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ISRAEL: AN ISLAMISTS' DILEMMA

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Is the Age of Global Jihad Over?

Murad Al-Shishani

Can Ijtihad Write the Future of Islam?

Mohamed al-Haddad

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Editor's Note

ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST, Barack Obama's election generated hope for a brighter relationship between the U.S. and Arab states. Just months after taking office, Obama addressed the worldwide Muslim community in a groundbreaking speech at Cairo University and promised a new American approach to international diplomacy. Still, Obama was saddled with high expectations during his first year in office, and nowhere has excitement over the new U.S. president deflated faster than in the Arab world. For many, an optimistic first impression of Obama faded in light of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the American response to human rights violations. As the U.S. adjusts its foreign policy and attempts repair the damage of the past several decades, it will reshape its stance on political Islam.

New Political Islam and the Obama Era

This issue of *Arab Insight* features a discussion of political Islam on the world stage, starting with an examination of two Islamist challenges: jihad and *ijtihad*. In the past decade, radical Jihadists attacked targets around the globe from the United States to India; they also claimed countless lives of fellow Muslims. Nations that were once friendly, or at least accommodating, to the Jihadist movement, such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, have recently begun to crack down on radical Jihadism within their borders. Still, the loose-knit global network has found ways to adapt and survive. In his article "Is the Age of Global Jihad Over?" **Murad Al-Shishani** discusses

how Jihadism responded to a shifting political landscape by reorganizing into decentralized cells.

Tunisian academic **Mohamed al-Haddad** touches on the historical roots of *ijtihad*, the independent interpretation of religious sources used to make a legal decision. A dormant practice for nearly a millennia, *ijtihad* was revived during the 20th century. While many Islamic scholars feel that the time for *ijtihad* has passed, others see it as a tool to integrate Islam with institutions that would otherwise appear problematic, such as democracy and scientific inquiry.

Although the U.S. developed an elaborate strategy to confront violent Islamists, Egyptian scholar **Moataz A. Fattah** notes that America has not created a cohesive strategy towards non-violent Islamists, who make up the majority of Islamists in the world. In the long term, Fattah argues, American security will benefit from identifying and engaging with nonviolent Islamist actors. **Khaled Hroub**, a Jordanian author, analyzes the frustration within the Muslim world regarding Obama's presidency, particularly his treatment of Islamists and his efforts at democracy promotion.

Islamists and Israel

Where does the relationship between political Islam and the state of Israel stand? Islamists show no intention of lessening their rhetoric against Israel, and Israel shows no sign of easing its hard line against Palestinians. One can hardly discuss a topic in the modern Middle East without touching upon either Israel or Islamists—but the intersection between these entities is often overlooked. Egyptian expert **Khalil al-Anani** looks at how major Islamist groups from the Muslim Brotherhood to Al-Qaeda differ in their perception of Israel. Using the charismatic leaders Amr Khaled and Aaidh al-Qarni as case studies, **Amr Abdel-Atty** discusses the trend of modern Muslim clerics who embrace technology, the so-called “new preachers,” and their position on Israel.

Yemen's Challenge

Burdened with a high unemployment rate and a heavily armed population, Yemen is no stranger to political instability. However, in the wake of the attempted Christmas Day Bombing over Detroit in December 2009, Al-Qaeda's operation in Yemen has become front-page news. This issue of *Arab Insight* would be incomplete without a discussion of Yemen's political crisis.

Since 2003, Saudi Arabia and Yemen have been waging an assault on Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). **Abdul Elah H. Shayea** describes how, in the face of such opposition, AQAP has only managed to survive but has become the most active branch of Al-Qaeda.

As alarming as Al-Qaeda's presence in Yemen is, no struggle exists in a vacuum. **Zuhair al-Harithi** examines how the regional power-play between Iran and Saudi Arabia affects Yemen's internal struggle between the national government in Sana'a, Houthi rebels, and Al-Qaeda. ■



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Is the Age of Global Jihad Over?

MURAD BATAL AL-SHISHANI

Author of The Islamic Movement in Chechnya and the Chechen-Russian Conflict

No longer a single, multifaceted organization, Al-Qaeda has evolved to embody a religious ideology or message. Al-Qaeda gave birth to the Salafist-Jihadist movement, now a major non-state actor capable of influencing geopolitics.¹ In response to regional and international political developments, the strategy and organizational structure of Al-Qaeda has become increasingly decentralized.

Key International and Regional Variables

Three primary variables affect the Salafist-Jihadist agenda. The first is the decline of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, largely attributed to resistance from the Awakening Forces, a coalition of militia groups created by Sunni tribal leaders. Members of these militias were recruited from the same Sunni Arab community in Iraq that protected Al-Qaeda during the sectarian political struggle created by the American invasion in 2003.²

The second variable is the election of Barack Obama, whose Middle East foreign policy differs drastically from that of his predecessor, George W. Bush. Seeking reconciliation with the Islamic world, Obama unveiled a new American strategy in a speech

1 Murad Batal Al-Shisani, *Al-'awlama fi al-'alaqat al dawliya* ("Globalization in International Relations"), *Shu'un al-Awsat*, Issue 113 (Winter 2004).

2 Murad Batal Al-Shishani, "Persuading the Uncertain and Punishing the Recalcitrant: Al-Qaeda Seeks to Absorb Iraq's Awakening Councils," *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 6, Issue 21.

at Cairo University in June 2009. Although counter-terrorism remains prominent in U.S. policy, seen in the increase of American forces in Afghanistan, Obama addresses terrorism as a comprehensive issue and acknowledges that terrorism can be a product of poverty and underdevelopment. In response to the new president's popularity, Al-Qaeda released malicious statements about Obama in the Muslim world, particularly among youth.

The third variable is the spread of "revisions" or "self-evaluations" within the Jihadist movement. Dr. Fadl (a pseudonym for Sayed Imam Abdel-Aziz), author of the authoritative 1988 guide, *Basic Principles in Making Preparations for Jihad*, is often described as the intellectual godfather of the jihadist movement. In 2007, Dr. Fadl published *Advice Regarding the Conduct of Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World*, criticizing

Al-Qaeda spreads malicious statements Obama in the Muslim world, particularly among youth

the indiscriminate violence of modern jihad, and describing Al-Qaeda as un-Islamic. The critique was a major intellectual blow to Al-Qaeda. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's second-in-command, responded to Dr. Fadl with his book *Vindication*, and fierce debate

ensued. Subsequently, a number of violent Islamist groups in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco published their own revisions.³

Is Al-Qaeda on the Ropes?

In 2010, analysis of Al-Qaeda centers around two key questions: Are the Salafist-Jihadists declining, perhaps even on the verge of extinction? Or, if they are not declining, what new organizational structure have they adopted?

In a *New Republic* article, Peter Bergen, author of *The Oral History of Osama bin Laden* and one of the first Western journalists to meet bin Laden, and Paul Cruickshank, a scholar at New York University's Center for Law and Security, concluded that Al-Qaeda is practically dead. Bergen and Cruickshank noted that Al-Qaeda's legitimacy has been shaken by critiques from ulama' (Islamic religious scholars), and support for Al-Qaeda in the Muslim world is on the decline. However, scholars such as Michael Scheuer, former chief of the CIA's Osama bin Laden unit, are skeptical of the claim

3 Camille Tawil, "What Next for the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group after Rebuff from the Libyan Regime?", *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 7, Issue 24.

that Al-Qaeda is losing power.⁴

Concerning the structure of the Salafist-Jihadist movement, *Foreign Affairs* covered a heated discussion between Professor Bruce Hoffman, editor-in-chief of *Terrorism and Political Violence*, and Marc Sageman, former CIA consultant and professor of psychiatry and ethno-political conflict. Sageman argued that Al-Qaeda has devolved into networks with loose shared guidelines but no central control, a view developed in his book *Leaderless Jihad*. Hoffman countered that Al-Qaeda's central command is still fully functional.⁵

Analysts debate whether Al-Qaeda has evolved into decentralized networks, or if its central command is still fully functional

Evolving Salafist-Jihadist Strategies

Since the 1990's, Salafist-Jihadists developed two strategies to adjust to international and regional changes. The first was to create safe havens in the Sudan, and later in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, where training camps were established for new recruits. These camps were the headquarters for operations such as the Riyadh bombings in the mid-1990's, the Mombasa and Darussalam attacks in 1998, the bombing of the destroyer U.S.S. Cole in Yemen in 2000, and the attack on September 11th. Most of the perpetrators of the attacks were pupils of the training camps, and knew the Al-Qaeda members responsible for other attacks from their shared time at the camps.

After 9/11, the American-led "War on Terror" dismantled much of Al-Qaeda's infrastructure in Afghanistan, scattered Al-Qaeda's members, and cut off its funding sources. It became increasingly difficult for Al-Qaeda to find a safe haven as they waged military campaigns against Pakistani forces in the Swat Valley and tribal regions of Northwest Pakistan. In response to these challenges, Al-Qaeda evolved into a group of decentralized cells, such as Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Al-Qaeda in Europe. These cells functioned under a common ideology but acted under the guidance of local leaders and were influenced by their regional environment. Cell initiatives from this period include the bombings in Djerba, Bali,

4 Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, "The Unraveling: Al Qaeda's Revolt against bin Laden," *The New Republic* (June 11, 2008). See also Michael Scheuer, "Rumors of Al-Qaeda's Death May Be Highly Exaggerated," *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 5, Issue 21.

5 Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman, "Debating the Containment of al Qaeda's Leadership: Does Osama Still Call the Shots?" *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2008).

Casablanca, Madrid, and London, and clashes with the Saudi government between 2003 and 2006. Operatives who served together in the original Al-Qaeda training camps were now division leaders with recruits of their own. By association with their commanding officers, the new generation of fighters became linked to “the mother Al-Qaeda,” a phrase coined during this stage.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq was a boon to jihadist recruiting, and gave would-be martyrs a golden opportunity to fight the Americans. Iraq, dubbed “the Islamic State of Iraq,” came to be seen as a harbor for Al-Qaeda.⁶ Salafist-Jihadist theorists saw Iraq not only as a battlefield to attack the U.S., but also as a gathering point to confront “the near enemy,” i.e. corrupt Arab regimes, in order to free occupied Islamic territories.⁷

The creation of smaller cells from the old, centralized Al-Qaeda reflects two ideological trends among the Salafist-Jihadists. The first trend was developed by the prominent thinker Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, currently held in American custody.⁸ Al-Suri promoted the phrase “the system, not the organization,” meaning jihadist movements

Salafist-Jihadist theorists saw Iraq not only as a battlefield to attack the U.S., but also as a gathering point to confront “the near enemy”, i.e. corrupt Arab regimes

should operate according to a procedure and strike common targets – either the near enemy (local regimes) or the far enemy (the U.S., Israel, India) – without direct orders from any larger organization.⁹

The second strategy used by Salafist-Jihadists groups is outlined in the book *The Management of Savagery* by Abu Bakr Najy.

Najy (a pseudonym) argues that in addition to safe havens, the Salafist-Jihadist movement must have a state, or mini-states, under its control. In Salafist rhetoric, controlling a state will “enable” the movement to wage attacks against the America and its allies, dragging the U.S. into multiple wars like the one in Iraq.¹⁰

In an audio recording released on January 14, 2009, bin Laden used Barack Obama’s inauguration as an opportunity to redefine Al-Qaeda’s battle against the U.S.

6 Jarret M. Brachman and William F. McCants, “Stealing Al-Qa’ida’s Playbook,” Combating Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy (February 2006).

7 “Know that defending the rest of the Muslims’ countries, especially the two holy sites [Mecca and Medina] begins with fighting on the front line in Mesopotamia...so hasten to the fields of jihad.” Osama bin Laden, “Oh People of Iraq,” [audio message] <http://www.tawhed.ws> (May 7, 2004). Likewise, Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi famously said “We fight in Iraq while our eyes are on Jerusalem, we fight in Iraq and our eyes are on Mecca and Medina,” which became a popular slogan in Salafist-Jihadist online forums.

8 See the authoritative work on Abu Mus’ab al-Suri (true name Mustafa Abdul-Qader Mustafa al-Sitt Maryam). Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

9 Ibid.

10 Abu Bakr Najy, *Idaarat al-Tawahhush [The Management of Brutality]*, published on jihadist websites in 2005.

He argued that the economic crisis was caused in part by the conflict between the U.S. and Al-Qaeda, and claimed that Al-Qaeda would outlast the U.S. in the fight. "God has bestowed us with the patience to continue on the path of jihad for another seven years, and seven more, and seven more."¹¹

According to bin Laden, the U.S. was weaker than ever when Obama took office, since President Bush "left behind him a heavy inheritance... One of the most difficult inheritances one can pass on is a long-lasting guerrilla war against a patient, stubborn enemy, and funded by usurious loans." Bin Laden went on to claim that between the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the financial crisis, Obama had been given an impossible task. "If he [Obama] withdraws from the war, it will be a military defeat, and if he continues he will drown in the economic crisis. How can he, when he has inherited not one but two wars, and he is unable to continue in them, and we are on our way to open up more fronts, God willing."¹²

Without specifying where the future battlefronts will be, bin Laden referred to what he called the "open fronts" in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Waziristan, the Islamic Maghreb, and Somalia.¹³ Having multiple, distant safe havens allows Al-Qaeda to plan on a much broader scale than when it used Sudan, and later Afghanistan, as its safe haven in the 1990's.

Bin Laden used Barack Obama's inauguration as an opportunity to redefine Al-Qaeda's battle against the U.S.

Safe Havens and the Vision for the Future

According to *The Economist*, although the U.S. prevents Al-Qaeda from using Afghanistan as a safe haven, there are still several other places where Al-Qaeda can marshal its forces, such as Yemen, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, the Philippines, and Uzbekistan.¹⁴ Stephen Biddle, strategic expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, writes, "We clearly cannot afford to wage protracted warfare with multiple brigades of American ground forces simply to deny Al-Qaeda access to every possible safe haven."¹⁵ This appears to be exactly what Al-Qaeda is betting on.

11 Osama bin Laden, audio recording released on jihadist websites January 14, 2009.

12 Ibid.

13 Murad Batal al-Shishani, al-Salafiya al-Jihadiya talja' ila asiya al-wusta harban min al-jaysh al-bakistani ["Salafist Jihadism Takes Refuge in Central Asia, Fleeing from the Pakistani Army"], *Al-Hayat*, July 3, 2009.

14 "A War of Necessity?" *The Economist*, August 20, 2009.

15 Stephen Biddle, "Is It Worth It? The Difficult Case for War in Afghanistan", *The American Interest* (July/August 2009).

Both Somalia and Yemen possess social and topographical qualities that make them attractive to the Salafist-Jihadist movement. At an average of 6.5 children per woman, Yemen's fertility rate is the highest in the Middle East, and its youthful population makes it an ideal location for Al-Qaeda training camps. In addition, Yemen's citizens are heavily armed, owing to tribal tradition. According to Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, the responsibility of the Yemeni people "towards Muslims' sacred places and wealth" is pleasing to Al-Qaeda, and the numerous sayings of the Prophet and prophecies related to Yemen are considered good omens.

In Al-Qaeda's view, Yemen's mountainous terrain creates a natural fortress on the Arabian Peninsula, a citadel where fighters can take refuge. Its 3,000 kilometer coastline includes jurisdiction over the strategically important Bab al-Mandab Strait, and

Yemen shares a border with Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Somalia has grown increasingly unstable as it absorbs fighters fleeing from Iraq and the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as jihadists from Western countries

Al-Suri identified Yemen as a suitable safe haven and base for jihadist attacks against Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.¹⁶ During the clash between Salafist-Jihadists and Saudi Arabia from 2003-2006, arms smugglers exploited the loosely patrolled Yemeni border, prompting the Yemeni and

Saudi governments to sign a number of security agreements. In a sign of the growing activity of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), an assassination attempt was made against the Saudi Assistant Interior Minister for Security Affairs by a man who entered Saudi Arabia through Yemen. AQAP counts Saudi nationals among its fighters, and was responsible for a large number of suicide bombings and attacks against Yemeni authorities in the past two years.

Likewise, Somalia has surfaced as a new theater in the Salafist-Jihadist movement. Somalia has grown increasingly unstable as it absorbs fighters fleeing from Iraq and the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as jihadists from Western countries. A number of tapes released by the Salafist-Jihadist group Al-

16 For more on Al-Suri, see two articles by the author. Al-Qa'ida fil-Yaman tasta'nafu nashataha mu'tamada 'ala buniya 'asha'iriya...wa irth ramzi wa jiyughrafi ["Al-Qaeda in Yemen Resumes its Activities Depending on a Tribal Structure...and an Symbolic and Geographic Heritage"], *Al-Hayat*, September 28, 2008, and Al-Ahamiya al-jiyubulutikya wal-naftiya lil-yaman lada tanzim al-qa'ida ["The Geopolitical and Oil-related Importance of Yemen for the Al-Qaeda Organization"], The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, (December 21, 2006).

Shabab al-Muhajideen reveal young men who speak in British and American accents,¹⁷ while the 2008 Europol Terrorism Situation and Trend Report listed Somalia as one of the top destinations for European jihadists.¹⁸ *The Economist* contends that Somalia's emergence as a jihadist safe haven is not only a threat for Somalia and its neighbors, but also European cities such as London.¹⁹ To date, one of the most jarring examples of Somalia's growing importance in the Salafist-Jihadist movement was the arrest of five men accused of planning an attack against a military base in Sydney in 2009. The men, Australian citizens of Somali and Lebanese descent, are linked to a Salafist cell in Somalia.

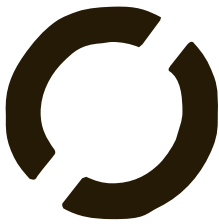
The recent emergence of Yemen and Somalia as Salafist-Jihadist strongholds reflects the expanding and amorphous nature of Al-Qaeda. No longer a centralized organization, Al-Qaeda is an ideology expressed through action. Under this operational shift, bolstered by theorists Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Najy, the Salafist-Jihadists have created multiple safe havens in order to train recruits, strategize, and launch attacks. This shifting approach makes it increasingly difficult for the U.S. and its allies to confront the Salafists.²⁰ Al-Qaeda has already metamorphosed into "Al-Qaedas". ■

17 Murad Batal al-Shishani, *I'adat al-i'tibar ila al-qarn al-afriqi fi adabiyat al-tanzim wa rasa'il qadatihi...al-som-al muladh qadim mutajadid lil-qa'idati wa munafidhahu al-bahriya fursatun lil-wusul ila al-'alim al-'arabi* ["Reconsidering the Horn of African in the Organization's Literature and its Leaders' Letters...Somalia is an Old, Renewed Haven for Al-Qaeda and its Naval Outlets are a Chance to Reach the Arab World"], *Al-Hayat* November 4, 2008.

18 EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2008 (Netherlands: European Police Office, 2008).

19 "Jihadists Attack Somalia: Al-Qaeda on the March," *The Economist*, May 21, 2009.

20 There has been an upswing in Salafist-Jihadist activity in the Levant, but after losing ground in Iraq, the salafists still do not have a safe haven. These militants, like the Salafists in Gaza, are part of the Neo-Zaraqawi movement.



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The Future of *Ijtihad* in Modern Islamic Thought

MOHAMED AL-HADDAD

Professor of Comparative Religion, La Manouba University, Tunisia

From the 19th century to the present, Islamic religious thought has presented its arguments as narratives, as opposed to concepts. A prominent example is the narrative of *ijtihad*, the independent interpretation of religious sources used to make a legal decision. *Ijtihad* has often been compared to gates that were closed a millennium ago and not reopened until the present era. Daily life has evolved radically since the last millennium, but there has been no accompanying development in mainstream Muslim legal theory. Cases of modern *ijtihad* dwell obsessively on peripheral issues such as the *hijab* (headscarf), the *niqab* (long veil), and beards, without coming to any definitive judgment. *Ijtihad* has also tackled banking, insurance contracts, abortion, and cloning— all without stepping outside the framework of *qiyas* (analogical reasoning) described in the books of jurisprudence. For *qiyas* to be used properly, the original issue and the modern issue must be parallel, an impossible condition in many cases, given the vast differences between life in the Middle Ages and today.

The prerequisites of *ijtihad* have been maintained exactly as they were established by early Muslim jurists. This inevitably means the same conclusions will be reached, since those prerequisites are, in fact, the mechanisms for producing knowledge. If the mechanisms remain the same, how can the knowledge they produce be any different?

On the other hand, if all mechanisms and controls were removed from *ijtihad*, this would not initiate the spread of new ideas, as was previously thought. Rather, a handful of demagogic views would dominate all others, due to competition over managing the sacred as explained by Max Weber. Religious extremism is fostered in a climate of mimetic rivalries (*surenchère mimétique*) in which each individual desires to have what his opponent already has. This causes religious consciousness to mimic its origins rather than adapt to modernity.

No Jurisprudence Without a New Interpretive Theory

Ijtihad cannot reclaim its former role unless it is allowed to borrow freely from modern interpretation theory on a range of issues, such as language, textual criticism, psychology, and so on.¹ This evolution is both necessary and credible — the old *ijtihad* also relied on concepts that were available as public knowledge, and whose sources were not religious.

A distinction must be made between *ijtihad* and religious reform. *Ijtihad* is a practical effort to adapt religious concepts to the transformations of evolving lifestyles. Such a balance is relativist and practical. For example, legislators can ban the practice of polygamy by employing a practical interpretation of religious text without needing to invoke linguistic arguments or historical precedent.²

Daily life has evolved radically since the last millennium, but there has been no accompanying development in mainstream Muslim legal theory

Religious reform, on the other hand, is more comprehensive, and entails the rearrangement of the entire relationship between the divine unknowable and human life. Reform is not merely rethinking a handful of stances and rulings, but broadly reconsidering the function of the sacred. Just as instruments of the state (the machine, the laboratory, the school) have changed in the modern era, religion and its role in a society with complex social structures should evolve as well.

A Familiar Term, Devoid of Content

The term *ijtihad* returned to use over a century ago, but the current use of *itjihad* does not live up to its potential. After Arab countries gained independence in the 20th century, their growing wealth led to a collective increase in Arab self-confidence and

1 Mohamed Al-Haddad, *Interpretative Investigations of Arab Reform Rhetoric* (Beirut, Dar al-Talia, 2002).

2 In 1956, shortly after gaining independence, Tunisia became the first Arab country to ban polygamy.

a movement for change. While developing their future, Arab countries looked to their historical roots, particularly in the field of religion, but no religious ruling can revive medieval culture. Networks of traditional papermakers and calligraphers crumbled with the advent of the printing press, the university developed at the expense of the mosque, the press spread in competition with popular preaching, and mass media provided an alternative to the storytelling of oral cultures. Since medieval society could not be reinstated, Arab countries moved from a fundamentalism of religious heritage to fundamentalism of the established text.

As part of this process, *ijtihad* became a literal reading of the sacred text rather than an evolving way of understanding the sacred and its relationship with the modern world. The famous 1946 book, *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, by the Egyptian author Sayyid Sabiq, is a prominent example of this disconnect. Traditional religious thought represented in the long-standing mechanisms of jurisprudence disappears, and the author simply addresses the text on a literal level. *Fiqh al-Sunnah* is akin to a Wahhabi-style *ijtihad*, only it focuses on legislation instead of doctrine.

***Ijtihad* is a practical effort to adapt religious concepts to the transformations of evolving lifestyles**

A twentieth century classic, *Fiqh al-Sunnah* has been translated into dozens of languages and is considered essential reading material for Islamic revivalist movements worldwide. The introduction to *Fiqh al-Sunnah* is written by Hassan al-Banna himself, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In the forward to *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, Sabiq writes:

This book addresses issues of Islamic jurisprudence coupled with evidence from the Qur'an and the *sunnah* [traditions of the Prophet], for which there is a consensus among the Islamic community. I have presented, simply and clearly, much of what a Muslim needs, and avoided mentioning points of disagreement unless they were truly worth discussing. This gives a correct image of Islamic jurisprudence, which God sent [through] Muhammad (peace be upon Him), and opens the door for people to understand God and His Messenger, and unites them in consensus on the Qur'an and the *sunnah*, eliminating points of disagreement and the innovation of sectarian intolerance. It also dispels the myth that the door of *ijtihad* has been closed.³

3 Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunnah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2001).

This paragraph contains three key implications. First, Sabiq believes that the history of Islamic jurisprudence does not live up to its potential. To Sabiq, ideal jurisprudence would combine many Islamic schools of thought with jurisprudence inspired by God himself and channeled through the Prophet (the Shari'a). Second, he believes that in order to return to the correct jurisprudential path, one must rely on three pieces of evidence: the Qur'an, the *sunnah*, and *ijma'* (consensus). Lastly, Sabiq sees *ijtihad* as a means to escape sectarianism and return to established texts, not as a way to determine what is required by the modern age.

Sectarian Fundamentalism Replaced by Textual Fundamentalism

The goals Sabiq outlines in his introduction can be evaluated by investigating the arguments presented in *Fiqh al-Sunnah*. The first section of *Fiqh al-Sunnah* addresses worship and is distinguished by a strict jurisprudential method. However, starting with the discussion of family law in the second section, Sabiq sounds more like a fire-brand preacher than a careful jurist as he denounces the depravity of women and blames them for a slew of problems.

The rulings in *Fiqh al-Sunnah* concerning women are all based on the assumption that women are inferior to men. Sabiq believes strongly that the distribution of family roles should be as follows: "The woman takes care of the house, raises the children, and creates the right atmosphere for the man to relax in, where he can forget his troubles and recharge his energy. The man, meanwhile, is the breadwinner of the house. With this fair distribution, each of them performs his or her natural functions in a way that pleases God."⁴ Sabiq's judgments are removed from the spirit of a changing age, and his portrayal of women does not in any way account for developments in education, contraception, infant mortality rates, or armed combat, let alone notions of gender equality.

Marriage

According to Sabiq, it is forbidden for a woman to arrange her own marriage; she must allow a guardian to arrange a match for her. A marriage can be arranged without the woman's consent, and sometimes girls can be married before puberty.⁵ Men can marry *ahl al-kitaab* (members of other monotheistic faiths), but women cannot. A wife will not be given an allowance unless she submits herself to her husband and allows him

4 Ibid. 2: 10.

5 "Women are often subject to emotion and so they do not choose well..." (Sabiq 2: 88). "As for the young girl, it is permitted for the father to marry her off without her permission, since she has no opinion" (Sabiq 2: 90).

to enjoy her however he wishes. (The reverse, of course, does not apply to men.) Men have the right to discipline their wives in marital disagreements, including corporal punishment.⁶

Birth control is forbidden on the grounds that it diminishes the strength of the Islamic community. The purpose of marriage is to multiply the father's bloodline. A husband is allowed to divorce his wife if she is infertile, but Sabiq makes no mention of male infertility, and by remarrying, women lose custody rights to their children.

Sabiq asserts that polygamy is not a religious issue, but a necessary component of civilization. In his opinion, an Islamic resurgence requires a large state and high birthrates. His other justifications for polygamy are that men have a greater inclination to procreate, the female population is greater than the male population because men experience greater hardship, the possibility of female infertility, and one wife is not enough to satisfy a man, particularly in countries with hot climates.

These rationalizations for polygamy demonstrate how ancient concepts are upheld in societies when they are no longer relevant. The strength of a modern state has more to do with its economy and military than the pure size of its population. Far fewer Islamic men die in battle than during medieval era, and the female population no longer exceeds the male population. It has long been established that sterility can occur in both men and women.

The other two "facts" cited in *Fiqh al-Sunnah* that uphold polygamy (the male desire to procreate and the effect of tropical climates) plainly show that Sabiq is misogynistic and willing to use flimsy justifications to account for male sexual desire while denouncing the same desire from women as immoral. In an indirect response to the 19th century reformer Mohammed Abdu, who issued a fatwa saying it was permissible to ban polygamy if it were proven that polygamy is harmful to society, Sabiq wrote, "The solution is not to ban what God has permitted for us, but rather it is to educate people on Islam's provisions."⁷

If his goal is to achieve Islamic unity, then Sabiq's rejection of *mut'ah* marriage (a temporary marriage contract for a fixed period of time) is problematic, since most Shiite clerics support *mut'ah* marriage. The alleged consensus exists only within the Sunni school, which prevents *Fiqh al-Sunnah* from achieving its goal of reconciling sectarian differences within Islam.

6 "Marital discord is when the wife disobeys her husband, denies him in bed, or leaves the house without his permission" (Sabiq 2: 140).

7 Ibid. 2: 84.

Divorce

In nearly every case, a husband may divorce his wife by making a verbal pronouncement, although Sabiq sides with the strict interpretation of Hanbalis that in general, divorce should be considered a last resort. (Contradictory stances on divorce are a perpetually thorny issue for jurists.)

A husband has a right to divorce, since he is “more careful about the survival of the marriage on which he spent his money, and would need to spend as much or more if he divorced and wanted to remarry.” To allow women this right would encourage divorce within society. However, Sabiq does not take a tough stance against men who pronounce divorce in jest.

Likewise, in divorce cases, the husband is not required to consult a judge, or even speak to his wife in person. He may write her a message informing her of the divorce, or enlist a third person with the power of attorney to inform her.

Public Sphere

Sabiq’s interpretation of the role of women in public life bears a similarly outdated, narrow approach to his rulings on marriage and divorce. Women are only allowed to adorn themselves with makeup in the house for the benefit of their husbands. Any female with a job outside the home is required to wear “appropriate clothes similar to nuns’ attire.”⁸ Women are forbidden to leave the house without their husbands’ permission, and are banned from going to theaters, cinemas, and stadiums, which are classified as places of debauchery.

After all the limitations Sabiq places on women, his discussion of women leading prayer or battle sounds theoretical at best. According to Sabiq, women have the right to fight in wars, but not to claim spoils. In the case of unintentional manslaughter, the blood money of a woman is half that of a man. A woman can serve as an imam only in the absence of men. If a single man is present, he becomes the imam by default.

Finance

On the issue of whether or not *zakat* (the alms tax) should be paid on oil revenue, Sabiq defers to early jurists who argued that there is no *zakat* on metals, or that there is *zakat* on gold and silver but not on other metals, or at the very most, the *zakat* on oil would be twenty percent.⁹ This means modern oil revenue belongs to those who own the oil fields, not for the people at large, and that it is permissible for some-

8 (2: 148) The attire popularized by the Muslim Brotherhood around the world as “Islamic garb” is actually borrowed from Christian nuns, not from traditional garments in Islamic societies.

9 Ibid. 1: 280-283.

one to own four-fifths of an oil field, or the entire field. Here, we can see the danger of resorting to pre-modern scholars without analyzing the contemporary context. Although Sabiq promised to rise above sectarian differences, on this topic he does no more than summarize medieval scholars without comment.

In his discussion of fiscal transactions, Sabiq mentions historical examples from ancient scholars. These case studies, limited to simple formulas for buying, selling, leasing, speculation, and loans, are insufficient to address the complexities of today's economy. The section on usury does not address the difference between interest that is charged for a profit and interest that is charged to account for inflation. In times of high inflation, if a lender is prevented from charging any interest, he would be forced to accept in real terms less money than he lent, and would lose money with each transaction. Sabiq's uncompromising definition of usury as "any increase on the principal, whether small or large" slams the door on any possible modern jurisprudence.¹⁰

The same holds true for Sabiq's section on speculation, which could have been an opportunity to modernize financial jurisprudence, but instead rehashes simple economic case studies from pre-capitalist societies. His presentation blurs the line between legal or economic considerations and devotional ones. For instance, loans are characterized as "an act of worship to draw closer to God" whereas "every loan which brings a return is usury"¹¹. In countries where banks have become the backbone of the economy, this reflects the enormous chasm between contemporary *ijtihad* and the requirements of modernity.

Warfare

Peace is a fundamental principle of Islam and war is an option of last resort, yet Sabiq's discussion of jihad makes it seem as though war in Muslim societies should be endless. The Islamic community is given a racist, imperialist definition as "the nation mandated by God to uphold His religion and spread His word, mandated also to liberate the nations and peoples, being the best among nations and its position relative to others being like a professor amongst pupils."¹² Jihad should only cease "on the

Peace is a fundamental principle of Islam and war is an option of last resort, yet Sabiq's discussion of jihad makes it seem as though war in Muslim societies should be endless

¹⁰ Ibid. 3: 126.

¹¹ Ibid. 3: 131-132.

¹² Ibid. 3: 38.

condition that injustice does not remain in the land, and no one is tempted away from [Islam].”¹³ Since this condition cannot be achieved in a practical sense, the Muslim community is continually encouraged to incite violence. Sabiq keeps alive the old delusion that religion can be spread by war.

Justice

Sabiq’s traditionalist view of punishment ignores discretionary rulings that have accumulated over centuries and have become fundamental to the judiciary system. Despite their influence, these discretionary rulings have not yet been codified, and remain vulnerable to the whims of dictators. Sabiq misses a great opportunity to assimilate them into his jurisprudence.

He defers to punishments proscribed in the Shari’a, including amputation, flogging, and stoning, despite the availability of modern methods that could serve the same legal purpose, such as prisons, correctional facilities, and rehabilitation programs.

Furthermore, a Muslim is not punished by the logic of “an eye for an eye” if he kills a non-Muslim, nor is a free man who kills a slave. These provisions clearly violate the principle of equality upon which the punishments are meant to be based: “the victim’s blood is equal to that of the perpetrator.”¹⁴ The unequal treatment of individuals

in *Fiqh al-Sunnah* is evidenced by the multi-tiered system of privilege. Sabiq says that “Islam established equality between Muslims and *dhimmi* (non-Muslim subjects),”¹⁵ but contradicts himself by saying a male slave is not compatible with a free woman, nor a non-Arab male with an Arab woman, nor a poor man with a rich woman, or a handi-

capped man with a non-handicapped woman — all rulings claiming to represent a religion that will unite humanity!

Sabiq’s arguments fail to live up to his goals, and *Fiqh al-Sunnah* is little more than a sectarian doctrine that regurgitates the opinions of the medieval jurists, occasionally striking a balance between diverging views. By rejecting *mut’ah* marriage while claiming that a consensus exists, Sabiq deliberately excludes Shiites from his discussion.

The stubborn jurisprudential habit of tackling all issues from the same angle prevents modern *ijtihad* from fulfilling its potential

13 Ibid. 3: 39

14 Ibid. 2: 363.

15 Ibid. 3: 9.

There are some positive aspects to Sabiq's work, such as his rejection of the widely held view that a man can divorce his wife by repeating "I divorce you" three times, the legitimacy of a divorce under the influence of alcohol, and certain articles in Egyptian law which limit the cases where a judge can intervene. But on the whole, these examples of true *ijtihad* are few and far between.

Looking Forward

No sooner had modern Islamic thought emerged from the fundamentalism of its own heritage and the Hanafi, Maliki, Jafari, and Shafa'i schools than it fell prey to fundamentalism of the text. Having demoted *ijtihad* to a literal reading of the text, scholars have not been able to modify the preconditions and mechanisms of *ijtihad* to account for the evolving role of religion in the modern era. Too few scholars are willing to admit how greatly the new *ijtihad* differs from the old, and the stubborn jurisprudential habit of tackling all issues from the same angle prevents modern *ijtihad* from fulfilling its potential.

To be effective, modern *ijtihad* should take place in a legislative assembly between individuals who are capable of representing society fairly. One of the best visions of modern *ijtihad* was developed by Muhammad Iqbal, a 20th century Indian intellectual who remains underappreciated and marginalized among Muslim writers.

Moving the right of *ijtihad* from individuals representing schools of thought to an Islamic legislative body is the only form which consensus can take in modern times. This transition ensures legislative debates to benefit from the views of laymen who can perceive quite well life's affairs, and in this way alone can we resurrect the strength to emerge from the lethargy reigning over our legislative systems, and move forward on the path of development."¹⁶

This parliamentary solution, drawing on debate from a broad spectrum of Muslims, represents the best hope for modern *ijtihad*. It is insufficient to call for the gates of *ijtihad* without the proper groundwork in place. ■

16 Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1930).

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Obama and Islamists: Toward Accomodation

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The most illustrative analogy I have found to describe what the terrorists accomplished on September 11th is that they penetrated the political nervous system of the U.S. Consequently, the Bush administration behaved like an elephant irritated by ants in its ears, and engaged in self-defeating, short-sighted and ill-defined policies toward friends and enemies. The greatest challenge of the Obama administration is to remove the ants from the elephant's ears by reconsidering the one-size-fits-all generalizations made by the previous administration about the complex and multi-layered phenomenon of political Islam.

The U.S. developed a strategy to deal with violent Islamists, but neglected to develop a cohesive strategy to deal with non-violent Islamists, who make up the majority of Islamists in the world. The Bush administration's strategy to undermine terrorism and violence relied on military engagement and procedural democratization. Such an approach failed to engage with Islamists in a constructive dialogue, and therefore will not be effective in combating extremism or mitigating violence in the long run.

The Obama administration needs a corrective strategy to address the unintended high cost of Bush's policy. The challenge ahead of the U.S. is to move from a strategy of demobilization (i.e. anti-violence) to one of deradicalization (i.e. anti-extremism).

Are All Islamists Terrorists?

No meaningful engagement can be made with Islamism as a political movement without differentiating between violent and non-violent factions, or local and transnational organizations. Therefore, U.S. policy should view Islamist formations in two dimensions: the organization’s attitude toward violence, and the scale of its agenda. The following table demonstrates an operational typology that can be a starting point for discussion.¹

Table 1: Typology of Islamic Formations

	Violent	Non-Violent
Global	Al-Qa’eda and its affiliate groups	Al-Tahrir Party, Muslim Brotherhood
Regional	Hezbollah (Lebanon, Syria, Iran), Hamas (Gaza, Syria and Iran), Taliban (Afghanistan and Pakistan)	Salafi and Shi’a movements in the Arab Gulf area
Local	Islamic Salvation Front (Algeria) Jama’a Islamiyya (Egypt) Islamist Rebels (Chechnya) The Union of Islamic Courts (Somalia)	Nahdatul Ulama (Indonesia) Parti-Islam se Malaysia, Yemeni Congregation for Reform, AKP (Turkey), Party of Justice and Development (Morocco), Islamic Constitutional Movement (Kuwait)

The main distinction in this table is between non-violent Islamists who advocate for incremental evolutionary change those who believe in a radical, violent reorganization of society.

Clearly, not all Islamists have global agendas. Local Islamists aim to reform their own country. Regional groups work within a specific geopolitical sphere, such as Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in the case of Hamas, Lebanon and northern Israel for Hezbollah, and Afghanistan and Pakistan for Taliban associates who are not affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Fawaz Gerges calls these groups “religious na-

¹ Patricia D. Netzley and Moataz Fattah, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2007).

tionalists” who have local, rather than cosmic, objectives, which differentiates them from transnational Jihadist networks like Al-Qaeda.²

Parallel to these violent organizations are the non-violent Islamist groups illustrated in the second column. In this table, “non-violent” indicates that the organization has refrained from using violence against their own societies or governments during the last 25 years. None of the non-violent groups and formations mentioned in this table are listed by the U.S. State Department as a “Foreign Terrorist Organization” which designates that “the organization’s terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States.”³

The U.S. neglected to develop a cohesive strategy to deal with non-violent Islamists, who make up the majority of Islamists in the world

This table contradicts the naïve, albeit prevalent, assumption that political Islam is inherently violent. The extremist transnational organizations that purport to act politically on behalf of Islam, such as Al-Qaeda, are fringe groups, and while they capture the West’s attention with their dramatic acts of terror, they are marginal within Islamist movements and irrelevant to the day-to-day political struggles within Muslim countries.⁴

The non-violent Islamic groups mentioned in Table 1 operate in political systems that are generally secular and non-democratic. Most keep a low profile when facing resistance from the ruling party, then bounce back politically when the autocracy liberalizes under domestic or international pressure. These Islamist groups refrain from violence despite the odds that encourage them to use arms against repressive rulers and their foreign allies. Most have learned that violence is counterproductive in achieving their political objectives, since authoritarian regimes generally have well-equipped and trained armies.

Local, regional, and global Islamist groups hold separate agendas but can unite for a common cause. The Egyptian Islamic Jihad, frustrated by its inability to overthrow Egypt’s secular autocratic regime, joined with transnational groups to target the “far enemy,” the West in general, and the United States in particular. Groups like Islamic

2 Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

3 U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations* (April 8, 2008). <http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/terrorism/state/103392.pdf>

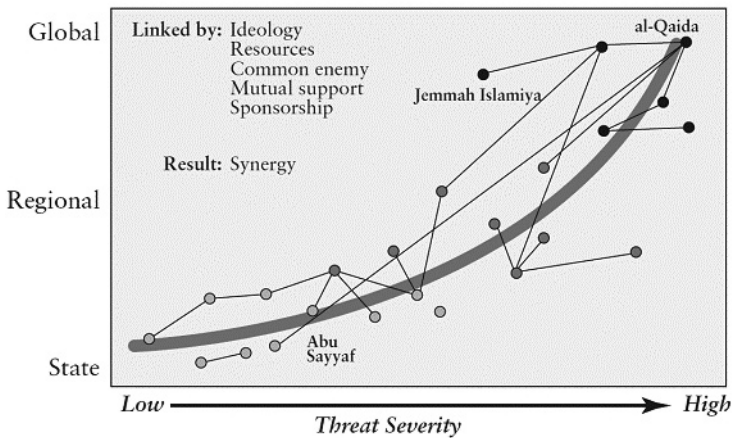
4 Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

Jihad believe that repressive, anti-Islamic regimes are kept in power by Western states. Therefore, a strike against the U.S. or Europe helps to undermine authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world.

For a regional Islamist group to join forces with a global campaign is often a tacit admission that it has not achieved results where it matters most-- at home. For instance, after two decades of an ineffective violent insurgency campaign, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad struggled to maintain popular support, and eventually became an Al-Qaeda affiliate.

To assume all Islamists are violent and hold a worldwide agenda is a strategic mistake which will lead to ineffective policy. The Bush administration understood that Islamism is a multilayered phenomenon, but failed to grasp just how many gradations exist within the Islamist rubric, and consequently, its counter-offensive was misguided.

TRANSNATIONAL TERRORIST NETWORKS



U.S. Strategy of Demobilization

Figure 1. U.S. National Strategies for Combating Terrorism (February 2003)

The U.S. National Strategies for Combating Terrorism (February 2003 and September 2006) outline U.S. policy to confront violent Islamist groups in the War on Terror. The 2003 Strategy outlined terrorists and terrorist organizations operating on three levels (see Figure 1). This substantially differs from Table 1 in that it fails to take non-violent Islamist groups into consideration.

At the first level in the table are “state” terrorist organizations that operate primarily within a single country. For American policymakers, such local groups do not pose

an immediate threat, but may become a liability if their ambitions remain unchecked. At the next level are terrorist organizations that operate regionally. Terrorist organizations with a global reach comprise the third, and most dangerous, category.

According to this strategy, the goal of American policy is not to eradicate terrorism but to return terrorism to the “criminal domain.” In order to reduce the level, scope, severity, and capability of these violent groups, the U.S. adopted a four-part strategy known as “The 4 D’s.”

(1) Defeat terrorists and their organizations. The operational goal is to identify terrorist organizations and individuals, locate them, and destroy them.

(2) Deny sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists; end the state sponsorship of terrorism; establish and maintain an international standard of accountability for terrorist actions; undertake efforts to strengthen and sustain the international effort to fight terrorism; conduct operations to interdict and disrupt material support for terrorists; and finally, eliminate terrorist sanctuaries and havens.

(3) Diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit. Partner with the international community to strengthen weak states and prevent the emergence or reemergence of terrorism. Win the war of ideas.

(4) Defend U.S. citizens and interests at home and abroad. Implement the National Strategy for Homeland Security. Enhance measures to ensure the integrity, reliability, and availability of critical physical and information-based infrastructures at home and abroad. Ensure an integrated incident management capability.

Several criticisms have been mounted against the overall U.S. strategy, starting with its description as a “War on Terror.” On August 6, 2004, President George W. Bush himself said, “We actually misnamed the War on Terror. It ought to be called the struggle against ideological extremists who do not believe in free societies, and who happen to use terror as a weapon.”

British foreign minister David Miliband said the correct response to the terrorist threat is to champion law and human rights. The phrase War on Terror, informally dropped from use by the UK government several years ago, “implied a belief that the correct response to the terrorist threat was primarily a military one -- to track down and kill a hardcore [group] of extremists.” Calling for groups to be treated as separate entities with differing motivations, Miliband argued there is no “simple binary struggle between moderates and extremists, or good and evil,” and treating them as such was a mistake.⁵

5 David Miliband, “War on Terror Was Wrong,” *The Guardian*, January 13, 2009. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7829946.stm)

President Barack Obama has rarely used the phrase War on Terror since taking office. In his inaugural address on January 20, 2009, he said, “Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred.” In March 2009, the Defense Department officially changed the name of the operation from “Global War on Terror” to “Overseas Contingency Operation,” and the Obama administration requested that Pentagon staff members avoid using the term War on Terror.

The U.S. should be particularly careful not to characterize all violent Islamists as inherently anti-American. In 2002, Richard Armitage, then U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, described Hezbollah as the “A-team terrorists,” suggesting that Al-Qaeda may be the “B-Team.”⁶ This misleading portrayal disregards Hezbollah’s documented activities over the past two decades which demonstrate that it is not interested in a global fight against Western nations. Equating all violent Islamist groups with Al-Qaeda reinforces the claim that Americans feel threatened by the Muslim world at large. This viewpoint, lacking in both respect and nuance, will unify potential enemies against the U.S. and harm American security in the long run.

Obama may have phased out the term “War or Terror,” but it will take more than semantics for the U.S. to revise its long-term security goals. The approach Obama inherited from the Bush administration is insufficient, perhaps even self-defeating, if it is not coupled with a strategy that focuses on non-violent Islamists. Critics like Robert Hutchings have noted that U.S. policy toward Islamism is still “reactive, threat-based and over-militarized.”⁷ The U.S. cannot fight violence unless it knows how to fight extremism. This deradicalization project requires a twofold strategy:

- 1) A carefully crafted democracy promotion policy
- 2) A comprehensive peace building policy

Is There a Second Life for Democracy Promotion?

Several commentators maintain that the Obama administration should stay clear of any effort to support democratic change in the Middle East. Bush wanted Arab democracy, the argument goes, he wanted a world according to John Locke; he received a world according to John Hobbes. Even when Arab states do hold successful elections, they may empower Islamist groups that are troublesome in the eyes of the U.S., such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The United States, it follows, would be better off not stirring that pot again anytime soon.

6 Ibid.

7 Robert Hutchings, “Shaping the Obama Administration’s Counterterrorism Strategy,” Cato Institute, January 12 2009. (<http://www.cato.org/events/counterterrorism/index.html>)

But this position is merely a reductionist view of America's attempts to promote Arab democratization.⁸ The Obama administration needs to promote political participation in the Middle East without advancing unstable, unfriendly, or illiberal democracies. Obama can avoid the traps of the previous administration by pursuing the "principled pragmatism" that Hillary Clinton expressed in one of her recent speeches.

Sometimes we will have the most impact by publicly denouncing a government action, like the coup in Honduras or the violence in Guinea... Other times we will be more likely to help the oppressed by engaging in tough negotiations behind closed doors, like pressing China and Russia as part of our broader agenda. In every instance, our aim will be to make a difference, not to prove a point.⁹

To implement real change in Arab countries, the U.S. must keep in mind the following threats to democracy building.

Democratization and the Trap of Instability

In most Muslim countries, the authority of individual rulers, the legitimacy of regimes, and the sovereignty of states are inextricably linked. In almost every country in the region, an abrupt shift in power not only diminishes the authority of the ruler but can also threaten the legitimacy of the regime and the unity of the state itself. It is relatively easy to remove unpopular autocrats from power; it is considerably more difficult to bring to power true democrats who can appease separatist tendencies. The connection between leaders and state cohesion was evident in Somalia after President Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991, in Afghanistan when the Taliban was removed from power in 2001, and in Iraq after Saddam Hussein was forced out of office in 2003.

If the United States were to press for regime change in Saudi Arabia, for instance, it would likely affect not only the current lead-

ers, but threaten the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy and the stability of the Saudi state. Save Egypt and Tunisia, which have very solid civil societies, this analysis can

Bush wanted Arab democracy, he wanted a world according to John Locke; he received a world according to John Hobbes

8 Thomas Carothers, "Democracy Promotion Under Obama: Finding a Way Forward," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief 77 (February 2009).

9 Hillary Clinton, "Remarks on the Human Rights Agenda for the 21st Century," Georgetown University, December 12, 2009. (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/12/133544.htm>)

be applied to most other Muslim countries.

However, democracy promotion does not necessarily mean regime change. Domestic and international pressure can push Arab states to enact steady, gradual reform. Saudi Arabia is known for having one of the most rigid political and social systems in the Muslim world, but in post-September 11th Saudi Arabia, the word *islah* [reform] is on everyone's lips. Saudi officials have declared specific steps will be undertaken to allow more public participation in the kingdom. Prince Sultan bin Abdel-Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister, promises political reform and claims he has no respect for the notorious 99% re-election results of other Arab regimes, since "manipulating elec-

It is relatively easy to remove unpopular autocrats from office; it is considerably more difficult to bring to power true democrats who can appease separatist tendencies

tions is the easiest thing the kingdom can do." It is wiser to press current regimes for democratic reforms rather than force them out of power. Regime change is simply too dangerous in unstable states.

The Threat of Illiberal Democracy

There is a fear among U.S. strategists that the transition from autocracy to democracy in the Middle East will bring religious leaders to power. The foundation of political participation is not deeply rooted in most Muslim countries, and oftentimes the best organized and mobilized parties in Muslim countries are the least liberal groups. Therefore, hasty democratization might result in a transfer from fairly liberal autocracies to fairly illiberal democracies.

In this regard, America's "principled pragmatism" should consider moving slowly away from the three dominant autocratic models in most Muslim countries, listed below.

- Containment of Islamist political parties. The Egyptian case represents this model par excellence; the Brotherhood in Egypt is allowed free participation in national, syndicate, and students' elections, so long as they do not win a majority of votes. If the Brotherhood wins a majority, either the election results are manipulated or the candidates of the Brotherhood are administratively excluded from office, sometimes arrested. This model, in which "democratic" regimes secretly and selectively manipulate election results, leads to a credibility crisis, and is not productive for democratic growth.
- Legal assimilation and political neutralization. This model is best represented by the royal models of Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Islamists exist legally but no matter how well they perform in elections, the monarch or emir

has the ultimate say in resource allocation.

- Autocratic exclusion of Islamists. The elimination of Islamist parties through coercion can be witnessed in Tunisia, Syria and Libya.

These models are inherently autocratic and feed into the frustration Islamists hold against their local governments and the U.S. The Bush administration made the strategic mistake of engaging in democracy promotion without focusing on institutional design. The Obama administration can press for better-crafted democratization, using models such as the Turkish or German political systems.

The German formula, crafted in the 1949 constitution of West Germany, is based on the concept of democratic exclusion, and prevents extreme rightists (i.e. Nazis) and extreme leftists (i.e. Communists) from political office. This model is preferable to the Islamist containment policy, since it excludes extremist parties but allows them to re-enter the political arena if they become reasonably moderate. Exclusion is only used as a tool to promote healthy democracy, not for the benefit of the ruling party. All political organizations enjoy a legitimate right to rule, with one caveat: no democracy for the opponents of democracy.

The main objection to this model is that it is difficult to establish unless an extremist party commits a crime amounting to a national disaster, or if the extremist powers are weak enough to be easily excluded from the political body. Therefore, the German political system could be well-suited to Arab societies like Syria, Tunisia, and Libya, where political Islam is not a strong force. But it would be difficult to instate in countries where non-violent Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are active and enjoy a high degree of public acceptance.

Another approach, the Turkish model of democratic assimilation, is held in high regard by the U.S. It differs from the German model in that all parties who agree to abide by the rules of a secular and democratic state are allowed to run for office. Parties are monitored by an institution that is dedicated to the protection of supra-constitutional rules, which no one can seek to change or amend.

The strength of this system is that the supra-constitutional rules guard against any individual or party that aims to undermine democracy. The rules are not “anti-Islamist” – they’re standards for the whole political spectrum. In this system of checks and balances, the Turkish model assumes that any political actor might try to undermine democracy once elected, and therefore ensures that Turkey as a state will

The German political system could be well-suited to Arab societies like Syria, Tunisia, and Libya, where political Islam is not a strong force

continue to be democratic.

The impact of this well-crafted system on Islamist parties can already be seen. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey is a prime example of an Islamist organization that renounced its radical, exclusivist Islamist agenda. AKP has developed a conservative democratic party platform that emphasizes “Muslimhood”, in the same manner that Christian Democrats in Western Europe draw upon Christian heritage.

The Turkish model upholds democracy by assuming that any political actor, once elected, might try to undermine democratic institutions

The Obama administration can and should strive to see more liberal democracy in the Middle East. Following the Turkish or the German model, balanced institutions and political systems tailored to the needs of each country will help build sustainable Muslim democracies.

The Peril of Hostility

One of greatest fears for U.S. policymakers is that democratization will empower American opponents in Muslim countries. Such logic uses a large brush to paint all Islamists as anti-democratic and anti-Western:

Democracy, diversity, accommodation – the fundamentalists have repudiated them all. In appealing to the masses who fill their mosques, they promise, instead, to institute a regime of Islamic law, make common cause with like-minded “brethren” everywhere, and struggle against hegemony of the West and the existence of Israel. Fundamentalists have held to these principles through long periods of oppression, and will not abandon them now, at the moment of their greatest popular resonance.¹⁰

Following this logic, the U.S. has no incentive to facilitate political participation of Islamists, which would essentially amount to aiding the enemy.

While it’s true that most Islamist parties are opposed (at least rhetorically) to key aspects of American foreign policy, such as its support for Israel, close relationship to autocratic leaders in the Gulf, and military presence in the Middle East, it is in America’s best interest to form strategic alliances with Islamist groups. The U.S. must learn to differentiate between violent Islamists and pragmatic ones who are ready to accept compromises. The positive effects of such American-Islamist collaborations can already be seen in Afghanistan (Burhanuddin Rabbani and Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf), Iraq (Muslim Brotherhood), and Turkey (AKP).

10 Martin Kramer, “Islam vs. Democracy,” *Commentary* (January 1993).

The U.S. must keep moderate Islamists in mind when crafting policy measures, and should collaborate with Islamists to achieve mutual goals. As Shibley Telhamy wrote, “Skepticism about the real aims of these groups [Islamists] should be balanced by openness to the possibility that their aims, once they are in power, could differ from their aims as opposition figures. This requires partial engagement, patience, and a willingness to allow such movements space and time to put their goals to the test of reality.”¹¹

A good example of innovative diplomacy is the coalition built by President George Bush in 1990 against Iraq when states such as Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia participated in a grand coalition of thirty countries to liberate Kuwait. Leaving Iraq and Afghanistan and finding a fair solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict are important steps to deradicalize and engage pragmatic Islamists through negotiations rather than violence.

To find common ground with Islamists, the U.S. can use criticisms that have been made against Al-Qaeda by other Islamists. For instance, Sayyad Imam, one of Al-Qaeda’s founders and former mentor to Ayman al-Zawahiri, brought Al-Qaeda under attack, describing its leaders as ignorant and arrogant, seeking personal gains and acting against Islamic teachings.¹²

Obama and Peace Building in the Middle East

In the Muslim perspective, survey data and anecdotal evidence show that no single issue is more damaging to U.S.-Muslim relations than America’s continued support for Israel.¹³ Resolving this conflict would be a major step towards deradicalizing large numbers of Islamists. After all, Islamists cannot be outraged on behalf of Palestinians if the Palestinians themselves are satisfied. Arab countries are ready to accept a peace treaty according to the 1967 borders, with territorial exchanges that will give Israel settlement blocs that are too expensive and painful to evacuate; a demilitarized Palestinian state whose capital is East Jerusalem; and the retraction of the demand for resettlement of refugees within Israel. This compromise deserves to receive the official stamp of approval of the Obama administration and should become the roadmap for negotiations.

Conclusion

11 Shibley Telhamy, “In the Middle East, the Third Way is a Myth,” *Washington Post*, February 17, 2006.

12 Kamal Habib, “Another Wave of Jihadist Adjustment: Internal Debates of the Movement,” *Arab Insight*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (Winter 2009). Jarret Brachman, “Al Qaeda’s Dissident,” *Foreign Policy* (December 2009).

13 Moataz Fattah, *Democratic Values in the Muslim World* (Colorado: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 2006).

If the goal of Obama's administration is to achieve long-term security for the U.S., it must make deradicalization a greater priority. Currently, the U.S. assesses Islamist movements according to the scale of their operation, and the severity of threat they pose to the U.S. The great flaw in this system is that it pays too much attention to violent Islamism.

The U.S. must amend its paradigm, and view Islamist groups in terms of their scale and use of violence. It will become clear that non-violent Islamists hold a majority, and their innate understanding of regional disputes and political Islam could make them invaluable allies to the U.S. In addition, many Islamist groups have local agendas. If the U.S. were more willing to help them achieve political relevance in their own countries, such Islamists would not be as tempted to join forces with global Jihadist networks.

The flawed democratization policy of the Bush administration should be replaced by a principled pragmatism that urges Muslim countries to adopt democratic reforms. The containment, neutralization, and exclusion of Islamist parties by Muslim regimes has largely proven unsuccessful. Using the German and Turkish political models, the U.S. should press for better-crafted political systems in Muslim countries, systems that aim not to eliminate Islamists, but to create healthy democratic participation for all. ■

The United States and the Muslim World: Has Obama Reneged on His Cairo Promise?

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Responding to a student's question in his landmark visit to Istanbul in April 2009, Barack Obama said, "States are like big tankers, they're not like speedboats. You can't whip them around and go in another direction ... you turn them slowly, and eventually you end up in a very different place."¹ Obama has begun to turn the American tanker, but this gradual change does not satisfy the expectations that swept the Muslim world upon his election. The image of the United States, badly damaged in recent years, requires a speedier overhaul than the one currently underway. Many Muslims and mainstream Islamists around the world wonder whether the turning of the tanker will be permanent. A policy reversal is more than likely when Obama leaves office, and the burst of fresh air that Obama's election brought to U.S.-Muslim relations could easily run out.

This article discusses the impact of Obama's presidency on improving U.S.-Muslim relations, with particular focus on Islamists and political Islamic movements. Obama's policy towards the Muslim world and the Middle East will hinge on two topics: the Palestinian- Israeli issue and support for democratization. While George W. Bush gave priority to democracy promotion in the Middle East and ignored Palestine, Obama

1 "Obama Urges Iraqis to Take Larger Role in Controlling Country," PBS NewsHour, April 7, 2009. (http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/white_house/jan-june09/obamairaq_04-07.html)

seems to have taken the opposite approach, concentrating on Palestine and ignoring democratization. If Obama cannot fulfil the high hopes pinned upon him by many Muslims, their compounded frustration could be more damaging than the anger they experienced during the Bush years, and lead to more radicalization. Underneath this fatalistic resignation would lie the sentiment, "If Obama cannot not mend fences with Muslims, no one can."

'Obamania' has had a significant effect on U.S.-Muslim relations. According to

In most Arab countries, approval rate of American leadership doubled, and in some cases tripled, during the first year of Obama's presidency

Gallup polls, in most Arab countries, the approval rate of American leadership doubled, and in some cases, tripled during the first year of Obama's presidency. From 2008 to 2009, approval of U.S. leadership increased from 14% to 37% in Tunisia , 25% to 47% in Algeria, 6% to 25% in Egypt, 12% to 29%

in Saudi Arabia, and 4% to 15% in Syria. (Lebanon and Palestine are the outliers; approval of American leadership fell from 25% to 22% in Lebanon, and 13% to 7% in Palestine.²) Overall, this positive upswing corresponds to the new language and tone that Obama brought to international relations. Confrontational policies have been replaced by cooperation, unilateralism by multilateralism, war-mongering by engagement and dialogue.

Perhaps the most striking dimension of the new administration's foreign policy, as repeatedly stated by Obama himself, is America's new approach to the Muslim world, and the Muslim Middle East in particular. Obama's major developments in this field include reinstating Palestinian issue at the top of the foreign policy agenda,³ scheduling a deadline for the removal of American troops in Iraq (whose presence is seen by many Muslims as a proof of American imperial hegemony over Muslim land), announcing that the infamous Guantanamo Bay detainment facility will close, and combating the disrespect towards and fear of Muslim-American and Arab-American citizens that emerged after 9/11.

Determined to deliver a clear message to the Muslim world about this new ap-

2 Julie Ray and Mohamed Younis, "Approval of U.S. Leadership Up in Some Countries," Gallup, November 13 2009. (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/118940/Approval-Leadership-Arab-Countries.aspx>)

3 During his summer 2008 visit to Israel Obama made clear that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of his top priorities. "I will not wait until a few years into my term or my second term if I am elected in order to get the process moving." Tim McGirck, "The Battle Over Gaza," *Time*, December 31, 2008. (<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1869152,00.html>)

proach, Obama gave his first televised interview just one week after taking office to the Saudi-owned, Dubai-based Al Arabiya satellite station. In the interview, he stressed that Muslims should know that the U.S. is not their enemy. Obama said that his job is “to communicate the fact that the United States has a stake in the wellbeing of the Muslim world, that the language we use has to be a language of respect. I have Muslim members of my family. I have lived in Muslim countries.”⁴

Obama’s reconciliatory approach to the Muslim world continued with his two historic speeches in Istanbul and Cairo in April and June of 2009, respectively. In both speeches, he reiterated the themes of coexistence and common values, dismissing the notion of a clash of civilizations. Obama made clear distinctions between the peaceful Muslim majority and the small, violent radical groups hijacking Islam and claiming to act in its name. The Cairo speech was praised around the world as an oratorical masterpiece, and several books analyzing its significance and impact have already been published.⁵

Islamist Ambivalence

Preceding Obama’s visit to Cairo, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement titled “The Brothers’ Opinion on the American President’s Visit to Egypt” on June 4th, 2009.⁶ The strangeness, and perhaps the significance, of the statement is that it did not pronounce any clear position on Obama’s visit. The Brothers’ reiterated their stance on Israel, attacked Western policies, and confirmed the right of the Egyptian people to defend their country and change their internal authoritarian regime. At the end, the Brothers declared they would assess Obama’s visit after it had taken place, and avoided making any prior judgement. Short and vague—but not condemning the visit altogether—it reflected the conflicted mood among Arab Islamists toward Obama’s visit. After Obama’s speech, the Brothers issued no followup message as they had promised, and posted nothing about the Cairo visit on their homepage. This reflects a continuing ambivalence among the Brotherhood, and among mainstream Islamist groups, about how to respond to Barack Obama, no longer a pet presidential candidate but the leader of the United States.

Reactions to President Obama by Islamist groups and intellectuals have been var-

4 “Obama Tells Al Arabiya Peace Talks Should Resume,” *Al Arabiya*, January 27, 2009. (<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/01/27/65087.html>)

5 See Cecil Patey, *Obama in Cairo: When Christians and Moslems Meet*, AuthorHouse.

6 Muslim Brotherhood Homepage, November 10 2009. (<http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=49566&SecID=211>)

ied and conflicting. A range of these reactions, spanning several movements, will be surveyed here. Isam Al-Aryan, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, wrote an article in Beirut's *Al-Akhbar* daily titled "A Letter to Barak Obama." In the article, Al-Aryan warned Obama against supporting authoritarian regimes in the region, lamenting that these regimes have surrendered their sovereignty and interest to outsiders. Al-Aryan also expressed bitterness that global American military outreach often operates against the essence of American values.

It is a matter of allegiance to your country when you promote principles that are called upon by the American Constitution, the values of freedom, respect of human rights, democracy, and respect for the will of people. By contrast, it is not a matter of allegiance to your country to keep your armies ... occupying all corners of the world. It is not a matter of faithfulness to your principles to keep those detainees in jail without conviction and extract false confessions from them by torture; and to use tyrants and autocrats who remain in power because of your support...⁷

Among the strongest Islamist endorsements for Obama, Mustapha Ikhlaiif's article in *Al Jazeera* called upon Obama to convert to Islam and become the worldwide Caliph of Muslims. The author, a Moroccan academic who writes with Islamist undertones, argues that the race and ethnicity of a Muslim leader is of no importance as long as he embodies the message of Islam. Ikhalif contends that Persians, Turks, Seljuks and other ethnicities have ruled over the Arab region – why could not Barak Hussein Obama be one of them? Obama has been received warmly, even hailed by Muslims, and the only major step he must take before reigning over Muslim countries is simply to convert to Islam.⁸

Al Jazeera also featured work by Muhanna Al-Habeel, a staunch critic of Obama and his Arab and Muslim fans. Al-Habeel, a Saudi writer, wonders how Obama "can explain to us the meaning of justice and tolerance in Islamic values at the same time that his forces strike against tens of innocent people in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and those American-occupied areas [are drowned] in rivers of blood." Al-Habeel went on to exclaim, "How nice Mr. President looked while he was sending his greetings to the

7 Isam Al-Aryan, "A Letter to Barak Obama," *Al-Akhbar*, July 7, 2009. (<http://www.al-akhbar.com/ar/node/139321>)

8 Mustapha Ikhlaiif, "Islamic America and Obama the Caliph of Muslims," *Al Jazeera*, November 18, 2009. (<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/800E59BC-7313-41A2-8BCB-85804ACC2D59.htm>)

victims in their graves...”⁹

Between these extremes, another Islamist writer, Nabil Shabib, a Syrian living in Germany, is skeptical. He believes Obama’s choice to visit Turkey first among Muslim countries was a loaded move. Shabib contends that Turkey is the type of majority-Muslim state the West wants to see—a secular Muslim country. More importantly, Obama wants to exploit the respected position of Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Turkey in order to implement American policies in the Muslim world. Obama wants Turkey to adopt a more active role in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, and in the Arab/Israeli conflict. For Shabib, this amounts to “Turkey becoming a Trojan horse for American policy in two components: soft political discourse; and political substance that is based on the continuation of hegemony in a new transformed ‘soft hegemony’ after military failures.”¹⁰

Khaled Meshaal, Hamas’ chief political leader, made several positive statements about Obama, expressing the readiness of Hamas to open dialogue with the U.S.

Hamas and Obama

Hamas, after greeting Obama’s candidacy with such enthusiasm, has been frustrated by the first year of his Presidency. Hamas followed the American presidential race closely and supported Obama to the point of harming his campaign. In April 2008, Ahmad Yousef, political advisor to the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, praised Obama during a WABC radio interview. The statement was widely used by Obama’s opponents, who denounced him as Hamas’ favorite candidate.¹¹

Khaled Meshaal, Hamas’ chief political leader, has expressed that his organization is more willing to engage with American policymakers since Obama came to office. Hailing Obama’s victory, Meshaal said, “It’s a big change—politically and psychologically and it is noteworthy and I congratulate President Obama ... yes, we are ready for dialogue with President Obama and with the new American administration, on the

9 Muhanna Al-Habail, “Obama Greets Muslims in Their Graves,” [in Arabic], Al Jazeera, August 29, 2009. (<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/E241E8B7-6559-4EBF-8941-585DB16A1166.htm>)

10 Nabil Shabib, “Turkey: Trojan Horse in Obama’s Policy” [in Arabic], IslamOnline, April 7, 2009. (http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1237705954218&pagename=Zone-Arabic-News%2FNWALayout)

11 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/05/12/obama-on-hamas-smear-we-d_n_101387.html, accessed 13 November 2009.

basis that the American administration respects our rights and our options.”¹²

Since his election, Obama holds a very delicate position regarding Palestine and Hamas, a litmus test for many Muslims concerning Western credibility in promoting human values and justice.¹³ In his Cairo speech, Obama introduced a new approach to Hamas. “Hamas does have support among some Palestinians, but they also have to recognize they have responsibilities. To play a role in fulfilling Palestinian aspirations, to unify the Palestinian people, Hamas must put an end to violence, recognize past agreements, recognize Israel’s right to exist.”¹⁴

In an interview, Meshaal responded by saying

Undoubtedly Obama speaks a new language. His speech was cleverly designed... The essence of the speech was to improve the U.S. image and to placate the Muslims. We don’t mind either objective, but we are looking for more than just mere words. If the United States wishes to open a new page, we definitely would welcome this. We are keen to contribute to this. But we [believe that cannot happen] merely with words. It must be with deeds, by changing the policy on the ground.¹⁵

However, despite early signs in January 2009 that the Obama administration was ready to engage with Hamas,¹⁶ putting an end to American isolation of the party and the 1.5 million Palestinians under its jurisdiction in the Gaza Strip, nothing tangible took place.

The greatest challenge for the Obama administration is how to translate rhetoric and well-intentioned statements into concrete change. After a year, Obama’s presidency has a mixed balance sheet, and frustration is gathering rapidly. On the Palestinian issue, Obama failed to pressure Israel to put a freeze on settlement building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Withdrawing troops from Iraq in January 2010 has

12 Dominic Waghorn, “Hamas Tells Obama: Let’s Talk,” Sky News, November 8, 2008. (http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/World-News/Hamas-Leader-Khaled-Meshaal-Says-He-Is-Ready-To-Talk-To-President-Elect-Barack-Obama/Article/200811215147164?lpos=World_News_Carousel_Region_2&lid=ARTICLE_15147164_Hamas_Leader_Khaled_Meshaal_Says_He_Is_Ready_To_Talk_To_President-Elect_Barack_Obama)

13 I have argued elsewhere that the Palestine issue is the barometer by which Arabs (and to a large extent Muslims) will judge Obama. “Obama and the Middle East: Palestine First,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Web Commentary, December 8, 2008. (<http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22507&prog=zgp&proj=zme>)

14 For the full text of Obama’s speech, see US Department of State, “Obama in Cairo: A Commemorative Transcript.” (http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/ejs/archives/obama_cairo_speech.pdf)

15 Joe Klein, “A meeting in Damascus,” *Time*, June 4, 2009. (<http://swampland.blogs.time.com/2009/06/04/a-meeting-in-damascus>)

16 Suzanne Goldenberg, “Obama Camp Prepared to Talk to Hamas,” *The Guardian*, January 9, 2009.

been postponed until August 2010. Obama's dialogue and engagement approach has not been particularly successful in confronting Iran about its nuclear program. Both Republican and Democratic Congressmen stalled Obama's plan to close Guantanamo by voting down measures to relocate the detainees. Turning the hefty tanker is a strenuous job indeed.

If Obama believes that the well-being of the Muslim world is in the interest of the U.S., he must adopt a more consistent approach on democracy promotion

Democratization Deficit

The second level of challenges Obama faces with regard to the Muslim world, and Islamists in particular, centers around democracy promotion. Islamists in the Arab world were dismayed that Obama did not use Cairo as an opportunity to address democratisation or the need for political reform in Egypt. Furthermore, he praised President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, an autocrat determined to hand over power to his son, Gamal. Downplaying the issue of democracy advancement is a notable shortcoming of "Obama-ism". As new realism becomes a cornerstone in Obama's foreign policy, his speeches about American involvement in the world have almost completely dropped the previous (Bush-style) emphasis on democratization.

There is a debate raging in Muslim countries on whether it's beneficial to invite external powers to promote democracy. There are concerns about a double standard, since the United States has been famously uneven in its application of democracy. The U.S. desires and fights for democracy in Iraq, but completely ignores Saudi Arabia, for example. The U.S. praises elections in Lebanon when they bring victory to Western-supported coalitions but lambasts elections that empower Hamas in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

Among Islamists (and other opposition forces) in the Arab world there is a great dilemma surrounding what to demand from the West. If Muslims ask the United States to pressure their authoritarian regimes for democratization, they must relinquish sovereignty. Advocates of democracy also understand that explicit American support can be the kiss of death for a popular movement in the Middle East. On the other hand, if the U.S. does not intervene, autocrats will remain in power, citizens will still be denied free speech and political participation, and America will appear complicit.

The onus lies on both sides. If Obama truly believes that a stable Muslim world

is in the best interest of the United States, then he must adopt a more consistent approach on democracy promotion, one that is less focused on immediate gain. This is necessary to establish a long-lasting, healthy relationship between the U.S. and Muslim states.

Islamists must develop vision of what they desire from the West, and the U.S. in particular, in terms of democracy promotion. If Islamists pragmatically engage with the U.S. to pursue democratic reforms, they can broaden their own support, and counteract the belief that democratization is a Western conspiracy to infiltrate Muslim countries. It is equally important that the Islamist movement continues its trend toward politicization and secularization, as demonstrated by the successful Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey. Focusing on public service and pushing ideological rhetoric and identity politics to the background will encourage external actors to deal more seriously, and less fearfully, with Islamist parties.

The 'Obamania' that swept the Muslim world has evaporated and harsh realities have resurfaced. Obama's tanker-speedboat analogy is frustratingly realistic. Many Arab observers have insisted that no matter how much goodwill Obama gained upon election, rhetoric must be proven by deeds. It is unfortunate that Obama has found himself in the middle of several intractable issues: two wars; the global financial crisis; domestic disputes about Healthcare. This limits the time and effort that he has allocated for U.S.-Muslims relations, especially the Palestinian cause and democratization, which ought to be top priorities. ■

Reading Between the Lines:

Islamist Views of Israel

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Despite their ideological and political differences, Islamist organizations share a common stance on Israel. From the Muslim Brotherhood to Salafist-Jihadists, Islamists view Israel as an illegitimate entity and the leading enemy of the Muslim world. Along with leftist and nationalist movements, Islamists believe that Arab countries have forsaken the Palestinians in their struggle against Israel, and question the dedication of Arab regimes to helping the Palestinians establish an independent state.

Although Islamist groups share a belief that Israel is illegitimate, they differ in their views on how to best approach Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood argues that Egypt should reconsider the Camp David Accords, whereas Gamaa Islamiya, which recently renounced violence, supports the treaty, and believes it was crucial in restoring occupied Egyptian territory. Salafist-Jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda, meanwhile, do not believe in the possibility of coexistence or peace with the Jewish state.

From the Muslim Brotherhood to Salafist-Jihadists, Islamists view Israel as illegitimate entity and the leading enemy of the Arab world

The Muslim Brotherhood and Israel

Ever since its founder, Hassan al-Banna, sought to raise awareness of the the Zionist project leading up to the 1948 Israeli-Palestinian war, the Muslim Brotherhood has strongly supported the Palestinian cause. The influence of the Brotherhood in Palestine was strengthened by the emergence of Hamas, a party that adopted the Brotherhood's general principles in its founding charter and is considered the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood.¹

Today, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt officially refuses to recognize Israel, even though Egypt formally signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1979. The Egyptian Brotherhood underwent a crisis in 2007 after Essam el-Erian, head of the political bureau, made the following remark: "If the Brotherhood comes to power, then it will respect the Camp David Accords and deal realistically with Israel."² El-Erian later denied that he meant the Brotherhood would recognize Israel. Mahdi Akef, Chairman (also know as Supreme Guide) for the Muslim Brothergood at the time, issued a quick clarification, emphasizing that the Brotherhood would never recognize Israel, and said this is "one of the constants of the group that will not change and is not up for debate." Akef also stressed that the Brotherhood "has not recognized the Camp David Accords since the day they were signed, and it rejects all agreements with Israel."³

In Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood takes an even firmer stance against Israel, since many of its members are Palestinian by background, and the branch has strong ties to Palestine. In fact, Hamas was founded in Jordan in 1987, and its political chief, Khaled Mashal, lived in Jordan until 1999. Although Jordan signed a peace agreement with its eastern neighbor at Wadi Araba in 1994, the Jordanian Brotherhood still does not recognize Israel.

The Muslim Brotherhood's position towards Israel stems from two primary considerations. First, the Brotherhood's goal is to end foreign domination in the Arab world, and it maintains that Arab and Muslim nations are at fault for Palestine's continued occupation. By fundraising and mobilizing public dissent, the Muslim Brotherhood pressures policymakers in the Muslim world to support Palestine.

1 Ironically, Fatah, Hamas' main political rival, was also formed out of a group of activists which included some Brotherhood members.

2 http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1190886489988&pagename=Zone-Arabic-News/NWALayout

3 <http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=82731>

The Brotherhood organized mass demonstrations against the Israeli war on Gaza in 2008, leading to a confrontation with the Egyptian government. In official statements, the Brotherhood accused the Egyptian government of complicity with Israel, and condemned their refusal to open the Rafah border crossing during the war.⁴

Although the Muslim Brotherhood is Sunni, and Hezbollah is Shiite, the Brotherhood supports Hezbollah as a fellow resistance movement against Israel. During the Israeli war on Lebanon in the summer of 2006, Mahdi Akef offered to send 10,000 volunteers to support Hezbollah.⁵ In April of 2009, Hezbollah-Egyptian tension peaked when members of a Hezbollah cell sent to Egypt were arrested by Egyptian police. The Muslim Brotherhood viewed the news with skepticism, and Akef accused the Egyptian government of fabricating the case in order to tarnish Hezbollah's image. The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood praised Hezbollah's support for the Palestinian resistance, and expressed indifference to Egypt's national security needs.⁶

Despite its frustration, the Muslim Brotherhood does not advocate for a military solution, but instead promotes negotiation with Israel

Second, the Muslim Brotherhood believes Israel is responsible for the fragmentation of the Arab world, and an outpost of global imperialism. This long-held position of the Brotherhood was used by Hassan al-Banna in 1948 to encourage volunteers to fight against the nascent Israeli state.

Third, the Brotherhood believes that Israel and the U.S. support authoritarian Arab regimes, which in turn repress the Brotherhood and deny it political participation. In support of this argument, the Brotherhood points to Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian election, when the U.S. backed down from its previously vocal promotion of democracy and freedom in the Middle East.

Despite its frustration, the Muslim Brotherhood does not advocate for a military solution, but instead promotes negotiation with Israel. Likewise, Hamas does not recognize Israel as a state with a right to exist, but acknowledges Israel as a fact on the ground. Therefore, Hamas accepts the principle of a two-state solution (drawn with respect to the 1967 borders) and offered Israel a truce lasting up to ten years.

4 <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=43364&SecID=212>

5 <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2006/08/03/26287.html>

6 <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11098&article=515487&search=%C7%E1%C5%CE%E6%C7%E4%20%C7%E1%E3%D3%E1%E3%ED%E4&state=true>

Al-Qaeda and Israel: All Bark, No Bite

Israel is public enemy number one for Al-Qaeda, indicated by its 1998 public declaration when Al-Qaeda named itself “The Global Campaign to Confront Crusaders and Zionists.” Osama bin Laden sees Israel as an irreconcilable enemy bent on occupying others’ territories, and therefore argues that peace with Israel is unthinkable. Analysts note that bin Laden’s speeches almost always include a token reference to the Zionist enemy and the need to liberate Jerusalem from Jewish hands.⁷

Al-Qaeda perceives Palestine as a core issue of concern to the Islamic nation. Ending the Israeli occupation is the *sine qua non* for Islamic unity, and liberating Palestine is a necessary step to declaring an Islamic state and reestablishing the Islamic caliphate.⁸ Al-Qaeda also harbors a desire to embarrass Arab regimes, who are viewed by bin Laden as apostate collaborators with Israel and America. Both Bin Laden and his second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, argue that liberating Palestine paves the way to freeing the other Arab societies from their despotic governments.

Bin Laden’s speeches almost always include a token reference to the Zionist enemy and the need to liberate Jerusalem from Jewish hands

Despite the centrality of Palestine in Al-Qaeda’s ideology, the organization has attempted very few military operations against Israel or its interests abroad, a point often cited by Al-Qaeda’s critics. For all its rhetoric, the only operation Al-Qaeda launched (indirectly) against Israeli was the 2002 bombing of the Kenyan city Mombasa. Al-Qaeda hit the Paradise Hotel, popular with Israeli tourists, and fired two surface-to-air missiles at an Israeli chartered aircraft.

From Al-Qaeda’s perspective, attacking Israel is inherently difficult because of Israel’s intelligence agency and security services. In addition, there have been few jihadist cells within the Palestinian territories during the past two decades, and Al-Qaeda may not wish to upstage the Palestinian resistance movement.⁹

7 Dīaa Rashwan, “The Guide to World Islamist Movements,” Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (January 2006).

8 http://mdarik.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1230650277448&pagename=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout

9 <http://www.islamonline.net/Arabic/Daawa/2009/01/images/03.pdf>

Salafist-Jihadist Movements

Salafist-Jihadist organizations, jihad-oriented groups that hold a radical religious agenda and use violence to achieve their objectives, closely resemble Al-Qaeda in their outlook on Israel, and have expanded during the past five years while Al-Qaeda itself has been on the defensive in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Salafists aim to liberate Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque, and restore Palestine's independence. Some of these movements have appeared in the Palestinian territories only recently, and the most prominent groups are listed below.

1) Jund Ansar Allah (Soldiers of the Companions of God) emerged in the Gaza Strip in late 2008. Its mission is to spread the word of Islam and to force non-believers out of Muslim lands. The group was first led by Abdul-Latif Musa, known as Abu Noor al-Madqisi, then by Abu Abdullah al-Suri, both of whom were killed by Hamas. The exact number of followers is unknown, but Israel claims that they have about 500 fighters, including Egyptians, Yemenis, Pakistanis, and Afghans. The organization is particularly active in Khan Younis and Rafah on the Egyptian-Palestinian border.

2) The leading Salafist group, Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam), founded by militants from Gaza's Durgmush clan, once enjoyed close ties to Hamas, and the two movements kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in a joint operation in 2006. The relationship soured, however, and after taking control of Gaza, Hamas launched an attack against Jaysh al-Islam, killing several of its members. Jaysh al-Islam abducted BBC correspondent Alan Johnston and held him ransom for months until Hamas negotiated a settlement in 2007.¹⁰

3) Other Salafist-Jihadist organizations include Jaysh al-Umma (Army of the Islamic Nation), Ansar al-Sunna, Geljat, and Kata'ib al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Brigades of Tawhid and Jihad). These groups developed in reaction to Hamas' increasing Westernization and democratization, particularly after its 2007 victory in Gaza. After

Despite the centrality of Palestine in Al-Qaeda's ideology, the organization has attempted very few military operations against Israel or its interests abroad, a point often cited by Al-Qaeda's critics

¹⁰ *Al-jama'at al-salafiya fi ghaza qariba min "al-qa'ida"...wa munshaqqa 'an fasa'il baynaha hamas* ["Salafist Groups in Gaza Close to Al-Qaeda...and Break Away from Factions Including Hamas"], *Ash-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 19, 2009.

Hamas signed a truce with the Israeli government and received Western leaders such as Tony Blair and Jimmy Carter, militant Islamists condemned Hamas for abandoning its original principles.¹¹

Like Al-Qaeda, the Salafist-Jihadists speak of liberating Palestine and destroying Israel, but have taken few actions to back up their rhetoric. Apart from Jaysh al-Islam's role in kidnapping Gilad Shalit, no Salafist-Jihadist organization has carried out any documented military operation against Israel. In 2009, one of the leading intellectuals in the Salafist-Jihadist movement, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, rebuked his fellow Salafists.¹² In an open letter published on his website *Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, al-Maqdisi angrily claimed that the jihadist movement has done nothing whatsoever to help the Palestinian cause.¹³

Scholarly (Traditional) Salafists

By scholarly or traditional salafists, we mean groups that use religious rhetoric but are uninterested in politics and do not practice violence. Although they generally stay removed from politics, scholarly Salafists also view Palestinian liberation as a top priority. This became evident during the Gaza invasion of 2009, when Salafist sheikhs and scholars universally condemned Israel's assault and called for aid to the citizens of Gaza. Some sheikhs also criticized Arab countries for remaining passive. Yasser Brahami, one of the leading scholarly Salafists in Egypt, published an article titled "The Events in Gaza and the Truth behind the Enemies," attacking Arab governments for their apathy towards Gazan citizens and the invasion, which was a disgrace to "international legitimacy," and an affront to human rights, democracy, and freedom.

Well-known Salafist preachers organized numerous lectures in a public awareness campaign for Gaza. These lectures included "Gaza's Suffering" and "Our Duty to Gaza" by Yasser Brahami, "The Gaza Holocaust and Jihad" and "On the Palestinian Division" by Said Abdel-Azim, "Advice and Analysis of What is Happening in Gaza," by Ahmed al-Naqib, "Promising Signs and Hope" by Sheikh Said El-Ruby, "Gaza and the Path to Victory" by Ahmed Farid, as well as "Gaza Will Not be Broken," by Abu

11 http://mdarik.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1248187934369&pagename=Islamyoun/IYALayout

12 Al-Maqdisi (true name Isam Mohammad Tahir al-Barqawi) is said to have held great influence with his fellow Jordanian, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the late leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

13 *Al-maqdisi yutahimmu al-tiyar al-salafi al-jihadi bil-taqdir tujah al-quds* ("Al-Maqdisi Accuses the Salafist-Jihadist Movement of Negligence towards Jerusalem"), *Islam Online*, May 6, 2009. (http://mdarik.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1239888674142&pagename=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout)

Ishaq El-Huwaini. Sheikh El-Huwaini was one of forty Egyptian Islamist preachers who issued a statement supporting the resistance. His manifesto called upon citizens in Egypt and the Islamic world to do “their duty imposed by Islam,” (namely, jihad) to provide material assistance to the Palestinian people, and to declare an economic, political, and cultural boycott of Israel and its allies.¹⁴

In Saudi Arabia, where authorities banned political demonstrations, the Salafists organized lectures and issued the statement “The Massacre of Gaza” signed by over sixty-five preachers and thinkers. The document stated that after the Gaza offensive “it is not permissible for Muslims to be silent and let their brothers down,” and mere condemnation was insufficient for victory. It went on to demand “acts proving the support’s sincerity, such as the Egyptian government permanently opening the Rafah crossing,” arguing that its closure helped achieve the enemy’s objectives. Among the signatories were Sheikh Abdul-Rahman bin Nasser Al-Barack, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz bin Abdullah Al-Rajihi, Dr. Abdullah bin Hamoud Al-Tuwaijiri, Dr. Abdullah Duwaish, Faisal bin Abdullah Al-Fuzan, Dr. Mohammed bin Said Al-Qahtani, and Suleiman bin Abdullah Al-Majed. These Salafist judges, intellectuals, activists, and academics are open-minded to other Islamic movements in Saudi Arabia such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Belief in Israel’s illegitimacy transcends regional and national differences, political orientation, and the Shiite/ Sunni divide

Sheikh Salman Al-Ouda, director of the *Islam Today* website, hosted a series of televised interviews in which he discussed Muslims’ obligation towards Gaza. Al-Ouda partnered with Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi on a speaking tour sponsored by the International Association of Muslim Scholars throughout Arab countries, calling for an end to the Gaza siege.

During the Gaza invasion, most Salafists directed their anger towards Israel and the inaction of Arab nations, although some Salafist groups blamed Hamas for the war, citing its control over the Gaza Strip and provocative behavior towards of Israel as the source of hostilities.

14 http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1230650272805&pagename=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout

Common Enemy, Divergent Methods

Although Israel is a common enemy for Islamists of all persuasions, there are many opinions on how to best approach the Jewish state. While the Muslim Brotherhood argues that coexistence with or recognition of Israel is impossible, it is willing to use a combination of resistance and negotiation to restore Palestinian rights. More radical groups, however, refuse any negotiation with Israel, and believe armed jihad is the only way to liberate Jerusalem and establish a state that encompasses all Palestinian territories. Within Palestine itself, Hamas has taken on a more pragmatic and diplomatic tone, while more radical groups still insist on jihad.

Islamist are united in their belief that Israel is an illegitimate state. This overarching conviction transcends regional and national differences, political orientation, and the Shiite/ Sunni divide. This view, coupled with the Islamist understanding that U.S. is a major supporter of Israel, propels Islamists to attack American interests in the Middle East and around the world. ■

Israel and “Tele-Islamists”: Rejection or Coexistence?

AMR ABDEL-ATTY

Editor of Taqirir Washington, Egypt

Religious leaders with an ability to connect with youthful audiences outside traditional places of worship, known as “new preachers” in the Arab press, have drawn much attention in the past few years, as a social and political phenomenon. These new preachers shun the traditional style of Muslim clerics, mixing freely with their followers and tailoring their Islamic message to the needs of a young audience. Using satellite broadcasts, internet chat rooms, social networking sites such as Facebook, and their own popular websites, new preachers reach a far greater audience than a traditional preacher could ever hope to in a mosque.

Western media outlets such as the BBC have compared the new preachers to American televangelists. With their enormous influence over Muslim youth, a number of new preachers, such as the Egyptian Amr Khaled, have an international presence. Khaled was listed among the most influential people in the Arab world by *Foreign Policy*, and counted by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World in 2007. *The Independent* dubbed him “the Billy Graham of Islam.”

With their clean cut appearance and judicious behavior, new preachers serve as role models for Muslim youth

Israeli scholars and reporters have taken an interest in new preachers and their sway over Muslim youth, which appears to be greater than many government-sanctioned religious leaders.

In addition to Amr Khaled, new preachers such as Mohamed Hassan, Aaidh al-Qarni, Khaled El-Guindi, Amr Abdul-Kafi, Mahmoud El-Masri, Tariq Suwaidan, and Khaled Abdullah have shaped modern Islamic discourse with their calls for increased religious observance and acts of charity.

Theologically, new preachers are dispersed across the Islamic religious spectrum, but they share certain personal characteristics. All are highly educated, many come

During Palestinian-Israeli confrontations, statements by new preachers are sought after by a large number of Muslims, particularly the wealthy and well-educated

from upper-class families, and in general, they do not have traditional religious credentials. Independent from both official religious institutions and Islamist opposition organizations, these preachers seek to strike a balance between Islam and their audience's consumerist lifestyle.

New preachers are distinguished by their accessible language and casual, modern attire. They closely resemble their target audience members, and offer advice on topics ranging from psychiatry to raising children, freely blending Western culture with Islamic heritage. With their clean cut appearance and judicious behavior, the new preachers serve as role models for Muslim youth.¹ The impact of new preachers is not limited to the Middle East, but also reaches Muslim youth living in countries with Muslim minorities.

Islamic movements in the Arab world are of two minds on the Palestinian issue. Hardline preachers call for military jihad in support of Palestine, and ignore any non-violent interpretation of the term *jihad*. These hardliners are usually clerics who are loyal to the government and support the official state position on Palestine.

New preachers recognize that misrepresentation of the Arab perspective has greatly hamepred the peace process. They urge their followers to use technology and broadcast their point of view to the outside world, as Jewish youth have successfully done in America. This essay will investigate the views of two international figures, Amr Khaled of Egypt and Aaidh al-Qarni of Saudi Arabia, concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

1 *Khitaab dini 'mudirn'...yufaddaluhu al-shabab* ["A 'Modern' Religious Discourse...that Youth Prefer"], December 3, 2008. http://www.moheet.com/show_files.aspx?fid=99449

Amr Khaled: Israeli Attacks Spread Despair

Although the new preachers generally concentrate on social and developmental issues and ignore politics, the Arab-Israeli conflict is often featured in their agenda on account of its resonance with Muslim youth.

In periods when Israeli aggression towards Palestinians escalates, new preachers condemn the attacks, and do not split ranks with the overwhelming majority of Arabs and Muslims in this regard. Still, compared to militant or pro-government preachers, the new preachers are quite restrained. During Palestinian-Israeli confrontations, statements by new preachers are sought after by a large number of Muslims, particularly the wealthy and well-educated. The visibility of new preachers typically rises during these crises on account of their judicious comments and initiatives to show solidarity with the Palestinian people. New preachers are invited to appear on popular talk shows and internet broadcasts, and are given extensive space in newspapers to express their opinion.

Still, the new preachers' moderate stance does not mean they are above making statements that are ubiquitous in the Arab world. When the Israeli assault on Gaza was underway in late December 2008, both Aaidh al-Qarni and Amr Khaled condemned the attacks in no uncertain terms, with the former describing them as “brutal and barbaric, dictated by the law of the jungle, and undertaken by bloodthirsty occupying killers trampling human values and dignity, international agreements, and the tenets of Islam.” Amr Khaled, meanwhile, described the Israeli assault as “terrorist,” in an interview on Al Jazeera, stating that the Israelis' goal was to “spread despair in the hearts of all Palestinians and Muslims.”

Khaled also claimed that Israel's attacks against Gaza aimed to incite anger, which would lead to the rise of violent, radical groups, giving Islam's enemies the chance to portray Arabs and Muslims, and Islam itself, as inherently linked to terrorism and extremism.²

Amr Khaled criticized Western media coverage (particularly the American media, without saying so directly) for sympathizing with Israel, portraying Hamas rockets against Israeli cities and towns while ignoring the “brutal” Israeli attacks against the besieged Gaza Strip. This one-sided coverage, Khaled said, only inflames the conflict. He argued that Western media outlets cannot focus on certain images and ignore others, provoking Arab youth to violence and extremism, and then claim that such acts of violence are representative of Arabs and Muslims.

2 Amr Khaled's official website, <http://amrkhaled.net/news/details.php?id=174>

Amr Khaled Dismisses Military Jihad

Contrary to preachers who call upon Muslim youth to take up arms and wage a jihad against the “infidel” occupation, Amr Khaled encourages youth to harness new technology and inform the world of Israel’s behavior. “There is a message I want to direct to the youth across the Arab world...call upon the free peoples of the world through all modern media to let them know of the terrorism taking place and the rights of the steadfast oppressed Gazan people.”

Amr Khaled does not see violent jihad as a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. He declined to sign a petition circulated by Egyptian preachers which openly called for a jihad to liberate Palestine after the assault on Gaza, saying,

“Behavior such as this has affected the Egyptian people negatively...it is truly important to mobilize the youth and inspire them to give more to their societies, but this giving has to be constructive with a positive yield, rather than pushing them in the wrong direction by calling them to jihad.”

Khaled describes his message as “a rejection of extremism,” crafted in opposition to “the preachers of strife.” In the absence of “clear, logical channels,” he argues, and as long as the youth have energy, “we must be concerned about them, and worry that mobilization will be used for unseemly ends, or in the wrong direction.”

In his Gaza initiative, Amr Khaled lobbied for a global economic, political, and academic boycott against Israel. His action plan included (1) petitioning 1,000

Khaled describes his message as “a rejection of extremism,” crafted in opposition to “the preachers of strife”

American and European universities through their websites and asking them to divest from Israel, (2) contacting 500 worldwide media organizations to let them know the truth about Israel, (3) spreading news about the tragedy in Gaza to 5,000 international groups

concerned with children and human rights, and (4) a civil society campaign to try Israeli military and political leaders for war crimes. Khaled sought to have the entire initiative translated into several foreign languages.³

In his lectures, Khaled urges Muslim youth to pursue positive action, and suggests they join solidarity groups on social networking sites like Facebook, promote the Palestinian perspective, organize blood drives, and call Palestinians to show their support.

3 Amr Khaled’s Gaza campaign, <http://amrkhaled.net/articles/articles3400.html>

At the same time, Khaled rejected the international community’s labeling of the Israeli assault as an act of self-defense. He said if there was not a consensus that the Israeli attack constitutes “blatant terrorism, then this is a sign that the world which claims to be civilized still practices the worst types of brutality.”

Amr Khaled Under Fire

Several preachers across the political spectrum, along with a number of journalists and youth bloggers, criticized Khaled for his statements on the Arab-Israeli conflict after Khaled’s appearance on the Iqra Channel on May 10, 2002. During the interview Khaled said that the Prophet David began building Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on the site of a Jewish man’s house, and the Prophet Solomon completed it.

After Israeli television picked up on Khaled’s comment and rebroadcast the footage frequently, criticism of Khaled in Egypt began to accumulate. Khaled’s statement was seen as supporting the claim that because the Temple of Solomon is beneath Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jews have the right to demolish Al-Aqsa to rebuild the temple. If this story were true, Muslims would have no right to Al-Aqsa, since Jews built the foundation.

Amr Khaled also came under attack during a trip to Jordan when he met with prominent Israeli figures for inter-religious dialogue. Critics alleged that Khaled was persuaded to attend after Israelis specifically requested his presence, since their goal was to encourage the so-called moderate Islamic movement.⁴

After the controversy surrounding Khaled’s Al-Aqsa Mosque statement died down, he was honored among *Time* magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in the World. In an interview with the Orbit Network, Khaled was asked what he would do if he came face-to-face with another figure on the Most Influential list, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, since Khaled and Livni were slated to attend the same reception. Khaled answered that that if he ran into Livni, he would have no hesitation about shaking her hand.

Khaled went on to say that he was against normalization with Israel and did not agree with Israeli policy in the Palestinian Territories. He distinguished between Jews as fellow followers of a monotheistic religion and racist Israelis who violate Palestinian

4 For more on the attacks against Amr Khaled for his statements on Al-Aqsa Mosque, see Ibrahim Mohamed Masoud, *fatawi ‘amru khalid khateera tamass haquq al-muslimin* [“Amr Khaled’s Fatwas are Dangerous, Infringe on Muslims’ Rights”], *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat*, August 15, 2002.

rights. He would tell Livni, “Jews are the grandchildren of Holocaust, victims who started a new Holocaust against the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, as if they were trying to unleash their anger, built up at what their parents and grandparents went through, against these innocent people.”

Aaidh al-Qarni...Hope in Obama

Many new preachers argue that Barack Obama’s foreign policy in the Middle East will not be more effective than George W. Bush’s, particularly where Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned. Aaidh al-Qarni, author of the wildly popular self-help book *Laa Tahzan* (Don’t Be Sad), believes Obama can provide a breakthrough in the Palestinian question. After Obama’s victory in 2008, al-Qarni wrote an op-ed in *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat* describing the helpless state of Gaza’s citizens, and calling on the President-elect come to their aid:

“In the name of 1.5 billion Muslims, we urge you to recognize the rights of the oppressed, besieged Muslims in Gaza. For what sin are the children, widows, orphans, elderly, and poor being attacked, after their land has been occupied, their houses destroyed, prevented from living their lives, deprived of freedom, their rights confiscated, their support cut off, and they face famine, prison, killing, and genocide with no food, clothes, medicine, or water.”

As the Israeli assault on Gaza intensified, al-Qarni asked Obama for an immediate intervention to stop the fighting. This was needed as part of a larger effort to mend his predecessor’s “rash, idiotic policies which have destroyed civilization and cut off the bridges of mutual understanding and acquaintance, stalling attempts for global peace, peaceful coexistence, and tolerance between mankind, and ruined America’s reputation in the world, hurting its interests and spreading hatred of it.”⁵

Al-Qarni interpreted Obama’s speech at Cairo University on June 4, 2009 as a dramatically new approach from American leadership. Al-Qarni praised Obama, a leader who “said the truth before the world, which no American president had done before,” and was optimistic that “Obama’s speech bears many encouraging signs regarding the American stance towards Islamic issues.”⁶

For his conviction that Obama could cause a breakthrough in the peace process, al-Qarni was labeled naïve by fellow religious leaders. Many Islamists believe that

5 Aaidh al-Qarni, *al-rajul al-aswad fil-bayt al-abyad* [“The Black Man in the White House”], *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat*, November 4, 2008.

6 Aaidh al-Qarni, *ahlan wa sahlana...bi-barak obama* [“Welcome, Barack Obama”], *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat*, November 9, 2009.

the American-Israeli relationship is too institutionalized to change with a new face in the White House. Some said that al-Qarni had forgotten – or, in harsher statements, was deliberately ignoring– how much clout the pro-Israel lobby in Washington holds, and maintained that Obama would hardly be any different from his predecessors or successors.⁷

Al-Qarni’s Message to the Palestinian People

Contrary to many new preachers who encouraged Arab regimes to intervene on behalf of the Palestinians, al-Qarni advised the Palestinian people to rely on themselves for liberation. In an open letter published on several Arabic-language websites, he warned Palestinians not to expect too much from the Arab world, who would offer nothing but speeches condemning Israel, “for [the Arabs’] hearts are lifeless and their consciences void.”

Al-Qarni sees Arab policies towards Israeli as little more than crowd-pleasing bombast. In an op-ed in *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat*, he wrote:

“Gamal Abdel Nasser promised us that he would throw Israel into the sea, then gave up Sinai to them and imprisoned his country’s Islamic scholars before hanging them. Saddam Hussein vowed to burn half of Israel with chemical weapons, but he burned Kuwait and Israel survived. Ahmedinejad swore to take Israel off the map, and I’m afraid that he will take us out instead and Israel will remain!”⁸

Al-Qarni praised Obama, a leader who “said the truth before the world, which no American president had done before”

Al-Qarni’s argued the Palestinians are capable of defeating Israel despite its military prowess, citing several historical examples from both Islamic and non-Islamic countries that overcame their colonial rulers.

“India alone defeated Britain, the superpower of its age, without begging for help from its neighbors or crying before the international organizations and global conferences! Vietnam fought the Americans and made a lesson out of them, and they left its land...was Algeria liberated from the French by the Arabs or the Algerians? By the Algerians, when they put forward one million dead.”

7 Salah Audat Allah, “*raddan ‘ala al-shaykh ‘Aaidh al-Qarni..!* [“A Response to Sheikh Aaidh al-Qarni!”], November 18, 2008. (<http://www.qudsmedia.net/?articles=topic&topic=1756>)

8 Aaidh al-Qarni, *sah al-naum yaa ‘arab* [“Wake Up, Arabs”], *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat*, January 18, 2007.

Al-Qarni on Jihad and Naturalization

Most new preachers do not focus on military jihad as a means to liberate the Palestinian Territories, and call Muslims to a different type of jihad, such as a grassroots media campaign highlighting Israeli human rights violations. However, during the Gaza crisis, Aaidh al-Qarni issued a fatwa declaring that Israeli “interests and everything with a link to Israel are legitimate targets for Muslims everywhere.” He went on to say that Israelis “must be a target and their blood must flow, as the blood of our Palestinian brothers flow.” Immediately following the release of the fatwa, a Saudi human rights organization reported that al-Qarni was arrested by the Saudi authorities, although a number of news sources denied this at the time.⁹

Like most new preachers, al-Qarni is a fierce critic of naturalization, a point he makes frequently in his *Ash-Sharq al-Awsat* column. In one article, he stressed the need to repair relationships within the Islamic world between rulers and subjects, professors and students, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, but was careful to clarify that relationships with Israel and the devil are the only exceptions to this rule. Al-Qarni disparages Arab intellectuals who promote normalization with Israel, and suggests that they focus instead on mending the troubled relationships within the Islamic community.

“Preachers of normalization with killers who are Ben Gurion’s grandsons, Moshe Dayan’s pupils, and the hoodlums and deviants of the world, forget this ugly normalization, and let us undertake a beautiful, refined normalization between the sons of one community, let us forgive each other, shake hands, and be sincere towards and forgive one another.”¹⁰

Although al-Qarni and Khaled do not agree on the efficacy of violent jihad, both stress the difference between Jews as followers of a divine religion and Israelis who occupy Palestinian territory. When the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) accused al-Qarni of making anti-Semitic statements on Saudi television saying Jews were naturally violent, al-Qarni offered a fierce rebuttal. He vehemently denied MEMRI’s allegation that he said the Jews were the first people to use violence, and said he had reprimanded the Zionist entity of Israel for waging war against occupied Palestine, “but Jews and Christians have the right to interact in the land of Islam and they have the right to coexistence.” Al-Qarni noted that Muslims “must protect

9 *al-riyad: i'tiqal al-shaykh 'Aaidh al-Qarni ba'd fatwahu bi-darb al-masalih al-isra'iliya*, [“Riyadh: Sheikh Aaidh al-Qarni Arrested After His Fatwa to Hit Israeli Interests”), *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, January 3, 2009.

10 Aaidh al-Qarni, *da'wa li-tatbi' al-'alaqat* [“A Call to Normalize Relations”], *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat*, June 28, 2007.

[Jews and Christians] in our lands as we protect ourselves.” In Al-Qarni’s view, the accusation leveled against him by MEMRI is indicative of the misrepresentation of Muslims worldwide, part of a Zionist campaign to distort the image of Islam.¹¹

Old Versus New

Although new preachers generally sidestep political issues to avoid conflict with their governments, they do take an interest in topics of great concern to their audience, particularly Palestine. When the the Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalates, new preachers offer thoughtful, moderate opinions on the conflict, and substantive suggestions for enacting change. Still, in order to maintain their relevance, new preachers still espouse some positions that commonly-held in the Arab world: they reject naturalization with Israel and condemn Israeli attacks on Palestinians.

New preachers understand that differentiating between religion and a political state is crucial to prevent Muslim youth, and the image of Islam at large, from being misrepresented abroad

Where the new preachers truly distinguish themselves on the Israeli-Palestinian issue is that they do not agitate for a jihad to liberate Palestine. Instead, they call on activists to publicize the Arab perspective to the West and aim to reduce Western partiality towards Israel. Compared to more traditional clerics, new preachers are careful to distinguish between Judiasm and the Jewish state. New preachers understand that differentiating between religion and a political state is crucial to prevent Muslim youth, and the image of Islam at large, from being misrepresented abroad. ■

11 *Aaidh al-Qarni lil-sharq al-awsat: lam aqul in al-yahud awwal al-umam ilati marisat al-3unf...wal-hamla hadafha tashwih suratina* [“Aid Al-Qarna to Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat: I Did Not Say That the Jews were the First to Practice Violence...and the Campaign’s Goal is to Distort Our Image”], *Ash-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 26, 2005.

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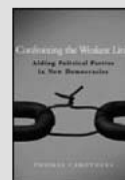
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Reviving the Dead:

The Yemeni Government and Al-Qaeda's Resurgence

ABDUL ELAH HIDER SHAYEA

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When the Nigerian national Omar Farouk Abdulmuttalab attempted to destroy an American jet over Detroit on Christmas Day, 2009, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) claimed credit for the operation. The reappearance of Al-Qaeda pushed Yemen to the forefront of international news, and AQAP became the center of discussions on the evolving nature of Jihadism.

Yemen's impoverished economy and unruly political landscape helped produce Al-Qaeda operatives long before a formal branch of Al-Qaeda was established in the country. Yemeni citizens were involved in early Al-Qaeda campaigns such as the bombings in Dar Es Salaam and Nairobi in 1998, and the attack on the USS Cole in 2000.

AQAP was officially established in 2003 and has withstood the Yemeni government's attempts to dismantle its cells and kill its leaders. This essay presents a simple insight about AQAP: after years of being targeted by Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, AQAP has emerged stronger than ever. Currently, AQAP is the single most active branch of Al-Qaeda, and its success is rooted in the demography of Yemen, uniquely well suited to Al-Qaeda's needs.

Al-Qaeda and Global Terrorism

There are two types of Al-Qaeda working on the local and international level. Operational Al-Qaeda is organized into branches and decision making is implemented through a top-down system. Its central leadership is located in Afghanistan.

The intellectual branch of Al-Qaeda, which became known as the international Jihad movement, rejects the Western way of life and opposes Western control of international organizations. It aims to establish a Muslim Caliphate according to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and relies on Jihad as its primary tool.

The intellectual movement is broader than operational Al-Qaeda, and many autonomous cells have developed from Jihadism. Such Jihadist organizations include

Al-Qaeda believes if it can expel foreign powers from the Arabian Peninsula, it will change the tide of international politics and spark the downfall of Western hegemony

Al-Bashaer, an organization established in Saudi Arabia in 2006, and the Jund Al-Yaman Brigade, founded in Yemen in 2007. Al-Bashaer has withstood several attempts by Saudi armed forces to dismantle its structure, and the Brigade's major operations include killing American and Belgian tourists and targeting residential compounds belonging to American oil companies in Sana'a.

The most pressing issue in Al-Qaeda's agenda is the worldwide occupation of Muslim land. Al-Qaeda believes this occupation causes humiliation to the Islamic nation, and no other issue can be tackled until Muslims establish sovereignty.

Before we continue, a comment or two on "terrorism" is needed. The U.S. State Department defines terrorism as deliberate, politically motivated violence. The Strategic Studies Institute, a division of the U.S. Department of Defense outlines four major Muslim political categories: fundamentalists, traditionalists, reformists, and secularists. The SIS classifies Al-Qaeda as a fundamentalist group, since it rejects democracy, aims to implement an Islamic political system, and considers the West (particularly America) to be its enemy¹. Steve Hoffman of Harvard University summarized Al-Qaeda members as people who "think with the mentality of the seventh century and master the technology of today."²

1 Cheryl Benard, "Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies, Rand Corporation for Research and Strategic Studies, Washington, 2002.

2 Steve Hoffman, USA Today, May 2007.

From the Jihadist perspective, Osama bin Laden defined Al-Qaeda's work in 1998 as an international front in the fight against Jews and Crusaders, a movement which will implement God's doctrines on earth by saving the oppressed from injustice.³ Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Al-Qaeda's second in command, expanded on this definition of Al-Qaeda as an "international front in the fight against the Jews, crusaders and infidels." Al-Zarqawi added that acknowledging bin Laden as an Emir (or leader) is required for any Al-Qaeda member.⁴

Mustafa Abu Al-Yazid, a senior financial advisor in Al-Qaeda, characterized Al-Qaeda as a "group of Muslims aiming to implement God's rule on earth and mobilize the energies of the nation toward that goal."⁵ Abdel Aziz Al-Muqrin, the former leader of AQAP, sought to differentiate Al-Qaeda from other Islamist groups. "A launching point for the establishment of a new Islamic state and a natural continuation of the historical movement of Jihad, which avoided many of the mistakes that other Islamist groups committed."⁶

In an interview published by *Al Jazeera* in early 2009, the leader of AQAP, Nasir Abdel Karim Al-Wuhayshi (also known as Abu Basir), described Al-Qaeda as the leader of the Islamic nation and the center of the Jihad movement. Abu Basir explained that in their quest to restore the Islamic Caliphate, Al-Qaeda members sacrifice themselves on behalf of God and the oppressed.

The Arabian Peninsula

Al-Qaeda uses a historical definition of the Arabian Peninsula (the eastern corner of Al-Ka'aba in Mecca to the Arabian Sea) that disregards modern political borders.⁷ As an integral part of its international strategy, Al-Qaeda believes if it can expel foreign powers from the Arabian Peninsula, it will change the tide of international politics and spark the downfall of Western hegemony.

Yemen, known in the hadith as a place that produced 12,000 fighters to fight for

3 Memo by the international front for the fight against the Jews and the Crusades, Al-Quds Al-Arabi, London, February 1998

4 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the archive of speeches by Al-Zarqawi, Al-Buraq Information Center, April 2004

5 Mustafa Abu Al-Yazid, special interview with Al-Jazeera, June 2009

6 Abdel Aziz Al-Muqrin, former leader of AQAP, Voice of Jihad, Second Edition, 2003

7 Faris Al-Showeel Al-Zahrani, audio lecture, "O people of the South" AQAP, Voice of Jihad 2004. Faris Al-Zahrani is one of Al-Qaeda's Sheikhs which was arrested by Saudi Arabia in 2005. He also publishes work on Jihadism under the name Abu Jandal Al-Azdi

Allah, holds theological significance for Al-Qaeda. Moreover, the country's landscape, which includes mountains, valleys, desert, and coastline, is well-suited to guerilla

Abu Basir notes that in the early stages of the Islamic Da'wa, Muslims needed to remove infidels from the Arabian Peninsula before they could reclaim holy sites in Palestine

fighting. Yemen's largely Bedouin population is known for carrying arms, offering hospitality to strangers and extending protection to guests—qualities that make the country appealing to Al-Qaeda's military division.

AQAP's goal is to dismantle current political states in the Arabian Peninsula, making way for the global Caliphate. Al-Qaeda will mobilize four armies that will march from the periphery of the Muslim world to the heart of Palestine: one army from Pakistan and Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and the last from the Levant.⁸ AQAP is responsible for establishing the army that will be launched from Yemen.

Tactically, Al-Qaeda sees liberating the Arabian Peninsula as a necessary step to liberating Palestine.⁹ Abu Basir notes that in the early stages of the Islamic Da'wa, Muslims needed to remove infidels from the Arabian Peninsula before they could reclaim holy sites in Palestine. In addition, the United States and NATO use the Arabian Peninsula to launch campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Al-Qaeda believes the American, British and French presence in the Arabian Peninsula helps to protect Jews in Palestine against the threat of the Mujahedeen, or freedom fighters.

Joint American-Yemeni operations show that Yemen's federal government is largely absent in the districts of Abeen, Shabwa and Arhab. Tellingly, in the confrontation between Sana'a and rebellious provinces, the Yemeni army shelled these districts from the air but did not attempt a ground invasion, fearing local resistance. Citizens in these regions do not recognize the authority of the national state, and reject its military presence. During the fall of 2009, residents of Abeen, Shabwa, and Arhab displayed their resistance to federalism by raiding government office buildings.

Although Al-Qaeda openly draws upon tribal allegiance (in a 2004 speech, bin Laden addressed specific Yemeni tribes by name: "O tribe of Bahalil Hashed and

8 Osama bin Laden, audio memo, the Path to Liberating Palestine, 2009.

9 Osama Bin Laden, letter "Expel the Infidels from the Arabian Peninsula." Printed letter, 1995.

Mathhaj and Bakeel! Rise to rescue your brothers as the war is going on”)¹⁰, its appeal is not limited to the tribal countryside of Yemen. The region with the strongest Al-Qaeda presence is the urban capital of Sana’a and its surroundings.

Yemen’s domestic political and economic status has played an important role in the spread of AQAP. Although Al-Qaeda’s rhetoric in Yemen still touches on international themes (i.e. the liberation of Palestine), compared to other branches, AQAP focuses less on worldwide jihad, and more on local issues. Yemen’s abundant poverty has created a restless, desperate body of citizens. Armed conflict and murder are abundant in Yemen, and rule of law is barely present. Such a society is highly attractive to Al-Qaeda, whose ideal recruits are young men looking for change and unafraid of death.

Historical Stages of AQAP Development

The relationship between Al Qaeda and Yemen has undergone four major stages of development. First, fighters from Yemen and Saudi Arabia participated in the establishment of Al-Qaeda in the mid 1980s -1990s in Afghanistan. During this stage, Al-Qaeda galvanized youth in training camps, stressing that their mission was not limited to expelling the Soviets from Afghanistan, but an international battle.

AQAP was started by Osama bin Laden in the mid-1990s in a letter titled “Expel the Infidels from the Arabian Peninsula.” The letter, directed to Saudi scholars and members of the national guard, is considered the first official Al-Qaeda document to specify America as the organization’s enemy. Bin Laden referred to Saudi Arabia as a land threatened by the Zionist-Crusader agenda, and occupied by foreign forces. He also drew a parallel between the threat faced in Mecca and Medina and the Al-Aqsa mosque in Palestine.

During the second stage, Al-Qaeda began looking to expand their movement worldwide. During Al-Qaeda’s first campaign outside of Afghanistan, fighting the American presence in Somalia, young men from Yemen and Saudi Arabia came to join the struggle. During this time, fighters from Yemen were promoted to leadership positions in Al-Qaeda for the first time, including Abu Ali Al-Harithi, who was later killed by a CIA covert mission in 2002.

Al-Qaeda’s also worked to eradicate the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP), since bin Laden considered the Socialists a greater threat to Al-Qaeda than Yemeni President Ali

¹⁰ Osama bin Laden, audio memo, “To the Islamic Nation” 2004.

Abdullah Saleh.¹¹ Al-Qaeda established assassination squads which targeted members of the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) and participated in the 1994 armed struggle that resulted in the dissolution of the YSP. In addition, Al-Qaeda also took the conflict between the Saudi and Yemeni regimes as an opportunity to smuggle arms from Yemen into Saudi Arabia.

Jihadism spread in the Arabian Peninsula in the wake of the 1996 attack against an American military base in Riyadh. Bin Laden did not claim credit for this operation, but he gave it his blessing. Al-Qaeda ideology was also visible in the 1998 clash between the Islamic Army of Adeb-Abyan (an Islamist group that supports Al-Qaeda's goals) and the Yemeni security forces. During the operation in Jibal Al-Maraqsh, southern Yemen, the Islamic Army kidnapped two Western tourists, and eventually killed four British nationals. The Yemeni government subdued the Islamic Army and arrested its military commander, Abu Hassan Zein Al-Abideen Al-Mehdar. Abu Hassan, originally from the Shabwa district in southern Yemen, was executed by the Yemeni authorities in 1999.

Al-Zawahiri considered Abu Basir's appointment critical to the Jihadist awakening in the Arabian Peninsula, and dubbed him the "Prince of Mujahedeen"

In the third stage of development, which coincides with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, AQAP was formally established as a branch within Al-Qaeda. Despite the group's name, AQAP only operates Yemen—there are no documented AQAP activities that extend past the Yemen-Saudi border, other than supplying personnel, and informational support

to other branches, such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

This period is marked by an profusion of Al-Qaeda scholarship, which fueled the debate over religion and secularism in Saudi Arabia. Sheikhs and scholars enriched the ideological library of Al-Qaeda by providing interpretations of Islam within the context of modern events. After questioning religious authorities, and attacking the process whereby fatwas are issued in the Kingdom, several Al-Qaeda intellectuals were imprisoned by Saudi police.

The fourth and current stage of AQAP development is the stage of defiance. AQAP, now an established branch of Al-Qaeda, is a vital component of the organization's

11 Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri, "The Call to International Islamic Resistance." Jihadist Experiments, part I, first publication, 2004.

global war of attrition taking place in Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia.

AQAP's contemporary history began with a prison break on February 3rd, 2006. Prisoners in a security facility in Sana'a worked for 55 days to dig a tunnel 45 meters long and 5 meters wide. Of the 23 prisoners who escaped, 13 were convicted members of Al-Qaeda, including those responsible for the USS Cole bombing. In July of 2006, bin Laden released a speech directed to the freed prisoners in which he described Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh as the "traitor who is obedient to America." This signaled that the escaped prisoners should start planning Saleh's removal from power. Prior to this speech, Bin Laden had not mentioned the Yemeni president, and focused primarily on removing leaders in Saudi Arabia.

This stage of AQAP is characterized by an influx of young, dynamic Saudi leaders. After Said Al-Shahri (35 years old) was appointed in 2007, he recruited fellow Saudis Abu Hamam Al-Qahtani (24 years old) and Abdullah Hassan Al-Aseery (23 years old) to join. The next year, Al-Aseery attempted to assassinate Saudi Arabia's Deputy Minister of the Interior, Prince Muhammad Bin Nayef.

In January 2009, Ayman Al-Zawahiri gave AQAP its current name (Qaedat Al-Jihad in the Arabian Peninsula or Qaedat Al-Jihaad fi Jazeerat Al-Arab), and approved Abu Basir, a Yemeni national, as the head of the group. Al-Zawahiri considered Abu Basir's appointment critical to the Jihadist awakening in the Arabian Peninsula, and dubbed him the "Prince of Mujahedeen." Mustafa Abu Al-Yazid, a member of Al-Qaeda's central leadership in Afghanistan, also described Abu Basir as the "Prince of the Mujahedeen in the Arabian Peninsula." To date, AQAP has attempted four assassinations, three successful and one failed (the attempt on Prince Muhammad Bin Nayef). In addition, AQAP has planned attacks on the American embassy in Yemen and South Korean tourists. Omar Farouk Abdulmuttalab's mission on the Detroit plane was AQAP's first attack against the United States proper. Abdulmuttalab now faces six charges, including attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction.

Organizational Framework

The highest authority in AQAP is the consultative council led by Abu Basir. Members of the consultative council include non-Yemeni nationals, such as the vice chairman, Abu Sufyan al-Azdi al-Shahri, former detainee of Guantanamo.

Other branches of AQAP include a media division with a television production unit, and a print publication division which issues a bi-monthly magazine called Sada

al-Malahim (The Echo of the Epic Battles). The name of the media division refers to the battle that will take place when the four armies of Al-Qaeda descend on Jerusalem. The print publication division also markets promotional materials, and oversees official statements and memos issued by other departments. Al-Qaeda's marketing campaign in Yemen has been particularly successful in Yemen, since the Yemeni media is fractured and weak.

Al-Qaeda harnesses popular support in Yemen by using mild, catchy slogans and tapping into local political discontent. AQAP rallies behind simple and sacred messages such as "Yemen, the land of al-Madad" ; "From Aden come 12,000 fighters"; "Expel the Infidels from the Arabian Peninsula!" Such slogans are fairly mainstream, and help to reinforce AQAP's religious nature.

The military branch has a unit specializing in the development of new tactics and technology, such as the bomb that targeted prince Muhammad Bin Nayef and the one used in the attempted Christmas Day bombing of 2009.

The legislative branch is the ideological heart of Al-Qaeda, and provides a check against other branches. For example, in September 2008, the legislative branch held an intellectual forum to discuss the effects of targeting the American embassy in Sana'a. The legislative branch released a study of the conditions in Yemen titled "Exposing the Democratic System and the Breaking of Yemeni Idols." The legislative branch also issued a letter following the assassination attempt of Prince Muhammad Bin Nayef that included a list of wanted Yemeni and Saudi officials.

AQAP's organizational structure is openly publicized, although AQAP does maintain the privacy of its members. Only the identities of the leader, the vice chairman, the military chief, legislative chief, the media leader are public. The author of this report was able to meet most of the higher leadership figures in the organization in the beginning of 2009.

Recruitment in the Arabian Peninsula

In a 2004 speech, bin Laden stressed that recruitment is linked to the fight against America: whoever seeks to destroy the U.S. may join Al-Qaeda, and whoever forms partnerships with American forces will be attacked.

Within AQAP, resistance to the U.S. is a central requirement for membership, but political and sectarian factors also come into play. AQAP divides Sunni Muslims into three groups:

1) Those who collaborate with the U.S. and the West at large. Al-Qaeda warns these groups to renounce their alliance.

2) Those who are loyal to the regimes that collaborate with America and Western powers. Al-Qaeda reprimands these groups and accuses them of hypocrisy.

3) Those who are neither loyal to Al-Qaeda nor the West. Al-Qaeda demands that these groups clarify their position.

There are also Muslims identified by Western intellectuals as “reformist”. They believe in peaceful resistance and democracy, co-exist with the West, and form alliances with national forces and religious groups such as the Shiites. Thus far, Al-Qaeda has had difficulty recruiting among the reformists, and has found a better audience among the Bedouin and communities with a more traditional understanding of Islam.

Al-Qaeda harnesses popular support in Yemen by using mild, catchy slogans and tapping into local political discontent.

Al-Qaeda does not support or recruit among Shiite Muslims, and considers them to be Islamic rejectionists. Although Yemeni Shiites have not entered into direct armed confrontation with AQAP, AQAP still warns of their danger. AQAP believes that the Saada war, which took place between the Shiites and the Yemeni regime, was orchestrated by the regime to keep its subjects powerless and weak. As described in an audio recording issued by the Al-Malahim Institute and narrated by the Saudi fugitive Muhammad Al-Rashid, Al-Qaeda maintains that the Shiites in Yemen are supported by Iran’s expansionist agenda, and their goal is to torment Yemeni Sunnis.¹²

Al-Qaeda believes all secular and nationalist groups are misguided, even those run by Sunnis, and aims to convince nationalist Muslims to join the fight against Western imperialism.

Many operatives are enthusiastic about joining the Army of Yemen, thought of as one of Al-Qaeda’s best armies. AQAP now has a surplus of trained fighters, and exports its knowledge and expertise to other divisions. Abu Asim Al-Tabuki, an operative from Shabwa in southern Yemen, was sent to lead Al-Qaeda maneuvers in Somalia. Al-Tabuki was among the 23 people who fled from prison in February in 2006, and was killed in 2007 in an air missile attack in an Al-Qaeda training camp in Somalia.

Resistance to AQAP Expansion

The spread of Al-Qaeda in Yemen presents a direct threat to Western interests, since it has a stronghold in the eastern and southern regions (Maarib, Shabwa, Hadhramaut)

12 Muhammad Al-Rashid, a leader in AQAP, audio memo titled “I’m a trusted advisor to you.” Al-Malahim Institute, November 2009.

and southern and western coastal areas (Abeen, Aden, Al-Hudaydah). From these regions, Al-Qaeda could eventually take control over the Gulf of Aden and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, affecting Western shipping and naval operations in the Red Sea.

Although AQAP's presence is on the rise, it is not popular in all camps with Yemen. Some groups in consider Al-Qaeda too extreme, and side with the West and the international community in eradicating Al-Qaeda from southern Yemen.

After the federal government attacked an Al-Qaeda training camp in 2009, foiling a planned suicide mission, hundreds of Yemeni citizens protested against the civilian deaths caused by the raid. These citizens oppose both Al-Qaeda and the Yemeni government.¹³ Many opposition groups believe the "threat" of Al-Qaeda is a manufactured by the regime and the regime uses Al-Qaeda in order to remain in power and distract from its own failings. Oppositional parties consider Al-Qaeda to be a product of regime which utilizes it to stay in power as long as possible, and to escape its own crises.¹⁴ The Houthis see Al-Qaeda as a terrorist movement that cooperates with the regime in its fight against them in Saada.¹⁵

Saudi Raids Against AQAP

Al-Qaeda claims that Saudi Arabia plays a major role in Yemen. According to the military official of the group, the Saudi Deputy Minister of the Interior Prince Muhammad Bin Nayef runs the interior ministry in Yemen and his authorities within it are greater than those in the ministry of his father . Al-Qaeda group declared that it discovered a spying network that is traced to Muhammad Bin Nayef in the Yemeni eastern and southern regions, which chases and identifies locations of Al-Qaeda members.

Saudi Arabia announced a list of 85 wanted Al-Qaeda members in February of 2009, which includes the Yemenis Al-Rimi and Al-Wuhayshi. It also continues its support to Yemen in its fight against terrorism. King Abdullah stated that the security of Yemen is tied to the security of Saudi Arabia and the whole region. Al-Qaeda's attempts to enter into Saudi Arabia and carry out operations inside the kingdom have not been successful. The first attempt was halted in March of 2009 in Najran on the border of Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The operation was comprised of 11 members who were arrested and some stored weapons were found. The second attempt was when

13 Firouz Sedarat <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLDE5BH0GU> Reuters, December 19th, 2009

14 Abdul Wahab Al-Anasi, secretary general of Al-Islah Party, Al-Sahwa Newspaper, January 7th 2009.

15 Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, Al-Jazeera Channel, Televised Memo, October 2009

Yusuf Al-Shihri and Raed Al-Harbi snuck into the region of Jazan on October 13th of 2009. The two members were on the list of 85 wanted persons and they were both killed in Saudi Arabia.

Despite the success of Al-Qaeda in intercepting security apparatus in Saudi Arabia during its assassination attempt of Prince Muhammad Bin Nayef in August of 2009, the Yemeni-Saudi cooperation has increased by establishing an informational center in October of 2009, which counters the information of Al-Qaeda. This was done particularly after some films were released by the group targeting the ruling family in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has also supported the British Prime Minister's initiative to hold a conference for the purpose of confronting what he described as the international threat coming from Yemen.

Shades of the Future

Looking to the future, Yemen will be plagued by three conflicts: the southern secessionist rebellion, the armed Shiite struggle (Houthis) and the Sunni movement (Al-Qaeda). These conflicts will take place amid a weak economy and government that struggles to exert its influence outside the capital.

AQAP evaluates Sunni Muslims on a sliding scale—those who are loyal to Al-Qaeda to one end, and those collaborate with America on the other. International intervention, however, can be just as polarizing, since the American-led anti-terror campaign relies on the attitude “If you're not with us, you're against us.” In its fight against Al-Qaeda, the West is relying on tools outside of traditional security mechanisms, manipulating political parties, civil society organizations, and heads of tribes in order to break Yemen's popular embrace of Al-Qaeda. ■

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Understanding Yemen's Troubles: A Saudi Perspective

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Bordering the largest oil-producing country in the world and controlling access to the Red Sea on the Bab al-Mandab strait, Yemen holds great geopolitical value. Its proximity to the Horn of Africa, the troubled hotspot, only increases Yemen's worth as a transit and trafficking site.

The Houthis, a Zaydi sect of Shiism that ruled Yemen in a traditional imamate until the revolution of 1962, are entering into the sixth year of fighting against the central government in Sana'a. Some Houthis are now looking to exploit sectarianism and cast the ongoing conflict between themselves and Sana'a in a religious light. The Yemeni government claims that the Houthis seek to restore the imamate.

The ongoing instability in Yemen is worrisome for its neighbors in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Saudi Arabia. The Houthi rebellion is no longer a purely internal affair, but now infringes upon the security of other countries in the region. The Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) support for the Yemeni government, and its statement that the security of Yemen, historically the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, is integral to the security of the larger region, shows that the GCC senses the danger of the situation and its potential repercussions.

Without placing blame on any party, this article will examine how the struggle in Yemen among the national government in Sana'a, Houthi rebels, and Al-Qaeda is affected by the regional power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Saudi Questions and Fears

From the Saudi perspective, the Houthis only represent a mild threat to regional security – unless they are seen as part of a three-way alliance with Al-Qaeda and

Looking at countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq and Yemen, it's clear Al-Qaeda thrives where law and order are absent

Iran. Reports that the Houthis desire full independence from Yemen (a suggestion the Houthis currently deny) further complicate the regional power balance.

Saudi Arabia is concerned that Salafists in southern Yemen will cross-pollinate with Zaydi Shiism in the north, effectively extinguishing the more moderate Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam, and splitting Yemen into three parts. The kingdom is also worried that the cities Ma'rib (100 km east of the capital Sana'a) and Sa'da (located in the heart of the Houthi insurrection) have become regional breeding grounds for terrorism.

Confrontations on the Saudi-Yemen border have made it clear that Sana'a is unable to extend its influence throughout Yemen, and the national government is facing a crisis. According to the official Saudi position, Saudi Arabia was provoked after its border control spotted militants crossing onto the strategic Jabal Dukhan mountain within the Kingdom. These militants opened fire on the border patrol officers, killing one guard and injuring others.

This act of entry was illegal, and any state has the right to protect its borders from trespassers, especially from militant trespassers, which constitutes a case of "armed infiltration" under international law. Saudi Arabia will not intervene in domestic Yemeni affairs, but it will protect against any infringement of its own security. **Neighboring Gulf countries have taken Saudi Arabia's lead and refuse to involve themselves in what they see as a domestic issue for Yemen.**

In the end, those who lose the most from the conflict are still the Yemeni citizens, and it is their right to ask for economic development projects and political participa-

tion within the framework of their constitution. However, taking up arms to realize these demands is unacceptable and illegal. If dialogue fails, the Yemeni government must act decisively to resolve the situation, since this conflict has already spilled over into the larger region.

Al-Qaeda's Role

Looking at countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq and Yemen, it is clear Al-Qaeda thrives where law and order are absent. Al-Qaeda exploits regional events to prey on the sympathy of local youth, and recruit them to join its network. Tactically, Al-Qaeda attacks facilities such as oil refineries, aiming to destabilize a country's economy, and eventually, its government.

Followers of this extremist ideology do not believe in dialogue or hearing multiple opinions. This stifling mentality prevents members from seeing things as they really are, rather than as they want them to be, an idealized version of the past. This is a disease which cannot be cured with medication--nothing short of amputation can save the rest of the body from certain death. "Amputation" here does not simply mean heightened security and intelligence measures to uncover and break up terrorist cells. There must be a lasting treatment of the sociological and psychological causes of extremism, although this is not the place to explore the topic in detail.

Tehran wanted Al-Qaeda to prioritize Yemen above Afghanistan or Iraq, indicating a plan to "Afghanize" or "Somalize" Yemen

To gain a foothold in Yemen, Al-Qaeda is cooperating with the Houthi rebel movement as well as the southern secessionists. Al-Qaeda is relying on Tariq al-Fadli, a former Al-Qaeda member and current leader of the southern secessionist movement, to help to supply them with recruits. According to statements by al-Fadli, Abu al-Hareth Muhammad al-Oufi (former Al-Qaeda field commander), and Nasir al-Wuhayshi (leader of AQAP), Al-Qaeda is receiving logistical and financial support from foreign backers to expand its cell in Yemen. Controlling Yemen and the Bab al-Mandab Strait would allow Al-Qaeda to link up with its members in Somalia and put pressure on Egypt by stifling Suez Canal traffic.

Strange Bedfellows

Corroborating statements by Yemen officials suggest that Iran supports the Houthis financially and militarily. Iran has sent Houthi leaders to training camps in the Hezbollah-controlled Lebanese Bekaa Valley and Eritrea, funneled arms to the Houthis across the Red Sea, and often stations its naval ships off the Yemeni coast, supposedly to protect its own oil tankers from pirates.

Mohamed al-Oufi, who turned himself in to the Saudi authorities, stated that in addition to supporting the Houthis, Iran also encouraged Al-Qaeda to increase its presence in Yemen. Al-Oufi claimed that Tehran wanted Al-Qaeda to prioritize Yemen above Afghanistan or Iraq, indicating a plan to “Afghanize” or “Somalize” Yemen. An Al-Qaeda takeover in Yemen would be even more threatening to the region than Afghanistan or Somalia, since Yemen controls one of the world’s most important naval passages.

Al-Oufi’s claims are supported by the presence of Al-Qaeda members such as Sayf al-Adl, Saad bin Laden, and al-Qaraawi in Tehran, officials who are charged with carrying out terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia and wanted for arrest. By strengthening the Houthis and backing Al-Qaeda in Yemen, Iran seeks to put pressure on the Gulf countries and weaken Saudi Arabia in particular.

As the British statesman Lord Palmerston once said, in politics there are “no permanent allies, no permanent enemies, just permanent interests.” This applies well to Al-Qaeda and Iran. Their alliance is pragmatic and temporary; their sectarian differences are entrenched. An alliance in Yemen should not be mistaken as a long-term commitment, or a shifting policy direction for either actor. As described in the writing of Al-Qaeda intellectuals Abu al-Ala Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, Al-Qaeda allows its members to use any means necessary to achieve an overriding goal.

Iranian Policy

To understand Iran’s role in Yemen, one must first examine its political structure. Iran has a history of intervening in the domestic affairs of sovereign countries. Once a country is destabilized, Iran supports pro-Tehran factions and creates a sphere of influence. By creating enough pockets of influence, Iran hopes to become the dominant influence in the Gulf. This pattern of providing material, military, or media support can be seen in Iran’s involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, the Gulf countries, Yemen, Syria, and Egypt.

When Iran's post-revolutionary foreign policy began in 1979, its sectarian ideology became an international agenda. Tehran sought to export the revolution by backing radical Islamic opposition movements against American interests, and to influence religious leaders across the Islamic world with its revolutionary philosophy.

In 1989, with the election of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as president, Iran's foreign policy became more pragmatic and realistic, a trend that was accelerated under Khatami from 1997 to 2005. During this period, national interests clearly outweighed ideological beliefs in Iranian decision-making as the state became more institutionalized and shook off the excess of the revolutionary period. Under Khatami, Iran matured politically, witnessing a détente in relations with the Gulf countries and the West. Khatami allowed Arab countries some breathing room, and relations were somewhat normalized. However, this era came to an abrupt end with the election of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in 2005, who reasserted an ideologically-oriented foreign policy.

Saudi Arabia will secure its own borders and prevent the flow of militants into the Kingdom, but has no desire to be dragged into a long lasting fight

The current Iranian foreign policy is bent on fomenting chaos and strife in the Middle East, especially within countries that are opposed to Tehran's leanings. It is widely believed that Iran seeks to develop nuclear weapons. Possessing a nuclear weapon would act as a deterrent to protect Iran and ensure the survival of the Islamic Revolution. Nuclear capability would also give the Iranian regime, which enjoys little respect in the international community, a stronger negotiating position with the West. Since the fall of Iraq in 2003, there has been a surge in sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, as well as growing Iranian influence in Iraq and Lebanon. The discovery of a Hezbollah cell in Egypt, along with Oufi's confessions about Iran backing AQAP, shed light on Tehran's intention to carve out greater influence.

Any new conflict, especially one with sectarian overtones, will only create more tension in the Gulf, a region whose security has been threatened by three wars in the past three decades. In the fall of 2009, the Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, and speaker of the parliament, Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, openly declared that Iran is actively involved in maintaining Yemeni security. The statements were met

with condemnation across the region, particularly since they coincided with the Hajj pilgrimage season and did not help create a positive holiday atmosphere. This tension added to the sense of regional instability and divide between the Gulf countries and Iran.

Iran has discovered that Al-Qaeda and the Houthi rebels can be used, like Hezbollah, as tools to exert its hegemony in the region. Tehran will use Yemen to draw attention away from the turmoil surrounding its recent presidential election and its widespread civilian unrest.

The Future of Tehran and Riyadh

The limited power and reach of Yemen's federal government have caused some to speculate that Saudi Arabia could get bogged down in a bloody guerrilla war against the Houthis. In reality, Saudi Arabia will secure its own borders, and prevent the flow of militants into the Kingdom, but has no desire to be dragged into a long-lasting fight. It appears that Iran desires to wage a proxy war and regionalize the conflict in Yemen. Saudi Arabia insists that the Houthi revolt is an internal matter which must be addressed by the Yemeni government.

Some argue that any escalation in the conflict between Iran and Arab countries could lead to a catastrophe. The threat should not be underestimated, but it is important to remember that Arab-Iranian relations have been characterized by Arab suspicion of the Iran's expansionist ambition for centuries, long before Ahmadinejad ever uttered an undiplomatic statement.

Once again, Iran has placed greater emphasis on militarization than on solving its domestic problems, such as a stagnant economy and a rapidly expanding population.

Arab-Iranian relations have been characterized by Arab suspicion of Iran's expansionist ambition for centuries, long before Ahmadinejad ever uttered an undiplomatic statement

Iranian muscle forced the Gulf countries to ally themselves with the United States in the 1980s, and it seems possible that this could happen again, given the huge difference in military capabilities between the Arab Gulf countries and Iran.

As long as Riyadh and Tehran are the two prominent players in the region, they must fix their deeply flawed relationship. Saudi Arabia's position is clear: it calls for Iran to not intervene in internal Arab affairs or to sow strife among the Arab peoples. Riyadh

also wants to end the sectarian conflict in the region, and reach a peaceful solution to its tense dealings with Iran, which some have called a Saudi-Iranian cold war. At the same time, Saudi Arabia is compelled to fill the vacuum left by the fall of Iraq in 2003, and will not allow the Persian tide to continue unchecked in the region, especially on its southern border with Yemen.

Reasoning, dialogue, and objectivity must be used to solve the outstanding issues between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The most productive way to solve Saudi-Iranian tension is to find mutual interests between the two counties. Iranians and Arabs share a geographic region, and they share a desire for security and stability. Both states aspire to have dignified, productive lives for their people and future generations to come. Gulf citizens are not interested in empty Iranian reassurances, but look forward to a serious, responsible resolution between Saudi Arabia and Iran. ■

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