government Gezi Park protests of June 2013. During
the crackdown, eight demonstrators died (at least four as a result of police violence), more than 8,000 people were injured, 104 sustained serious head injuries, and 11 people lost an eye as a result of the police’s excessive use of force (e.g., live ammunition, tear gas, water cannon, plastic bullets, and beatings).²⁷

A close examination of the JDP’s first term reveals that it has acquired power by following the political strategy of the failed Islamist political parties that the JDP grew out of. Since its inception, part of the Islamist movement in Turkey has focused on proselytizing an Islamic way of life in the belief that the spread of Islamic piety will lead to an Islamic society and the transformation of the country into an Islamic State. Likewise, the JDP’s strategy has aimed to Islamize society from below.²⁸ It has employed a range of Islamic social networks—foundations, associations, media, dormitories, the Imam-Hatip schools (or prayer-leader and preacher schools),²⁹ private schools, and Quran courses—to establish a strong constituency and to bind together Turkey’s diverse Muslim and Islamist groups. As the JDP’s power has grown, it has increasingly pursued policies that reflect its Islamist agenda. This has included efforts to establish chapels (ibadethane) in each residential building;³⁰ trying to open up year-round Quran courses and their dormitories (which are normally only open during summer months); enabling evening-time Quran courses to provide accommodation and food for children from poor families;³¹ and making it easier for the graduates of Imam-Hatip religious schools to enroll in all departments of universities.³² Because of heavy criticism from the secular segment of society and the vetoes of the pro-secular President Ahmet Necdet Sezer in 2003 and 2004, the JDP either withdrew its proposals or postponed public deliberation over them to a later date.

The JDP’s actions in the course of its first term raised questions among secular Turks about the party’s intentions. Some thought the party was pursuing a “moderate” Islamist or conservative social agenda, but that politically it was committed to democracy. Other Turks worried that the JDP was instead hiding its Islamist political agenda and that it had embraced the practice of takīyyah (a permitted behavior of dissembling or disguise for the sake of promoting the cause of Islam). The JDP would, indeed, have had abundant reason to do this insofar as it wanted to avoid the secular military’s harsh response and the fate of its Islamist predecessors, including the National Order Party (NOP), the National Salvation Party (NSP), the Welfare Party (WP), and the Virtue Party (VP).³³ It should be noted that after four years in office, Prime Minister Erdoğan stated, “I have never changed. Islamic ideas do not change.”³⁴ Now that the party’s power has grown, and it has successfully limited the military’s political influence, it is freer to pursue an agenda that is overtly more Islamist.
The JDP Mobilizes Against the Secular-Democratic State

After its electoral victory in the 2007 general elections, the JDP abandoned its policy of seeking consensus and common agenda with Turkish liberals. The JDP-dominated parliament’s election of former JDP foreign minister Abdullah Gül as president in August 2007 gave the party greater power and allowed it to mobilize the Islamist social movement. Unlike his pro-secular predecessor President Sezer, Gül approved most of the JDP’s bills and the party’s appointments of high-ranking bureaucrats into key state institutions. Thus, in the course of Gül’s presidency, the JDP has appointed a growing number of Imam-Hatip graduates and Islamic brotherhood members as high-ranking civil servants in public administration.

With the legislative and executive branches under its control, the JDP started to increase pressure on the judiciary, universities, and the press. In December 2007, following President Gül’s approval, the JDP amended the Law on Judges and Prosecutors, which required that all judicial candidates be interviewed by the Ministry of Justice. Thus, the party created new opportunities for forming a pro-JDP cadre inside the judiciary. During the first eight years of JDP rule, more than 4,000 young lawyers and prosecutors sympathetic to the party’s policies became judges. Meanwhile, President Gül appointed Yusuf Ziya Özcan, a professor viewed in secular circles as pro-JDP, as chair of the Higher Education Board—an institution that controls all universities in Turkey. The new chairman created a pro-JDP cadre at the board. The JDP also created new opportunities for Islamist media to wield greater influence. For example, the JDP used legal means to transfer the country’s second largest media conglomerate to a pro-JDP businessman.

As JDP’s actions and policies continued to strengthen the Islamist movement, the chief public prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals filed a case with the Constitutional Court in March 2008. The case expressly asked the court to outlaw the party for being “a center of anti-secular activities” and to ban 71 party members from politics for five years. The initiative did not win the support of an important segment of the Turkish public, the U.S., or the EU. In July 2008, the Constitutional Court declared that the JDP was, in fact, a center of anti-secular activities, but the court issued a judicial warning and a financial penalty instead of outlawing the party.
Meanwhile, the JDP allied with the followers of the Fetullah Gülen congregation in the police, judiciary, and the media. The group’s leader is a self-exiled Turkish imam in the U.S. who is said to have at least one million followers in Turkey. After it allied with the followers of the Gülen congregation, the JDP used a controversial court case called Ergenekon to suppress its pro-secular critics. The Ergenekon case is based on an allegation that a large number of people conspired to launch a violent coup against the JDP government. The alleged conspirators included an array of nationalist-oriented organized crime bosses, intelligence officers, retired generals, military officers, journalists, university presidents, professors, politicians, businessmen, civil society association members, and artists. Ergenekon suspects were arrested (and some were detained) without an indictment. Authorities interrogated them based on their private phone conversations, which the police had wiretapped. The arrests of several prominent secular-oriented JDP critics in the course of the Ergenekon investigation raised suspicions that the JDP government was trying to suppress its pro-secular critics by arresting and detaining them together with possible real criminals.

In the course of the investigation, it was disclosed that the JDP government was making widespread use of wiretaps, and this became a contentious issue in Turkish politics. In June 2008, it became clear that the Ankara Heavy Criminal Court had authorized the police in April 2007 to wiretap all citizens’ phone and e-mail conversations throughout the country. Even the judiciary was not immune from the wiretapping. In November 2009, it was revealed that the wiretaps involved phones of 56 judges and prosecutors, including the chief prosecutors of Istanbul and Ankara and the central phones of the Council of State, the Supreme Court of Appeals, and a number of court houses. Even though no evidence was found suggesting that the wiretapped judges and prosecutors were linked to the alleged Ergenekon terror organization, the JDP government used the Justice Ministry, the Telecommunications Directorate, and the police to intimidate an important segment of the judiciary. Meanwhile, the JDP continued to curtail press freedom in Turkey. Those journalists who criticized the JDP government’s policies were detained as suspects of the Ergenekon terror organization or they were fired from their posts as newspaper owners bowed to government pressure.

By the Winter of 2010, the scope of the Ergenekon investigation with respect to the military had widened. In February 2010, a number of retired and serving military officers were arrested and detained, this time within the framework of the so-called “Sledgehammer” (Balyoz) investigation, which is based on the allegation that current and retired generals and military officers tried to initiate a violent coup against the JDP government. The Sledgehammer case was later combined with a
branch of the Ergenekon lawsuit. The JDP successfully used both cases to mobilize its base and public opinion against the secular military. Indeed, a January 2010 public opinion poll conducted by the Istanbul-based A&G research firm revealed the drastic decline in Turkish society’s trust in the military from around 90 percent in 2008 to 63.4 percent—a historic low—following the Ergenekon investigation. Thus, the secular military, the Islamist movement’s main adversary, no longer enjoyed its former popularity among the Turkish public.

Yet, according to The Washington Post in March 2011, much of the evidence that the prosecutors pursuing the Ergenekon investigation relied on looked “flimsy and even fabricated.” The Human Rights Watch’s 2012 report made similar arguments about the case. In addition, Turkish, U.S., and German forensic experts concluded that the digital evidence on a number of CDs in the Sledgehammer case was forged. For example, the Sledgehammer indictment asserts that the documents on the CDs were prepared in 2003 to plot a coup against the JDP government. However, those documents were prepared using the Calibri font—a typeface that Microsoft did not release until 2007. Despite this evidence that the CDs were fabricated, in September 2012 a Turkish court sentenced more than 300 current and retired generals and military officers to prison terms between 16 and 20 years in the Sledgehammer case. Later, in an August 2013 ruling in the Ergenekon case, a Turkish court sentenced 275 journalists, academicians, politicians, and high-ranking retired generals to hundreds of years of imprisonment in total and several aggravated life sentences. In October 2013, the Supreme Court of Appeals approved the convictions of 237 suspects in the Sledgehammer case and called for the re-trial of 88 convicted suspects. Meantime, the Ergenekon case has been awaiting for the Supreme Court of Appeals’ approval.

The September 2010 referendum on the JDP’s constitutional amendment package—which 58 percent of the Turkish electorate has approved of—further increased the JDP-dominated executive and legislative branches’ power over the secular judiciary. While the voter turnout in the referendum was a high 78 percent, polls suggested that nearly half of the electorate could not name a single amendment. The JDP’s distribution of economic incentives particularly to poor urban voters has played a significant role in the party’s success. Following the referendum, the size of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (SBJP) and the Constitutional Court was increased—from 7 to 22 and from 11 to 17, respectively—and President Gül and the JDP-dominated parliament appointed pro-JDP personnel to these institutions.

In the October 2010 SBJP elections, 11,000 judges and prosecutors voted for all 16 of the Justice Ministry-supported candidates—another major victory for the
JDP. The ministry’s official representation on the board increased from two to five.\textsuperscript{68} In November 2010, the new SBJP promptly approved the Justice Ministry’s annual appointment list of 190 high-ranking judges and prosecutors.\textsuperscript{69} And in December 2010, the SBJP elected chairmanships for its three chambers, which regulate promotions, appointments, duties of serving judges and prosecutors, their expulsions, and admission of new judges and prosecutors to the profession. Three Justice Ministry-supported SBJP members were also elected as the chamber chairs.\textsuperscript{70} In the winter of 2011, the JDP continued to restructure the high judiciary. In February 2011, the JDP-dominated parliament passed a new regulation to increase the number of members of the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State: The Supreme Court of Appeals’ membership increased from 250 to 387 and that of the Council of State from 95 to 156.\textsuperscript{71} The JDP maintained its policy of increasing its control over the high judiciary by appointing pro-JDP people.\textsuperscript{72}

Meanwhile, the JDP began to use its growing power to impose Islamic values on Turkish society. In January 2011, the party introduced a new regulation that severely restricted the consumption, sale, and advertisement of alcohol,\textsuperscript{73} while Erdoğan implicitly called Turkey’s first and second presidents, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü, “drunken lawmakers.”\textsuperscript{74} The new regulation officially came into force in September 2013. In March 2011, the Directorate of Religious Affairs launched the new so-called “family imam” project. Along with other religious officials including the Mufti of particular regions, the imams would pay visits to citizens’ homes to listen to their problems, provide advice on resolving them, and warn the society at large about the harms of using alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. As the imams traveled from neighborhood to neighborhood, they would collect information about the residents and help distribute assistance to the needy.\textsuperscript{75} This practice has helped to grow the party’s core constituency among Turkey’s middle and lower classes.

The fact that the Directorate of Religious Affairs represents only the Sunni sect of Islam makes the JDP’s family imam outreach particularly problematic from the perspective of pluralism and the democratic principle that the state should treat all citizens as equals—including Turkey’s Alevis, non-Muslim minorities, and nonbelievers. Nonetheless, as the JDP leaders opened up new opportunities for the Islamist mobilization across society, Islamists in the state bureaucracy,\textsuperscript{76} some other JDP officials,\textsuperscript{77} and Hizbullah members\textsuperscript{78} all followed suit. Today, the JDP’s policy initiatives are having their intended effect. A comprehensive survey by Professor Binnaz Toprak between December 2007 and July 2008 revealed that secular-oriented Turks felt they were under increasing JDP-backed Islamist pressure to conform. Secular Turks have faced increasing discrimination in their daily lives.
and workplaces from both Islamists in the bureaucracy and the brotherhoods that have become empowered under JDP rule. The effects of this in Turkish society have become evident. A February 2011 report by Istanbul-based Bilgi University entitled “Discrimination Based on Religion and Faith in Turkey” found that many victims of religious discrimination have bowed to Islamist pressure and opted for changing their life-styles.

In August 2010, the government revised the National Security Policy Paper (NSPP) and removed Islamist “reactionism” or fundamentalism from the list of threats. Before the revisions by the Interior Ministry, Foreign Ministry, General Staff, and National Intelligence Organization, Islamist reactionism had been on the list of crucial domestic threats to the secular-democratic Turkish state. The new NSPP defined the Kurdish separatist PKK terrorism as the foremost domestic threat to the Turkish state.

In January 2011, the Supreme Court of Appeals released from prison a number of high-ranking Hizbullah members along with some PKK members and other notorious criminals on the ground that the court did not approve the lower courts’ rulings on time. This occurred because of an amendment in the Turkish penal code known as the Code of Criminal Procedure. This amendment limited the imprisonment period without a conviction to 10 years unless the Supreme Court of Appeals approved lower courts’ rulings by that time. After their release, it was discovered that the Hizbullah members had actually been directing the terrorist organization by using the Internet from the Diyarbakır prison. Almost all members subsequently fled Turkey. Even though some of the released members were detained again, all were released from various prisons in October 2011. Later, in January 2012, published a seventeen-page manifesto demanding more political and cultural rights for Kurds in eastern and southeastern areas of Turkey. The demands included autonomy, independence, and the use of Kurdish as an official language. By the end of the year, had formed a political party called the “Free Cause Party” or “Hüda-Par.” It seems that the JDP regards the Hüda-Par as yet another means to Islamize the Kurds in the eastern and southeastern areas of Turkey and thus, it regards the party as a counterbalancing force against Kurdish PKK (the Kurdish Workers’ Party, also known as Kongra-Gel) separatism and terrorism.
The 2011 General Elections and Its Aftermath

The 2011 General Elections, which were a tremendous victory for the JDP,\textsuperscript{90} forced the tension between the secular military and the party to come to a head. In late July 2011, the Chief of the General Staff and commanders of the Land Forces, Air Forces, and Navy resigned from their posts to protest detentions of 250 generals and military officers as part of the Sledgehammer investigation. The detained generals and military officers were awaiting promotion at the High Military Council’s annual meeting, held between the military and government representatives. Prime Minister Erdoğan rejected the promotions. The military high command’s resignation created an unprecedented opportunity for the JDP to appoint generals that it trusted, thus consolidating the party’s control over the military. Erdoğan promptly appointed Commander of Gendarmerie Forces General Necdet Özel, who remained in office as the highest ranking commander, as the new chief of the General Staff. The pro-JDP Islamist media portrayed the general positively.\textsuperscript{91}

During its third term in power, the JDP has focused on changing the education system in ways that favor the Islamist movement. In February 2012, Erdoğan stated that his government initiated a “silent revolution” in Turkey, and he called for raising a “religious and revengeful youth.”\textsuperscript{92} Despite the protests of both center-left and center-right secular segments of Turkish society,\textsuperscript{93} in March 2012, the JDP-dominated parliament amended the mandatory education system to favor the Islamist mobilization. Among other things, it reopened the \textit{Imam-Hatip} schools, the religious secondary schools that had been closed by the secularist government following the soft military coup of 1997 in what came to be known as the “February 28 Process.”\textsuperscript{94} In the aftermath of the coup, the military released a report to the press arguing that there was a correlation between the rising number of the electorate graduating from the \textit{Imam-Hatip} schools and the increase in the Islamist Welfare Party’s votes. In order to curb the Islamist movement, the military had initiated an education reform bill designed to reduce the number of these schools.\textsuperscript{95}

The JDP’s education bill introduced a mandatory 12-year education that would be divided into three layers: four years of primary school, four years of secondary (middle) school, and four years of high school. The bill not only kept the mandatory...
teaching of the religion curriculum, but also introduced two additional elective religion courses—the Quran and the Life of Our Prophet, His Majesty. Following the vote, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that “the last trace of the February 28 process has been erased.” Moreover, a JDP parliamentarian stated in August 2012 that following the new education bill, the government had the chance to make all schools in the country follow the model and curriculum of the Imam-Hatip schools. Furthermore, in September 2012, the JDP announced that it has been working on a regulation allowing Imam-Hatip graduates’ admission to the military academies. Subsequently, the General Staff announced that it did not have the authority to reject the JDP’s draft regulation.

In the spring and summer of 2012, the JDP took further steps to roll back the freedoms that the liberal segment of Turkish society has come to take for granted. Women’s rights were a central focus. Prime Minister Erdoğan, who has said that women in Turkey should have at least three children, called abortion “murder.” In May 2012, the JDP government prepared a draft law whose stated goals was to increase fertility across the country. The draft law aims to restrict women’s rights by imposing an abortion ban after the fourth week of pregnancy (including in cases of rape and incest) while severely restricting Caesarean births (which the prime minister has described as an “unnatural” procedure).

The JDP has also sought to impose religious obligations on other parts of society. In the cultural sphere, for example, the JDP curtailed the freedom of the arts by controlling theatres’ repertories, starting with Istanbul municipality-owned city theatres. The JDP moreover announced that each theatre and opera house would have a small mosque (mescit).

In higher education, the JDP ordered that with the assistance of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, each university should have a mosque on its campus. The JDP banned the public’s celebration of national holidays, including the republic’s foundation day. It erased the “Turkish Republic” from official buildings and tried to intimidate citizens who protested the JDP’s policies by sending the riot police to disperse demonstrators.

The JDP’s efforts to replace the secular-democratic principles of the Turkish state with its conservative interpretation of Islam finally resulted in mass anti-government demonstrations throughout Turkey. These demonstrations have collectively come to be identified with the Gezi Park protests. On May 31, 2013, people from all walks of life spontaneously gathered together throughout the country to protest the JDP government’s authoritarian policies and the police’s excessive use of force against peaceful protesters. Protesters included liberals, pro-seculars, conservatives, center-leftists, center-rightists, leftists, anti-capitalist Islamists, Turkish
nationalists, Alevi, white-collar professionals, workers, and students. The Gezi Park protests revealed the deep polarization that now exists in society, mainly liberals and pro-seculars versus Islamists and urban and rural poor, who receive JDP incentives. Despite the mass protests, Prime Minister Erdoğan managed to consolidate his power.

By the fall of 2013, the JDP had silenced its pro-secular rivals in the state establishment and mobilized against its former ally, the Gülen congregation. A considerable portion of private test preparation schools, which prepare students for university entrance exams, are financed and run by followers of the Gülen congregation. It uses these schools as social networks for recruiting new young members to the congregation. To weaken the Gülen congregation’s organizational and financial power, the JDP prepared an education bill intended to close down these schools. In March 2014, the JDP-dominated parliament passed the bill, which requires the closure of these schools by September 2015, and President Gül approved it.

In mid-December 2013, on the eve of the March 2014 local elections, the Gülen congregation mobilized its followers in the police and judiciary (some of whom played crucial roles during the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer investigations) against Erdoğan’s close circle by conducting a corruption probe in mid-December 2013. The police detained around 60 people on charges of money laundering, gold smuggling, and bribery. They included sons of the minister of interior, the economy minister, the environment and urban planning minister, the chair of a public bank, several bureaucrats, and high-profile businessmen. In May 2014, an Istanbul prosecutor dismissed charges against the suspects. While denying his involvement in the investigation, Gülen called on his followers to vote for the second party after the JDP in each district, that is, either the center-left Republican People’s Party (RPP) or the Turkish nationalist Nationalist Action Party (NAP).

Prime Minister Erdoğan dismissed the corruption allegations as part of an international conspiracy involving the Gülen congregation to overthrow his government. He called the congregation a “state within a state.” And Erdoğan declared his government would eradicate the “parallel structure” in the state. The JDP then removed the investigation’s lead prosecutors and thousands of police officers. It banned Twitter and YouTube for airing recordings that support corruption claims against the prime minister, his children, and various cabinet ministers. It increased government control over the judiciary by introducing a new judiciary bill, which President Gül approved in February 2014. The new judiciary law gave the justice minister, who already chairs the SBJP, more direct control over the board and a stronger role in its decision-making. Critics argued that the government could
have undue influence over judges and prosecutors because of its power to discipline or reassign them. The new law also gave the justice minister the power to authorize the investigation of council members for misconduct and disciplinary matters. In April 2014, the Constitutional Court overturned the judiciary law.

Despite the corruption scandal and mass protests, the JDP secured 45.43 percent of the vote in the March local elections in provincial councils, which was followed by the NAP with 20.71 percent and the RPP with 16.87 percent. The JDP’s vote in large city municipal elections is 45.54 percent, which is followed by the RPP’s 31.04 percent and the NAP’s 13.65 percent. During his election campaign, Prime Minister Erdoğan turned the elections into a referendum on himself and his government. The March 2014 local elections showed that an important segment of the Turkish electorate continues to regard the JDP as representing “financial stability and competent management.” “They may steal but they also get things done” is a common argument among JDP supporters.

A January 2014 poll by the Istanbul-based KONDA research firm found that 77 percent of Turkish citizens believe in the corruption scandal. Although almost half of the JDP voters agree, they will continue to vote for the party. Indeed, an April 2014 poll by the Istanbul-based Ipsos polling firm found that the corruption scandal persuaded only 4.6 percent of the JDP’s voters to switch sides. The poll indicated that for 75 percent of JDP voters, the corruption allegations had no effect on their voting preference, while 20.1 percent said they have become more attached to the JDP. Eighty-four percent of JDP voters stated that they voted for the party because of the party’s leader and the party’s services. The poll showed that claims of the Gülen congregation’s infiltration into the state bureaucracy persuaded only 4.4 percent of the JDP voters to switch sides.

The JDP’s success in the elections seems to have emboldened Erdoğan to run for president in the August 2014 election. Meanwhile, the JDP maintains its policy of increasing its control over the Turkish state and society. In April, the JDP-dominated parliament passed a bill enabling the National Intelligence Organization (NOP) to demand without a court order any data deemed threatening to national security. This covers individual Web browsing activity, email and text messages, and company sales records.

The JDP has won the support of an important segment of the Turkish electorate mainly by providing services to the urban and rural poor and by maintaining robust economic growth, reaching an annual rate of nine percent in 2010 and 2011, thanks to the flow of foreign capital into Turkey during the last decade. (It is interesting to note the capital flows into Turkish economy from unidentified sources, which was $4.8 billion in January 2014 and $10 billion in September
Turkish citizens have enjoyed a threefold increase in the country’s GDP and per capita income since 2003. Whether the JDP will be able to maintain this success is questionable given that much of the economic growth came from consumer spending (70 percent of GDP) based on credit.

Over the past decade, the JDP used incoming foreign capital to spend on consumer goods and construction instead of on new businesses that would support lasting growth. Even though Turkey’s $800 billion economy is among the 20 biggest in the world, the IMF recently warned that “it is not built on a sustainable model and remains too vulnerable to dangers outside its borders.” Likewise, Standard & Poor’s noted that “the boom in consumer credit had become a serious risk for Turkish leaders.” Indeed, following the U.S. Federal Reserve’s announcement of a scale back in its stimulus program in May 2013, foreign investors were reluctant to lend to emerging markets such as Turkey, and the Turkish lira lost a quarter of its value as a result. Turkey, which has one of the biggest current-account deficits in the world—7.9 percent of GDP in 2013—was particularly vulnerable. By way of comparison, the current account deficit of South Africa is 5.3 percent of GDP, Brazil is 3.6 percent of GDP, Indonesia is 3.3 percent of GDP, and India is 2.6 of GDP.

Moreover, consumer debt in Turkey, which is about $131 billion, equals 55 percent of household disposable income, while debt by the Turkish private sector totals more than 60 percent of GDP (one of the highest among developing countries). Inflation runs at more than 7 percent. Among 14 developing countries, Turkey has the lowest savings rate: 12.6 percent of its GDP, compared with an average of 33.5 percent. Thus, Fadi Hakura, associate fellow at the Chatham House, convincingly argues that “Turkey is in a vicious circle: economic growth drives investment needs that cannot be satisfied by domestic savings, which causes addiction to fickle and footloose speculative financial flows (“hot money”) to finance its CAD” [current account deficit].

So long as the JDP is able to maintain its policy of distributing material incentives to the urban and rural poor without taxing to pay for them, then the party is likely to preserve and even increase its voter base in the 2014 presidential and 2015 general elections. Yet, as the nationwide Gezi Park protests have showed, even if the JDP wins elections for the fourth time, growing polarization within society may prevent the party—and the nation—from maintaining the stability it has enjoyed for more than a decade. Indeed, Turkish citizens have become increasingly polarized and divided by the JDP’s Islamist agenda—with liberals and pro-seculars versus Islamists and the urban and rural poor who receive JDP’s material benefits and incentives; Alevis versus Sunnis; and Turks versus Kurds. Prime Minister Erdoğan
regards Sunni Islamism as the common bond of Turkish society. Having secured half of the Turkish electorate’s support over the past decade, he has been successfully pursuing the strategy of polarization by using the rhetoric of “us” (pro-JDP voters) versus “them” (the others). By doing this, the JDP leadership forms unity among the JDP electorate and mobilizes it to vote for the party in the elections. In August 2014, the Turkish electorate will directly elect their president for the first time. If he wins, Prime Minister Erdoğan aims to strengthen the office of the presidency. If the JDP succeeds at this, it will further erode the already weakened separation of powers in Turkey and will likely take the country toward greater autocracy and greater instability. As such, Turkey may become yet another zone of instability in the conflict-ridden Middle East.

NOTES

20. “AB’ye bir adım daha” [A one more step towards the EU], Yeni Şafak, August 8, 2003; Milliyet, August 7, 2003.
21. “4 yılda sessiz devrim yaptık” [We initiated a silent revolution in four years], Yeni Şafak, August 16, 2005.
22. “20 bin yeni polis alınacak” [Twenty thousand new police officers will be admitted], Yeni Şafak, October 4, 2006; “Üniversite mezunu 10 bin polis alınacak” [Ten thousand university graduates will be admitted as police officers], Radikal, June 5, 2009; “20 bin polis alınıyor” [Twenty thousand police officers is going to be admitted], Milliyet, June 2, 2010; “Gül’den 55 bin yeni kadroya onay” [Gül approves new cadres of fifty-five thousand ], Yeni Şafak, June 18, 2010; and “40 bin öğretmenle atama, 30 bin polis kadrosu” [Forty thousand teachers and thirty thousand police officers will be appointed], Milliyet, July 4, 2012. In 2010, thirty thousand police officers were appointed. And in July 2012, the JDP-dominated parliament approved the appointment of 30,000 new officers into the police force.
23. “Başbakan: Polis rejimin güvencesi” [Prime Minister: The police is the assurance of the
regime], Milliyet, June 28, 2009; “Polis Teşkilatı rejimin sigortası” [The police organization is the regime’s assurance], Yeni Şafak, June 28, 2009.

24. “Polise ağır silah verilecek” [Heavy weaponry will be given to the police], Habertürk, January 7, 2010; “TSK’nın ‘ağır silah’ talebi reddedildi” [The military’s “heavy weaponry” demand was rejected], Yeni Şafak, January 8, 2010. See also “Silah kanunu değişiyor” [Weapon law is changing], Vatan, December 8, 2010; “Hükümetle askerin ‘silah’ gerilimi!” [Tension between the government and military over “the weaponry!”], Milliyet, December 25, 2009; and Rahmi Turan, “Akal körelince...” [When intelligence declines...], Hürriyet, February 4, 2010.


29. Islamists regard the imam-hatip schools as social networks that sustain and enhance their political power by educating the youth according to Islamist principles. Imam-hatip graduates, who besides entering the divinity faculty, also enter the education, political science, and law departments as well as the police academy, and go on to find jobs in government and the private sector. Even though females cannot become prayer leaders or preachers, female students have been admitted to the imam-hatip schools since the 1970s.

30. Milliyet, May 31, 2003. In May 2003, while passing Turkey’s sixth EU reform package in the parliament, the JDP tried to introduce the establishment of chapels (ibadethane) in each residential building. Yet, in Islam, unlike in Christianity, there is no need to have a chapel to worship. See Radikal, June 12, 2003.


32. “Rektörlerden sessiz protesto” [Silent protest of university presidents], Milliyet, May 15, 2004; Hürriyet, May 14, 2004; and “ Üniversiteler Anıtkabir’de” [Universities are at the (Atatürk’s) mausoleum], Cumhuriyet, May 15, 2004.

33. The Constitutional Court outlawed the NOP in 1971, the WP in 1998, and the VP in 2001. The NSP was banned in the aftermath of the 1980 military intervention.

37. “Sezer’in vetolu bürokratlarını, Gül atamaya başladı” [Gül has started to appoint bureaucrats who were vetoed by Sezer], Milliyet, September 18, 2007; “Sezer’in veto ettiği bir bürokrata daha atama” [Another appointment of a bureaucrat who was vetoed by Sezer], Milliyet, November 14, 2007; “Cumhurbaşkanı Gül hükümetten geleni onayladı” [President Gül approved all of the JDP’s proposals], Milliyet, January 2, 2008; “Gül, 202 atama kararnamesi onaylamış” [Gül approved 202 appointments], Milliyet, January 17, 2008; “Gül, Sezer’in seçmediğini atadı” [Gül appointed people who were vetoed by Sezer], Milliyet, August 19, 2008; and “AKP’nin en rahat yılı” [The smoothest year for the JDP], Cumhuriyet, August 27, 2008.
40. “Tartışmalı yasa geçti” [The disputed law has been approved], Milliyet, December 2, 2007.
41. Sedat Ergin, “HSYK seçimi nasıl okunmalı?” [How should the SBJP elections be interpreted?], Hürriyet, October 19, 2010; “Listede hata bile yapılmadı” [There was not even one mistake in the list], Milliyet, October 19, 2010.
42. “İşte Gül ile yeni YÖK Başkanı arasındaki bağlantı” [The relationship between Gül and the new Higher Education Board chair], Hürriyet, December 10, 2007; “Bütün yasaklar kalkacak” [All prohibitions will be lifted], Milliyet, December 12, 2007.
43. Milliyet, February 20, 2008.
44. “Sabah ve ATV resmen Çalık’in” [Sabah-ATV officially belongs to the Çalık conglomerate], Yeni Şafak, April 26, 2008; “Circulation wars,” The Economist, May 8, 2008. Prime Minister Erdoğan’s son-in-law is chief executive of the Çalık conglomerate.
48. For the Ergenekon case see Soner Çağaptay, “Turkey versus Turkey,” Wall Street Journal, July

49. “Biri bizi gözetliyor!” [Somebody is watching us!], *Milliyet*, June 1, 2008.

50. “O izni veren Şahin” [Şahin gave that permission], *Hürriyet*, November 14, 2009; “Tam 12 bin kişiye dinlendiriniz mektubu” [Letter to twelve thousand people informing them that their phones were wiretapped], *Hürriyet*, November 19, 2009; “Danıştay’da ortam dinlenmesi” [Area wiretapping in the Council of State], *Milliyet*, December 25, 2009; and “Danıştay’da dinlenme şüphesi” [Suspicion that the Council of State was wiretapped], *Hürriyet*, December 26, 2009.

51. “Osman Kaçmaz hakkında takipsizlik kararı” [Charges against Osman Kaçmaz were dropped], *Hürriyet*, January 12, 2010; “56 hakim ve savcı dinlendi, sonuç sıfır” [Fifty-six judges and prosecutors were wiretapped, the result is zero], *Milliyet*, January 12, 2010; and “11 ay dinlendi, suç bulunamadı” [He was wiretapped for eleven months; no guilt was found out], *Radikal*, January 13, 2010.


60. “Balyoz delili 76 belge sahte” [Seventy-six documents used as evidence in the Sledgehammer lawsuit are forged], Hürriyet, March 24, 2012.
66. Sedat Ergin, “Anayasa konusundaki kaygılarım” [My worries about the constitution], Hürriyet, September 10, 2010. See also “Yarın bunları oylayacağız” [tomorrow we will vote for these points], Hürriyet, September 11, 2010.
67. “Yemekli toplantılarda liste iknası” [Lunch and dinner meetings in order to garner support for the (ministry’s) list], Milliyet, October 20, 2010; “Bakanlık listesi kazansın diye her yola başvuruluyor” [Everything is being done in order to assure that the ministry's candidate list wins], Hürriyet, October 14, 2010; Sedat Ergin, “HSYK seçimi nasıl okunmalı?” [How should the SBJP elections be interpreted?], Hürriyet, October 19, 2010; and “Listede hata bile yapılmadı” [There was not even one mistake in the list], Milliyet, October 19, 2010.
68. “Bakanlık: HSYK seçimleri için baskı yok” [The ministry: There is no pressure for the SBJP elections], Hürriyet, October 15, 2010; “Listede hata bile yapılmadı,” Milliyet, October 19, 2010; “Bakanlık kazandi” [The ministry won], Hürriyet, October 18, 2010; Mehmet Tezkan, “HSYK da ileri demokrasiye geçti” [The SBJP transferred to advanced democracy as well], Milliyet, October 18, 2010; Cüneyt Ülsever, “Yargı bağımsızlığına el-Fatiha” [Goodbye to judiciary independence], Hürriyet, October 19, 2010; Sedat Ergin, “HSYK seçimi nasıl okunmalı?” [How should the SBJP elections be interpreted?], Hürriyet, October 19, 2010; and Rıza Türmen, “Filmin sonu” [End of the movie], Milliyet, October 22, 2010.
69. “Yaz kararnamesi tamamlandı” [The summer appointments were approved], Hürriyet, November 5, 2010; “HSYK atamaları tamamlandı” [The SBJP completed the appointments], Yeni Şafak, November 5, 2010; Yalçın Doğan, “HSYK imzayı anında bastı” [The SBJP promptly signed], Hürriyet, November 18, 2010; and “Andıççı savcı düzey indi” [The (Ergenekon suspect) prosecutor’s rank was lowered], Yeni Şafak, November 6, 2010.
70. “HSYK üyeleri daire başkanlarını seçti” [The SBJP members elected their chamber chairs], Yeni Şafak, December 22, 2010; “HSYK’da sürpriz yok” [There is no surprise at the SBJP], Milliyet, December 21, 2010.
71. “Yargıtay ve Danıştay’da daire ve üye sayısı arttı” [Number of chambers and memberships of the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Council of State increased], Hürriyet, February 14, 2011.
74. “‘Who are the two drunks,’ Turkish politicians ask after PM’s remarks,” Hürriyet Daily News, May 29, 2013.
76. “Bakanın ‘yok’ dediği sıralar görüntülendi” [the desks, which the minister “denied,” were pictured], Hürriyet, January 14, 2011; “Konya’da “örtülü” protesto” [“Veiled” protest in Konya], Cumhuriyet, February 19, 2011.
78. “ilköğretimde türbanıyla girdi” [She entered the primary school by wearing her türban], Hürriyet, October 20, 2010; “S. sınıf öğrencisi türbanla sınıfa girdi” [Turbaned fifth-grade student entered her class], Cumhuriyet, October 29, 2010; “Firari yöneticisinin son fotoğrafı” [The photograph of the fugitive executive], Milliyet, August 2, 2011; and Yaşar Doğan, “Orada uzakta bir köyde Hezbollah.” [The Hezbollah is in that distant village], Hürriyet, January 22, 2011.
82. “Hezbollah in lideri de serbest kaldı” [Hezbollah’s leader was released as well], Hürriyet, January 4, 2011; “Domuz bağı cinayetleri sanıkları serbest” [Hogtie murder suspects are free], Hürriyet, January 4, 2011; Murat Yetkin, “Justice is bleeding,” Hürriyet Daily News, January 5, 2011; and “1 Hezbollah üyesi ve 5 PKK’lı daha serbest” [One Hezbollah mem-
ber and five PKK members were released as well], *Hürriyet*, January 6, 2011. On the Hezbollah see Soner Yalçın, “Türbanlı bir annenin yazılmamış öyküsü” [A non-written story of a türbaned mother], *Hürriyet*, January 9, 2011.

83. Under the JDP government, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) was amended in 2005. One article of the CCP was regarding pertaining to maximum detention period of suspects for both criminal cases as well as crimes against the state. The amendment’s implementation was first postponed to 2008 and later to the end of 2010. In Yusuf Kanlı, “Justice,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 5, 2011.

84. “Hezbollah in lideri de serbest kaldı” [Hezbollah’s leader was released as well], *Hürriyet*, January 4, 2011; “Domuz bağı cinayetleri sanıkları serbest” [Hogtie murder suspects are free], *Hürriyet*, January 4, 2011; Murat Yetkin, “Justice is bleeding,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 5, 2011; and “1 Hezbollah üyesi ve 5 PKK’lı daha serbest” [One Hezbollah member and five PKK members were released as well], *Hürriyet*, January 6, 2011. On the Hezbollah see Soner Yalçın, “Türbanlı bir annenin yazılmamış öyküsü” [A non-written story of a türbaned mother], *Hürriyet*, January 9, 2011.

85. “Hezbollah internetle, PKK şişeye haberleşiyor” [The Hezbollah communicates via Internet, while the PKK communicates via a bottle], *Hürriyet*, January 13, 2011.

86. “İmza vermeyen sanıklar tutuklanacak” [Suspects, who do not sign, will be detained], *Hürriyet*, January 14, 2011; "Firari Hezbollah çılar en son Bingöl’dede görünmüş” [Fugitive Hezbollah members were last seen in Bingöl], *Hürriyet*, January 19, 2011; and “Hizbul’a yeni operasyon” [A new operation against the Hezbollah], *Hürriyet*, January 19, 2011.

87. “Hezbollah davasında tutuklu sanık kalmadı” [No detainee left from the Hezbollah case], *Milliyet*, October 18, 2011.


90. “3. dönem zaferi” [Victory for the third term], *Yeni Şafak*, June 13, 2011. In the June 2012 general elections, the center-left Republican People’s Party (RPP) received 25.9 percent of the votes, while the Turkish nationalist Nationalist Action Party (NAP) got 13 percent and the pro-Kurdish PDP received 6.57 percent of the votes.


92. “Erdoğan: Seçilmişleri atanmışlara kul etmeyiz” [Erdoğan: We will not allow the subordination of the elected parliamentarians to bureaucrats], *Yeni Şafak*, February 19, 2012.

96. “28 Şubat’ın son izi de silindi” [The last trace of the February 28 process was erased as well], Yeni Şafak, March 31, 2012.
97. “Okullarını imam hatip yapma şansı yakaladık” [We caught the change to make all schools imam-hatips], Radikal, August 24, 2012.
98. “Imam-hatip graduates to be accepted into military academies,” Today’s Zaman, September 17, 2012.
103. “Tiyatroya, operaya mescit zorunlulugu” [Small mosque is mandatory in theatres and opera houses], Radikal, June 6, 2012.
104. “Hiçbir üniversite mabetsiz olmasın” [Universities should not be without a mosque], Yeni Şafak, July 7, 2012. For an example of university mosque projects see “Akdeniz Üniversitesi’ne 7 bin kişilik cami yaptırılıyor” [A mosque for seven thousand people is being built on the Mediterranean University campus], Yeni Şafak, April 19, 2012.
107. “Yasa geçti: 1 Eylül 2015’te dershaneler kapanıyor” [The law has passed: The tutoring schools will be closed down on September 1, 2015], Radikal, March 1, 2014.
112. Daren Butler, “Hundreds of Turkish police officers purged in government crackdown,”

113. Murat Yetkin, “Who is spying on Turkey and for whom?” *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 24,
2014.


115. Daniel Dombey, “Turkish law ‘strikes at judicial independence.’” *Financial Times*, February
26, 2014.


117. Tim Arango, “Turkish court overturns part of law on judiciary, loosening government’s grip,”


120. Ibid.


122. “Seçmen icraatı ve lideri seçti” [ Voters chose services and leadership], *Radikal*, April 1, 2014.


124. Joe Parkinson, Sam Schechner, and Emre Peker, “Turkey’s Erdogan: One of the world’s

125. Gülümhan Gültén, “Kaynağı belirsiz 4.8 milyar dolar!” [$4.8 billion unidentified capital!],


5, 2014.


129. Jack Ewing and Sebnem Arsu, “Credit card debt threatens Turkey’s economy,” *New York
Times*, February 27, 2014.

Arsu, “Credit card debt threatens Turkey’s economy,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2014;
and “Turkish economic mess: How did it get to this point?” CNN, March 28, 2014.


133. “Reports: Turkey has worst savings rate of emerging economies,” *Today’s Zaman*, February
26, 2014.

134. Fadi Hakura, “After the boom: Risks to the Turkish economy,” *Chatham House Briefing Paper*
(August 2013). See http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Eu-

__TURKEY’S DECLINING DEMOCRACY ▪ 175__
Contributors

RASHAD ALI
is a Counter-Terrorism Practitioner, CENTRI (UK).

MOKHTAR AWAD
is a Research Associate in the National Security and
International Policy program at the Center for American Progress.

BANU ELİGÜR
is an Associate Professor at Başkent University in Ankara, Turkey.

FANAR HA/dd AD
is a Research Fellow at the Middle East Institute,
National University of Singapore.

KILIC KANAT
is Assistant Professor at Pennsylvania State University, Erie.

KIRK H. SOWELL
is the principal of Uticensis Risk Services, and publisher
of Inside Iraqi Politics.

HANNAH STUART
is a Research Fellow at the Henry Jackson Society, UK.