



## **Heretic's Musings On What It All Means**

**Yossef Bodansky**

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### **Executive Summary**

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- Two years after the profound turmoil the West calls “The Arab Spring” erupted – the Greater Middle East, the Intifada’s and Arab Awakening are still escalating and spreading. The entire region is engulfed in soul-searching turmoil. Political crises throughout the entire Arab World keep intensifying. Islamist authorities strive to consolidate their hold onto power against increasingly irate populace that keeps rioting in the absence of instant gratification panacea solutions to their plight. There is no solution in sight to any of these.
- The Greater Middle East has just crossed the threshold of a historic transformation – namely, the reversal of the modernization and state-building process, and the commitment instead to a myth-driven Caliphate-based utopian posture that is yet to be defined. Concurrently, the increasingly destitute populace is seeking solace and remedy in sub-national frameworks at the expense of their existing states. These trends lead to the inevitable clash with the realities of a modern world where international and economic relations are based on states as the sole building blocks of the world order. This brewing crisis is further aggravated by the insistence of the Obama White House on intervening and guiding from afar what is an indigenous awakening. The outcome of all these mega-trends will be wrathful and merciless.
- The sub-national dynamics and the Islamicization of post-Awakening state regimes continue colliding. The dominant long-term mega-trend is the destruction of the state – especially in rural and lesser-developed areas. Consequently, economies and food supplies collapse – sending the destitute people to the already overpopulated urban slums in search of non-existing jobs and income. This increases despair, radicalization and jihadization. Fearing the export of instability and terrorism – the US-led West pour financial and military aid to the Islamist governments it has just helped empower in the hope that these Islamist regimes will be able to somehow both seduce and suppress the grassroots. But the Islamists use the Western aid to pursue their own regional aspirations rather than address grassroots problems because the forces of the interior challenge the Islamists’ legitimacy.
- Thus, absent real effort to rebuild and reorganize the Mashriq along traditional frameworks – the exacerbation of the Mashriq will keep growing fast. The US-led West that once again emerges in the public eye as sponsoring, empowering and financing the oppressors is increasingly becoming the objective of both the grassroots’ wrath and the Islamists’ Jihad. The Islamist elites, after all, must demonstrate their Islamic credentials by Holy War as the sole excuse for not caring for their destitute populace. Quite a return for two years of persistent and lavish US and Western support for the Intifada’s and Awakening.



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## About the Author of this Issue

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Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State. He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (*New York Times* No. 1 Bestseller & *Washington Post* No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (*New York Times* Bestseller & *Foreign Affairs Magazine* Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports. Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



Yossef Bodansky



## ANALYSIS

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On 17 December 2012, Tunisia's new President Moncef Marzouki and Parliament Speaker Mustapha Ben Jaafar traveled to Sidi Bouzid to commemorate the second anniversary of the self-immolation of a local young vendor that set the entire Arab World aflame. They were met by a crowd of about 5 000 youth shouting "Get out! Get out!" – the rallying cry of "The Arab Spring". When Marzouki started to speak – the protesters shouted, as they had done two years beforehand, "the people want the fall of the government," and then started throwing tomatoes and stones at Marzouki. Shortly afterwards, the security officers evacuated Marzouki and Ben Jaafar before the crowd turned violent. This incident reiterated just how stark the contrast between Tunis and the people remains. "The government does not have a magic wand to change things... It will take time to mend what we have inherited from 50 years of dictatorship," Marzouki told the jeering crowd. "I understand this legitimate anger. But the government has diagnosed the problem. In six months, a stable government will be in place and will provide the remedy to heal the country's problems. For the first time we have a government not stealing from the people." Marzouki's words fell on deaf ears. "The people in government act like they're punishing us for starting the revolution. Nothing has changed for us," lamented a wounded veteran of the Intifada. Tunisian officials concur. They concede that Tunisia's interior remains marginalized despite "frequent outbreaks of social unrest amid bitter frustration at the revolution's failure to bring material benefits." Unemployment is still 18 %, and remains especially high among young Tunisians – the population sector that launched the Intifada. Meanwhile, throughout the December 17 exchange between Marzouki and the enraged crowd in Sidi Bouzid, hundreds of Islamists also gathered at the edge. Members of the Hizb ul-Tahrir waved their black flags – reminding the people of yet another solution at hand.

At the time of writing, the second half of December 2012, it has been about two years since the profound turmoil the West calls "The Arab Spring" erupted. In the Greater Middle East, the Intifada's and Arab Awakening are still escalating and spreading. The entire region is engulfed in soul-searching turmoil that is far more profound than the fratricidal violence noted by the West. Concurrently, political crises throughout the entire Arab World keep intensifying. Islamist authorities strive to consolidate their hold onto power against increasingly irate populace that keeps rioting in the absence of instant gratification panacea solutions to their plight. Meanwhile, established governments try desperately to avoid their toppling by local Islamist movements. Violence continues unabated everywhere even if formal conflicts – such as the wars in Libya or Iraq – are formally over. The Syrian fratricidal carnage is far from over and its outcome is bound to have far-reaching region-wide reverberations. Street riots and Jihadist insurrections in Tunisia, Egypt, or Jordan keep reminding the local governments how precarious their state is and how fertile the ground is for drastic changes and revolutionary eruptions.

Nevertheless, it is already possible to draw some early conclusions about longer-term and wider-area implications. The Greater Middle East has just crossed the threshold of a historic transformation – namely, the reversal of the modernization and state-building process started in 1917 and the commitment instead to a myth-driven Caliphate-based utopian posture that is yet to be defined. Concurrently, the increasingly destitute populace is seeking solace and remedy in sub-national frameworks – ethno-religious groups, tribes and extended-families – at the expense of their recognition of, and loyalty to, the existing state. These trends lead to the inevitable clash with the realities of a modern world where international and economic relations are



based on states as the sole building blocks of the world order. This brewing crisis is further aggravated by the insistence of the Obama White House on intervening and guiding from afar what is an indigenous awakening. To be sure, the outcome of all these mega-trends will be wrathful and merciless.

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The seminal outcome of the Awakening inside the Arab World is the death of the modern state and the rise of the Ikhwan and other Islamist movements as the new ruling elites. This development need not have surprised. The state boundaries created by Sykes-Picot during the First World War were never recognized and legitimized at the grassroots level. The concept of the modern state – Daula – did not go beyond an administrative entity associated with ruling dictators. The people's own grassroots aspirations have always been defined in terms associated with the populace – Qawmiya – or geographic and economic features – Wataniya – neither of which has fixed or enduring boundaries. However, cognizant of the omnipotence of the modern world around them, Arabs were apprehensive about challenging the impact of the world system on their own lives and thus resigned themselves to living and functioning within states. Not anymore. The modern Arab state is no more.

Having rejected modernity and westernization in their dramatic Intifada's, Arab grassroots are ready more than ever before to give the Islamist-Jihadist rallying cry "Islam is THE Solution!" a chance to deliver. Toward this end, the Arab World is rejecting the concept of the modern state in its entirety – from fixed borders, to the centrality of the citizenry and the sweeping equality of all. The "democratic constitutions" being adopted in a wave of elections and referenda make mockery of Western values for they promise and guarantee equality, rights and freedoms only on condition that they do not violate or contradict the Sharia – which, of course, does not recognize equality on the basis of gender and religion.

Significantly, the Jihadists had long foreseen this trend and made things happen through persistent incitement and agitation. Starting the mid-1970's, Islamist-Jihadist luminaries urged the "de-linking" of the Muslim World from the West because of irreconcilable incompatibility of core values. Starting 2003 – the 80th anniversary of the collapse of the Turkish Caliphate by the Western powers – the Jihadist leadership rallied Arab grassroots to reject political Westernization with a major incitement program. In 2004-5, Ayman al-Zawahiri capitalized on the initial receptivity in order to reincarnate local al-Qaidat Jihad branches in historic names not identical to modern states – thus giving contemporary viability to these entities. In late-2010, Osama bin Laden personally launched the new "the Son of the Soil/Land" (Ibn ul-Balad) initiative jointly with the Muslim Brothers to train and dispatch teams of highly trained Jihadist operatives to the countries where Intifada's are already taking place or being prepared in order to assist the local Muslim Brothers and Islamist groups in their struggles against the local security authorities, Western intelligence services, and all other "enemies" of Islamism-Jihadism. Simply put, it is these professional cadres that made the Intifada's professionally possible. Thus, the Jihadists and the Ikhwan won't let go of their achievements.

However, the ascent of the Ikhwan and the great hopes engendered do not alter the destitute prevailing throughout the Arab Middle East. Regional economies continue to deteriorate and collapse. The two primary sources of hard currency and employment for both educated youth and service providers – foreign investment and tourism – have dried up. The standard of living, the availability of basic food and medical services, and life expectancy are all on the discernable decline. The costs of marriage in the cities are rising fast – significantly reducing the segment of the male population that can afford to get married and raising their average age to above 30. The ensuing frustration of young males manifests itself in rampant sexual violence against women.



Millions of Egyptians working in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Gulf States fled home – swelling the ranks of the unemployed and depriving the country of the hard currency they used to send home. Meanwhile, in both Egypt and Tunisia, state bureaucracies remain moribund, corrupt, and the sole source of employment for educated youth (with the right family connections) – thus enshrining the grassroots notion that nothing has really changed. In Libya, oil revenues are far below pre-revolution levels, and the tribal violence prevents even the erratic distribution and local development programs of Qadhafi's Jamahiriya. All the while, the pro-Islamist Arab satellite TV, led by Al-Jazeera, continue their incitement campaigns – reporting success and enrichment under the Ikhwan that only frustrate further the majority of destitute.

Hence, given the continued failure and endemic instability of the new Islamist regimes – the big quandary is what will happen when the grassroots internalize that the Ikhwan will have failed to deliver the food, medical services, shelter, and, most important, betterment of prospects for the youth. This time, failure will be attributed to the earthly representatives of the divine powers – not dictators corrupted by the West. The grassroots' rude awakening will be shattering. This is a horrendous prospect from which there can only evolve ferocious and fratricidal bloodbath.

At the western edge of the Greater Middle East, Morocco demonstrates that there can be viable positive alternatives to the self-devouring Awakening. Morocco's unique success reiterates the importance of national leadership combining Islamic legitimacy with westernized policies. Morocco is a hereditary constitutional monarchy. The country has been ruled by the immensely popular Alaouite Dynasty since 1666. Being a direct descendant of both Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, the King of Morocco has unassailable legitimacy under the most traditionalist and Islamic terms. The King of Morocco uses this authority in order to facilitate and legitimize modernity and the democratic reforms process. Hence, as is the case in Western democracies, free and fair parliamentary and local/regional elections give the people of Morocco venues to express their political opinions and affect both national and local issues. Morocco thus proves that the horrors of the Arab Middle East are neither inevitable nor preordained. The delicate balance between Islamic traditions and westernized modernity endures even after the Islamist PJD party won the November 25, 2011, parliamentary elections. Thus, recent attempts of the PJD to assert themselves elicited strong resistance from both the socialist-liberal-secularist parties and the public at large. Despite the upheaval around them, the vast majority of Moroccans remain committed to the moderate policies long advocated and implemented by the King.

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The main aggregate impact of the two years of Intifada's and Awakening is the increase in the importance of the Mashriq (roughly the Arab World east of the Sinai Peninsula) in Arab-Muslim affairs, as well as the ensuing demise of the Fertile Crescent of Minorities and the concurrent refocusing of Arab politics on the traditional sub-national frameworks. These trends aggravate the impact of the overall mega-trends prevailing in the developing world and to which the Arab World is not immune. The most important mega-trend is the impact of accelerated population dislocations. These are diverse – ranging from rapid urbanization that breeds radicalization and insurrection to disruptions in food supplies due to the emptying of rural areas. These disruptions end up sending vast swaths of population into the fold of radicalization and rebellion.

Consequently, the inability of governments to address these challenges results in far more than loss of control over territory. The primary and long-term outcome is the loss of population trust and confidence in the system of government and thus also in the government's ability to address destitute and resolve crises. Just how



prevalent this phenomenon is was demonstrated in the communities' handling of the unprecedented shortages during Eid al-Adha in late-October 2012. Virtually all aid – mainly meat and other foodstuff – was provided to the needy and destitute by non-government Islamist and localized charities. Thus, the quest for solution increasingly takes place in sub-national framework – urban slums, tribes, extended families – that, in turn, leads to the ascent of militant irredentism, secessionism, separatism and sectarianism – all of which breed insurrection, insurgency and terrorism.

As well, in the widespread absence of legal-traditional forms of income, and absent social conventions associated with state governance, there grows the lure of both grassroots populace and insurrection movements to capitalize on the vast sums easily available from supporting drug and organized crime economy. This alliance results in terrorism, insurrection and insurgency being far better funded than ever before – and thus constituting a challenge most regional governments are no longer capable of addressing and resolving on their own.

Meanwhile, the growing importance of the Mashriq also results in the return of the outside powers – presently, the Islamist tripartite alliance of Iran, Turkey and Egypt. Their contemporary aspirations are essentially the revival of their traditional quest for spheres of influence as Mahdivist Iran/Persia, neo-Ottomanist Turkey, and Ikhwani Egypt (as both the contemporary United Arab Republic and the reincarnation of historic Bilad al-Kanana). These three powers have long had hegemonic aspirations over the Mashriq through various means ranging from cultural-economic influence to outright military occupation. Their current ascent comes at the expense of Bilad al-Sham (modern Syria, Iraq and Jordan) and Al-Jazira (the Arabian Peninsula, especially Saudi Arabia). The web of mutual economic relations – particularly cheap energy supplies from Iran and the lure of huge profits from sanctions busting – overshadows the Sunni-Shiite disputes (that never fade away completely).

The Arabian Peninsula is experiencing growing threats of instability short of full-fledged Intifada's. The nascent crisis is the confluence of several trends. Most important, particularly in the western parts, is the radicalization of the increasingly young population due to accelerated urbanization and Islamist incitement. Attempts at governance reforms without losing the Islamic character and legitimization of the ruling Houses – particularly the House of al-Saud – have so far failed to appease the radicalized and increasingly Jihadist youth. The return home of trained and indoctrinated Jihadists along with weapons and explosives is already manifested in the spread and escalation of local terrorism and insurrections. Overwhelmed by these threats, conservative segments of the populace are withdrawing into the proven protective fold of tribal allegiances – thus further undermining the authority of the central state. In the eastern parts of the Arabian Peninsula, the growing security challenges are the result of the nascent Shiite insurrection that is exacerbated by incitement from Iran – ostensibly in the name of the Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia. The escalation of the current civil disorder to terrorism against the energy infrastructure is only a question of time. The Iran-sponsored on-and-off riots in Bahrain and the brewing instability and insurrection in Kuwait should be considered trend setters. Should Tehran move to close the Strait of Hormuz – the Shiites of eastern Arabia will set the entire region aflame on Iran's behalf.

The unfolding of the Intifada's and Awakenings also brought to the fore the real importance of several issues – such as the Palestinian Question – to the Arab-Muslim World. Hence, irrespective of the Islamists' rhetoric about their enduring commitment to the liberation of Jerusalem and the destruction of Israel – the inward preoccupation of the Intifada's and Awakenings aptly demonstrate the irrelevance of the Arab-Israeli conflict to





the mega-trends dominating the Arab World. Arab masses now pour to the streets to demonstrate and riot on issues of great importance for them – that is, domestic issues – and no longer only on the “permissible issues” tolerated by the security services – that is, solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Thus, even the attempt of Iran and the HAMAS to reignite regional interest through a crisis and fighting with Israel did not work. The Arab World paid the lip service and remained preoccupied with domestic-economic issues while the Jihadists kept sending weapons to the Sinai and Gaza Strip. However, the specter of an Israeli war – for example, in the context of a foreign intervention in Syria – is enough to scare away the Western countries fearing being identified as Israel’s partners against the Arabs. Thus, sparking a war with Israel remains an expedient instrument for Damascus, Tehran and the HizbAllah in order to deter or neutralize Western military intervention.

Pragmatism concerning Israel is not limited to the Arab World. Indeed, pro-HAMAS/pro-Palestinian rhetoric notwithstanding – Turkey is once again reaching out to Israel in order to coordinate anti-Syria stance. In fall 2012, Turkey and Israel secretly and gradually moved to restore their former relations. Senior Turkish officials noted that “Erdogan criticizes Israel, and at the same time, holds secret diplomatic and intelligence meetings with Israel.” National Intelligence Organization (MIT) chief Hakan Fidan met with Mossad chief Tamir Pardo and other senior officials in order to “restore and boost intelligence cooperation with Israel.” Consequently, Ankara once again permits the missile shield radar in the Kurecik military base in Malatya to relay data concerning Iran to Israel. Israel is fast becoming the key to Turkey’s ability to cope with the closure of the border with Syria. Turkish trucks are now transported by ship from Iskenderun harbor to the Israeli port of Haifa from where they continue to Jordan, and onward to Persian Gulf states. At the same time, however, Turkish newspapers close to Erdogan’s AKP and the Islamists publish exposes blaming Turkish Jews for assisting the IDF’s raid on the Marmara – thus building populist tension with, and hostility toward, the Jewish community. Ultimately, however, Turkey’s increasingly pragmatic policy might not work because of the Obama White House.

The disastrous role the US-led West is currently playing in the Arab Middle East started with Obama’s June 2009 speech in Cairo as understood by the Arab World. Obama pledged “to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims,” leading to a fresh relationship “based upon mutual interest and mutual respect” and “based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition.” Obama’s endorsement of the Muslim ways in the name of the United States boosted and empowered the budding quest for self-awakening, delinking from, and rejecting of, Westernization – doctrines long advocated by the Islamists-Jihadists from Egypt to Libya to Syria. Then, in 2011, the US-led NATO intervention in Libya set a precedent for Western empowerment by force of Islamists-Jihadists irrespective of the indigenous grassroots’ desires and aspirations. Libya is still in a state of chaos – preventing a new system of governance from rising while enshrining the Sharia in its Salafist interpretation as the “law of the land” at the expense of, and confrontation with, the indigenous tribal, Sufi and Sanussiyya traditions. Alas, the Islamists-Jihadists in Syria, Jordan and beyond consider the Western intervention in Libya the precedent for their own empowerment should they succeed in seducing the US-led West to intervene militarily on their own behalf.

In late-2012, however, the US regional policy is dominated by Obama’s quest for a historic rapprochement with Iran virtually at all cost. Although secret bilateral negotiations have been going on for a couple of years now – it was only in fall 2012 that a major breakthrough took place during a face-to-face meeting in Doha, Qatar. As first disclosed by former IRGC official turned CIA agent “Reza Kahlili”, the Doha meeting was between Obama’s senior advisor and closest personal confidant Valerie Jarrett and Khamenei’s confidant and advisor on international affairs Ali Akbar Velayati. Jarrett was born in Shiraz, Iran, where her father managed a hospital, and knew



Velayati as a child. The personal trust between Jarrett and Velayati, coupled with her unique personal stature with Obama, delivered the dramatic breakthrough the Obama White House has been yearning for since 2009. Obama's determination to complete the historic rapprochement with Iran overshadows all other US considerations and policies in the Greater Middle East.

Thus, Washington's empowerment of the US-sponsored tripartite alliance is dominated by its impact on Obama's quest for a historic rapprochement with Iran. Similarly, the Obama White House continues to support and empower Islamist-Jihadist movements, particularly Ikhwan-affiliated, at the expense of US traditional allies considered anti-Iran. Most adversely affected are the close allies among both the region's minorities (especially Israel) and the Arab interior (especially Saudi Arabia). Indeed, a senior US official told Israel's Chanel 10 TV that "US President Barack Obama plans to propose to Iran that they conduct direct negotiations over the Islamic Republic nuclear program," and that "the decision did not involve any coordination or consultation with Israel." Ultimately, the escalating crisis in Syria is the litmus test of the Iran-focused new US policy. Presently, Obama is doggedly pursuing a twin-track policy (without declaring it, of course):

1. The preference is a major deal with Iran. Under the conditions of the deal – Iran will retain preeminence/dominance in Syria (albeit without Assad) and Lebanon. Iran will also be a key member of the tripartite alliance with Turkey and Egypt which the US will empower over the Greater Middle East. Under such an arrangement there will be no need for Western/NATO military intervention for Iran will "deliver" Assad.
2. If there is no deal with Iran – the US will support (from behind) a Turkey-led NATO military intervention that will overthrow the Assad regime and will empower Islamists-Jihadists affiliated with the Muslim Brothers in Damascus. The crux of the US-sponsored world "recognition" of the new Syrian Council is aimed to build the political justification for such an intervention. The Kremlin has long delivered clear messages from Assad that he is ready to negotiate the establishing of a new government in Syria (with him leaving power and Damascus) with the legitimate opposition. Assad's sole precondition is that having won the war strategically – he remains the president of Syria until such time that he hands over power to his successor (who can be Sunni Arab from the opposition). The US-led recognition of the Council as the sole representative of the Syrian people precludes negotiations and sets the conditions for a costly and needless military intervention.

Meanwhile, Khamenei's objectives in the negotiations with Obama are, in order of priority:

1. Gain international recognition and acceptance of Shiite Iran as a global all-Islamic (not just Shiite) power as well as a leading regional power both on its own (including opaque nuclear status) and within regional alliances (mainly the tripartite alliance);
2. Resolve Iran's endemic economic and scientific-technological woes due to the sanctions and demonization; and
3. Guarantee the regional and international acceptance of Iran's hegemonic rights and strategic interests in the Shiite populated parts of Iraq and the eastern Arabian Peninsula (which means dominance of the region's energy resources), as well as Iran's unique status in western Syria and Lebanon through guaranteed on-land access to and control over the HizbAllah (which means recognition of Iran's stature as a Mediterranean power).





Khamenei is convinced that the attainment of these objectives will guarantee the Mullah's hold onto power for ever and ever.

Indeed, in mid-December, Tehran started a disengagement from the Assad administration in accordance with Obama's promises. Senior Iranian officials outlined a step-by-step peace plan for Syria to be capped by presidential elections in which the opposition would be encouraged to run their own candidates. Senior Iranian diplomats throughout Europe (including Moscow) stressed that Tehran does not want or expect Bashar al-Assad, or any member of his inner-circle, to stand for, let alone win, the proposed presidential elections. Tehran anticipates that a Sunni Islamist will win the elections, and the Iranian diplomats acknowledged they are closely cooperating with some would-be candidates Tehran can live with. "Iran is concerned about the power of pro-Saudi forces if Assad is brought down," explained strategic affairs analyst Hassan Hanizadeh. "It is trying to organize other groups in Syria as alternatives just in case."

Concurrently, the Obama White House intensifies the overall policy of empowering Ikhwan-affiliated movements throughout the Middle East to the detriment of the languishing grassroots. In a bitter article in the December 16, 2012, issue of *The Daily News Egypt*, Farid Zahran blames the rise to power of political Islam in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East on the all-out support from the US and the West. "All the evidence points to the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood would never have been able to stay in power without the continued support of the US and other European countries." Zahran cannot fathom why the US empowers and sustains in power organization that is anathema to everything and every value the West is standing for. The toppling of the Mubarak administration only worsened oppression in Egypt because "the Muslim Brotherhood is a fascist organization that is able to govern the country and push forth its agenda in a way that Egypt's traditional elite was unable to."

Zahran accepts that the US-led West is adamant on controlling the Middle East, but laments that "the West has chosen the religious wing of fascism to serve as its agent, as they are the ones most likely to support the propagation of a conservative, reactionary agenda. However the Muslim Brotherhood is also a ticking time bomb, one that could potentially explode and shatter the West's iron grip on the region." He argues that "what the West does not understand is that religious fascist organizations feed off each other, and if allowed to propagate will eventually spawn an entity that will inevitably turn its aggression towards the West itself, labeling it the Great Satan and the source of all corruption in the world."

The US-led West should have known better by now just how dangerous it is to rely on, and closely cooperate with, radical Islamist elements, Zahran ponders. "The West, and the US in particular, has already paid the price for its alliance with the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, so when will it pay the price for propping up political Islam in the Arab world? I think not long, as the death of the American ambassador in Libya was just the first of many acts of retribution soon to be witnessed in the West." Ultimately, Zahran warns, it will be the grassroots in the Middle East who were abandoned by the US-led West and left to languish under Islamist regimes that will rise up against both their tormentors and those who empowered them. Thus, Zahran warns the US-led West, "the most painful act of retribution will most likely come from the people of the region themselves, who see the West as the bankrollers of these fascist organizations who are trying to rebuild the repressive regimes of the past, only this time with a religious hue."



There are already developments throughout the Middle East confirming Zahran's dire predictions and warnings. A good example is the discussion between US-sponsored rebels in the Aleppo area in mid-October 2012. The rebels discussed with a visiting Arab observer their objectives and plans for the Syrian Jihad and beyond. "We will move on. When, Allah willing, we cleanse Syria, we won't stop there. We will continue to the Shebaa Farms and Kafr Shuba, and we will pass through the Golan Heights all the way to Jerusalem," explained a Syrian mujahid. "Then we will make an about-turn, cleanse Iraq, where there is still some filth. After we are done with Iraq, we will move on to Constantinople, and then Cordoba and Andalusia. That's it. Now that we have weapons, we don't intend to ever lay them down."

Asked how one can reconcile these objectives with the support the Syrian opposition has been getting from the West, the Syrian mujahid was very clear in his blaming of the US for the recent transformation of the Jihad in Syria. "The West, Bashar, and America should be happy. This is what you get for supporting the Bashar regime. We told you [the US] that we wanted freedom. If you had removed him, you'd never have heard from us again. You have brought this upon yourselves. We have become Islamists. We have become terrorists. You forced this situation upon us. You could have called him up and said: 'Bashar, get out.' He would have left. But instead, you supported and financed him. Why? Because he serves as [Israel's] border guard. Not a bullet has been fired there in the past 48 years."

Indeed, even these directly empowered and sponsored by the US-led West now dare to challenge the US over Jihadist issues. In mid-December, when the US blacklisted the Jihadist al-Nusra Front because of its close cooperation with al-Qaida-linked terrorists in Iraq, the entire Syrian opposition leadership objected vocally. Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib, the leader of the National Coalition just recognized by the Obama White House as "the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people", led the public rejection of the US designation. "The decision to blacklist one of the groups fighting the regime as a terrorist organization must be re-examined," al-Khatib declared. "We can have ideological and political differences with certain parties, but the revolutionaries all share the same goal: to overthrow the criminal regime [of Assad]." In Syria and southern Turkey, opposition commanders declared openly "We are all al-Nusra!" Commanders of 29 opposition groups - all sponsored by the West - signed a petition in support of Jabhat al-Nusra and against the US. "No to American intervention, for we are all Jabhat al-Nusra" the petition stated. The commanders urged all fighters to "raise the Jabhat al-Nusra banner" as "a thank you" for their unique contribution to the fighting against the Assad regime. "These are the men for the people of Syria, these are the heroes who belong to us in religion, in blood and in revolution," read the petition.

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With the passage of time, the sub-national dynamics and the Islamicization of post-Awakening state regimes continue colliding. The dominant long-term mega-trend in the Mashriq is the ongoing destruction of the state - especially in rural and lesser-developed areas. Consequently, economies and food supplies collapse - sending the destitute people to the already overpopulated urban slums in search of non-existing jobs and income. This increases despair, radicalization and jihadization. Fearing the export of instability and terrorism - Western governments pour financial and military aid to the Islamist governments the US-led West has just helped empower. The US-led West hopes that these Islamist regimes will be able to somehow both seduce and suppress the grassroots - albeit in the name of new Islamist constitutions and promised democratic reforms. But the Islamist governments use the Western aid to pursue their own regional aspirations rather than address



grassroots problems because the forces of the interior challenge the Islamists' legitimacy. So what's the point in helping the interior? And why should the starving destitute grassroots support the governments that once again oppress them? Absent real effort to rebuild and reorganize the Mashriq along traditional frameworks – the exacerbation of the Mashriq will keep growing fast. The US-led West that once again emerges in the public eye as sponsoring, empowering and financing the oppressors is increasingly becoming the objective of both the grassroots' wrath and the Islamists' Jihad. The Islamist elites, after all, must demonstrate their Islamic credentials by Holy War as the sole excuse for not caring for their destitute populace. Quite a return for two years of persistent and lavish US and Western support for the Intifada's and Awakening.

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**Remarks:** *Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.*