



The Salafi Jihadist Threat in Lebanon

Matteo Tomasini

In the last few years, particularly after the May 2007 fighting in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Barid, the threat of al-Qaeda establishing a base in Lebanon from which to wage its global jihad has become a cause for concern for most of the international community. This paper will examine to what extent this concern is justified by tracing the history of Salafi jihadism in Lebanon and analyzing its future prospects with an emphasis on the likelihood al-Qaeda will choose to open a new front in Lebanon. The paper concludes with a range of policy prescriptions intended to help Lebanon and the international community counter the growth of al-Qaeda and Salafi jihadism in general.

SALAFISM AND SALAFI JIHADISM

A shortcoming of many analyses on religious extremism in Lebanon has been the failure to distinguish between Salafism and Salafi jihadism, often resulting in the equation of Salafism with religious extremism and violence. Salafists are Sunni Muslims who seek to return to the purest form of Islam by imitating the life of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions.

They commonly reject attempts at Islamic reformation, maintaining that the example of

Mohammed and his immediate followers is the only legitimate religious interpretation of God's will. While Salafists agree on the central tenets of the religion, divisions emerge when those tenets are applied to modern issues. One of these divisions is well-illustrated in the debate over whether Western civilians working in Iraq can be attacked. All Salafist groups believe that targeting and killing civilians is prohibited by Islam. However, if one believes that these civilians are assisting the U.S. military, then reference is made to those Qur'anic verses and hadiths (recorded sayings or traditions of the Prophet and his followers) that relate to the status of those who aid in warfare against Muslims, and the civilians become legitimate targets. If instead one argues that these civilians are not directly assisting the U.S. military, then the clear Qur'anic prohibitions on killing noncombatants triumphs.¹ Thus, though they share a common religious foundation, Salafists can engage in radically different activities based on their subjective application of hadiths to the modern day context.

Generally speaking, Salafists believe in creating the right societal conditions for establishing an Islamic state through education and proselytizing. That is not to say that they deny the potential for violence, only that they prioritize social reform. Salafi jihadists, on the other hand, believe that only violence and offensive jihad will lead to the establishment of an Islamic state. It is important to note that Salafi jihadists constitute only a small percentage of

Matteo Tomasini,, Fletcher MALD 2010, is a second-year student concentrating in International Security Studies and Foreign Policy Analysis with a focus on the Middle East. He is also a research assistant at the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies.

Salafists worldwide.² Ideologically speaking, Salafi jihadists also aim to: raise awareness among Muslims that their religion is declining in political, military, economic and cultural terms; identify the source for this decline in the persistent military humiliations at the hands of Israel and the West; and create a new identity defined by membership in the worldwide Muslim community, or *umma*.³ This last goal suggests that an individual country's Salafi jihadists are open to the influence of the greater Muslim world.⁴

SALAFI JIHADISM IN LEBANON: CAUSES

The roots of Islamic extremism and, by extension, the Salafi jihadist movement in Lebanon during the 1980s are complex and best analyzed on three levels: the local, the systemic and the individual.

At the local level, the rise of Salafi jihadism can be attributed to the nature of Lebanon's sociopolitical system as defined by the 1943 National Pact. The Pact stipulates that Lebanese Christians will forgo all military alliances with Western powers while Muslims will set aside any forms of nationalism that extend beyond Lebanon's geographical boundaries. The Pact also reinforced the confessional schism that existed by confirming that Lebanese presidents would be Maronite Christians, premiers would be Sunni Muslims and the speaker of the Parliament would be Shiite Muslim. Civil service appointments and public funding would also be determined on a confessional basis.⁵ In sum, Lebanon's sectarian system has denied the possibility of one group monopolizing power and creating an authoritarian state, thus frustrating Lebanon's radical Islamists who aspire to create an Islamic state. It has also greatly polarized the various sects and hampered the growth of a national identity. As a result, Salafi jihadists became more receptive to outside actors and often paved the way for external interventions into Lebanese affairs.

At the systemic level, the rise of Islamist militancy in the broader Middle East coincided with an identity crisis stemming from the failure of pan-Arabism, the humiliation resulting from successive military defeats to Israel, and a

perception among Muslims that the *umma* was losing the ideological battle to the West. In Lebanon, these frustrations were reinforced by a 15-year civil war that pitted Christians against Muslims and by Israel's 1982 invasion and subsequent 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon. Lebanese militants are also quite affected by ongoing regional conflicts, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the sectarian violence in Iraq.

At the individual level, the growth of Salafi jihadism is attributable to the success of local and foreign Salafi jihadist leaders in penetrating Lebanese Muslim society with their ideology. While nonviolent Salafists are the most likely to be receptive to the ideology due to the common religious foundation, ordinary criminals and alienated individuals with little concern for Islamic thought also make up the pool of recruits. It is no coincidence that the cities in which Salafism and Salafi jihadism emerged and developed—Tripoli, Majdal, Anjar, Qarun and Sidon—are characterized by high unemployment and rampant poverty.⁶

GEOGRAPHIC ENABLERS OF SALAFI JIHADISM IN LEBANON

Geographically, Lebanon is relatively small and there are few remote areas from which Salafi jihadist organizations can operate freely. The exceptions are the areas surrounding Tripoli and the Palestinian refugee camps that are outside the control of the Lebanese state.⁷ While it is possible that small groups have operated in the hinterland surrounding Tripoli, all major Salafi jihadist organizations have thus far used the refugee camps as their bases. Given their centrality to Salafi jihadism in Lebanon, a brief overview of the camps is in order.

The Palestinian "problem" can be traced back to the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and the June 1967 war, during which more than 300,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon, mainly settling in the South. A further influx of approximately 3,000 Palestinian militants occurred in 1970 in the aftermath of what Palestinians refer to as "Black September," when King Hussein of Jordan evicted the majority of armed Palestinians from his country in three weeks of bloody fighting. Today,

according to the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), there are between 350,000 and 400,000 refugees in Lebanon, most of whom live in 12 camps.⁸

Conditions within the Palestinian refugee camps slowly improved under the control of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1970s due to an influx of money from the Arab Gulf states and strong employment programs. When the PLO was ejected from Lebanon in 1983 by Israeli and Syrian forces, the economies of the camps collapsed, despite UNRWA's continued provision of aid. The refugees suffered yet another blow when the Gulf States cut off funding in response to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's siding with Iraq during the first Gulf War in 1991.

Since then, conditions have steadily declined. Palestinians are prevented by law from working in over 60 skilled professions and are not allowed to own property or register companies. Construction around the camps is prohibited, resulting in severe overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, and a large percentage—as high as 27% in some camps—live in abject poverty.⁹

Each successive Lebanese government has ignored Palestinian issues for fear of appearing to facilitate the naturalization of the overwhelmingly Sunni refugees, which would upset Lebanon's delicate power balance. As such, feelings of resentment and alienation are common within the camps, making them either ripe ground for recruitment or, at the least, passive supporters of extremist groups targeting the state.

SALAFI JIHADISM IN LEBANON: HISTORY

In the 1990s, large-scale crackdowns on Salafists by Lebanese security forces, multiple Israeli aggressions against Lebanon and violent clashes with rival Islamic groups further mobilized Salafi jihadists. However, Salafi jihadist ambitions remained almost exclusively local during that decade and the various groups rarely subscribed to the doctrine of al-Qaeda's global insurgency. Furthermore, Lebanon's various Salafi groups were not united under a single organization and so were not considered too great a threat to the state.

From 2003 to 2007 the threat was completely transformed as Lebanon, and the

region as a whole, witnessed a number of events that led to the rapid growth of Salafi jihadist movements. The most consequential of these events were the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The political and security void that characterized Lebanon in the aftermath of the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri and the subsequent Syrian withdrawal from the country gave radical groups room to maneuver and grow. Syria's effective intelligence and security apparatus had previously kept many of the radical Islamist groups in check, but Lebanese forces were incapable of rising to the task. At the time the Salafi jihadist movement faced difficulties in many parts of the world, and the lack of security in Lebanon attracted many of its members.¹⁰ Additionally, the withdrawal of the Syrian presence delivered a further blow to the camp economies as it had provided employment to many Palestinians. This sudden job loss resulted in dramatic increases of drug and alcohol abuse which in turn facilitated the encroachment of radical jihadist groups.¹¹

The second major factor in the rapid spread of Salafi jihadism in recent years was the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Following the invasion, Asbat al-Ansar, a Salafi jihadist group based out of the Ain al-Hilweh camp, sent—

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with the tactical cooperation of Syrian military intelligence—hundreds of volunteers to join the Iraqi insurgency, where they not only gained combat experience but also strengthened their ties to al-Qaeda leaders. Such activity subsided upon Syria's 2005 withdrawal; however, Damascus continued to act as a willing conduit for fighters moving to and from Iraq.¹² As Andrew Exum notes, there was a definite correlation between the 'Awakening' in Iraq, which severely limited al-

Qaeda's ability to operate there, and the rise of Lebanon as a base of Salafi jihadist operations.¹³

AL-QAEDA'S INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON

The extent to which al-Qaeda has now and in the past maintained a presence in Lebanon is the subject of considerable debate, with Syria and its supporters claiming that al-Qaeda poses a real threat to Lebanon's national security while the anti-Syrian coalition led by Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and parliamentary majority leader Saad al-Hariri believes that Syria fabricates this threat in order to destabilize Lebanon and justify continued intervention. Externally, Swedish, Danish, German, Italian and U.S. intelligence agencies are convinced that al-Qaeda has a real presence in Lebanon and is set on striking against their respective interests in the country.¹⁴

But what does having a "real presence" in Lebanon entail for a group like al-Qaeda? Since the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda has ceased to exist as a structured organization and instead persists as a network of affiliated groups motivated by a common ideology.¹⁵ Terrorism expert Marc Sageman recently took this notion further by arguing that the threat of al-Qaeda leaders plotting attacks and issuing commands to affiliated groups has transformed into one in which local groups conceive and execute operations independently with little or no guidance from the top.¹⁶ Other analysts take exception to this argument, concluding that while al-Qaeda has exhibited bottom-up initiatives it still remains capable of top-down operations.¹⁷ Sageman's characterization of al-Qaeda would imply that the organization has established a presence via groups like Fatah al-Islam and Asbat al-Ansar. However, its activities over the last nine years seem to indicate that it is attempting to establish a more traditional presence in Lebanon so as to exert more direct control over operations in the area.

What follows is a brief history detailing al-Qaeda's involvement in Lebanon which demonstrates that while the threat of al-Qaeda has often been exaggerated, it is by no means a Syrian myth. The group has repeatedly worked with

local Salafi jihadist groups by providing financing, training and ideological guidance.¹⁸

Links between al-Qaeda and Lebanese Salafi groups began to develop in 2000, when a group of possibly Chechen origin and connected to Osama bin-Laden asked Bassam Kanj, a veteran from Afghanistan, to set up a Salafi jihadist network in Lebanon. Kanj focused his recruitment efforts in the poor neighborhoods of Tripoli and in Ain al-Hilweh, a Palestinian refugee camp located outside the city of Sidon in south Lebanon. In January 2000, a group known as Dinniyeh was involved in a week-long firefight with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) after which the group more or less disbanded with survivors joining Asbat al-Ansar.¹⁹

From 2001 to 2005, Asbat al-Ansar was one of the most prominent Salafi jihadist groups in Lebanon. Although it has denied formal links to al-Qaeda, Asbat al-Ansar is reported to be partly funded and armed by the organization.²⁰ During this period other incidents occurred linking al-Qaeda to Lebanon. First was the March 2003 car bombing murder in Ain al-Hilweh of Abd al-Sattar Jad (AKA Abu Muhammad al-Masri), identified by Israeli intelligence services as al-Qaeda's commander in Lebanon.²¹ Two months later, in May 2003, was the arrest of a Yemeni, Maamun al-Awami (AKA Abu al-Shahid) for providing military training to a group that was plotting to blow up a McDonalds. Al-Awami was arrested while leaving the Ain al-Helwa refugee camp and accused of having connections to prominent al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri who funded his group. At around the same time, Lebanese authorities discovered a cell linked to al-Qaeda under the supervision of known jihadist Ismail al-Khatib.²²

Beginning in 2004, al-Qaeda's leadership in Iraq decided to use Lebanon as a base where it could hold meetings and plan operations in Iraq. Al-Qaeda also began to increase funding of certain religious programs and charities including Jund al-Sham, a splinter group of Asbat al-Ansar. Jund al-Sham, during this period at least, was used by al-Qaeda to directly influence events in Lebanon according to Fida Itani of the Lebanese daily *Al Akhbar*.²³ In September 2004, 20 al-Qaeda

suspects, including two leaders, were arrested in connection with a plot to attack the Italian embassy in Lebanon. One of the involved networks was based in Ain al-Hilewh and the other was based in West Beqaa.²⁴ Following these arrests, Lebanese authorities claimed that al-Qaeda no longer had a network in Lebanon.²⁵

However, one year later—in December 2005—an al-Qaeda affiliated organization claimed responsibility for firing rockets at Israel from the south of Lebanon. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, at the time leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, announced on tape that the attack was “made under direct instructions from Osama bin-Laden” and Lebanese Interior Minister Ahmed Fatfat confirmed that the attacks were financed directly by al-Qaeda.²⁶ In January 2006, Lebanese police announced the capture of 13 al-Qaeda suspects connected to al-Zarqawi who were in the process of planning suicide attacks in Iraq and possibly Lebanon.²⁷

Later that year, al-Qaeda’s “Human Resources Group” arrived in Lebanon to reinforce the tactical, technical and logistical skills of local groups. The group was led by “Suleyman D.” (AKA Abu Ghradia), a Syrian member of al-Qaeda with training experience in Turkey and Afghanistan.²⁸ Weeks later, Palestinian-Syrian Abdullah Hadraji, together with seven members of al-Qaeda, visited Nahr al-Barid with the goal of establishing an official presence in Lebanon.²⁹ At this point the story of al-Qaeda in Lebanon becomes inextricably linked to that of Fatah al-Islam.

Fatah al-Islam was officially formed on November 26, 2006 after splitting from Fatah Intifada, a secular pro-Syrian faction that had itself broken away from the mainstream Fatah movement in 1983. The group’s leader, Shakir al-Absi, has denied all links to al-Qaeda, claiming “al-Qaeda has its strategy; we have ours.”³⁰ However, investigations into the group indicate that Fatah al-Islam was actively trying to deepen its affiliation with al-Qaeda. According to Syrian political analyst Sami Moubayed, Fatah al-Islam repeatedly tried to gain al-Qaeda approval for its operations, but failed each time despite al-Absi’s and other group members’ strong links to al-

Zawahiri and other top al-Qaeda members. Abdullah al-Binshi, the Saudi “*sharia expert*” sent by al-Qaeda to evaluate Fatah al-Islam, concluded that “Lebanon is not the land of jihad.” Abu Abdulrahman al-Afghani, another senior member of al-Qaeda who evaluated Fatah al-Islam’s operations, left unconvinced of their tactics.³¹

Abu Hamza, a jihadist who has in the past demonstrated key insight into al-Qaeda operations, wrote on the jihadist forum “Ekhlaas,” that Fatah al-Islam continued to attempt serious negotiation to become a formal affiliate until the group was crushed by the Lebanese Armed Forces during the May 2007 firefight at Nahr al-Barid.³² Al-Qaeda saw fighting against the Lebanese government as counterproductive to jihadist interests and worried about becoming new targets of the LAF, so it severed relations with Fatah al-Islam.³³

That al-Qaeda had personal, financial and ideological connections to the major Salafi jihadist groups in Lebanon should not be taken to mean that it was alone in supporting these groups. Multiple actors have been accused of funding and providing weapons to these groups in order to advance their own agendas. Ultimately, however, the real winner would always be al-Qaeda and its adherents. For example, there is considerable evidence that at various points in its development, Fatah al-Islam was supported by both Syria and Saad al-Hariri’s Future Movement. Al-Hariri is alleged to have funded Fatah al-Islam so that it might act as a counterbalance to Hezbollah, while Syria, which has a history of sponsoring foreign terrorist groups, may have supported Fatah al-Islam to deflect attention from the United Nations al-Hariri tribunal or to use the group to break up any potential al-Hariri-created Islamist coalition that could be used to fight Hezbollah.³⁴ As both actors quickly learned, however, Fatah al-Islam was following its own program and used the funds it received to recruit dozens of new combatants, organize more training sessions at Ain al-Hilweh and prepare plans for attacking UNIFIL in the South.³⁵ As a Hamas official explained, “all sides tried to benefit from [Fatah al-Islam] but no one can control them.”³⁶ By late 2007, al-Qaeda had

developed a vast network throughout Lebanon; however, it remains unclear how the group intends to use it.³⁷

FUTURE OF SALAFI JIHADISM IN LEBANON

Having suffered strategic defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan, many analysts are concerned that al-Qaeda is searching for new fronts on which to wage its global jihad. This concern is reinforced by multiple statements made by al-Zawahiri and bin-Laden over the last few years explicitly referring to Lebanon,³⁸ and by the appointment of al-Saadi Nahed, a Saudi extremist and veteran of the insurgency in Iraq, as the new “emir” for al-Qaeda in Lebanon.³⁹ This section will address the likelihood that al-Qaeda will continue to establish a traditional presence in Lebanon from which to pursue its objectives and, if so, whether it will be successful given the current situation.⁴⁰

As mentioned earlier, Lebanon’s small size and sectarian population greatly limit the ability of extremist groups to freely maneuver within the country. A further limitation, according to a former high-ranking jihadist, is that many Islamic groups and religious leaders have ties to Lebanese intelligence services.⁴¹ As such, should al-Qaeda choose to settle in Lebanon, it will be compelled to find a home in the Palestinian refugee camps. With Nahr al-Barid completely destroyed after the May 2007 fighting, Ain al-Hilweh, the largest of the 12 Palestinian refugee camps, which hosts Asbat al-Ansar, Jund al-Sham and possibly other unknown Salafi jihadist groups that subscribe to al-Qaeda’s ideology, is the most likely candidate. In fact, according to several sources, al-Qaeda may have already begun infiltrating the camp. In September 2008, a Jordanian official told *Al-Hayat* that a group of al-Qaeda members including 25 Jordanians and a number of Yemenis, Saudis and Europeans had relocated to the camp from Iraq. He also asserted that “al-Qaeda representatives are in Lebanon at present and they are trying to establish contact with [certain] groups based in Ain al-Hilweh.” These “certain groups” would include Jund al-Sham, Asbat al-Ansar and the remnants of Fatah al-Islam. Others doubt that this

infiltration is being directed by a central al-Qaeda authority and refer to what currently exists as a “fake al-Qaeda.”⁴²

Regardless, Ain al-Hilweh is quite different than Nahr al-Barid and it cannot be assumed that—even given al-Qaeda infiltration—the camp will radicalize at the same astonishingly quick rate that Nahr al-Barid did. Ain al-Hilweh is home to several Palestinian nationalist parties including Fatah and Hamas which, fearing the fate of Nahr al-Barid, are proactively trying to avoid a confrontation with the state. A joint security force involving all the various factions has been formed to create some sense of internal order, and discussions have been held regarding turning over some of the most-wanted jihadists that may be living in the camp.⁴³ The Salafi jihadist groups are resisting this “moderating” of the camp, however a prominent Fatah commander has been quoted as saying that “all the Palestinian forces are discussing how to get rid of [them]” and that “if a peaceful solution is not found, we will mount a security operation against them and finish them off once and for all.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, the LAF, and to some extent Syria, has undercover intelligence officers stationed in the camp, thus making large-scale operational planning a challenge.⁴⁵ Al-Hilweh’s external security environment is also quite different from al-Barid’s. Fearing attacks on UNIFIL forces stationed nearby, the LAF has encircled the camp, and Hezbollah, which is hostile to al-Qaeda, is in effective control of south Lebanon.

Assuming al-Qaeda means to exert more direct control over groups in Lebanon, it is still unclear how receptive Lebanese Salafi jihadist groups would be to subordinating themselves to bin-Laden or al-Zawahiri. Although these groups share much of al-Qaeda’s ideology, they have thus far failed to unite under a single organization due to their dissimilar agendas. Indeed during the Nahr al-Barid fight, no other Salafi jihadist group militarily—much less vocally—aided Fatah al-Islam, as those groups’ leaders believe that jihad should be waged against Israel, not Lebanon.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Salafi jihadists in Lebanon have to contend with several enemies—the Lebanese

government, Israel, Shiite and Christian groups, and UNIFIL—and may thus be unwilling to utilize their limited resources to engage in activities that may upset the prioritization of their targets.⁴⁷ As Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstrop argue, “each [group] is more concerned about its own survival than about waging an offensive jihad against ‘infidels’.”⁴⁸

Crucial to the continued survival of a terrorist group is active support or at least passive sympathy on the part of the local population. Thus far, al-Qaeda-related groups have not appreciated the importance of winning over the local population—a strategy that is all the more important considering the recruitment challenges it faces. Foreign jihadists are no longer entering Lebanon at a high rate, and a majority of the Lebanese Sunni community is opposed to Salafi jihadist ideology.⁴⁹ While operating from Nahr al-Barid, the Salafi jihadists treated the locals with disdain and often fought with them.⁵⁰ As a result, the population often protested the presence of Fatah al-Islam; However, ultimately there was no opposing organization powerful enough to dislodge the Salafi jihadists.⁵¹ Should these groups continue to alienate the population in Ain al-Hilweh, al-Qaeda will find that its presence will not be tolerated and at this stage, Palestinian groups are sufficiently powerful to defeat the Salafi jihadists should it come to a confrontation.

It has been argued that al-Qaeda recognizes the above challenges and indeed has no intention of waging jihad from Lebanon.⁵² Instead, al-Qaeda may settle on using Lebanon as a staging ground for operations in Palestine and Europe. In the past two years numerous groups from Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Libya, Egypt and Jordan—most of which have close links to al-Qaeda—have gone to Lebanon, primarily to Ain al-Hilweh, to train. After training, many of the jihadists either return to their home country or move on to Iraq. It has been reported that a significant number travel to several European countries with considerable ease.⁵³ The threat to Europe is very real: in September 2009, French police disrupted a Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) cell allied to the al-Zarqawi network in the suburbs of Paris. Two of the

detainees told authorities they had received explosives training at a camp near Tripoli in northern Lebanon (Hunt 2006).⁵⁴

POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS

Regardless of al-Qaeda’s aims in Lebanon, it is imperative that the threat of Salafi jihadism be contained and its root causes addressed. For even if al-Qaeda has no intention of establishing Lebanon as a battlefield for global jihad (at the moment preferring instead to use Lebanon as a training ground and intermediary post between Europe and several Middle East countries), beyond the destabilizing effect that such groups have on the Lebanese state, the groups that currently exist could well form the backbone of future al-Qaeda initiatives if left unchecked. The international community should take this opportunity while groups are still relatively weak and divided to quash the threat of Salafi jihadism in Lebanon using military, diplomatic and economic tools.

A comprehensive policy to address this threat may include: international community assistance to Lebanon in the form of military aid and advisors to Lebanon; domestic and internationally-supported economic and political development programs; a reevaluation of Palestinian policies on the part of the Lebanese government, complemented by progress on resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict; engagement with other groups within Lebanon that could serve as a moderating force; and cooperation with Syria.

It is too much to expect the LAF to assert itself in the camps, as doing so would almost certainly result in a violent confrontation. However, the international community must continue to provide military support and consider sending military officers and intelligence officials to advise the LAF in counterterrorism practices. Given that most of the advisors are currently tied up in Iraq, one solution—suggested by Andrew Exum—is to create an “Advisor Corps,” a “group of soldiers with the specific mission of training and advising foreign militaries on combating returning jihadists and the counterinsurgencies they will lead.”⁵⁵ Special attention should also be given to aiding Lebanese counterterrorism efforts,

particularly those of the Military Intelligence Directorate, which is the most experienced, effective and capable counterterrorism institution in Lebanon.⁵⁶

A key lesson that advisors might impart is the importance of having the support of the local population. Most of those living within the Palestinian camps have little sympathy for the Salafi jihadist groups that operate in their midst, however relative to the LAF they are considered by many to be the lesser of two evils. During the Nahr al-Barid firefight with Fatah al-Islam, the LAF indiscriminately shelled the camp, resulting in a high civilian death toll. After the main fighting was over, forces entered the camp looting anything of value, smashing whatever had not been destroyed by the shelling and even urinating in olive jars.⁵⁷ Already disadvantaged by government policy, actions such as these can only further radicalize the local population and aid jihadist recruitment efforts. Alienating the population also obstructs the human intelligence collection efforts that are fundamental to dismantling a terrorist group. Recent reports that the Lebanese military was planning on helping to reconstruct Nahr al-Barid and a published statement by the army declaring that it was keen on strengthening the “solid relationship with Palestinians” are steps in the right direction, but much more has to be done before Palestinians will trust the military.⁵⁸

To halt the radicalization of Palestinians in the camps it is imperative that government policy towards them also be reviewed. That is not to say that Palestinians should be naturalized; doing so would upset the balance of power in Lebanon and also impede negotiations over the right of return. Rather, Bernard Rougier argues that the only way to halt and possibly reverse this radicalization is to allow the refugees to work and live freely in Lebanon. Besides aiding them economically, this step will allow them to escape the shadow of the extremist clerics within the camps that shape their world view.⁵⁹ More complicated, but perhaps just as necessary, is the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Rougier argues that if nothing is done on this front, the “nearby enemy”—represented by the PLO in the eyes of most Salafi jihadists—will lose

its legitimacy, thus making it easier to overcome. Attention will be then turned to the “distant enemy” which, according to al-Qaeda, must be targeted as a priority. He writes, “Ain al-Hilweh might become the vanguard of a Salafi jihadist militancy that would spread in the Palestinian territories, break through national barriers, and change the scale of the struggle, the better to strike...the West in general.”⁶⁰

Economic and political development programs in the North will also go a long way in denying Salafi jihadist groups additional recruits. According to a recent report co-authored by the United Nations Development Program and the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs, 53% of citizens in the North live in poverty and 18% live in extreme poverty. In each case, the rates are twice the national average. While some Salafist groups and NGOs provide relief, ultimately only the state can offer the resources necessary to effectively tackle unemployment and poverty in the North. In February 2008, the Future Movement announced that it would donate \$52 million in development aid to Tripoli, Akkar and other regions in the North. This is a welcome step in the right direction, but far from the potential that could be achieved should the current political stalemate end.⁶¹ In the meantime, given the relatively small amount of money that it would involve, the international community should consider delivering more aid to the region.

Engaging with other groups within Lebanon may also prove an effective way to control the spread of Salafi jihadism. After the 2007 fighting in Nahr al-Barid, Fatah and Hamas, which were at the time fighting each other in Gaza, cooperated with each other and with Lebanese authorities to isolate the threat from al-Qaeda.⁶² As noted earlier, these groups continue to be a moderating force in Ain al-Hilweh and should not be ignored. The issue could also serve as a basis for cooperation between the U.S. and the Hamas government of Palestine. The international community should also seek the cooperation of Hezbollah, if only unofficially, whose human intelligence assets in the South are far superior to those of the state.

Any long-term solution to the threat of al-Qaeda and its affiliates should involve Syria,

given its ability to control the stream of jihadists flowing across its border with Lebanon and its possible material and financial support for the groups themselves. From 2005 to 2007, the U.S. used blunt diplomatic warnings to force Syrian cooperation on the issue of foreign fighters crossing into Iraq from Syria. However, given Syria's recent relative power gains, Syria would likely be more resistant to such pressure today. The U.S. still holds significant leverage over Syria, including the ability to lift sanctions, ease pressure on the ongoing al-Hariri Tribunal and International Atomic Energy Agency investigations, and more generally, to pull Syria westward where it stands to gain more politically and economically. However, the U.S. would likely only be willing to use such leverage as part of

comprehensive negotiations over the Golan Heights and peace with Israel. Similarly, Syria would likely only renounce support for these groups (if this support is indeed present), in exchange for such concessions. The Obama administration has already indicated its desire to restart the Syria-Israel track; helping stem the threat of Al-Qaeda in Lebanon is just one more reason to do so.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

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- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 829.
- ⁷ While these are the areas to which Salafi jihadist groups are restricted, other extremist organizations operate more widely within Lebanon. For example, Hezbollah operates independently in southern Lebanon below the Litani River as well as within the Beqaa Valley. However, Salfi Jihadists are not on friendly terms with Hezbollah, and so do not have access to these areas.
- ⁸ Other sources have put the number of refugees at 200,000 - 250,000 as the UNRWA does not remove names from its lists once refugees emigrate. See Mahmoud Zayat, "Top PLO official killed in Lebanon bombing," *Middle East Times*, March 23, 2009.
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- ¹² See Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005) 48-52; and Jane's, "Asbat al-Ansar," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, 2008.
- ¹³ Andrew Exum, "Return of the Jihadi," *Democracy Journal* (Summer 2008): 44-54.
- ¹⁴ See Bilal Y. Saab, "Al-Qa'ida's Presence and Influence in Lebanon," *CTC Sentinel* (Combating Terrorism Center), November 2008: 6; and Abdulmajid al-Sabati, "Interview with Italian FM D'Alema," *Al Watan*, January 13, 2007.
- ¹⁵ See Marc Sageman, *Understanding terror networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31 (1) (Summer 2006): 32-33.
- ¹⁶ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless jihad: terror networks in the twenty-first century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Interestingly, Abu Hamza, a jihadist with intimate knowledge of al-Qaeda operations, makes a similar argument in a posting to on the jihadi web-forum, "Ekhlās." In his essay, "Bin Laden and the Globalization of Jihad" he writes, "Al-Qaeda is not an organization or a traditional side in an international war. It is cells and an ideological orientation that jumps every day to new regions that meet the requisite Sharia and strategic goals... The spidery chain of spontaneously-generating cells, an expanding network, and terrorist strikes will not end as long as there are basic incentives, like religious and ideological doctrine and the bitter reality of domination, oppression, and humiliation in which the *umma* lives." See Will McCants, *Jihadica*, May 26, 2008, <<http://www.jihadica.com/channeling-sageman>> (accessed April 10, 2009).
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- ²¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism: Chapter 6--Terrorist Organizations*, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 30, 2008, <<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2007/103714.htm>> (accessed April 10, 2009).
- ²² Fida Itani, "Thus Lebanon Entered the Era of Globalized Jihad [in Arabic]," *Al Akhbar*, April 7, 2008.
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- ²⁴ Jane's, "Al-Qaeda in Lebanon."
- ²⁵ Olga Mattera, "The Re-emergence of al-Qaeda in the Middle East [in Italian]," *Osservatorio Strategico* 8 (4) (April 2006): 10.
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- ²⁸ Fida Itani, "Training and funding that paved the way for Fatah al-Islam [in Arabic]," *Al-Akhbar*, April 11, 2008.
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- ³⁰ Souad Mekhennet and Michael Moss, "Final in Lebanon Camp, a New Face of Jihad Vows Attacks on U.S.," *The New York Times*, March 16, 2007.
- ³¹ Sami Moubayed, "Al-Qaeda sets Lebanon record straight," *Asia Times*, September 15, 2007.
- ³² Will McCants, *Jihadica*, May 24, 2008, <<http://www.jihadica.com/bin-laden-statement-prompts-speculation-on-aq-strategy-in-palestine-part-3>> (accessed April 20, 2009).
- ³³ Andrew Exum, "Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon," *Global Politician*, March 2008.
- ³⁴ See Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Fida Itani, "Groups trained in Lebanon and launched worldwide [in Arabic]," *Al-Akhbar*, April 10, 2008; Fida Itani, "Al-Qaida roots itself in Lebanon," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 4, 2008; Seymour M. Hersh, "The Redirection: Does the new policy benefit the real enemy?" *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2007; and "March 14 denies charge of funding Fatah al-Islam," *The Daily Star*, November 8, 2008.
- ³⁵ Itani, "Al-Qaida roots itself in Lebanon."
- ³⁶ Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon."
- ³⁷ Itani, "Al-Qaida roots itself in Lebanon."
- ³⁸ On December 20, 2006 al-Zawahiri said: "All the UN resolutions that have taken parts of it, and recognized Israel's presence on it, starting with the partition resolution to Resolution 1701 are all null and void, and, in the balance of Islam, are worthless. We should reject, renounce and fight these resolutions. We should not take hesitant positions towards these resolutions by saying that we will respect and acknowledge them as a fact of life, and other such statements that would squander the Muslim's rights. Recognizing these resolutions implies the recognition of the Hebrew state." On February 13, 2007, al-Zawahiri said: "I call on the brothers of Islam and of jihad in Lebanon not to yield to resolution 1701 and not to accept. . . the presence of international and Crusader [Western] forces in south Lebanon." In December 2007, bin-Laden described the UN peacekeeping force in south Lebanon as "Crusaders" sent to Lebanon "to protect the Jews" of Israel. On April 21, 2008, al-Zawahiri called upon jihadists to attack UNIFIL forces.
- ³⁹ Nicholas Blanford, "Was Al-Qaeda Behind Beirut Bombing?" *Time*, January 25, 2008.
- ⁴⁰ In early March 2009, in an internet question and answer session posted on several jihadi websites, a well-regarded jihadist with connections to al-Qaeda and affiliated groups asserted that al-Qaeda had already established a real presence in Lebanon, was well-armed and currently completing preparations for operations against Israel. This information has not been corroborated by other sources. See Al-Shishani, "Al-Qaeda Ideologue Describes Alleged Spread of Al-Qaeda in the Levant."
- ⁴¹ Mahan Abedin, "A search for unity: interview with Omar Bakri Mohammed," *Asia Times*, June 12, 2008.
- ⁴² See "Al-Qaeda has Infiltrated Ain al-Hilway Camp," *The Daily Star*, September 13, 2008; and Abdel-Latif, "Cedar Jihadis."
- ⁴³ Uhammad Salah, "Ayn Al-Hulwah Trying to Avoid Fate of Al-Barid," *Al-Safir*, November 10, 2008.
- ⁴⁴ Nicholas Blanford, "In Lebanon, pragmatism tempers jihadist aims," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 4, 2008.

⁴⁵ While Syria officially withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, there remains a small core of intelligence officers in Lebanon, particularly in the South.

⁴⁶ Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstrop, *Fatah al Islam: How an Ambitious Jihadist Project Went Awry* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007), 211.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁹ Saab and Ranstrop, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism," 841.

⁵⁰ Andrew Exum, "Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon."

⁵¹ Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon."

⁵² Abedin, "A search for unity: interview with Omar Bakri Mohammed,"

⁵³ See Itani, "Training and funding that paved the way for Fatah al-Islam [in Arabic];" and Itani, "Training and funding that paved the way for Fatah al-Islam [in Arabic]."

⁵⁴ Hunt, "Can al-Qaeda's Lebanese Expansion be Stopped?"

⁵⁵ Exum, "Return of the Jihadi."

⁵⁶ Saab and Ranstrop, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism." While in January 2006 Lebanese security forces announced the creation of a Special Agency to Combat Terrorism, which would have branches throughout the country and whose staff would receive international counterterrorism training, today this agency exists in name only. Bilal Y. Saab, Interview by Matteo Tomasini, *Senior Research Analyst, Brookings Institution* (April 25, 2009). For more information on current MID initiatives, see Saab, "Al-Qa'ida's Presence and Influence in Lebanon," 5-9.

⁵⁷ See Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon;" and Nicholas Blanford, "Is Lebanon facing a 'new breed' of Al Qaeda?" *Christian Science Monitor*, May 24, 2007.

⁵⁸ "Army to implement new field measures at Nahr al-Barid camp," *Naharnet*, March 20, 2009.

⁵⁹ Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Taylor Long, "Poverty and patronage." *Now Lebanon*, February 19, 2008.

⁶² Daniel Levy, *Talking Points Memo*, May 21, 2007,

<http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2007/05/21/five_comments_on_the_lebanon_s> (accessed April 23, 2009).



Corruption and Social Trust in Afghanistan

Qiamuddin Amiry

“Someone begs President Karzai to control corruption in his administration. After listening carefully, Mr. Karzai asks him: ‘How much would you give me to do that?’”

- Contemporary Afghan joke

Since 2001, one of the main obstacles for good governance and development in Afghanistan has been the existence of pervasive corruption in the country. Donor countries have repeatedly pressed President Hamid Karzai to address issues of corruption. In turn, Mr. Karzai has placed blame on the members of his cabinet and the deputies in parliament.¹ Besides President Karzai and leaders of donor countries, ordinary Afghans are equally frustrated with corruption. For instance, “according to a survey conducted by Integrity Watch Afghanistan, *corruption is endemic*, with two-thirds of respondents considering corruption to be an established practice.”² In 2005, Afghanistan dropped from 117th to 176th in 2008 on Transparency International’s corruption index, and the country’s place rose from 11th to 7th on the failed states index.³ In addition to corruption in the government, Afghan society suffers from high levels of distrust within the general population.

Qiamuddin Amiry, Fletcher MALD 2011, is a first-year student concentrating in Development Economics and International Business Relations. He is an active member of the Fletcher Youth Initiative, and the South Asian Society, and Fletcher Futbol. Before coming to Fletcher he received a B.A. in Government from Colby College.

Why has Afghanistan become mired in social distrust and corruption? Do corruption and distrust, as some scholars have claimed, have cultural roots? The lack of strong and efficient institutions has harnessed a pattern of distrust among the Afghan people that was already in place, which in turn has led the country into a “social trap.” It is very difficult to get out of this trap, unless Afghanistan creates strong and trustworthy institutions to replace the presently corrupt infrastructure.

The concept of the “social trap,” was invented by psychologist John Platt, who examined the question, why in some countries do people trust other people, while in other countries people are generally distrustful of strangers? This theoretical approach to corruption provides a lens through which to analyze the relationship between Afghani state and society. In order to understand whether or not there may be something unique about the Afghans’ relationship with their government that feeds a habit of distrust, I will use this framework to look at the

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history of state building and social distrust in Afghanistan. These two sections will lead to an explanation of how a weak and corrupt state has harnessed a pre-established pattern of distrust in society. In conclusion, I will look at some of the implications of distrust and corruption for development.

SOCIAL TRAP AND NON-COOPERATIVE GAME THEORY

Corruption in a society is related to the level of trust, or lack of trust, among the members of that society. As corruption has become pervasive in Afghanistan, the Afghan people have become more skeptical of the motives of others: the society is caught in a “social trap.” The psychologist John Platt invented the concept of the “social trap,” which can be considered “an ‘umbrella term’ for a number of strategic situations in which social actors find themselves, in which the central element is that their behavior is determined by their assessment of the future action of others.”⁴ The logic of the social trap is built off of the principles of non-cooperative game theory, which state

1. Everyone wins if everyone chooses to cooperate.
2. “But if people cannot trust that ‘almost everyone else’ will cooperate, it is meaningless to cooperate, because the end is *contingent on cooperation by almost everyone else*.”⁵ The conclusion is that “efficient cooperation for common purposes can come about only *if people trust that most other people will also choose to cooperate*.”
3. Lacking that trust, the social trap will slam inexorably shut. That is, we end up in a state of affairs that is worse for everyone, even though, everyone realizes that they would profit by *choosing to cooperate*.”⁶

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In such a situation of distrust, in Professor Rothstein’s words, “the end result of individual rationality may very well be collective irrationality.”⁷ In acting upon their own best interests, people will not cooperate with another, even though their cooperation would bring more benefit to the community. This pattern of non-cooperative game theory is more common in some countries than others.

Despite the fact that human beings are believed to be rational utility-maximizing individuals, there is great variation in the level of social trust among people in different countries. In some countries, trust becomes a very rare commodity. Francis Fukuyama defines trust as “the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on part of

other members of that community.”⁸ Thus, social trust “can be seen as an example of what Douglass North has called the informal institutions in a society, which are established systems of beliefs about the behavior of others.”⁹ In their research, “Political Corruption and Social Trust- an Experimental Approach,” Bo Rothstein and Daniel Eek found

out that 16 percent of Romanian students thought that “most people can be trusted,” while 60 percent of Swedish students thought that way.¹⁰ These findings led Rothstein to argue that there is a higher level of corruption in Romania than in Sweden. Rothstein has argued “that high levels of corruption would cause low social trust;” and has presented three interrelated causal mechanisms for his corruption-trust theory (adopted from Rothstein 2005, ch. 5):¹¹

1. **The inference from public officials:** If public officials in a society are known to be corrupt, citizens will believe that even people whom the law requires to act in the service of the public cannot be trusted. They will therefore conclude that most common people cannot be trusted either.

2. **The inference from the general population:** Citizens will perceive that most people in a society with corrupt officials must take part in corruption in order to obtain what they feel is their rightful due. They will therefore conclude that most other people cannot be trusted.
3. **The inference from oneself.** In order to act in such a society, citizens will, even though they may consider it morally wrong, also begin to take part in corruption. They will therefore conclude that since they cannot be trusted themselves, other people cannot be trusted.

If a society is mired in social distrust, it does not mean that dishonesty is in the genes of its citizens, or that they are inherently and culturally mendacious. Countries with very similar cultures, such as Singapore, Hong Kong and China, perform very differently with respect to social trust and corruption. In the latest measurement published by Transparency International, Singapore was rated to have an index of 9.3 on a scale of 0-10, Hong Kong was placed fourteenth, and China, with an index of 3.5, was in fifty-ninth place.¹² As professor Rothstein says: “people who take bribes or evade taxes may hold values by which they actually consider what they do to be morally wrong. The reason why they continue to act treacherously or opportunistically is not necessarily that they suffer from some kind of moral defect, but rather that there is no point in being the only honest player in a rotten game at which everyone else cheats – or is perceived to cheat.”¹³ In order to build social trust, large groups of the population need to change their view of society. This will require strong and corruption-free institutions (such as the police and the judiciary) that govern by the rule of law and punish corrupt civil servants. This way, the state plays an impartial role within society. However, this brings us to a dilemma: “where do you find the uncorrupted judges, bureaucrats, and policeman in a society where corruption is rampant?”¹⁴ Most judges and policemen may be willing to act honestly, but only if they trust that

most other policemen and judges to do the same. Afghanistan has been struggling with this dilemma, and the state has failed to build corruption-free institutions necessary to gain the trust of the population.

STATE AND SOCIETY IN AFGHANISTAN: A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In a country composed of multiple ethnicities, the state has to be impartial to win the trust of the people. This has not been the case in Afghanistan. The Afghan state has functioned, in one form or another, as a patrimonial state where one clan, tribe or family rules over a heterogeneous society and the government's resources are distributed as patronage to those loyal to the ruling clan. To use Sudipta Kaviraj's metaphor, the state's relation with the rest of society has been like a circle of circles. Each of these circles a distinct cultural identity within Afghanistan. The ruling clan or regime has come from one of the circles. The ruling circle, whether it is a regime, a clan, or a family, has often either come from one of these circles, or from an elite group that created a new circle. Either way, the state or ruling regime has never been like a thread running through all the circles. Instead, it has either marginalized society or has been marginalized by it. Due to many reasons, the relationship between the other circles has not been harmonious.

The Afghan state has always existed within a deeply-rooted tribal society. The equilibrium between tribes has more or less defined the relationship between state and society in Afghanistan throughout its history. There exists an entire canon which discusses the complexity of tribal societies in Afghanistan and their successful resistance to authority. Thus, a profound discussion of the topic is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I will briefly look at the creation of

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Afghanistan as a distinct political unit under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Durani in 1747, the reign of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan (1880-1901), the rule of Amir Habibullah Khan and his son Amir Amanullah Khan (1901-1929), the reign of the Musahiban brothers (1929 – 1978), the Communist regimes in the 1980s, and Afghanistan under the Mujahedin in early 1990s. This historical background will give context to a discussion of social distrust in Afghanistan today, and how it undermines efforts of state building and development.

However, before discussing the nature of state-building in Afghanistan and the state's relationship with 'Afghan society,' it is important to define the notion of state, and differentiate between a *traditional state* and a *nation state*. According to Charles Tilly, traditional states rarely "directly administered areas outside of cities and towns. They dealt with most rural or nomadic population as corporate groups. Control faded out toward ill defined frontier rather than shifting suddenly at monitored borders."¹⁵ Nation states are different from traditional states in many ways. Tilly defines modern states as those "governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralized, differentiated, and autonomous structures."¹⁶ The notion of "governing" is important here. Nation states govern their subjects, while traditional states rarely do so. Afghanistan has struggled to become a nation state.

The nature of Afghanistan's foundation as a distinct political unit in 1747 had many implications for the state's rapport with the society and its subsequent political history. Ahmad Khan Abdali, the founder of Afghanistan, "came from a small clan, the Saddozai branch of the Popolzai Pashtuns, themselves a major sub-tribe of the Abadalis."¹⁷ The Abdali-led confederation "was a loose alliance of tribes sharing a strong Pashtun cultural identity. Their common aim was conquest, pillage, and the extraction of tribute from conquered peoples and

territories."¹⁸ Even within the Pashtun confederation the ruler's clan was one of the many clans; and "Ahmad Shah was in the traditional tribal context only a chief among equals."¹⁹ "He led the Durani confederation and ultimately the united Pashtun tribes in the conquest of non-Pashtun lands... the tribes, their group-feeling cemented by a charismatic leader and the sharing of loot ruled over towns and villages."²⁰ Thus, they created a circle with a goal that was alien, not to mention vicious, to the non-Pashtun population. Ahmad Shah's tribal confederation fitted Ibn Khaldun's tribal model. Ibn Khaldun, (1332-82) the North African historian, sociologist and philosopher, developed a tribal model that "depicts tribes largely [as] self-governing groups of people united by a "group feeling" based on a belief in common kinship."²¹ In this way, the tribal state ruled by Ahmad Shah was totally detached from the major part of the society that it "ruled," which included: Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Aymaks, Farsiwans, Brahuis, Baluchis, Turkomens, Nuristanis, Kohistanis, Pamiris, Kirghiz, Gujar, Moghols, Arabs, Qizilbashis, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews. These non-Pashtun societies

were never part of the united Pashtun circle. Ahmad Shah failed to create a sense of common identity for Afghans by stitching these different circles together. Therefore, oppressed identity groups bore a sense of skepticism towards the tribal state from the very beginning of Afghanistan's history.

Although the basic form of a modern state in Afghanistan emerged under Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, also known as the 'Iron Amir,' the lack of trust between state and society only increased. Using resources provided by the British, Abdul Rahman Khan created a state structure that endured until the fall of Najibullah in 1992; he was "a Pashtun ruler using external resources to reign over an ethnically heterogeneous society while manipulating that social segmentation to weaken society's resistance."²² Iron Amir

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“described his task as putting in order all those hundreds of petty chiefs, plunderers, robbers and cut-throats.”²³ In his twenty year reign, “rebellions were punished by mass executions or deportations such as the forced resettlement of thousands of Ghizali Pashtun tribesmen, chief rivals of the dominant Abdalis in regions where they were neutralized in the midst of hostile Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens and Tajiks.”²⁴ Not only did he foster intense resentment against his state by society in general, he also created hostility among different ethnicities within Afghanistan. For instance, he mobilized the Ghizalis in a jihad against the Shi’ite Hazaras, whom he considered heretical. The Ghizalis plundered, displaced and sold the Hazaras into slavery.²⁵ This resentment and hostility that resulted from this conflict would haunt Afghanistan for decades to come.

Although Abdul Rahman tried to create “one grand community under one law and one rule,”²⁶

“The feeling of patriotism, as known in Europe, cannot exist among Afghans, for there is no common country.”

equality before the rule of law did not exist to harness a sense of trust between state and society. For instance, he created an “elite class of bureaucrats dependent on him alone and detached from their tribal or ethnic

affiliation. The core of this elite was from the royal family and from among the leading chiefs of the Mohammadzai clan.”²⁷ He recruited “slave boys, *ghulam bache*, from areas forcibly brought by the Amir under his control and from leading non-Pashtun families, who were trained like the Janissaires in the Ottoman Empire.”²⁸ Thus, the line between master and slave was made boldly clear during his reign.

The Amir failed to give Afghans a sense of common identity. As a British general Sir Henry Rawlinson, observed: “The nation consists of a mere collection of tribes, of unequal power and divergent habits, which are held together, more or less loosely, according to the personal character of the chief who rules them. The feeling of patriotism, as known in Europe, cannot exist among Afghans, for there is no common country.”²⁹ The Amir, in association with his

Mohammadzai clan, wanted to implement his idea of a modern state over a heterogeneous population that did not share his vision for a common future.

After Abdul Rahman Khan’s rule came to an end, his son Amir Habibulla Khan (1901- 19) and his grandson Amir Amanullah Khan (1919 - 29) both dramatically changed Afghanistan’s state policies. Haibbullah Khan opened the country to modern education for the first time, and allowed the Mohammadzais exiled by his father to return.³⁰

After Habibullah Khan’s assassination, his son King Amanullah Khan took radical measures to reform Afghanistan. He targeted three areas to reconstitute social control: taxes, land tenure, and transportation.³¹ Amanullah Khan was the first Afghan king who penetrated deep into rural Afghan communities and linked the peasant-tribal system to both the state and the market; he attempted to create the crucial thread running through different cultural circles within the country. One of Amanullah Khan’s radical measures was that “he regularized the system of taxation, abolishing tax farming and requiring that all taxes be paid in cash.”³² He ended indirect rule through the tribal leaders and increased direct tax on land and livestock, which brought him into conflict with the landowning khans. He encouraged trade by planning a new transportation network and expanded the education system, opening it to foreign influence. Furthermore, he encouraged the participation of women. Amanullah gave Afghanistan its first constitution in 1921, according to which even the king’s actions were, in principle, subordinated to law. Through the constitution, he introduced the notion of universal citizenship and declared that citizens had rights. This was the end of slavery for marginalized ethnicities like the Hazaras. Strengthening the army, however, was not his first priority. His radical modernization of the country brought him in conflict with the tribal leaders and the Islamic *ulamas*. Habibullah, also known as *Bacha-yi Saqao* (son of water carrier), toppled Amanullah’s regime.

Bacha-yi Saqao was soon replaced by the Musahiban brothers of the Mohammadzai family, and the distribution of patronage remained in its

place. Under the Musahiban the government relied heavily on foreign aid. For instance, “from 1958 to 1968 and again in the 1970s the state financed over 40 percent of its expenditure from revenue accruing directly from abroad.”³³ The monarchy continued the patronage-oriented system of governing. In the words of Rubin:

[Government] expenditures showed the domestic consequences of becoming an allocation state; they presented the distribution of foreign aid as patronage to favored groups. The beneficiaries of most of the irrigation projects were tribal Pashtuns. Eastern Pashtuns dominated the trucking industry, especially because much of the profit derived from smuggling across the nearby Pakistani border. Many of those recruited into the new middle class were also tribal Pashtuns; indeed, the Musahiban made a concerted though ultimately unsuccessful effort to Pashtunize the predominantly Persian-speaking civil service....the Musahiban rulers used the resources obtained from their international connections to create a patronage network calculated to strengthen Pashtun nationalism, which they hoped would in turn prove an ideological buttress for their rule.³⁴

Meanwhile, the foreign aid the government took on certain “development” projects created new types of constituencies. For instance, “after the mid-1950s the school system expanded with foreign, largely American, aid.”³⁵ Some of the secondary boarding schools, such as Rahman Baba and Khushhal Khan Schools, enrolled only Pashtun students from eastern tribes.³⁶ Under this period, as the government took a non-confrontational approach with the rural khans, it created constituencies in the cities that were newly educated and loosely considered intellectuals: “the state educational process led to weakened traditional social control over those who went through it. Schooling separated village youth from their kin groups and from most of the population, in which the literacy rate remained

under 10 percent.”³⁷ The core leadership of both the future Mujahedin and the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) were educated in this period. Thus, during this time a new circle was created from among the existing circles, and the new one was very alien to the old ones.

The newly-educated elite “intellectuals” founded or joined social and ideological organizations; For instance, “the principal communist organization was the PDPA. The Soviet Union provided the PDPA leaders some protection from government repression.”³⁸ The PDPA was divided into Khalq (people) and Parcham (Flag), who fought over the leadership of the Party. Meanwhile, a new Islamic movement was gaining influence among the Kabul University students under the name of Muslim Youth Organization.

In 1973, Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan, the king’s cousin, carried out a coup, ended the monarchy, introduced the Republic, and declared himself the president. He cracked down on the Islamists, whose main activists and leadership fled to Pakistan. Daud Khan also expelled the Parchamis, who had assisted him with the coup. Khalqis and Parchamis reunited, and the PDPA army officers began planning a coup and toppled Daud’s regime. This change of regime was a battle between the elites, while the majority of the population, especially the rural people, watched the scene unfold from the margins. Soon, conflict broke out again within the PDPA. Babrak Karmal and the rest of the leadership of the Parcham wing were sent into exile. The Khalqi government had its own internal conflicts; Hafizullah Amin wanted to carry out a revolutionary transformation of Afghan society by decree and terror, while Noor Mohammad Taraki, the General Secretary of the Party, wanted more moderation. When Amin felt that the Soviet Union planned to replace him with a Taraki-Karmal coalition, he had Taraki killed and he took over.³⁹

Amin’s rule marked one of the most brutal periods between the Afghan state and society. Amin’s goal was to use the state apparatus to destroy all competition for social control in all sectors of Afghan society. He wanted to neutralize both tribal aristocracy and rival intelligensia. He wished that “the masses liberated from

domination would then be enlightened through a mass literacy program and would gratefully support the Khalqis; the regime was dominated by Ghilzai and Paktia Pahstuns of tribal origins.”⁴⁰ Amin’s regime used mass arrests, torture and secret executions on a scale Afghanistan had never seen before even under Abdul Rahman Khan. He targeted any social groups that could have threatened his regime: students and teachers, army officers, religious leaders, Islamists, Parchamis, Maoists, bureaucrats, and members of ethnic groups who have revolted against the government such as Nuristanis and Hazaras.⁴¹ The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, assassinated Amin, and put Babrak Karmal in power. By then the Islamist factions based in Pakistan were actively organizing an opposition to the regime in Kabul with the help of the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Afghanistan experienced more social fragmentation following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, as both the United States and the USSR suspended military aid to their clients in Afghanistan. Rubin observes that “the fragmentation of the political and military structures of the resistance prevented the mujahidin from turning local victories into a national one. For many commanders, the personal obligation of jihad ended with the Soviet withdrawal.”⁴² With weapons at the disposal of the Mujahedin, they engaged in a struggle for power at the local level, with each faction backed by its own foreign supporter. For instance, the Islamic Party, led by Gulbudin Hikmatyar, was supported by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan because both countries feared that the domination of Afghanistan by a Persian-speaking regime would lead to the rise of an Iranian influence in the country. Since ethnic identity was much stronger than national identity, and some factions of Afghan society had deep-rooted resentment against others (such as Hazaras against Pashtuns), the battle for Kabul was waged between alliances

that “largely followed ethnic patterns in composition if not in ideology.”⁴³ In this battle, hundreds of years of resentment and hostility among ethnicities came to the surface. The majority of Pashtun fighters gathered around Hekmatyar, and one of the bloodiest wars was fought between Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e Islami and the Hazara faction of Hizb-e Wahdat. The international community, however, tried to bring the Mujahedin together, which resulted in the The Peshawar Agreement of 24 April 1992, which was brokered by Pakistan. When the accord failed, Kabul turned into a battleground for warring ethnicities. Hekmatyar launched a barrage of rockets against Kabul that destroyed half of the city, and took some 25,000 civilian lives.⁴⁴

With the collapse of the pro-communist regime in Kabul, there was no legitimate state in Afghanistan. Thus, it is difficult to see a relationship between the state and society at all—additionally, the shaky relationship between different circles was destroyed too. Since even individual circles were divided into subsections, Afghani people became skeptical of those who were not in their immediate family or circle of close friends.

The state of brutality and chaos in the country led to the rise of one of the most religiously conservative regimes that Afghanistan has ever experienced -- the Taliban. Although the Taliban brought security by driving the warring factions out of major Afghan cities, they failed to create strong, impartial and efficient institutions. Pashtuns and religious extremists dominated the Taliban regime. Therefore, anyone who did not share the regime’s dogma was marginalized and terrorized. This is again a familiar pattern in the Afghan relationship between state and society: a regime with a particular ideology trying to rule over a heterogeneous population that does not share the ideology of the regime. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Karzai’s regime inherited a society that was not only skeptical of the state, but

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Karzai’s regime inherited a society that was not only skeptical of the state, but also fragmented into pieces—with each piece loyal to a different khan, a warlord, or a religious leader and suspicious of all others.

also fragmented into pieces—with each piece loyal to a different khan, a warlord, or a religious leader and suspicious of all others. Could Karzai create a sense of trust among these people?

PRESIDENT KARZAI'S GOVERNMENT: 2001-PRESENT

For President Karzai to win over the people and create a sense of social trust among them, he needed to build strong, efficient and corruption-free institutions that could offer people an alternative to the warlords' protection. This way, he could signal to different circles that a new era of politics was at hand. However, Karzai's administration started poorly because international donors operating in Afghanistan—chiefly among them the United States – were not ready for state building. As Ahmed Rashid puts it, "United States policymakers had concentrated on waging war but had not considered how to wage the peace."⁴⁵ The consequences of this half-hearted nation-building had many critical implications for Afghans and their future government.

The Bush administration tried to fix Afghanistan on the cheap as the United States diverted its effort and interest from 2002 onwards to Iraq. After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the United States turned to the warlords, such as Gul Agha Shirzai to "stabilize" the country. Ironically, by supporting these warlords the United States was undermining the authority of the very government that it was meant to protect. Warlords such as Gul Agha Shirzai are known for doling out government contracts to family and friends. In Afghan politics this was a familiar business – a system run on patronage. Therefore, the task of building trust between state and society was hard to achieve from the very beginning.

Running Afghanistan cheaply also meant that the international community did not invest the resources to create a strong Afghan bureaucracy. Nevertheless, this bureaucracy was essential, so instead, the international community relied on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to carry out quick impact projects. This way, "Afghanistan was stripped of the capacity to help itself, the donors rushed to fill the gap with

technical assistance contracts running into hundreds of millions, more foreigners came to fill these open vacancies jobs that Afghans could easily be trained for."⁴⁶

The system not only failed to train new people for the government, it also had the unintended effect of attracting top Afghan professionals to the NGO world, rather than leaving them in positions where they could strengthen the government. Mr. Ghani, the former finance minister, recalled in an interview with the BBC News: "Within six months of starting my job as finance minister, my best people had been stolen by international aid organizations who could offer them forty to a hundred times the salary we could."⁴⁷ As the "NGOs sucked away most of those who had been working as professors, engineers, doctors and teachers to highly paid positions supporting the donor circus," a handicapped government bureaucracy became even less functional.⁴⁸ "To rebuild, states need to establish government institutions that do broadly what they are supposed to do, and that invest heavily in higher education and skills to create a competitive work force."⁴⁹ For instance, South Korea and Japan owed their success in post-war state building to a large extent to their efficient bureaucracy. The Afghan bureaucracy, on the other hand, became so weak and ineffective that it could hardly spend its budget. In 2005 and 2006 the government spent only 44 per cent of the money it received for development projects. Meanwhile, according to the Ministry of Finance, donor countries spent about \$500 million on poorly designed and uncoordinated technical assistance."⁵⁰ In Afghanistan, the NGOs have repeatedly competed with the government over the resources necessary for building an effective civil service system.

A weak central government was not in a position to hold these NGOs accountable because the NGOs were only accountable to their donor

"Within six months of starting my job as finance minister, my best people had been stolen by international aid organizations who could offer them forty to a hundred times the salary we could."

countries. Ironically, a poor and devastated country like Afghanistan became a place for people to get rich. With billions of dollars of humanitarian aid flowing into the country, sub-contractual layers turned into a common business: “by one estimate, international contractors are responsible for almost three quarters of the U.S. development assistance in Afghanistan.”⁵¹ And while corruption is an endemic part of the Afghani government, the “layers upon layers of subcontracting appear to Afghans as a case of many hands legally taking a cut before funds reach the target program.”⁵² This means that by the time the money gets to the last contractor, who really does the physical work on the ground, there is not much money left to finish the project. The case of a small village in a remote part of Bamiyan province, in Afghanistan’s central highlands, serves as a good example:

In 2002, \$150 million could have transformed the lives of the inhabitants of villages like this one. The money was received by an agency in Geneva, who took 20 percent and subcontracted the job to another agency in Washington DC, who also took 20 per cent. Again, it was subcontracted and another 20 per cent was taken; and this happened again when the money arrived in Kabul. By this time, there was very little money left; but enough for someone to buy wood in Western Iran and have it shipped by a shipping cartel owned by a provincial governor at five times the cost of regular transportation. Eventually some wooden beams reached to the villages. A young man explained: ‘the beams were too large and heavy for the mud walls that we can build. So all we could do was chop them up and use them for firewood.’⁵³

Unfortunately, this example is certainly not an isolated case, but rather a common practice; too often, money for development projects is “burned” by the time it gets to the site of construction.

Cases such as Bamiyan tell a story that is familiar to the Afghan people: ordinary Afghan society is marginalized, while elite groups who are supposed to be helping the people are helping themselves by filling their own pockets. This feeds pre-established social distrust among people. This case also highlights the fact that under Karzai’s regime, resources are distributed unequally. Those with connections and “contracts” get rich on behalf of those who need help. There should be no doubt that such an approach to state building and reconstruction has a devastating effect, not only on the relationship between state and society, but also on the pillars of social trust among people.

Equal distribution of resources and opportunities reflect roots of generalized trust in a society. Bo Rothstein and Eric Uslaner argue that “the distribution of resources and opportunities plays a key role in establishing the belief that people share a common destiny and have similar fundamental values. When resources and opportunities are distributed equally, people are more likely to perceive a common stake with others and to see themselves as part of a larger social order. If there is a strong skew in wealth or in the possibilities for improving one’s stake in life, people at each end may feel that they have little in common with others.”⁵⁴ This is one way of explaining the pervasive corruption in government institutions. If a civil servant feels that he or she makes one hundred times less than his or her neighbor who works for an NGO, the individual might feel great resentment against the system. And if he or she feels that most fellow civil servants are taking bribes – due to a low-paying salary – that person will most likely take bribes because there is no reason to be the only honest one in a rotten game. The massive inequality of opportunity and distribution of resources, along with non-cooperative game theory, goes a long way to explain why government bodies suffer from pervasive corruption.

THE POLICE AND THE JUDICIARY

A corrupt police force is the gateway for the loss of a society’s trust and faith in the government. After all, “a trusted law enforcement

institution would assist nearly everything that needs to be achieved in the country from security, through gender rights and minority rights, to building investor confidence and development goals.⁵⁵ It is the police force that is responsible for bringing corrupt officials to the judiciary, thus giving people a reason to trust in the government. Afghanistan lacks this law enforcement institution. According to an article in the *New York Times*, at all levels Afghan officials misuse their positions in the civil administration and the police force for quick profits.⁵⁶ The article notes that “the lack of trust, coupled with the absence of security forces in almost all villages, further strengthens the hand of the Taliban as the only real power here [Ghazni province of Afghanistan]. The list of schemes that undermine law enforcement is long and bewildering, according to American and Afghan officers who cite some examples: police officials who steal truckloads of gasoline; judges and prosecutors who make decisions based on bribes; high-ranking government officials who reap payoffs from hashish and chromites smuggling; and midlevel security and political jobs that are sold, sometimes for more than \$50,000, money the buyers then recoup through still more bribes and theft.”⁵⁷ Investigations show that the Afghan police force is ill-trained and low-paid. While these factors do much to explain widespread corruption within the police force, this corruption has also created a situation in which the police force does not trust Afghanistan’s political leadership.

The leadership’s character and outlook affects every level of the administration. When civil servants feel that their bosses are cheating, this enables them to find a reason to take bribes too -- especially if their salaries hardly pay for their families’ expenses. This ultimately makes common citizens feel suspicious of others in society because their civil servants are cheating. Thus, Afghan society is caught in a social trap, where everyone feels that everyone else is cheating. This hierarchy of corruption is very common in Afghanistan. For instance, “a raft of

investigations has concluded that people at the highest levels of the Karzai administration, including President Karzai’s own brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, are cooperating in the country’s opium trade, now the world’s largest. In the streets and government offices, hardly a public transaction seems to unfold here that does not carry with it the requirement of a bribe, a gift, or, in case you are a beggar, “*harchee*” — whatever you have in your pocket.”⁵⁸ President Karzai publicly acknowledged that corruption “is contributing to the collapse of public confidence in his government...”⁵⁹ It is widely acknowledged that “the two fatal weak points in Afghanistan’s government today are the Ministry of the Interior and the judiciary. Both are deeply corrupt and plagued by a lack of basic skills, equipment, and

resources. Without effective and honest administrators, police, and judges, the state can do little to provide internal security -- and if the government does not provide security, people will not recognize it as a government.”⁶⁰ “Community leaders complain forcefully about judicial corruption, which has led many to demand the implementation of

Islamic law, or sharia -- which they contrast not to secular law but to corruption. One elder from the province of Paktia said, “Islam says that if you find a thief, he has to be punished. If a murderer is arrested, he has to be tried and executed. In our country, if a murderer is put in prison, after six months he bribes the judge and escapes. If a member of parliament is killed ... his murderer is released after three to four months in prison because of bribery.”⁶¹

CONCLUSION

If Afghani civil servants such as police and judges, whose job it is to hold others accountable, are corrupt themselves, then how can people trust normal citizens? On the other hand, if law enforcement agencies were deemed to be corruption-free by society, the general population would actually rely on these agencies, and Afghan citizens would obey the rule of law. Unfortunately, bringing about such a change

“The lack of trust, coupled with the absence of security forces in almost all villages, further strengthens the hand of the Taliban as the only real power here.”

would be no simple task: social distrust in Afghanistan has historical roots, and the majority of the Afghan population has always been marginalized. Afghanistan's resources and opportunities have historically been in the hands of a few and the rest of society has felt that it is not part of a larger social order. Therefore, Afghan citizens have always remained within their own circles, and trusted people within that circle. The ruling circle has repeatedly failed to encompass all of society, especially the rural areas, and give them the feeling that they share a common destiny. The 'state' either did not bother to engage with rural populations, such as the Musahiban brothers, or it took an elitist approach when it confronted them. The latter approach was evident under Abdul Rahman Khan, Amanullah Khan and later under the communist regime: the discourse that they tried to introduce into Afghan society was alien to the people.

Today, Karzai's government faces the challenge of stitching these circles together with a single thread. With a weak central government,

this will be a difficult task. The warlords, although not strong enough to topple the government, are still very influential. They command loyalty based on ethnic lines. The presence of the foreign troops and their airstrikes causes hundreds of civilian casualties and gives people the feeling that either their government does not care about them or is not in a position of authority; this makes the task of creating social trust even harder. In order to break out of Afghanistan's social trap, it will be necessary to change the way the majority of Afghan people view their society. This task will require a strong, corruption-free and impartial government that punishes dishonest officials and creates a sense of national identity that is stronger than regional or ethnic circles.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

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Egypt's Unique Role in the Reawakening and Reorganization of the Palestinian National Movement: 1948-1967

David Aaron Wallsh

The years between 1948 and 1967 witnessed the extraordinary revival of the Palestinian national movement. Following Israel's 1948 defeat of invading Arab armies—what Palestinians term *al-nakbah* (the catastrophe)—Palestinian society was rendered geographically divided, socially fragmented, leaderless, and bereft of any viable national institutions. Yet, less than two decades later Palestinians could boast of increasing Arab and international recognition of their plight, an armed resistance movement, and the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The political consolidation that took place during this period is best divided into two separate stages. First, contrary to the opinions of some scholars, the decade after the *nakbah* (up to 1959) constituted the national movement's "formative years," a time during which a small cadre of Palestinian activists launched a fury of political, social and military processes meant to reawaken the shattered national spirit.¹ Second, the period from 1959 to 1967 can be seen as the time when the idea for a representative and distinct Palestinian national institution took shape and materialized.

David Aaron Wallsh, Fletcher MALD 2011, is a first-year student concentrating in International Security and International Political Economy, with a geographic focus on the Middle East. Prior to Fletcher, he received an MA in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The year 1959 marks the transition between these two stages and, as such, holds particular significance. At an Arab League Council (ALC) session in March, Egypt initiated what would be a five year campaign for the creation of a 'Palestinian Entity.' Fateh was established in October and began distributing its monthly publication, *Filastinuna*, in November. Also in November, a group of Palestinian students from universities across the Arab world came together to form an unprecedented, cross-border national union, the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS).²

The profound transformation of Palestinian society and the achievements of its national movement beg the question of how such a weak and divided society consolidated. Yezid Sayigh notes that the collective experience of exile, dispersion and shared longing to return to a specific territory made patriotism a natural feeling among Palestinians.³ But early Palestinian patriotism emphasized a range of sometimes conflicting identities, including religion, kinship, or Arab ethnicity.⁴ The

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development of a distinctly Palestinian nationalism, Sayigh argues, was not inevitable.⁵ A study of the activities of both Palestinians and the Arab states in which they found themselves after 1948 reveals that the reemergence of Palestinian nationalism was largely a result of Egypt's commitment to the Palestinian cause. In the critical years after the *nakbah*, Egypt played a unique and indispensable role in reawakening and reorganizing the Palestinian national movement through its campaign to champion the cause of Arab nationalism and its concomitant support of popular organizations, military activity, and the relentless pursuit of a Palestinian entity.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL BACKGROUND

Why is it that Egypt not only supported the Palestinian cause, but contributed more than any other Arab state? Indeed, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and, to a lesser extent, Iraq each absorbed thousands of Palestinian refugees after the 1948 war and equally shared in the humiliating defeat to Israel in that war. A brief overview of the local (Egypt and Gaza) and regional background will shed light on this question by examining Egypt's administration of the Gaza Strip and its rising stature in the inter-Arab arena, respectively.

Local Background

After the 1948 war and the conclusion of its armistice agreement with Israel in February 1949, Egypt found itself in control of a coastal strip of land stretching from the Rafah border crossing in the south to an area just north of Gaza City. The area, which was officially named the 'Gaza Strip' in 1955, was home to approximately 200,000 refugees and 88,000 original residents.⁶ While in the middle of the war the whole of Palestine was placed under the temporary civil administration of the newly-created All-Palestine Government (APG), soon after the armistice agreement Egypt established its military administration in Gaza. A governor-general was selected from the Egyptian military to head the administration and was vested with full authority over local affairs. As was the case in Syria and Lebanon, Palestinians in Egypt were left politically disenfranchised.⁷

While Egypt's later contributions to Palestinian nationalism were unparalleled, it must also be noted that Cairo made daily life and political organizing quite difficult for Palestinians in the first few years after the war. Gaza has suffered from overcrowding and severe unemployment since 1948. Despite sharing Gaza's only open land border, Egypt refused to allow large numbers of refugees into Egypt to obtain residence or work.⁸ International travel (including travel from Gaza to Egypt) was cumbersome for both Gazans and Palestinians in Egypt; travel and identity documents were issued by the then Cairo-based APG and grew increasingly worthless as Arab recognition of the APG declined.⁹ Moreover, in an effort to avoid further confrontation with Israel and to restore unity with Jordan's King Abdullah, who had annexationist ambitions in the West Bank, the Egyptian monarchy actively sought to dismantle what remained of Palestinian national institutions after the war. Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the nationalist leader and driving force behind the APG, was "summoned" to Cairo as early as February 1949 where he was placed under strict surveillance. Soon after, APG headquarters was also moved from Gaza to Cairo for closer monitoring and its responsibilities were diminished.¹⁰ Also in 1949, Egyptian military authorities in Gaza moved quickly to disarm bands of Palestinian fighters, repatriate hundreds of Egyptian volunteers associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and dismantle a local radio station.¹¹

Despite these activities, the most distinctive feature of Egypt's administration in Gaza was its temporary nature. While Israel excluded Palestinians from its political system and Jordan forcibly included them in its polity, Egypt never attempted to annex the Gaza Strip. It certainly governed according to the interests of Cairo, but Gaza nonetheless remained the only place after the *nakbah* where Palestinians could preserve their identity on their land. As a result, Gazans never called for the expulsion of the

Egypt played a unique and indispensable role in reawakening and reorganizing the Palestinian national movement.

Egyptian administration or organized opposition against it, even though they often blamed Egypt for their economic and other woes.¹²

Regional Background

In addition to Egypt's position vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip, its support of Palestinian nationalism must further be viewed in the context of inter-Arab and international politics. Perhaps more than any specific action or policy, the rise in popularity of Arab nationalism and its premier advocate, Egyptian leader Gamal Abd al-Nasir, in the 1950s and 1960s empowered Palestinians everywhere. Nasir's anti-imperialist, Pan-Arab rhetoric and actions elevated him to *de facto* leadership of the Arab world; and the fact that he made the liberation of Palestine a top priority of Arab nationalism led many Palestinians to see him as a natural ally.¹³ No wonder then that many of those Palestinians

who were politically active in the early years after 1948 were involved with Arab nationalist opposition parties and organizations. However, the realization among Palestinians that they could not rely on the Arab world to secure their future—which accompanied the decline of Pan-Arabism in the 1960s—can also be seen as an indirect result of Egyptian action, or lack thereof.¹⁴

But in the early 1950s, the future of Arab nationalism seemed promising. In 1952, Egypt's dissatisfaction with the continued British presence near the Suez Canal, economic issues, and the conduct of the war against Israel led to a *coup* by a group of nationalist military officers dubbed the Free Officers. The new government, which was at first led by Muhammad Naguib and also included Nasir, was originally weary of instigating Israel and therefore cautious in its support of the Palestinians. Yet uncontrollable Palestinian infiltration into Israel, harsh Israeli reprisals, and Palestinian demonstrations in response soon led Egypt to support Palestinian commando activity.¹⁵

Tensions escalated between Israel and Egypt when Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal Company in 1956. Israel partnered with Britain and France in attacking Egypt that October, and

Israel's ensuing five month occupation of Gaza jolted Palestinians. It convinced many of them both of the need for armed resistance against Israel and that Nasir was their partner in this struggle.¹⁶ In fact, the establishment of Fateh—though itself not an adherent of Arab nationalism—should be seen as a direct result of the 1956 occupation. Fateh was founded by Palestinian activists who sensed relatively early that only an autonomous Palestinian organization could be relied upon to conduct armed resistance. This opinion would later come to define the Palestinian national movement.¹⁷

Gazans never called for the expulsion of the Egyptian administration or organized opposition against it, even though they often blamed Egypt for their...woes.

Nasir's popularity in the Arab world extended beyond Palestinian circles, and in 1958 he achieved the first tangible manifestation of Arab nationalism when he orchestrated the merger of Egypt and Syria to form the United Arab Republic (UAR). The creation of the UAR served as

yet another impetus for Palestinian mobilization, as it appeared that unity would strengthen the Arab world and hasten the liberation of Palestine. In fact, just after the UAR was formed the first legislative and executive councils were established in Gaza.¹⁸ Conversely, as alluded to above, it stands to reason that the dissolution of the UAR in 1961—not to mention Algeria securing its independence from France through armed resistance months later—had the opposite effect of pushing more and more Palestinians away from Arab nationalism and towards self-reliance.¹⁹

Through Arab nationalism Nasir helped to reawaken the political consciousness of countless Palestinians, while the movement's decline equally convinced them of the need for an autonomous Palestinian movement. But in addition to ideology, the Egyptian government enacted a number of specific policies designed to bolster Palestinian nationalism within its conception. One of the most important of these steps was the decision to allow masses of Palestinians, including many Gazans, to study in Egyptian universities. Cairo's political and financial support of Palestinian students provided

young activists with one of their first mediums for reorganizing after the *nakbah*. As Laurie Brand writes, “A politicized core of Palestinians had been champing at the bit, awaiting any political opening to reorganize more freely. Nasir gave them their chance.”²⁰

PALESTINIAN STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Popular organizations played a groundbreaking role in raising the political consciousness of Palestinians as early as the 1950s. At the time, prevailing regional politics rendered cross-border organizing impossible, which caused many young activists to turn to social associations and unions in their host countries. Mass organizations would later develop connecting Palestinians in different countries and representing constituencies ranging from workers and women to teachers and students. The most important of these groups was the Palestinian Students Union (PSU) in Cairo.²¹ It was in Egypt’s universities that future Palestinian leaders such as Yasir Arafat, Salah Khalaf, and others first met and began to revive the national movement; and it is no coincidence that a decade and a half later these same individuals would constitute the leadership of Fateh and the PLO.²² Over the course of the 1950s, the PSU would successfully raise the profile of the Palestinian issue in the Arab arena and internationally, and for the first time unite Palestinians in a national organization across international borders.

The Palestinian Students Union was founded in Egypt in 1944 (although records suggest a Palestinian student association existed in Cairo as early as 1911). At that time Egypt boasted the oldest and most prestigious university system in the Arab world. The relatively low cost of living, availability of stipends and scholarships, and Cairo’s status as a nationalist and cultural center in the 1950s further combined to attract thousands of Palestinian students. After the 1952 revolution, the Free Officers expanded the monarchy’s previous policy of open admissions for Palestinian students, making Egypt the primary educator of Palestinians (including Gazans). Nasir, who was vying for leadership of the Arab world in the 1950s, likely calculated that the benefits of educating Palestinians far exceeded the costs.

Egyptian universities would produce educated and politicized graduates who would find work throughout the Arab world and who would be grateful to the Egyptian regime. Equally, the small size of Egypt’s Palestinian community meant that Palestinian students posed little political danger.²³

As Nasir’s popularity and the number of Palestinians studying in Egypt both grew, so did the PSU. One of its former leaders described it as “a sort of umbrella organization grouping Palestinian students of various political stripes.”²⁴ It was the only Palestinian organization at the time to hold democratic elections, and therefore the only institution that could legitimately claim to represent Palestinians. The union’s major breakthrough came in 1954, when a Palestinian student delegation, including Yasir Arafat, was selected to accompany an Egyptian delegation at an international youth festival in Warsaw. With no legitimate bodies of international standing existing then to represent Palestinians, Warsaw provided the PSU with a first opportunity to assert a Palestinian national identity on an international stage.

Months later, the PSU challenged the Egyptian regime when it organized a sit-in and hunger strike at its headquarters to protest Egypt’s inability to protect against Israeli raids. This event is notable because of the student demands, one of which was to discuss their grievances with Nasir. Nasir agreed to a meeting with PSU demonstrators and leadership, and a mutually beneficial

relationship ensued between both parties. The union scored another success in 1955 when it won full membership into the International Union of Students (IUS) in spite of Israeli opposition. Finally, according to Yasir Arafat, the PSU’s most important accomplishment was gaining Egyptian approval to publish and distribute its newsletter, *Sawt Filastin* (Voice of Palestine). Arafat saw *Sawt Filastin* as important for Palestinians everywhere, not just students in Egypt, as it was a way to

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communicate with “brothers” in Gaza, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere and facilitate their ability to organize.²⁵

The General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS)

Given the success of the PSU, it was only a matter of time until an international Palestinian student organization was created. The idea originally came from Palestinian students in Iraq who, without any prior permission from the government, started plans on establishing a federation to unite the diaspora-wide Palestinian student groups. However, the fallout between Nasir and Iraqi president Abd al-Karim Qasim in 1959 led Qasim to expel pro-Nasirist Palestinian students, among them the leaders behind this idea. Many of these students later ended up in Cairo, where they joined forces with the PSU and together proposed to Nasir the idea of founding a general union of Palestinian students. Nasir, eager to boost his nationalist credentials, gave full support to the idea of a union headquartered in Cairo. He even circumvented an Egyptian law that prohibited organizations registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, including the PSU, from operating transnationally and transferred jurisdiction over the GUPS to the executive branch.²⁶

The first meeting of the GUPS occurred in November 1959 at Cairo University. At the time, it was the only international forum in which Palestinians could express their political views and national identity. The GUPS quickly earned respect throughout the Arab world; its leaders found themselves in meetings with Arab heads of state and accepting sizable donations from countries wishing to exert their influence. Early GUPS achievements included: reaching an agreement with Jordanian student groups designating it as the only student group West Bank students were eligible to enter; passing unprecedented resolutions calling for the establishment of a Palestinian entity, a liberation organization, and a liberation army; and gaining

recognition from the Arab League as a “distinct entity.” Its greatest success though occurred in March 1965, when it organized a Palestine Symposium in Cairo. Through Nasir’s financial, political, and organizational support, the GUPS hosted the first conference of its kind, which was attended by political leaders, intellectuals, and delegations from fifty-eight countries.²⁷

MILITARY ORGANIZING

A second means through which the Egyptian government helped to revive Palestinian nationalism was by organizing Palestinian military units. While the new regime after 1952 initially showed signs of restraint vis-à-vis Israel, Palestinian infiltration from Gaza into Israel led to a series of Israeli reprisals that eventually forced its hand. Cairo thus decided to form units and support military activity as a means of deterring Israeli attacks.

Though Egypt never produced a militarily significant Palestinian fighting force, its contributions were nonetheless important. Commando activity gave Palestinians a concrete way to work towards the liberation of their homeland. As Moshe Shemesh explains, it was a symbol of the Palestinians’ “will to use force for the liberation of Filastin.”²⁸

As early as 1949 Egyptian military intelligence sponsored a group of Palestinians known as the *fida'iyyun* (men of sacrifice) to conduct unarmed reconnaissance missions inside Israel. Later, because it was prevented by the armistice agreement from deploying its forces inside Gaza, the Egyptian military established the Palestine Border Police (PBP) in a bid to control Palestinian infiltration. The PBP was composed of a few hundred volunteers and, as was the case in most Palestinian units later formed by Egypt, led by Egyptian military commanders. The PBP was not, however, willing or capable of stopping Palestinian infiltration and therefore decreased in size and responsibility. Discontented with these restrictions and continuing Israeli raids, Palestinians demonstrated in Gaza calling for

After Syria's merger with Egypt—Palestinian *mughawir* intervened in the developing feud between Nasir and Qasim by smuggling weapons into Iraq to assist a rebellion by pro-Nasir elements in Mosul.

arms, conscription, and training. Nasir, having just taken control of the Revolutionary Council, was eager to diffuse the situation and acquiesced by transforming the PBP into 11 Battalion, Palestine Borders Guard (PBG) and increasing both its size and the quality of its weaponry.²⁹

The Palestine Borders Guard proved equally as ineffective at preventing infiltration. In February 1955 Israel conducted a particularly deadly raid inside Gaza in which over three dozen Egyptian soldiers were killed. Palestinians once again took to the streets protesting their inadequate protection, this time on the heels of a three day demonstration against Cairo's plans to resettle Palestinians in Sinai. At last Nasir relented to Palestinian demands: two full brigades were formed and Palestinian forces were raised to 15,000 men. Also, Egypt extended its military training for university students to include students in secondary school.³⁰

Israel's February 1955 raid and Nasir's change of policy further led Egyptian military intelligence to propose the establishment of a special task force to undertake commando missions inside Israel. Cairo quickly approved, and by April 1955 the *fida'iyyun* began combat activity. Later that year the *fida'iyyun* reached over 1,000 in number and were re-designated as 141 Battalion. Commando activity against Israel subsequently increased dramatically causing a rise in frequency and harshness of Israeli responses. The cycle of violence picked up throughout 1956, culminating in Israel's invasion of Egypt on October 29, 1956 as part of the tripartite invasion.³¹

In the aftermath of the 1956 war, Egypt grew dissatisfied with the *fida'iyyun* and the other military forces it had created. The strategy of forming Palestinian military units to deter larger attacks and Israeli reprisals had backfired.³² Egypt thus dismantled many of the battalions and brigades it had established and in their stead formed in 1957 the Palestinian Brigade, a new force touted as the "Palestinian army." The Brigade was composed of graduates from the Egyptian Military College known as "officers of the PA" and included almost 3,000 volunteers. Still, its functions were not offensive in nature and it was relegated to guarding facilities, engaging in

propaganda, and training units of newly created militia called the Popular Resistance.³³

Role of a Palestinian Army in the Arab Cold War

Palestinian fighting units in Gaza, Egypt and the broader UAR might not have been significant for their military capabilities and accomplishments, but they certainly played a substantial role in the inter-Arab arena. In Syria, for example, Palestinian units known as *maghawir* (commandos) were formed and, though restricted from operating inside Israel, were deployed by Syrian military intelligence against rivals domestically and abroad. In one particularly famous mission in March 1959—notably after Syria's merger with Egypt—Palestinian *mughawir* intervened in the developing feud between Nasir and Qasim by smuggling weapons into Iraq to assist a rebellion by pro-Nasir elements in Mosul.³⁴ Qasim thwarted this mission and the rift between Iraq and Egypt deepened. Both leaders saw themselves as champions of Arabism and a proxy war soon developed over who was more devoted to the Palestinian cause.

Accordingly, Qasim also began fostering Palestinian military units and in 1960 announced the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Army.³⁵ Nasir responded in kind, and a race ensued over not only which country could best prepare for the military "liberation of *Filastin*," but also over who could deliver political independence. At around the same time as this dispute began, Israel started its project to divert water from the Jordan River, an initiative which threatened to strengthen it at the expense of the Palestinians. This action led to even further rivalry between Arab states as they competed to prove their anti-Israel credentials to the public. It was in this context that, according to Moshe Shemesh, "[inter-Arab] rivalry led to more activity on behalf of the Palestinian Entity."³⁶

CONCLUSION

In the mid-1960s, and especially after the 1967 war, Fateh's armed resistance movement gained considerable popularity within Palestinian circles, eventually causing Egypt to recalculate its support of the PLO and Shuqayri. Sayigh notes two main shortcomings of the PLO in its early

years: it failed both to act militarily against Israel and to provide the Palestinian masses with opportunities for political participation.³⁷ As a result, the Palestinian national movement would take a number of forms in the years and decades after 1967, embracing armed resistance, diplomacy, and—more recently—cooperation with Israel. Still, one cannot escape the fact that the agendas and infrastructure of the present-day national movement(s) owe a great deal to the “formative years” of the immediate post-*nakbah* era.

These foundations were undeniably nurtured, strengthened, or simply created by Egypt under the leadership of Gamal Abd al-Nasir. While Nasir created obstacles to Palestinian nationalism when in his interest, by the mid-1950s he surely calculated that a supportive stance vis-à-vis the Palestinians would increase his popularity and catapult Egypt’s standing in the Arab world. Regarding popular organizations, Nasir facilitated the establishment of the first ever post-*nakbah*, cross-border national organization (the GUPS), which was in fact designed more towards Palestinians’ political consciousness than any normal student-related activities. He furthermore sowed the seeds of armed resistance by training and arming thousands of fighters. Egypt’s unique

Cairo's lasting contribution to the institutionalization of the Palestinian national movement, to date, is the creation of the PLO.

role in this respect should not be underestimated; it is certainly not a coincidence that when increasing *fita'iyyun* activity reached an intolerable point for Israel, Jerusalem responded by assassinating the Egyptian military intelligence chief at the time.³⁸ While Egypt was not the only country to organize Palestinian military units, in many cases other leaders who did the same, such as Qasim in Iraq, did so largely as a response to Egyptian action.

Finally, Cairo's lasting contribution to the institutionalization of the Palestinian national movement, to date, is the creation of the PLO. For all their enthusiasm, Palestinians themselves in the mid-twentieth century lacked the international standing and organization to achieve such a success independently. They needed a regional backer. In that respect, Egypt stands out as the most crucial force behind the revival of post-*nakbah* Palestinian nationalism.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

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U.S.-Iran Cultural Diplomacy: A Historical Perspective

Ramin Asgard

WHAT IS CULTURAL DIPLOMACY?

In his seminal review of modern American cultural diplomacy, *The First Resort of Kings, American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (2005), Dr. Richard Arndt explored the full breadth of this important element of American international statecraft. Arndt defined cultural diplomacy by first considering how it contrasted with “cultural relations, or “relations between national cultures, those aspects of intellect and education lodged in any society that tend to cross borders and connect with foreign institutions.” Cultural diplomacy, he stated, “can only be said to take place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests.”¹

Meanwhile, the current Iranian perspective on what cultural diplomacy entails appears to encompass a broader sense of cultural diplomacy:

Ramin Asgard is a career Foreign Service Officer with the Department of State. He serves as a Political Advisor to the Command Group at US Central Command in Tampa. His primary concentration and expertise within the CENTCOM AOR is Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula. Prior to joining CENTCOM, Mr. Asgard served as Director of the Iran Regional Presence Office (IRPO) in Dubai, the US government's primary field operation concerning Iran.

The major responsibility in cultural diplomacy is supposed to be undertaken by diplomats. . . [C]ultural diplomacy is not excluded to foreign diplomacy handlers. All people, including artists, traders, athletes, journalists, clerics etc. can be representatives of the Iranian culture and inform other societies on the cultural and civilizational richness of Iran²

There are differing views, however, as to the necessity of diplomats to the practice of cultural diplomacy. The Berlin-based Institute for Cultural Diplomacy notes that Cultural Diplomacy as a practice has existed for centuries: “Explorers, travelers, teachers, and artists, for example, can be considered as informal ambassadors, or early cultural diplomats. Cultural diplomats also include any individual that has spent time abroad and has interacted with local people, as this is an important form of cultural exchange.” Indeed, as Arndt himself pointed out, the U.S. government played a limited role in cultural diplomacy until the 1930s, when it “permitted, facilitated, tolerated and occasionally abetted cultural diplomatic interventions, but rarely funded them.” As late as 1938, he pointed out, the State Department foresaw handling no more than five percent of the total work of

cultural diplomacy, focusing only on coordinating, supplementing, and facilitating natural private flows of people and knowledge.³

Whether diplomats are involved is an important point, as it means issues of national interest and security enter the calculus. As a result, there arises a tension between viewing cultural diplomacy primarily as an instrument of national security statecraft rather than as primarily a means for increasing mutual understanding between people. While ideally mutual understanding can foster improved national security, there are times when application of these concepts concurrently can be problematic. The development of cultural diplomacy in America has witnessed several periods where cultural diplomacy became primarily an element of national security statecraft. Reviewing multiple reports on the role of cultural diplomacy within U.S. foreign policy, the Advisory Committee on Public Diplomacy, an independent advisory body which helps to guide State Department public diplomacy policy-making noted the tension in the United States of sustained public diplomacy during peaceful times.

Cummings also notes this and other patterns in his 2007 survey of nearly 70 years of cultural diplomacy efforts by the United States government (2007, Cummings).

Active involvement in – and funding for – cultural diplomacy programs by the federal government has most often been stimulated by a perceived foreign threat or crisis. The Nazi threat really got the United States started in the business of cultural diplomacy. World War II expanded American involvement still further, and the Cold War with the Soviet Union enlarged many of these activities...New concerns with global terrorism... may be the primary factor shaping the development of American cultural diplomacy throughout the first part of the 21st century.⁵

The Advisory Council report, rather than stating any conclusive position regarding this tension, pointed it out and noted that perhaps the current emphasis on cultural diplomacy during the War on Terror will “create enduring structures within which to practice effective cultural diplomacy and articulate a sustaining vision of the role that culture can play in enhancing the security of this country.”

With these parameters and dilemmas in mind, I now will turn to the main theme of this paper, a historical account of US-Iran cultural diplomacy.

THE EARLY PERIOD- 1834-1906

Official ties between the United States and Persia began in 1856 when the Qajar Nasseredin Shah dispatched Persia’s first Ambassador, Mirza Abolhasan Shirazi to Washington, D.C. The United States dispatched diplomatic envoy Samuel Benjamin to Persia in 1883. Relations were upgraded to the Ambassadorial level in 1944.⁷ In the 19th century, Iran’s relations with great powers focused on largely one-sided, but never quite colonial ties with Great Britain and Russia. Both powers dominated Iran well into the twentieth century. During this period, Iranian leaders sought a third country to help Iran resist the power of Russia and Great Britain, and looked favorably upon the United States. Early cultural ties - preceding official ties by decades - helped to enhance American standing in the Iranian popular imagination.

Cultural ties between the US and Persia began in 1834, with the arrival of Protestant missionary Justin Perkins and Dr. Asahel Grant, a physician. Sent by the Protestant Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to administer to the Assyrian/Nestorian Christians of Iran, Perkins and Grant were the first Americans to live in Iran, and settled with their wives to live in Urmia in Northwestern Iran. Soon after in 1848, Joseph Cochran also settled in Urmia as a missionary along with his large family. One of Cochran’s sons, (Joseph Jr.), returned with his wife to Urmia in 1878 after completing medical school. In 1879, Dr. Cochran founded,

through support from the Board of Assyrian Missions, Iran's first modern medical school, the Medical College of Urmia.⁸

During this same period American Presbyterian missionaries established the American College (later called Alborz College) in the Armenian quarter of Tehran. Beginning as a grade school in 1873, the school soon attracted many Moslem students and adopted Persian as its language of instruction. In 1898, Rev. Samuel Jordan arrived to assume leadership of the school, and championed the school's growth into a junior college (1924) and finally into a US-accredited liberal arts college (1928). Reverend Jordan's legacy with Alborz College included the transmission of the best of American values such as the dignity of work, the virtue of community service, democracy and equality, equality of women, and love of country. Even though the Russians, British, French, and Germans opened schools in Iran, it was to the American school that the leaders of the country, including the royal family, sent their sons and daughters.

Perhaps an even more poignant figure, the American Howard Baskerville, taught at the American Memorial School of Tabriz until his fateful decision to join the Constitutional revolutionaries of Tabriz. Baskerville's heroic stand with the Iranian Constitutionalists occurred during the next phase in Iran's political development and transition to modernity - a phase in which Americans were intimately and comprehensively involved.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE AMERICAN THIRD OPTION: 1906-1945

United States-Iran cultural diplomacy during the first half of the twentieth century was advanced primarily through the interaction of prominent elites from both countries. American missionaries, scholars, and financial advisors played a prominent role in Iranian development during this period. Geostrategically, the British Empire still dominated Iran and the region, while first Czarist and then Soviet Russia menaced Iran from the north. America, and to a lesser extent Germany, were perceived as neutral and without

the regional colonial baggage of the other great powers of the day. The stifling impact of the British-Russian rivalry was documented for a Western audience by American Morgan Shuster, who served as Treasurer General to Iran in 1911. Shuster's efforts to help Iran assert its financial independence led to his ouster under intense British and Russian Pressure, which he documented in his book *The Strangling of Persia*.

Despite the negative influence of outside powers, there are many legendary figures that played prominently in the growth of US-Iran cultural affairs during this period, and while some may have played a greater role, there is perhaps no more romantic figure punctuating this phase of US-Iran cultural relations than a young Kansan schoolteacher named Howard Baskerville.

Howard C. Baskerville, a graduate of Princeton University (B.A., 1907), arrived in 1908 to teach science and English under a two-year contract at the Memorial School of the American Presbyterian Mission in Tabriz shortly before the

United States-Iran cultural diplomacy during the first half of the twentieth century was advanced primarily through the interaction of prominent elites from both countries.

Constitutionalist-Royalist battle for the city began. Through Mirza Hosayn Sharifzadeh, a leading constitutionalist and a fellow teacher at the Memorial School he got acquainted with the Constitutional movement and many of its adherents. His sympathy for the Constitutionalists led him to

enlist in their ranks and become an ardent supporter of the popular cause, which focused immediately on breaking the Royalist siege of Tabriz, which had led many to starvation. After resigning from his post he started drilling Persian volunteers together with W. A. Moore, an Irishman and representative of several British papers in Persia. Baskerville's group, Fawj-e Najat (Detachment of Salvation) used to be trained in the courtyards of the Tabriz citadel.

With the danger of famine growing day by day, the two "Europeans" advised sorties and carried out reconnaissance operations through the Royalist lines, mapping their positions. Lacking military experience but not courage, Baskerville led his forces on an assault on the Royalist

garrison on April 19, 1908 where he was killed during the assault. The funeral at the American cemetery of Tabriz on the following day turned into a great rally; Baskerville's men, groups of *fedayis*, Armenians, Georgians, American residents of Tabriz, and a great number of the inhabitants paid him the last honors. He was buried with honors in the Armenian Cemetery in Tabriz. To this day, a statue of Baskerville stands in the Tabriz Constitution House. Though other prominent Americans, such as Arthur Pope, have arguably had a much greater impact on Iranian culture and architecture, none had as poignant a story as Howard Baskerville.

THE COLD WAR AND THE SHAH: 1946-1979

After WWII, the Cold War came to Iran almost immediately. Only firm US pressure on the Soviet Union forced Stalin to retreat from his occupation of large sections of Northern Iran. Without this American involvement, the remainder of Iranian Azerbaijan and the southern Caspian coastal provinces would have stayed in Soviet hands, perhaps permanently.

In 1949, with the Cold War in full swing, the US established the Voice of America (VOA). The Voice of America in Iran began operations that year, broadcasting a message of "liberal developmentalism" to Iranians that centered on modernization, improved technical capacity, and political pluralism, along with a fine selection of classical and modern American music. Soon, however, with perceptions of renewed Soviet designs on Iran - this time through a powerful Iranian Communist Party - the Tudeh - shifted VOA's emphasis to heavily anti-Soviet content.¹³ In this climate of intense suspicion of Soviet aims, Prime Minister Mossadeq rose to power, marginalized the young Shah, and proceeded to nationalize the Iranian oil industry. Coming as it did during the peak of Cold War rivalry between the US and USSR, Mossadegh's tenure was buffeted by this conflict and soon ended with the return to absolute rule by the Shah.

Even during this period when Cold War exigencies impacted Iran, sometimes harshly, America still enjoyed considerable goodwill and influence within Iran.

Even during this period when Cold War exigencies impacted Iran, sometimes harshly, America still enjoyed considerable goodwill and influence within Iran, and in the 1950s began to again actively work to engage Iranians in cultural diplomacy. A key institution in this process was the Iran-America Society, which was formally established in Tehran in the mid-1950s as a non-profit organization. It served as the venue for U.S. cultural programs in Iran through the work of the United States Information Service (USIS) and was mandated to "foster among Americans and Iranians a greater knowledge of the arts, literature, science, folkways, social customs, economic and political patterns of the United States and Iran, and to develop a deeper understanding of the similarities and diversities of the Iranian and American ways of life."¹⁴ In a message commemorating the Iran America Society (IAS) on May 27, 1967, President Lyndon Johnson noted that "[t]he United States prizes the

fullest possible exchange of culture and ideas between nations in the belief that the understanding so engendered between peoples is an important asset to peace."¹⁵ Through vibrant student advising and an active Fulbright Binational Commission, USIS and the IAS were able to maintain a steady flow of Iranian students and scholars to the United States, and many

American scholars traveled to Iran. This hugely successful program led to Iranians becoming the most prolific foreign student population in the US by the 1970s, with over 30,000 enrolled by the mid-1970s.

ILLNESS/INVASION BROUGHT BY "THE WEST"- "GHARBZADEGI" AND "THE MONGOLS"

Despite the success of American cultural programming and outward signs of Iranian modernization and prosperity, beginning in the 1960s, a strain of Marxist-inspired anti-Western, anti-modern thought began gaining influence among both Iranian intellectuals and the burgeoning middle class. Perhaps due primarily

to the rapid pace of modernization in what was still a traditional, largely rural, and only semi-literate society, certain Iranian secular and religious intellectuals began developing an anti-Western ideology in reaction to the strong influence of “the West” and America in particular. Among the first and probably the most important was Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Al-e Ahmad’s 1962 essay, *Gharbzadegi* or “Westoxication” has been described as “perhaps the single most important essay published in modern Iranian history.” In describing what Al-e Ahmad meant by Westoxication, Dabashi notes”

By this term he meant the excessive and rather awkward preoccupation of certain influential segments of Iranian society with manner and matters “Western” in origin. He considered this preoccupation a major malady that had gradually but incessantly weakened the Iranian national character, the major component of which he considered to be Shi’a ethos.²⁶

Dabashi further noted that “the term *Gharbzadegi* became so deeply entrenched in the Iranian political vocabulary of the 1960s and beyond that even Ayatollah Khomeini used it when he delivered his letters and wrote his proclamations in Iraq (where he was in exile in Najaf).²⁷ Al-e Ahmad’s popularity was so lasting and pervasive that the Islamic Republic issued a stamp in his honor in 1981. Oddly Al-e Ahmad, a former Tudeh party member, took pride in his knowledge of Western philosophy and languages, translated several major Western literary works into Farsi, and even visited the US in 1965 on a three-month exchange program with Harvard at Henry Kissinger’s invitation.²⁸ He also visited several European countries, Canada, and Israel, heaping effusive praise on the enlightened leadership and society

of this last “Western” destination.²⁹ Despite being “infected” with the malady he so vehemently denounced, his ideology laid the foundation for Islamist ideologues like Ali Shariati and Rohollah Khomeini to create a militant, populist strain of Shi’a Islam which swept to power in the Iranian revolution. Perhaps this paradox can help explain much more about the Iranian attitude towards Western cultural influence and certainly affords much grist for further reflection on this aspect of our subject.

In a similar vein, the filmmaker Parviz Kamiavi also attacked the perceived Western cultural onslaught with his 1973 film *Mogholha* (The Mongols) in which he likened the spread of television in Iran to the devastating medieval Mongol invasions of Iran.³⁰ Indeed, the Iranian historical experience with foreign invaders – Greeks, Turks, Arabs, Mongols, Russians, and others retains a potent influence on Iranian perceptions of foreign encroachment – whether political, military, or cultural.

REVOLUTION AND ESTRANGEMENT:1979-2006

With the Islamic Revolution’s strident anti-Americanism as a driving force, the many institutions of American cultural engagement within Iran were destroyed, nationalized, or Islamized. The IAS’ main offices in Tehran were bombed in 1978 as part of the uprising against the Shah. The Cultural Centers in Tehran and Isfahan were closed in 1979. The last IAS director in Tehran, Kathryn Koob, was held hostage at the US Embassy for 444 days.³¹ With the seizure of the US Embassy in 1979, any prospect for official cultural engagements were foreclosed. The embassy seizure, and later the Iran-Iraq war, radicalized Iran’s politics and helped propel anti-Americanism to new heights.

Following from foundations established by Jalal Al-e Ahmad and other intellectual founders of Iranian anti-Westernism, the Islamic

With the Islamic Revolution’s strident anti-Americanism as a driving force, the many institutions of American cultural engagement within Iran were destroyed, nationalized, or Islamized.

Republic blended a strong strain of anti-imperialist Marxist discourse with the new doctrines of politicized Shiism formalized through the works of Khomeini, Shariati and others. Their view of outside cultural influences as “a disease” or “an invasion” still shapes Iranian thinking about the outside world today. As noted by Buchta (2006), these appeals are tailored to hold sway with mass domestic audiences and sustain the spirit of Al-e Ahmad.

The [anti-Western] discourse features virulent anti-American emotions, embodied in the slogan “cultural invasion through the West” (tahajjom-e farhangi-ye gharb), which is primarily used by leading advocates of the conservative wing of Iran’s power elite. They believe Iran is in mortal danger from the West, especially the United States, and its effort to spread Western cultural influences in the media, fashion, music, the Internet, consumption habits, and social behavior.

This anxiety over cultural domination by the “enemies of Islam” is certainly a root theme of the Iranian revolutionary discourse, but the generalized fear of malign outside influence is nothing new and is partially understood within the context of Iran’s actual experience with British and Russian imperial activities in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. This experience has contributed to what Abrahamian (1993) calls the “paranoid style in Iranian politics.”

Amirahmadi (1991) refers to this paranoia as an element of Iran’s “obsolete political culture” and adds that “[t]he paranoia associated with this conspiratorial view of politics is largely cross-class and cross-ideological. It is however, widespread among Iranian political elites and intelligentsia who continue to use it as a weapon against political enemies or for the manipulation of their followers.”³ This paranoia over malign foreign intentions severely limited cultural engagement between the US and Iran during the

postrevolutionary period, and increased Iran’s isolation from much of the rest of the world.

KHATAMI AND THE DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS

With the election of reformist cleric Mohammad Khatami in 1997, the Iranian government tentatively moved to overcome this paranoid approach. Khatami swept into office with an overwhelming majority of the popular vote, and sought to expand domestic cultural freedoms while simultaneously reaching out beyond Iran through the “Dialogue of Civilizations”. The “Dialogue of Civilizations” was intended as a direct rebuttal to the “Clash of Civilizations” doctrine outlined by Harvard’s Samuel Huntington - first in an essay in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993 and then in greater detail in a book length “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order” in 1996.³⁶ Huntington drew the term “Clash of Civilizations” from a September 1990 Bernard Lewis essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled “The Roots of Muslim Rage”.³⁷ Huntington summarized his theory as follows:

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural...The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.³⁸

Lewis noted in his article that “Muslim rage” represents “no less than a *clash of civilizations*—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.”³⁹

During this early post-Cold War period, these scholars, perhaps missing the bracing clarity of the Cold War’s Manichean intellectual and strategic environment were casting around for some equivalently stark dualist doctrine. In

response, the Dialogue of Civilizations theory arose, and was soon embraced by a large worldwide audience that, exhausted and riven by the Cold War's long shadow, rejected the Clash of Civilizations theory and its implications.

Khatami first outlined this doctrine in the Tehran Declaration communiqué of the Organization of Islamic Conference summit in Tehran in 1998, and quickly gained adherents across the world's many cultures. The United Nations formalized this theory in 1998 by declaring 2001 the "Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations", noting that "[d]ialogue among civilizations is a process between and within civilizations, founded on inclusion, and a collective desire to learn, uncover and examine assumptions, unfold shared meaning and core values and integrate multiple perspectives through dialogue."⁴⁰

Acting on this theory, Khatami attempted to apply its aspirations to Iran's repressive cultural environment and to the continued conflict between the US and Iran. In both cases, despite significant early successes, reverses eventually left Khatami with little lasting impact after eight years in office. Ultimately, he was unable to overcome the deeply ingrained "paranoid style" of Iranian politics, but it should also be pointed out that paranoia and fear of engagement was not limited to Iran. After the tragedy of 9/11, the United States was perhaps not in the best frame of mind to undertake the daunting task of initiating a long-term global dialogue based upon a doctrine introduced by one of its staunchest modern adversaries. Departing the Presidency in 2005, Khatami remained involved in the "Dialogue of Civilizations", which had spawned several institutions working to realize its goals, including his own, the International Institute for Dialogue among Cultures & Civilizations.⁴¹

With the arrival of Ahmadinejad in 2005, paranoia has continued to deter those Iranians seeking engagement with the outside world, including those seeking cultural ties with Americans. As a recent example indicates, even those predisposed towards forging cultural ties remain sensitive to insidious foreign influence. Seyed Mohammad Marandi, the current director

of the University of Tehran's Department of North American and European Studies followed this line of thinking.

Paranoia has created a chilling effect on all cultural activities with America as even the most open and positive exchanges are perceived and/or portrayed as elements of an enemy plot. But to be fair, paranoia and xenophobia are hardly unique to Iranians or Iran. As Abrahamian points out, the title of his essay on the paranoid style of Iranian politics was drawn from Richard Hofstadter's article "The Paranoid Style of American Politics" (1965).⁴³ Hofstadter described that throughout American history nativistic groups have claimed Washington was being subverted by foreign conspirators - at times Freemasons, at others Catholics or Jews, and later by International Communism. The McCarthy hearings of the early 1950s showed a stunned America exactly how all-consuming the damage from such paranoia could be. After 9/11 the fear of Muslim terrorism exercised a similar, but thankfully dissipating hold over American views of engagement with the outside world, most particularly the countries of the Muslim Middle East. One important vehicle for helping both sides overcome those elements of their legacies that inhibit engagement is the many first and second generation immigrants from the region. Of most importance to our current inquiry, Iranian-Americans have played a vital role in this capacity.

Iranian-American individuals and institutions are perhaps in the best position of all to assist with cultural engagement between the US and Iran. Unfortunately, most have had their enthusiasm dampened by formidable obstacles including the aforementioned fears of the other by both America and Iran, logistical hurdles, visa difficulties, legal and regulatory limitations, sanctions, and a host of other daunting challenges. Perhaps most debilitating however, is that many first generation Iranian-Americans

Paranoia has created a chilling effect on all cultural activities with America as even the most open and positive exchanges are perceived and/or portrayed as elements of an enemy plot.

retain a healthy dose of Iranian paranoia and have assimilated a fresh infusion of American paranoia as well. Thankfully, the new generation of Iranian-Americans appears to have at least shed the Iranian “Uncle Napoleon” complex of seeing conspiracies within every human interaction. The Iranian-American role in maintaining a cultural bridge during the post-Revolutionary period has been laudable. Joining their capacity with like-minded supporters of cultural relations in the US and Iran, they were key to sustaining - albeit at a relatively modest level - cultural ties that would have otherwise atrophied and eventually dissolved.

In addition to the continuing work of organizations like the American Institute of Iranian Studies and the International Society for Iranian Studies, several new organizations were formed during this period of estrangement which also helped maintain US-Iran cultural ties. The Foundation for Iranian Studies was established in 1981 as a non-profit educational and research institution to preserve, study, and transmit Iran's cultural heritage; to study contemporary issues in Iranian government and society; and to point to the probable social, economic, political, and military directions Iran might take in the 21st century. The Foundation aims to serve as an information center for the study of Iran's past, present and future. Non-partisan and non-political, the Foundation believes authentic, objective scholarship can and should encompass a multiplicity of intellectual contributions and a diversity of opinions.⁴⁴

While these active organizations helped to maintain scholarly ties despite manifold obstacles, other organizations helped to preserve, albeit tenuously at times, cultural connections via other forms of exchange programming. A leader in this area was the Search for Common Ground (SFCG), founded in 1982, whose stated mission is “to work to transform the way the world deals with conflict - away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving. [SFCG] works with local partners to find

culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacity to deal with conflicts constructively: to understand the differences and act on the commonalities.”

While official bilateral ties remain strained, the goodwill generated through such engagement may gradually help create an environment more conducive to improving even these intractable issues.

Given our current focus on cultural diplomacy, and the large scope of SFCG's US-Iran program, we will only consider the citizen-to-citizen exchanges here. That said, there is no doubt that there is a place for “Track Two” diplomacy in facilitating cultural engagement. The historic work of SFCG and other organizations committed to sustaining US-Iran people-to-people engagement in the absence of diplomatic relations have somewhat helped bridge the gulf between these countries during

this period. These fragile ties were crucial in establishing the foundation for the next phase in the history of US-Iran cultural diplomacy.

TOWARDS A RENAISSANCE: 2006-2008

On May 31, 2006, Secretary Rice spoke on the US-Iran relationship, suggesting a new direction was possible. In relation to our subject, she stated:

President Bush wants a new and positive relationship between the American people and the people of Iran -- a beneficial relationship of increased contacts in education, cultural exchange, sports, travel, trade, and investment.⁴⁶

The key to fully realizing the full scope of this new relationship was tied to resolving the nuclear issue and beginning to address a number of other areas of conflict between the two countries. Nonetheless, the effort to reach out to the Iranian people via cultural diplomacy began immediately. Key to these efforts was the establishment of the Iran Regional Presence Office (IRPO) in Dubai in August of 2006. Through IRPO, the US began the first official US-Iran cultural diplomacy programming since 1979. I was fortunate to be

Steps for Improving US-Iran Relations

Measure	% of Americans who favor	% of Iranians who favor
Direct Talks on Issues of Mutual Concern	82	57
Greater cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges	63	63
Greater trade	55	64
Provide more access for each others' journalists	70	70
Have more Americans and Iranians visit as tourists	43	71

Source: *Public Opinion in Iran with Comparisons to American Public Opinion, April 7, 2008*

selected to lead these efforts beginning in August 2006 as the IRPO Public Affairs Officer.

The International Information Programs Bureau (IIP) and the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau (ECA) of the US Department of State led the Washington component of cultural diplomacy programming. The IIP Bureau established a Farsi-language website, began a program of publications in Farsi called the AVA project, and arranged for private American speakers from the world of academia and beyond to travel to Dubai and other cities with large Iranian populations. The ECA Bureau worked closely with the IRPO to establish a framework for renewed cultural, education, and sports exchanges with Iran. In addition, ECA began plans for an educational advising service for prospective Iranian students seeking higher education opportunities in the US.

IRAN-FOCUSED CULTURAL OUTREACH PROJECTS IN THE UAE

Our ongoing efforts spearheaded through our regional presence in UAE build upon the foundation established over the last century and a half of US-Iran cultural diplomacy. As we have seen, this engagement started with private institutions, later gained support from official channels, went through a period of official estrangement during which private institutions again took the lead and enjoyed support from the vibrant Iranian-American community, and now finally is enjoying a period of renewed growth.

A WorldPublicOpinion.org Poll conducted in partnership with Search for Common Ground and Knowledge Networks.

While official bilateral ties remain strained, the goodwill generated through such engagement may gradually help create an environment more conducive to improving even these intractable issues. In a recent poll by SFCG and University of Maryland, two elements of cultural diplomacy were strongly advocated as means to improve bilateral relations by both Americans and Iranians (see chart).

CONCLUSION

Cynics throughout recent history have always challenged the value of cultural diplomacy and cultural engagement. Results are difficult to quantify, as such programs generally lack a natural supporting constituency, and within the US-Iran context mutual paranoia often derails even the best designed programs. In addition, in the US case, such programs have fallen victim to changes in policy direction and structures.

The official US institutions of cultural diplomacy have undergone no fewer than 14 restructurings since the Buenos Aires Agreement of 1936 began America's involvement in comprehensive cultural diplomatic programming. American skepticism over the value of cultural engagement even led to such surprising outcomes as the US' temporary withdrawal from UNESCO in 1984 - an entity it helped to found in 1946. Meanwhile, the intensity of Iranian anxiety about foreign cultural domination has complicated and

at times virtually eclipsed even the most transparently apolitical and beneficial cultural engagement.

Despite all these obstacles, the history of US-Iran cultural diplomacy is overwhelmingly positive and its impact on many thousands of Americans and Iranians has endured regardless of political differences between our two nations. As we look forward, the prospect of a new foundation for better relations between the American and Iranian peoples has been at least partially rebuilt. Much work lies ahead, and a diminution of mutual suspicions would advance such noble efforts considerably.

While there is no doubt the lingering reality of US-Iran political differences will influence this process, the reverse may well also be true. As this historical review of US-

Iran cultural diplomacy shows, people and private institutions operating in the spirit of good will can make a major difference in building mutual understanding, even within a context of political and diplomatic tensions. That said, official cultural diplomacy facilitated through professional diplomats has and can continue to greatly expand the scope and depth of such engagement. To all those who envision a future where Americans and Iranians are no longer separated by their differences but united by their many similarities, support for US-Iran cultural diplomacy may be among their best vehicles to help advance this goal.

POSTSCRIPT-2009-2010 DREAMS DEFERRED

I left day-to-day oversight of our cultural diplomacy programming at IRPO in June 2008 to begin a year as the director of the overall IRPO operation. Soon the fragile but resilient structures which supported the exchanges of the past two years began to falter. First, the State Department, for reasons I never learned, decided in advance of

the Fiscal Year 2009 budget against requesting any further funds to support US-Iran cultural diplomacy.

Second, the conflicting motives behind U.S. public diplomacy outreach to Iran essentially collapsed under the weight of their inherent contradictions.

Finally, powerful circles within the Iranian government began peddling the line that our cultural diplomacy outreach was merely a façade to lay the groundwork for a “velvet revolution”. Exchange programming continued on a dramatically reduced basis in 2009, and was eventually suspended in mid-2009.

Looking back over the past 166 years of U.S.- Iran cultural diplomacy, the picture remains bright overall. In 2010, such relations remain at a nadir, but at some point in the relatively near future – perhaps under a more

enlightened government in Iran and a less conflicted policy environment in Washington – these programs may resume. At present, the unfortunate recent trend in U.S.- Iran relations towards mutual hostility and recriminations has resumed. Despite the current impasse, the glorious legacy of Alborz College, Howard Baskerville, Hugh Pope, the Iran-America Society, the Franklin Book Program, the Dialogue of Civilizations, wrestling diplomacy, and the brilliant efflorescence of U.S.-Iran cultural interaction from 2006-2008 offer ample hope that a new season of cultural interaction may eventually break the chill.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

Looking back over the past 166 years of U.S.-Iran cultural diplomacy, the picture remains bright overall.

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