



A Conversation with Dr. Kenneth M. Pollack

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I was struck by something you wrote recently. You said that “the only thing standing between Iraq and a descent into total Bosnia-like devastation is 135,000 U.S. troops — and even they are merely slowing the fall.” How will we know if Iraq is sliding into all-out civil war?

Well, the most useful statistic in these kinds of situations — counter-insurgencies, stability operations, civil war — is civilian casualties. Whether the number of Iraqis is 50,000 dead or ten times that, the number is less relevant than the

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trend — and the trend line is a very bad one.

Also, more and more Iraqis have lost confidence that next year will be better. This is a key bellwether of Iraqi hope for the future and willingness to cling to reconstruction. Also,

Iraqis are increasingly saying that the war was not worth it. They claim to be worse off than they were under Saddam Hussein. And that is saying a lot, because we should never lose sight of the fact that Saddam did not need to be demonized — he was a demon. The state that he ran in Iraq was absolutely awful, so for Iraqis to say their current situation is worse speaks volumes to their sense of where things are headed and just how bad the violence is getting.

To what extent can U.S. troops actually serve to stave off this war? Would it make a difference if there were 60,000 troops? 200,000 troops?

The troop numbers are certainly not unimportant, but there is more to it than that. The U.S. troop presence in Iraq is the most important retarding factor. Militias cannot openly engage in ethnic cleansing as long as the U.S. is there.

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Look at what happened in Balad: Sunni groups attacked Shi'a, the Shi'a retaliated and started a campaign of ethnic cleansing. Within just a day or two, American and Iraqi troops were deployed to Balad and shut down all of those operations. In the absence of U.S. troops, those operations would have continued; they would have snowballed. You would have seen reprisals from the Sunnis, a Bosnia-like situation of ethnic-cleansing breeding ethnic-cleansing. As long as the U.S. troops are there, they can shut this down.

Can the U.S. reverse this dynamic?

It's unclear at this point. We have gone so far down this path, we don't know whether we've crossed a point of no return. That said, it's clear that where U.S. troops are present, working with Iraqis and using the right tactics, they do have a very positive impact. Iraqi and American units paired up can bring real security to areas. I have seen this myself in Mosul. Where good Iraqi units are present with American forces, they can create greater security, which can open up low-level political and economic development that can really turn things around.

The best example of this was H.R. McMaster in Tal Afar. He was a brave commander, he trained his troops properly, got many to a basic level of Arab proficiency, they spent a lot of money on reconstruction, and they tried right from the start to bring real economic and political development along with security. And while they were there they enjoyed great success.

In parts of Baghdad, we're seeing something similar. The current plan does not have as many troops as it needs or the necessary political and economic equipment. But in some neighborhoods of Baghdad, they are creating greater security to where the economic and political components can begin to have a greater impact.

The problem is that we do not have nearly enough of that. We're just not concentrating the troops properly to do it in bigger swaths. We just

have 5 or 6 neighborhoods in Baghdad. And Baghdad is gigantic, basically the size of Los Angeles — we don't have enough troops to cover that much territory. Instead we have troops spread out elsewhere in Iraq, where they are simply sticking their finger in the dike.

So American troops are helping to stave off the inevitable, but if they had the right resources and the right concentration of forces, maybe they could still turn things around. But given the fact that we do not, the ground is starting to slip from beneath their feet. We may still get to civil war with the American forces there; it just will take a lot longer than if the American troops were withdrawn.

What other potential retarding factors do you see warding off a civil war?

There are a few. You do have a lot of Iraqi people who do not want a civil war. In most cases, you find that Iraqis understand the danger and want to stick with reconstruction. Whenever they see American and Iraqi forces doing the right thing, they do the right thing. You do still have Iraqis joining the security services, joining the police for the right reasons as well as the wrong reasons. If the Americans were to leave, all these Iraqis who still have hope and are trying to do the right thing would have absolutely no incentive to do the right thing. It is very contingent on the U.S. troop presence. In fact, they would have every incentive to join one of the militias as the only way they could protect themselves. And then there's also the Iraqi leaders who are trying very hard to do the right thing. It is an incredibly formidable task but because you do have people like that who are willing to try, again it is retarding this descent towards civil war.

It seems so much easier to prevent sectarian civil war than it is to reverse it once it's begun. If every flare-up like the one you described in Balad has the potential to become the spark for a nationwide civil war, what is the best-case scenario for Iraq? And how do we get there?

I'll give you an almost-miraculous scenario: the U.S. agrees to concentrate its troops and really deploys American troops along with the best Iraqi troops in the places they're most needed, fully recognizing that this means places like Anbar are going to go to hell. But that's the only way you can do this.

If the United States were willing to actually reach out to the UN and the international community in a way we never have, and create areas of security where those civilians can actually operate freely, then you could start to move things in a different direction. Again, this is all in the realm of possibility. These are all things which, if we had adopted them in the spring when they were proposed by my group and by Lt. Gen. Corelli, ground forces commander in Baghdad, we definitely could have turned the place around. Eight months later, it's going to be a lot harder to do so.

What we need to do in Iraq is to start from the ground up. All the solutions discussed on Iraq focus on the top, on a national reconciliation program, on a Dayton-style peace conference — they all miss the point. You are never going to have that happen until you start to change conditions on the ground. Right now, the problem in Iraq is that you have a security vacuum, people who live in fear, and no functional economy or local leadership. That's what needs to change. Once that happens, you can break the power of militias because they will no longer have the support of the people. Once that shifts to the central government, you can start brokering these kinds of national reconciliation deals. But by focusing all our efforts on the top, we have allowed the bottom to go to hell. And only by starting to rebuild things from the bottom up are we going to be able to transform them. The problem is that rebuilding from the bottom takes a lot longer and requires a lot more effort.

Is there any way divide the country and split mixed Iraqi cities without massive bloodshed?

No, and that's the problem. I have a great deal of respect for both Joe Biden and Les Gelb and for their proposal, which is basically to help Iraq divide itself and then simply preside over a partition within a federal structure.

The problem is that if you try to divide Iraq, you are going to get the civil war that you seek to prevent. However, if you cannot prevent the slide to civil war, perhaps in 5, 10, or 15 years there will be enough ethnic cleansing and enough bloodshed that you can preside over a partition. That is essentially what happened in Bosnia.

My colleague Michael O'Hanlon has been proposing "voluntary relocation." He is proposing that we create financial and other incentives for Iraqis to leave integrated or divided communities and move to communities that are more homogenous. It's certainly something we ought to be looking hard at, but there are obviously some problems.

In some cases, you have mixed families or mixed individuals. I cannot tell you how many Iraqi friends of mine describe themselves as "sushis" — half Sunni, half Shi'a. Where do they go? What becomes of them? And divided families? These are big unanswered questions, aside from the fact that most Iraqis do not want to move. Many are saying they would rather fight and die to stay in their homes. Which, again, is exactly how you get a civil war. But there are Iraqis who are increasingly being forced out of their homes. At least for them a program of voluntary relocation might give them an alternative to joining a militia. You offer a micro-loan to start a small business in a different part of the country. Maybe Iraqis see this offer and, while it is not their first choice, prefer it to joining the Mahdi Army to fight for their homes.

In case of a civil war, you recommend that the U.S. not pick sides. Why?

This might seem counterintuitive, but Dan Byman and I did some historical research analyzing civil wars over the last 30 years. It emerged that

picking sides is not actually helpful. Trying to develop a proxy force to win the war for you typically does not work.

When you get involved civil wars by supporting proxies, everyone comes to grief. And the best example is the Pakistanis. On the one hand, they created a proxy that won the Afghan civil war. The Taliban won the Afghan civil war, and look what it did to Pakistan. Pakistan is an absolute basket case, torn apart by Islamic fundamentalism and divisions within the society - many of which were either caused or exacerbated by the rise of the Taliban. And so, even in case of victory, supporting proxies is not a great model for how to manage a civil war.

There has been some discussion about the utility of supporting an independent Kurdistan to serve as a front-line ally in this region – akin to a “mini-Ulster” solution the British had in mind for Israel. In your estimate, is this something the United States should support?

But one of the things our study of civil wars revealed is that once one subgroup declares independence, others follow suit. Succession breeds secessionism

Look, I am a Kurdophile. I have publicly and repeatedly said that the Kurds deserve their own nation, and I absolutely believe that. But timing is everything in politics. One of the most interesting phenomena in Iraq is that many of the Iraqi leaders still trying to do the right

thing are Kurds – Jalal Talabani, Barham Salih, Hosheyar Zebari, and even Massoud Barzani. They have taken some of the most important steps making it possible for Iraq to continue to stumble along.

The Kurds recognize that the timing is not propitious for them to declare independence. If we give them no other alternative, they will declare independence. But one of the things our study of civil wars revealed is that once one subgroup declares independence, others follow suit. Succession breeds secessionism. You see it

everywhere: in the Caucasus, in Yugoslavia – it’s very common. And if the Kurds declare their independence in Iraq, you can expect to see Kurds and other groups in Iran, Turkey, and Syria doing the same thing. All of which would be very bad for the region and ultimately bad for the Kurds.

For the United States, Kurdistan can be an enclave in the midst of a Sunni-Shi’a civil war. I think that that would be helpful to all involved, certainly to the Kurds. The fewer Kurds being

slaughtered, the better for all mankind. I think it would be in America’s interest to help the Kurds maintain their security in the midst of a civil war. One of the only ways the U.S. can prevent the Kurds from declaring independence and launching a chain reaction of secessionism is to go to the Kurds and essentially say, “here is the deal: Iraq is in a civil war, we are not going to ask you to get involved, that would be very counterproductive. But in return for help with your security – arms sales, financial assistance, economic aid, perhaps even U.S. troops in Kurdistan – you are not going to declare independence until we stabilize the situation in Iraq so that you can secede in a peaceful way.”

Do you think that is already the tacit agreement?

I hope so. The Kurdish leaders certainly recognize that as their best course of action. I think there are Americans who believe that as well. Whether they have actually had these conversations, Kurds and Americans, I could not tell you that. But both sides do seem to recognize that that is the deal.

Can you talk a bit about the experience of revising your opinions about Iraq?

I cannot tell you how many Iraqi friends of mine describe themselves as “sushis” – half Sunni, half Shi’a. Where do they go? What becomes of them? And divided families?

Sure, it's an ongoing process. Look, I think you have to revise your opinions every day as the situation does unfold. Let me start with the most obvious thing — there was not a weapons of mass destruction program in Iraq. Saddam was not reconstituting his nuclear weapons program, so that aspect of my beliefs about the importance of a war with Iraq clearly goes out the window.

But it is not so easy to say that since there was no WMD threat, we never should have gone to war. There were other factors involved. First, Saddam was a threat, a complication, and a force for instability in the Middle East. In addition, Saddam was one of the worst dictators of the last 60 years.

As someone who believes in liberal intervention, who supported intervention in the Balkans, who wanted us to find a way to intervene in Rwanda and would still like to see us do something in Darfur or Congo, I cannot simply look at one of the worst dictators of the last 60 years and say it does not matter because removing him would be hard. All those things remain rationales for a war.

Obviously, it was never a rationale for going to a war as quickly or as recklessly as we did. I argued in my book and throughout the run-up to the war that we did not need to go to war immediately, that we had to go to war in as responsible a manner as we possibly could.

Having gone to war, unseated Saddam Hussein, and recognized that the WMD argument is not nearly as compelling as I believed at the time, the only rationales for war that remain are those other ones: Saddam was a threat, a force for instability in the region, and humanitarian arguments.

Whether those rationales can actually justify this war depends entirely on the success of reconstruction. It is very simple. Right now, Iraq is sliding into all-out civil war. If it does so, we will have created greater instability in the region than Saddam ever caused us. And we will have left the Iraqi people in a worse situation than they were under with Saddam — which Iraqis

increasingly believe is the case. If that is the case, this war is absolutely unjustifiable.

On the other hand, if we can somehow turn things around, even if it takes 5 or 10 years, if we get to a place where Iraq avoids nightmarish ethnic-cleansing, if we somehow do keep the violence to its current levels, if we get to a point where Iraq is stable and prosperous, then yes you can say reluctantly that the war had a justification, that we left Iraqis better off than they were before we invaded. . . . It all comes back to how badly we mishandled the reconstruction, which I just find inexcusable.

Was the main problem that we underestimated the difficulty of the mission or that we executed it poorly?

At some level, this is something for historians to debate. I tend to be of the latter opinion. Everything that I have seen in Iraq leads me to believe that this was possible. Again, the fact that three and a half years after the invasion, after we have made every single mistake it was possible to make, leaving the Iraqis in the worst situations imaginable, you still have about 40% of the Iraqi population saying the situation is going to be better next year. That is stunning. Last year it was still up at around 60%. Public opinion is absolutely essential, and that you had enormous numbers of Iraqis who truly believed in this reconstruction project and who were incredibly patient in terms of allowing it to try to succeed. In my book, I predicted a honeymoon period when Iraqis were very grateful to be rid of Saddam Hussein. But we shouldn't assume more than 6-12 months to show Iraqis that reconstruction can work. In fact, we would up with nearly three years of a honeymoon period.

Look at all the books written about this Iraq War: everyone who participated in the reconstruction or has done work as an independent outside observer believes that it was possible for reconstruction to succeed. It was always going to be very hard, and the Iraq that we created was not going to be Switzerland for a very, very long time,

if ever. However, there does seem to be a consensus among both the people who were over there and the outside experts. They all said it was possible to have made this thing work in some fashion, and it was mostly our mistakes that doomed us.

You describe America’s policy dilemma regarding Iran in terms of “the two clocks” — the long-term effort to reform and reconcile with the Iranian regime and the short-term effort to stave off their nuclear program. It seems like the disjunction between these two clocks has grown. Is that still the policy dilemma we face in Iran?

The two clocks is still out there, and it is still useful for a certain segment of American policy.

But other things we see cropping up are becoming more important. It’s still important because I do still believe that there will be regime change in Iran some day. It seems like regime change is still pretty far away. There are people who say, with good reason, that Iran may face an internal economic crisis in 3-5 years. And if that kind of crisis comes to fruition, that could cause or speed regime change in Iran.

And therefore, it is not useful, it is not realistic, it is not responsible to suggest that regime change as a policy of the United States government is a good way to solve our problems with Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons capability

The two clocks are still a useful analogy because they make clear that regime change is probably not going to happen before Iran acquires nuclear capability. And therefore, it is not useful, it is not realistic, it is not responsible to suggest that regime change as a policy of the United States government is a good way to solve our problems with Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons capability.

One often-neglected aspect Iranian politics is its ethnic diversity — the Arabs, the Kurds, the Azeris, and various other peoples. Should U.S. policy exploit these potential divisions?

Iran is a multi-ethnic, almost polyglot, nation. There are frictions and tensions among the different ethnic groups. And there certainly are things that the United States could be doing to exacerbate those tensions. But the big question is, to what extent do we want to do so?

And the first question before that is, what is it that we are trying to accomplish? If we truly are trying to accomplish is regime change, then that is a good way to go. We ought to try to exacerbate those tensions as much as we possibly can. But, again, if you start with the metaphor of the two clocks, then you assume this is not going to solve our nuclear problem, then you have got to first start with what are policies that could solve our nuclear problem.

If it is about negotiating with Iran, at some point you are going to need to be able to give that up because there is no question that one of the things that Iranians are going to demand as part of those negotiations is that we give up our support for the various minorities.

This is very similar to what the Nixon administration faced with the Kurds. Are you willing to sell these people down the river? The Nixon administration helped the Shah support the Iraqi Kurds to fight the Iraqi central government in the early 1970s. We did it knowing full well that at some point the Shah was going to cut a deal with Saddam. When he did that, he was going to be selling the Kurds down the river, and we would be complicit in it. And that is exactly what happened, and the Kurds paid the price. Do we want to stir up Iranian Kurds and Iranian Azerbaijanis and Iranian Arabs against their government only to sell them down the river when we decide to cut a deal with Tehran for their nuclear program? These are the dilemmas of these kind of covert action campaigns.

What would it take to deter Iran from pursuing a bomb? New leadership in America? In Iran?

All those things probably would be helpful. But I am always skittish about the term “grand

bargain," because I think it is unlikely to unfold that way if we negotiate with Iran. It is more likely to be a far more informal set of deals that will amount to the same thing.

Right now, the biggest problem is that Iran's hardliners are in a pretty dominant position. They don't control the government, but they have the advantage. That needs to change. You have to reach a point where the advantage is with

Iran's pragmatists. Don't get me wrong, pragmatists should not be taken as a euphemism for "nice guys." These are not nice guys. But Iran's pragmatists typically prioritize Iran's economic health and its domestic politics. They look for good governance and prosperity, and they have been willing to make deals on all these issues in return for the western investment and trade they recognize as critical to Iran's economy.

So what needs to happen is a change in the balance within Iran. And that can happen through external events. So if the UN agreed to impose sanctions on Iran, that would be very helpful.

The more the Iranians recognize that the international community truly is resolved to make them pay a price for insisting on this path, that is step one. Step two is that Iran's economy is going to have to worsen. It can worsen on its own. It has all kinds of deep-seated structural problems, and Ahmadinejad's policies are not helping — they're actually making it worse. That's one of the reasons why people talk about the potential for real crises inside Iran in 3-5 years. That is one way. Another way would be to get real sanctions imposed on them.

The more the Iranians recognize that the international community truly is resolved to make them pay a price for insisting on this path; that is step one. Step two is that Iran's economy is going to have to worsen. It can worsen on its own. It has all kinds of deep-seated structural problems, and Ahmadinejad's policies are not helping — they're actually making it worse

Yes, but what are the chances of that? Will Russia and China ever agree to sanction Iran's oil industry?

They are within the realm of possibility. I'll put it this way. I published *Persian Puzzle* in 2004, and I laid out exactly this policy. I had people saying to me, "none of it will ever happen, the Russians, Chinese and Europeans will never agree to it, you'll never get the IAEA to sanction them, you'll never get it voted out of the IAEA, you'll never get it into the United Nations, the UN will never pass a Chapter 7 Resolution." All of those things have happened, all of those things that people said would absolutely never happen, have happened. So, it suggests that it actually is entirely possible to imagine a series of new resolutions which impose greater and greater sanctions on Iran. It's not a sure thing — it never was a sure thing. As for petroleum, we may not even need to get there. These financial controls the Bush Administration has talked about are actually very clever. Again, you need to create a climate where Iran is isolated. Iran's stock market has collapsed, it's getting very little foreign investment, and insurance companies are not willing to insure Iranian projects and goods because they're anticipating sanctions. That in and of itself is imposing a very serious burden on Iran without any sanctions actually being passed.

One of the great challenges is that, with Iran's complex system of mixed clerical and parliamentary rule, it feels as if Iranian policy is made inside a black box.

Yeah, unfortunately it is very difficult for us to know what is going on inside of Iran. Decisions are made by a very small group of extremely tight-knit, closed-mouthed people. When I talk about the hard-liners, I am referring to Ahmadinejad and a constellation of other people behind him, you know people with names like Janati, and Yazdi, and a variety of other figures including Safavi, the head of the Revolutionary Guards.

We tend to concentrate on Ahmadinejad because he is colorful and says a lot of obnoxious things, but he does not run the government of Iran. He's only one player. He has his own power, and his

We tend to concentrate on Ahmadinejad because he is colorful and says a lot of obnoxious things, but he does not run the government of Iran. He's only one player. He has his own power, and his stature within the Iranian regime has clearly grown over the last year because he has been able to use the nuclear issue and a lot of old-fashioned pork-barrel politics to make himself more popular with the Iranian people

stature within the Iranian regime has clearly grown over the last year because he has been able to use the nuclear issue and a lot of old-fashioned pork-barrel politics to make himself more popular with the Iranian people.

And we have seen that degree of popularity does translate into greater influence within the Iranian government. But it doesn't mean he is even first among equals. Khomeini remains first among equals. It is still an open question whether Ahmadinejad is first among the hardliners themselves.

If you could somehow get to the hardliners and ask them, "Who is your most

important figure? Who is the person who decides to do something and has everyone else fall into in line?" I am not certain they would name Ahmadinejad. But again, Ahmadinejad is the one who captures the headlines, who has captured the world's attention. And in some ways that is unfortunate because, he is not the one who is calling the shots in Tehran.

At this point it seems like a cliché for our politicians to praise Iran's culture and civilization while criticizing their politics. What is it that Americans should know about Persian culture?

One of the most important things for Americans to understand is Iranian pride, just how proud the Iranians are of their culture, of their achievements

and a belief deriving from that pride that Iran ought to be one of the world's great powers. This is one of the reasons we have all these clashes with the Iranians. Because Iranians believe they ought to be calling the shots in a part of the world where we believe that we ought to be calling the shots, and psychologically because the Iranians have such an enormous chip on their shoulder about the United States. That we are a greater power than them and, quite honestly, that pisses them off. And as a result, almost anything we do, they take the wrong way and they see as a sign of disrespect.

That said, let me just finish by making the point that while it is certainly useful to understand Iranian culture, and the more that Americans do understand it the better, I do not think that we should fall into the trap of thinking that the problems between the two of us are merely civilizational and caused by miscommunication. We have some real and difficult problems with the Iranians. They are trying to acquire capabilities that we do not want them to have. We do not want them to have them because they support terrorist groups, because they have been very aggressive against us in the last 26-27 years, and because they continue to define us as their enemy, and they act accordingly.

You know, whether they were Persians, Russians, or misguided-Methodists, it wouldn't really matter — those problems would still remain. And to some extent, trying to deal with them at this cultural-psychological level actually takes away from some of our strengths. We need to recognize the Iranians as important players in the Persian Gulf, we need to stop pretending that they are not, and stop insisting that we will not deal with them — but we need to deal with them in hard political terms.

The more time we spend wondering what Persians actually want based on their culture, I think it actually takes us away from dealing with the real problems we face. At the end of the day, we were able to find very good, constructive solutions to our problems with the Russians not

by understanding Russian civilization but by sitting down and working out a series of compromises that were acceptable to us and to the Russians. To a certain extent, the Iranians cannot do that because they cannot get over their own cultural baggage. Quite honestly, we can't help them get over that cultural baggage. We just need to be ready so that when they are able to, we are there with a real, constructive set of compromises. Which is something the Bush administration has been less than willing to do.

In Iraq, it seems that we took advice from expatriates who lived in a different Iraq than the one that we invaded. Is there any danger of that happening in Iran with the subset of anti-regime Iranians accessible to Americans as opposed to the majority that elected Ahmadinejad?

Sure, I certainly think there is a danger of that. It goes back to the same point about regime change. There are Americans out there who believe fervently in regime change, and it seems to be the case that these people are talking to Iranians who are trying to convince them that regime change would be quick and easy in Iran. They say the Iranian people are just waiting to overthrow their government, that all its going to take is a strong rhetorical commitment on the part of the United States for the Iranians to rise up against their government. That is exactly the same Siren song we heard on Iraq. I think it would be a tragic mistake if we followed it once again in Iran and dashed ourselves on those rocks. Especially given the fact that we just made this mistake in Iraq.

Five years into the Cold War, we already had foundational documents like the writings of George Kennan that would guide us over the next several decades. Do you think we have seen anything like that in the last five years that

will endure as a strategic road map for where we are heading over the next several decades?

I hope not because the only document out there is the Bush Administration's National Security Strategy, which I think is horribly misguided. Not because of their emphasis on preemption, which most people have focused on, but because of the problems they have diagnosed. One of my greatest concerns with U.S. Middle East policy is that the Bush Administration has tended to see it through the lens of terrorism. I think that's been a tremendous mistake. Terrorism is not the problem in the Middle East. Terrorism is a symptom of the problems of the Middle East. And by focusing on the symptom and not the underlying problems, we have exacerbated the underlying problems.

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

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The Pakistan Earthquake: An Agent of Social and Political Change

Shamineh S. Byramji

Disasters, natural or man-made, are horrific events that destroy lives, disrupt the social, economic, and political fabric of communities, and can erase decades of development gains, sometimes in a matter of minutes.¹ The daunting aspect of disasters is their potential magnitude and their indiscrimination to affect everything and everyone in its path. But it is essentially this indiscriminating attribute that provides a small silver lining or a short window of opportunity. A disaster has the ability to effect surviving communities to their very core, leaving an opportunity for self-examination and re-evaluation of their make-up and structure.

The recent earthquake in Pakistan upset the country's traditional balance in both gender and politics. However, a country's vulnerability after a disaster does not always result in positive transformation. The changes accompanying the relief operation in Pakistan, and the influx of all forms of aid, have presented a window of opportunity for both negative and positive cultural transformation. This paper describes some of the more apparent changes that have taken place during the relief effort: the expanding role of Islamic militant groups juxtaposed against the improvements of the gender gap. The final section is a culmination of recommendations that emerged from examining the current post-disaster

situation, with a particular focus on strategies for empowering women through the reconstruction process.

A Positive Window of Opportunity — Bridging the Gender Gap

On October 8, 2005 an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter Scale hit the Pakistan-administered section of Kashmir, killing 75,000 people. The fault line of October's quake encompasses some of the most conservative areas of the country, where the rigid observance of *Purdah*, a segregation of the sexes, has deprived many women of education, healthcare, and their own means of livelihood.² However, due to the medical emergency that the earthquake caused, the disaster has surprisingly provided some women the opportunity to seek medical assistance for the first time in their lives.

Due to the general lack of modernization in the affected areas, most of these villages, even if they had a medical facility, have never been exposed to progressive medicine. For some this changed within hours of the quake, as doctors from Karachi and Lahore came in to set up medical camps in the worst hit areas.³ For those

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within camps, it is a standard camp procedure to establish some sort of medical facility within the camp that provides round-the-clock medical assistance. Additionally, to meet the short-term health needs of local communities outside the camps, the World Health Organization (WHO) constructed 35 prefabricated basic health units (BHU) in earthquake-affected areas. The WHO also operates 64 field hospitals with a staff of 87 medical teams. Several other relief agencies have also planned to set up prefabricated health facilities. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), for example, proposed the establishment of about 50 prefab BHUs, while another 22 are to be constructed by the UN family and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).⁴ In terms of gender, it is not clear that these medical facilities provide for the needs of women. However, it can be presumed that, where possible, these international agencies include female medics on their teams.

[T]he hospital I visited in Bona is run by Save the Children and the only female doctor there is an American volunteer. And she had been there for two weeks and the hospital had seen 3,200 female patients which I was told was unprecedented in that area because there had never really been female doctors in that area before and the women were reluctant to go to the hospital because it is against their religious sensibilities to be treated by a male doctor unless its really an extreme case.⁵

Hence, it is plausible that the relief effort has provided at least some women with the opportunity to seek medical assistance for the first time in their lives.

In a similar light, another opportunity that has emerged from the rubble of this catastrophe has been access to education within camps, particularly for girls. Across the quake-affected region, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) partner agencies, such as UNICEF and Save the Children, have established improvised schools in relief camps providing

young children, and some not so young, with access to education.

The most encouraging example of this experience has been within the Mehra relief camp, the largest in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) housing over 20,000 people mostly from the Allai Valley. Approximately 2,700 children attend either morning or afternoon classes, and teachers estimate that up to three-quarters of their female students had never previously attended school. Most of the new pupils are under 10, but several of the girls are as old as 17.⁶ The Pakistan Newswire reported that, "Hundreds of girls are attending school for the first time, learning math and science, Urdu and English in tents at the Mehra Camp."⁷ School was never an option for most of these girls as they were expected to help their mothers with domestic chores or parents needed them to work due to economic constraints. Where village schools did exist, enrollment was often just for boys, as there was a lack of female teachers and parents would not allow girls to be educated by male teachers in classrooms where boys were present.

Reports indicate that it is not only camps administered by international aid agencies that established schools. According to the Federal Relief Commission, among the 55 tented-villages in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJZ) some 20 tent-schools have also functioned in the camps, employing nearly 90 teachers and enrolling over 1,100 students. Likewise, among the 23 tent villages in NWFP around 20 schools are now being run in the province, enrolling more than 3,000 students and employing almost 100 teachers.⁸ However, no reports state if these schools are catering to both girls and boys, or if they are only offering education to male pupils.

International aid agencies are not the only organizations that have taken extra care to assist women through the relief and reconstruction process. Several local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also attempting to gain a gender perspective. For example, the Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation, an NGO working with rural communities in the Mansehra division of NWFP, has conducted "people's assemblies." The idea was to expand the political space of the marginalized, especially women, so that they would be able to effectively engage with the state. Since the success of their first assembly

in late January 2006, the foundation has held others with similar results. One organizer explained, "We wanted to provide the women a platform to share views, hopes and fears about reconstruction of homes, of rebuilding health and education facilities, and of achieving livelihood security."⁹

Around 600 women traveled from nearby areas to attend the last assembly to express their views about the progress of rehabilitation. Most of the concerns voiced at the assembly were regarding the need for female doctors and gynecologists, and girls' schools in their villages. Many women also complained about the design of the homes being planned. Although there was general unanimity over following building codes for safe reconstruction, several women stated that the pre-fabricated models neither met with their traditions nor respected their privacy.

Many young girls attending the people's assemblies also spoke passionately about their right to education. In this very traditional area, religion and custom demand that women wear a *pardah* (veil) and defer all decisions to men. Thus their vocal demands present a notable step forward. Hopefully, these women's concerns will continue to be taken seriously both in the assemblies and in the larger political sphere.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Gender Support Program has also attempted to empower women after the devastation of the earthquake. The UNDP program is assisting the Pakistani government to consider women's concerns when planning projects and preparing budgets: "How the budget is allocated can produce very different outcomes in terms of gender equality. It is their access to social services."¹⁰ The UNDP program advocates that gender is a crosscutting theme, crucial to promoting gender equality and women's status in society. The program aims to help women find a stronger political voice by establishing 'political schools' where thousands of locally elected female representatives will have the opportunity to develop leadership skills, as well as knowledge about how to navigate their way through the government structure.¹¹

Thus, there are some organizations, both internationally and locally, that see "real opportunity [in post-disaster] to change traditional power relations which can bring a lasting change."¹² These organizations are doing the most they can, but further external pressure is needed for the government and other development partners to adopt a gender framework that could make a lasting impact to gender relations in Pakistan.

A Negative Window of Opportunity - The Role of Islamic Militant Groups

After the quake struck, it took several days for the relevant Pakistani government agencies to begin mobilizing their resources and strategies, a delay which left a void of authority and no organizational mechanism to seize control of the relief operation in an orderly manner.¹³ In the days following the earthquake, NGOs and radical Islamic groups filled the void created by the central government. Through the efforts of these organizations much relief reached some of the devastated areas.¹⁴ Militant groups were among the first to arrive with aid in some of the worst affected villages. Islamic militant groups tend to have vast networks and disciplined cadres able to organize and commandeer lifting equipment and tents to the most remote regions.

Currently, over a half dozen banned militant groups carry out relief work in the quake-affected areas of Azad Kashmir, "A cursory glance over the relief and rehabilitation activities being carried out by the guerillas-turned-philanthropists in Azad Kashmir shows that they are well organized and devoted. The volunteers and infrastructure of the banned organizations are working night and day to help the quake survivors."¹⁵ For instance, Dawa, the parent organization of the outlawed Lashkar-I-Taiba (LeT), erected a cluster of tents to provide shelter for displaced persons, along with a mobile hospital where doctors from Pakistan, Indonesia and other nations could perform surgery.¹⁶ Similarly, the Jamaat-ud-

Militant groups were among the first to arrive with aid in some of the worst affected villages

President Musharraf, although admitting he will not stop the militant groups from undertaking relief work, insists he will not allow them to exploit the situation to solicit new recruits

Dawa (JuD) camp by the Neelum River in Muzaffarabad set up tented shelter for an estimated 2,000 people, approximately a dozen clinics for the injured, and provided relief for up to 2,500 other victims in Muzaffarabad alone.¹⁷

Islamic militant groups are said to consider the disaster to be a golden opportunity to “reactivate themselves” and improve their image among the masses.¹⁸ For the most part, they can claim success. The popularity of Islamic militant groups has risen sharply since the earthquake struck.¹⁹

These groups have seized the opportunity to raise their profiles by painting their names on the side of refugee tents and flying flags from the roofs of trucks carrying blankets and other supplies.²⁰ The Islamists are, as the saying goes “doing well by doing good.” Earthquake victims are understandably grateful for their help.²¹ An old man, after he had been lifted down a mountain by the Hizbul-Mujahideen group, said “What the *mujahideen* (holy fighters) have done, no one else would do and I will always pray for them.”²²

Some analysts hope that groups like Jamat-ud-Dawa, having seen the benefits of relief work, are replacing militancy with social work. Others state this might be a sign that they are following the lead of Palestinian Hamas, claiming that they want to pursue eventually more mainstream political ambitions.²³ Research shows that Islamist groups have long used charity to boost their support amongst poor Muslims; “Islamist groups like the Jamaat-I-Islami (JI) have always used their extensive welfare networks to give support to people failed by their governments as a fundamental part of their strategy to achieve political power.”²⁴ Development analysts say this is likely to bolster their legitimacy and advance the separatist cause.²⁵

President Musharraf has admitted that Islamic groups, including ones banned by his

government, have exploited the administrative vacuum in the worst hit areas. And he has further admitted that he is reluctant to prevent them from entering quake-affected areas because of the dire need for assistance.²⁶ Musharraf is also hesitant to deter these Islamist groups from doing relief work because their access to survivors may even surpass that of international agencies. Additionally, some groups are providing far better medical care than their state-run counterparts and have been an indispensable part of the relief effort.²⁷

Beyond the political implications of these Islamist groups gaining popularity and power in the affected areas, these groups are using their new popularity to smuggle weapons and recruit the young and vulnerable according to some human rights campaigners.²⁸ Allegedly, children orphaned by the earthquake are ‘adopted’ by these militant Islamist groups and placed into training camps. Although the Pakistani government moved quickly following the quake to ban adoptions and intends to house these children in state-run institutions, aid agencies still claim these militant groups bring orphans and displaced children into their camps.²⁹

A further concern that arises from the government allowing militant groups to fill the administrative void in quake-affected areas is the increased penetration of these groups into other government sectors. Education, for example, is a particular concern. Almost all state-run schools in Pakistani-administered Kashmir and five affected (NWFP) districts were destroyed or badly damaged in the quake. Volunteers and non-sectarian NGOs are concerned that *madrasas* (religious schools) will replace these schools, as it is easier to set up a *madrasa* than it is to rebuild a school.³⁰

Islamic militant groups are said to consider the disaster to be a golden opportunity to “reactivate themselves” and improve their image among the masses

The Deobandi Wafaqul Madaris Al-Arabiya, Pakistan's largest union of *madrasas*, has established an earthquake relief fund to rebuild 1,500 mosques and 300 *madrasas* in Azad Kashmir and NWFP... In Battagram, the foundation has set up twenty tent schools, operating under the Jamaat-I-Islami's (JI) student and teacher wings. Other religious organizations, such as Al-Huda Foundation and Iqra Foundation, are also focusing on the education sector, hoping to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of government schools. Jihadi groups such as the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JD) also see in this an opportunity to gain new recruits."³¹

UNICEF is particularly concerned about unmonitored *madrasa* 'tent schools' in some camps but believes that it is the government's responsibility to address this issue.³² President Musharraf, although admitting he will not stop the militant groups from undertaking relief work, insists he will not allow them to exploit the situation to solicit new recruits. Some are hopeful that Musharraf will keep to his word, others are

International NGOs and aid agencies working with the Pakistani government must identify and develop mechanisms that will provide local communities with a role in decision-making

hopeful that as victims start returning to their villages the influence of radical groups will wane. Some analysts also fear that the involvement of militant Islamic groups in relief work will undermine certain development efforts. First, Western relief agencies, including those run by the UN and the U.S. government, are complaining of harassment. These Western relief agencies fear that if this tension should explode into actual violence against them, they might have to leave.³³ Likewise, such strong involvement from militant groups will most likely undermine gender development efforts in the country. Workers

from Jammata-ud-Dawa, for example, have urged some female humanitarian staff workers to wear the veil, not just the usually required headscarf. Pressured by Al-Rasheed Trust, an Islamic charity, one international NGO was even forced to remove female staff from an Islamic-run camp. Overall, complaints arise about increased gender segregation, enforced prayers, and compulsory Islamic education at JD relief camps in Mansehra.³⁴

Recommendations

Due to the vast devastation caused by the earthquake and administrative vacuum left by the government, the relief effort has been inconsistent and varied. The Islamic militant groups have proven most resourceful, mainly due to their strong economic base and knowledge of the terrain. The international relief agencies have been successful in pushing forward a gender framework, and incorporating women and girls in their education and vocational training courses. The government administered relief effort, however, lags behind both of these two groups. It lacks the commitment to involve local authorities and the foresight to incorporate a gender-framework to its reconstruction plans.

Due to the vast devastation caused by the earthquake and administrative vacuum left by the government, the relief effort has been inconsistent and varied

Political Consistency

Immediately following the earthquake, the Pakistani government permitted militant organizations to participate in the rescue effort because of their abilities in delivering aid to remote areas. Now several months later, the government needs to intercede in this private aid distribution and play a more active role in what is happening within the newly formed camps.

Similarly, the international community's close cooperation with the Pakistani military was understandable in the first few months after the quake, but as the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase progresses, a decentralized military role is

essential. In particular, international agencies and NGOs need to focus on establishing a closer working relationship with civilian institutions, while also building civilian capacity. International NGOs and aid agencies working with the Pakistani government must identify and develop mechanisms that will provide local communities with a role in decision-making. By involving elected officials the capacity for civilian disaster response will be improved. Civil society organizations should also play a role in informing government policy, monitoring public expenditures, and implementing reconstruction and rehabilitation projects. Donors should also encourage the government to create mechanisms that allow local NGOs with a proven track record to participate effectively.

To achieve a decentralized aid distribution infrastructure, the International Crisis Group (ICG) suggests that major donors should work through a single overarching body that is supplemented by country-specific accountability mechanisms at the national level. If a donor country is reluctant to join such an umbrella mechanism, ICG posits the possibility of participation as an observer.³⁵

Equal Aid Distribution

An overarching monitoring system could facilitate better transparency of the aid process. The widespread allegations of corruption, pilferage, and hoarding might subside by implementing an independent system to track the distribution of aid and compensation.³⁶

Additional transparency is also needed for the registration process of affected households. Presently, only male household heads are registered. Registration of women separately and independently of male family members will assist in ensuring that women who do not have husbands or fathers (or are in polygamous marriages) are still documented. Separate registration of women will also ease the problem women face in seeking asylum.³⁷ Hence, registration and documentation of parentless

children, single women, and others who are vulnerable to abuse is urgently required. Placing all registration data on a web-site, for example, might be a successful mechanism to make relief efforts more transparent.³⁸

Regarding equal distribution of aid, changes must occur as soon as possible. For example, research demonstrates that in cultures with strong *pardah*, like in Pakistan, most women will not go to aid centers or stand in line to receive assistance. As a consequence, many women are left out of the process.³⁹ Therefore, aid must be given to women, the injured, and the elderly who are unable to reach distribution centers or make their needs known, for example, through door-to-door relief services.⁴⁰

For equal distribution to occur, the policy regarding distribution of compensation on a per-roof basis needs review. Several families often share one roof, hence, per family distribution of the amount would be more equitable. Compensation payments should not be restricted only to men, nor should tenants or other affected people who do not own property be excluded from compensation. Pending payments need to be made immediately, so people can begin reconstructing their homes. Additionally, longer-term schemes need to be introduced, such as initial interest free loans.⁴¹

Female Relief Workers

Women relief workers are very important to female survivors. In a gender-segregated environment such as Pakistan it is not socially acceptable for men to work with women. Moreover, female survivors have an inability to freely discuss their needs with male outreach workers or invite unrelated men into their homes. Thus, extra efforts are needed to recruit additional female staff. Additionally, a means of providing personal security for female staff is necessary for a culture that often opposes both female and outside aid workers.⁴²

Accessing Local Women

As both a necessity in terms of effectively delivering relief and as an opportunity to empower women, it is essential to include local women in pre and post-disaster planning. Planners should identify key groups of women whose local knowledge, community languages, social networks, and insight into community history is an asset in assessing vulnerability.⁴³ Local groups of women should be consulted in both design and operation of emergency shelter and in housing design during the reconstruction phase. These efforts can both protect and advance the rights of women.⁴⁴

The Pattan NGO in Pakistan best exemplifies this gendered local capacity building after the 1992 floods. The NGO encouraged the formation of local village groups. They organized women and men into separate groups to institutionalize women's participation in decision-making. In housing reconstruction, women's views about design and layout were incorporated. Some of these women were involved physically in the construction of the homes, but the NGO's main goal was to increase women's decision-making role more than their workload.⁴⁵ The use of participatory methods for information gathering and program design can illuminate the different needs of men and women and increase women's capacities in the decision-making process.⁴⁶

Expand Education Options

To further bridge the gender gap in the wake of a natural disaster, relief agencies need to take greater advantage of the opportunities presented within relief camps. Due to cultural restrictions on mobility, many women have not had the opportunity to learn about or access the outside world. Vocational training courses, as already implemented in some of the USAID and Save the Children relief camps, should be further extended into the realms of education and health.

Apart from economic restraints, two of the main constraints to female education are access in

The widespread allegations of corruption, pilferage, and hoarding might subside by implementing an independent system to track the distribution of aid and compensation

terms of mobility and lack of female teachers within villages. Now that mobility is not as much of a constraint within camps, the government, in collaboration with relief agencies, needs to expand the number of camps that have schools.

As demonstrated in the Mehra Camp, if given the opportunity to attend school within the camp many girls and their families support the idea.

With government support and funding, education could become a long-term initiative that addresses the shortage of female teachers. The camps should not only look at schooling primary age children but also older girls and women, who, with a little additional training, could return to their villages and teach primary school themselves.

The Community Support Program (CSP) in rural Baluchistan is an example of a program that specifically addressed the shortage of female teachers. Carried out in three stages, the CSP experiment provided communities with a school in the village, ensured the presence of a female teacher, and encouraged the communities' involvement in running the school. Due to the short supply of educated females, the educational qualifications were relaxed relative to the standard requirement for a government teacher. The teachers were given in-service training to make up for an insufficient educational background.⁴⁷ A similar scheme can be replicated within current camps; however, it will involve substantial commitment from both the government and relief agencies.

Expand Health Coverage

Many of the same restrictions that limit female access to education pertain to health coverage, such as restricted mobility, lack of trained female health practitioners, and a lack of empowerment and awareness. Life within the camps is an opportunity for relief agencies to provide health facilities to formally inaccessible groups of women. Within a gender framework,

relief agencies should address the specific needs of women in disaster situations, including providing suitable bathrooms, undergarments, sanitary supplies, prenatal, and maternity care.⁴⁸ However, beyond treating some women for the first time in their lives, which could possibly build a demand for future access to healthcare, this is an opportunity to train and educate women in basic preventative health care.

With lower literacy rates and training, women are often overlooked as a potential resource in health-related issues. Training women to care for and educate others in health and sanitation practices increases the likelihood that more women will be accessed and cared for. Additionally, such training will increase women's caretaking capacities, while also boosting their self-confidence, skills, and organization abilities. In particular, older women are often overlooked, despite their experience and knowledge, and the role they traditionally play as midwives and health educators. Such realities indicate the need for relief agencies to reassess priorities, such as qualifications or English language skills, when selecting refugees for health training.⁴⁹

Information Dissemination

Without initiative to disseminate information more effectively, none of the gender empowering programs will work. Many survivors are unaware of free medical services, schools, or tent camps that are available just a few kilometers away.⁵⁰ Therefore, intensive information campaigns covering a wide range of issues are critical.

Information campaigns can take form in a variety of different ways. Relief agencies and/or the government should look into using village loudspeakers to communicate a few well-chosen messages, either informing people of services being offered or as a general health information campaign. Their use should be expanded, as local media campaigns can also build community acceptance or at least reduce social barriers towards women's needs.

The most successful project thus far consisted of mobile health teams that delivered their services to local communities. The project was

successful because preceding the visits by the mobile teams there were extensive information outreach campaigns. This ensured maximum effectiveness of the mobile teams. Communities were informed repeatedly about when and where the team would arrive (typically at a local market where people tended to congregate), how long the teams would stay, and which services the team would provide.⁵¹ In Pakistan, especially in the affected regions, such a model could be very powerful, particularly given the constraints on women's mobility.

Concurrently, women refugees should be made aware of their rights, as well as their available sources of protection. Relief agencies need to find a means to educate women about their legal rights, especially pertaining to compensation and land rights. As was indicated earlier, most women in rural Pakistan are unaware of their rights, and even those that are aware are scared to act on them. Again, by having large numbers of families within secluded camps it provides relief agencies with the opportunity to disseminate information regarding legal rights.

At the local level, agencies should work with entities that are already doing similar work. For example, Pakistan's Society for the Advancement of Community, Health, Education and Training (SACHET) has made critical contributions in this area. They have used media and community outreach efforts to mount campaigns that disseminate information about female rights regarding child marriage, dowry, and divorce. However, SACHET or similar organizations need to be further encouraged and supported to expand their work to laws that protect women. This can be done both within the relief camps and in surrounding affected areas.

Conclusion

The recommendations in this paper are, to some extent, idealistic, though some, in part or in

Without initiative to disseminate information more effectively, none of the gender empowering programs will work

full, have begun to be implemented. However, the real basis of this piece is to highlight that following a disaster there is a real possibility for political and social change. Presently, civil society organizations and international agencies have begun to endorse the idea of considering reconstruction as an opportunity for transformation. However, despite the evidence from experts on gender and disasters who believe that crises situations provide a real opportunity for changing inequality in relationships between men and women, joint civil society organizations in various countries have not included changing gender roles or relations on their work agendas.⁵² Aid agencies themselves have an unparalleled opportunity to challenge gender barriers by

generating jobs and income for disaster survivors.⁵³ It is a chance to “build back better” and apply principles of sustainable development and hazard reduction to communities and regions that are likely to remain at high risk of future disasters.⁵⁴

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

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Processing Democracy: Turkey and the Kurds

Geoffrey Gresh

The European Union's (EU) final decision to permit Turkey's accession talks in October 2005 ushered in a new period of hope, prosperity, and democracy for Turkey's diverse multiethnic population. Since 1999 when Turkey was finally approved as an applicant country to the EU after several decades of waiting, it has embarked on an ambitious program to harmonize its policies and institutions with those of the *Acquis Communautaire* and the Copenhagen Criteria necessary for full EU membership. In particular, Turkey has passed and adopted numerous new measures that will ultimately lead to a stronger democracy, greater freedom of expression, a more dynamic civil society, and increased governmental transparency. After six short years, positive effects of such reform in Turkey are beginning to appear and affect such important ethnic groups as the Kurds. Turkish society and its Kurdish minority, approximately 20 percent out of 70 million in Turkey,¹ must overcome troubled relations of the twentieth century before Turkey can be fully accepted into the EU.

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However, with a new wave of democratic reforms and outside assistance from the European Union in the past five years, the Turkish government and its Kurdish population have slowly initiated a process of reconciliation and greater acceptance. A final reconciliation between Turkish society and the Kurds must surmount many obstacles, but the new prospect of an EU membership adds incentive for improved future relations.

The Evolution of Turkey and its Kurdish Question

The Economist aptly begins this analysis by assessing the recent transformation of ethnicity and culture in Turkish society:

Turkey is more like a tree, with roots in many different cultures and ethnicities. In its early years it was pruned and trained to grow strictly in one direction: Turkish. Now, in its maturity, its branches tend to go their own way, seeking their own kind of light.²

With the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, the father of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, rose to power and fought for the establishment of a secular and modern republic. From 1919 to 1922, the Turks and Kurds united under the umbrella of Islam and fought for the

establishment of a new Turkish republic in the War of Liberation. Under the Ottoman system, the Turks and Kurds fell under the same *millet* and united to combat the rise in nationalist sentiment among the various non-Muslim minority groups of the former Ottoman Empire.³

Turkey has passed and adopted numerous new measures that will ultimately lead to a stronger democracy, greater freedom of expression, a more dynamic civil society, and increased governmental transparency

Moreover, during the Ottoman period the primary element of identity was Islam; ethnic identities among the Muslim population were not of great importance beyond the linguistic and cultural.⁴

The unity between the Turks and Kurds of the early 1920s degenerated with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 and formation of the Republic

of Turkey. The new national identity that emerged by the mid-1920s was based on the Turkish language: "For Atatürk, the nation to which Turks were to belong was a political and social entity composed of citizens tied together by a common language, culture, and collective consciousness and ideals."⁵ Additionally, the constitution of 1924 defined a "Turk" as anyone living within the borders of Turkey and connected to Turkey by a union of citizenship. The problem arose, however, when the members of the new national assembly defined 'real' citizens of Turkey as being Turkish speaking *Hanafi* Muslims. Such a definition excluded non-Turkish speaking Kurds belonging to the devout *Shafi* branch of Sunni Islam.⁶ In 1924 Atatürk further divided society and ostracized devout Muslim Kurds by abolishing the Islamic caliphate.

During Turkey's state formation of the 1920s, the Kurds, who were traditionally led by local tribal chieftains or *aghas*, had to submit themselves for the first time to centralized state regulations such as taxation, military conscription, and local public administrative policies. As a result of this new centralized nation-building process, the Turkish government experienced

strong resistance in the Kurdish provinces and between 1924 and 1938 the Turkish government put down seventeen different rebellions in Kurdish communities across Turkey.⁷

In the 1920s and 1930s the government and military denied the existence of its Kurdish population as they attempted to establish a new "Turkish" identity. In this environment of accelerated Kurdish assimilation into Turkish society, the Kurds also grew more aware of their own ethnic identity, ultimately leading to increased tensions between the two groups for the remainder of the century.⁸ Additionally, Kurdish national identity had been spurred on after an explicit reference by the Allies in the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920 for the formation of a Kurdish nation-state.

To further heighten the tension between Kurds and Turks in a post-Atatürk era, the military largely controlled the rights and freedoms of Kurds in the 1940s and 1950s in what became an increasingly normalized discrimination. Kurds, for example, were permitted to participate in politics under the condition that ethnic identity was not mentioned. And as a result clandestine political parties such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDPT) were established in the 1960s even though they wielded very little power under stringent operating restrictions placed upon them by the Turkish government.⁹ Thus, over time the Kurds grew increasingly disillusioned by the exclusionary tactics adopted by the state and military to keep them from participating in government.

By the 1970s Kurdish dissatisfaction over the government's policies against the Kurdish population significantly increased. To make matters worse, Turkey's economy was on the verge of collapse with spiraling inflation and political stalemate by the end of the 1970s. Thus,

During the Ottoman period the primary element of identity was Islam; ethnic identities among the Muslim population were not of great importance beyond the linguistic and cultural

across Turkey the 1970s ushered in an era of political polarization and increased armed clashes between left and right wing groups. The Kurds contributed to national political polarization by establishing twelve Marxist-Leninist Kurdish separatist groups, with the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) being the most dominant and radical.¹⁰ By 1979 Turkey was on the verge of political anarchy with sharp increases in the number of assassinations and street clashes claiming more than 1,000 civilian lives.¹¹ In 1980 the military was left with no choice but to intervene and restore law and order for a third time in the Republic's history. The military coup of 1980 restored stability to Turkey, while at the same time leaving a political void by outlawing all political parties and establishing martial law. The Kurdish cities and provinces of eastern Turkey were greatly affected by the military coup and subsequent violent crackdown of communist and nationalist activities. In this period, Diyarbakir, the Kurd's cultural and political center, became synonymous with death and torture.¹²

The constitution drafted by the military in 1982 further contributed to the anger and disillusionment of the Kurds by explicitly approving provisions that significantly strengthened cultural and political suppression in the Kurdish provinces of the southeast. In 1983 a similarly controversial law was passed by the military whereby, "It [was] forbidden to express, diffuse or publish opinions in any language other than the official language of states recognized by the Turkish state...The mother tongue of Turkish citizens [was] Turkish."¹³ This culture of violence and repression established at the beginning of the 1980s ultimately provoked violent clashes in 1984 between the military and PKK, headed by its founder Abdullah Öcalan. The PKK acted as the spokesman for the disenfranchised Kurds across the country who desired greater freedoms and a Kurdish national state.

With the increased forced assimilation of the Kurds and intermarriage between Turks and Kurds of the past decade, there is a significant decrease of Kurdish nationalism and separatist sentiment

From 1984 to 1999, Turkey and the PKK fought a bloody internal war that claimed the lives of more than 37,000 civilians, Turkish soldiers, and PKK fighters, ending only when Öcalan was captured by Turkish Special Forces after fleeing his headquarters of operation in Syria. At the pinnacle of the conflict in the mid-1990s, 250,000 Turkish troops were amassed in the southeast and from 1990 to 1997 3,211 villages were evacuated, displacing more than three million civilians to cities within the southeast and western territories.¹⁴ During this period, Turkish and Kurdish nationalism spread fervently across the country. Many Kurds grew tired of being marginalized and repressed by the Turkish government and military, and therefore sought more ways to

fight for secession. From the Turkish perspective, the PKK represented most Kurds and was viewed as terrorist insurgents who sought to undermine state legitimacy.

Fifteen years of internal war led to a new a period of Kurdish migration to the large cities in the west such as Izmir and Istanbul, currently Turkey's largest Kurdish city. The large influx of migrants during this period sparked an unforeseen process of urbanization for the Kurds, introducing them to the forces of modernity and secularism. Moreover, the Kurds were forced to assimilate into Turkey's more secular cities and adopt more modern business practices, ultimately leading to the formation of a new Kurdish middle class.¹⁵ This migration phenomenon is important to note because of the profound effect it has had on the political makeup of the country today. With the increased forced assimilation of the Kurds and intermarriage between Turks and Kurds of the past decade, there is a significant decrease of Kurdish nationalism and separatist sentiment. Overall, continued Kurdish assimilation across Turkey has assisted in the greater inclusion of Kurds into Turkey's democratic institutions.¹⁶

By 1991, there was a thaw in relations between the Kurds and Turkish President Turgut Özal after he publicly recognized his Kurdish descent. Furthermore, Özal played an important role in helping pass legislation to repeal the law that had forbidden the public use of the Kurdish language. Following the national elections in 1991, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel also argued that, "Turkey had to recognize the Kurdish reality and could not continue to pretend that Kurds were Turks who had originally come from Central Asia."¹⁷

During this period, the Kurdish question was also publicly debated to a greater extent than in previous decades by many politicians, intellectuals, and other civil society leaders. Unfortunately, the death of Özal in 1993 ended the dialogue with the Kurds that began under his leadership. The pro-Kurdish political parties, including the Democracy Party (DEP) and its predecessor, the People's Labor Party (HEP), further contributed to a national political stalemate by adopting a radical Kurdish nationalist platform. The platform sparked a strong counter reaction by hard-liners in parliament who ultimately ordered the closure of both political parties and the arrest of their members of parliament.¹⁸ The post-Özal period marked another return to more violence and fighting between the PKK and military that continued until Öcalan's capture in 1999.

Despite a return to violence by the end of the 1990s, the brief period of Özal's presidency is noteworthy in terms of a new dialogue that it provoked in Turkish society regarding its Kurdish population. For the first time in decades the Turkish government and society began to better acknowledge the presence of its distinct Kurdish population. Certainly, the relations remained embittered because of the continued conflict that raged in the southeast, but as Murat Somer notes, there was a greater awareness and opening up of mainstream social discourse about the existence of Turkey's Kurdish population.¹⁹ Indeed, a great ethnic cleavage continued to exist in society because of the war raging in the southeast. However, the fact that a mainstream Turkish daily newspaper like *Hürriyet* was publishing

more articles that referred directly to the Kurdish population and their distinct ethnic identity marked the beginning of a new period of social reconstruction and reconciliation that continues today.²⁰

Further nation-wide surveys have also demonstrated that Kurds no longer categorize themselves as purely Kurdish and, in many cases, affiliate themselves as being Kurdish-Turkish:

Based on nation-wide surveys conducted in 1996, 2002, and 2003-2004, 9.24 percent, 11.35 percent, and 10.63 percent of all respondents, in respective order, declared themselves to be Kurdish: They marked "Kurd" as one of their identities from among a long list of ethnic, national, and religious categories known to exist in Turkey. Among these ethnic Kurds, however, 2.71 percent, 5.76 percent, and 5.20 percent, declared themselves as exclusively Kurdish. The other ethnic Kurds identified with Kurdishness in combination with other identity categories as Sunni-Kurdish and Turkish-Kurdish.²¹

According to this data, the ethnic division between Turks and Kurds appears ambiguous. Moreover, many Kurds seem more assimilated into Turkish society based on the recorded responses and ethnic affiliations documented in this survey. In fact, according to a report published by the Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) at the climax of fighting in 1995, only 13 percent of those polled desired some form of autonomy and another 13 percent supported the establishment of a separate Kurdish state.²² During this period in the 1980s and early 1990s the government and military often grouped all Kurds into one category of separatists when, in reality, many Kurds opposed the war and the ideology of the PKK. Furthermore, the Centre for European Policy Studies noted in their research that many Kurds bear multiple identities, which makes for a more conducive environment for further governmental reforms."²³

Democratic Reforms and the European Union

Since 1999 Turkey has adopted a program of democratic reform that directly affects its Kurdish population. Certainly, in a five year period since the start of membership talks with the EU, the Turkish government has not been able to completely overcome the ethnic tensions that hinder society after close to two decades of internal war. Further, the effect of several decades of discriminatory policies adopted against the Kurds still remains to a significant extent today. However, the Turkish government

has made important strategic reforms that will ultimately help in better integrating its Kurdish population. Box 1.1 below summarizes some of the reforms undertaken recently by the Turkish government on the Kurdish issue.

The summary outlines many of the reforms implemented by the government in such areas as freedom of expression, the use of the Kurdish language, and other projects initiated for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the war. Despite having implemented some reforms, there are still many stipulations in the new laws that

Box 1.1

Reforms adopted by the Turkish government on the Kurdish issue

- The constitutional amendments of October 2001 removed the restriction on the use of any language prohibited by law in the expression and dissemination of thought from Article 26 of the constitution. Similarly, restrictive language on broadcasting was also removed from Article 28.
- Broadcasting in Kurdish was permitted with the third democratization package in August 2002. The seventh package adopted in July 2003 further amended the broadcasting law to provide for such broadcasting by public and private radio and television stations.
- The law that deals with the teaching of foreign languages was also amended with the third package in August 2002, opening the way for private courses in Kurdish. The seventh package adopted in July 2003 allowed the teaching of such languages in existing private courses without requiring that new courses be created altogether. It also prescribed that the Council of Ministers alone would regulate and decide which languages are to be taught (without having to obtain the approval of the National Security Council).
- The Civil Registry Law was amended in July 2003 to permit parents to name their children in Kurdish.
- In an attempt to foster social peace in the region, parliament adopted a law on 'social reinsertion' in August 2003. The law provides for a partial amnesty and reduction in sentences for persons involved in the activities of an illegal organisation, namely the PKK. The law excludes the leaders of the organisation as well as those who have committed crimes. By December 2003, 524 prisoners out of 2067 applications had been released and about 586 PKK militants have surrendered.
- Implementation of the "Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project" (where the aim is to support the return of those displaced during the conflict to their villages) has continued. According to official sources, 124,218 people were authorised to return to their villages from June 2000 to May 2004. More than 400 villages and hamlets have reportedly been reopened with government assistance.

Source: Senim Aydin and E. Fuat Keyman, "European Integration and the Transformation of Turkish Democracy," *EU-Turkey Working Papers from the Centre for European Policy Studies* (No. 2, August 2004), 35.

inhibit the full and open expression of the Kurdish language. For example, the new broadcasting laws that permit Kurdish on television and airwaves are very limited; for television four hours a week is permitted, not exceeding 45 minutes a day, and for radio, five hours per week is allowed, with a maximum of 60 minutes per day.²⁴ Additionally, NGOs and other local representatives have expressed concern over

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freedom of expression from Article 301 in the new Penal Code (formerly Article 159, “Insulting the State and State Institutions”) because it has been used by some judges and lawyers to prosecute and, in some cases, convict individuals, including Kurds, who have spoken out against the state and its policies.²⁵

The public trial of the famous Kurdish politician,

Leyla Zana, became representative of the Kurdish struggle for achieving full freedom of expression. In 1994 Zana was arrested and convicted with three other Kurdish politicians under the old penal code. She was originally arrested for speaking Kurdish during a parliamentary session, which is forbidden under Turkish law. In addition, she was convicted for her direct ties to the PKK. In 2004, however, Zana was released from prison because of the Turkish legislature’s adoption of the new penal code, as well as other judiciary reforms that permitted a retrial of her case.²⁶ Zana’s case is important because it is one of the first publicized cases that demonstrates how Turkey’s newly adopted judicial and legislative reforms are being enforced. Certainly, Turkey must continue to ensure greater freedom of expression for the Kurds. However, the European Commission’s progress report on Turkey in 2005 did note that the amount of prosecutions and convictions in cases regarding freedom of expression had declined.²⁷

Positive reforms have also been made in the area of freedom of association. The new Law of Associations was first adopted in November 2004:

The Law is important in reducing the possibility for state interference in the activities of associations and has already begun to bring a number of practical benefits for associations, thus facilitating the further development of civil society in Turkey.²⁸

Despite some legal stipulations, such civil society groups as the Ankara Kurdish Democracy, Culture, and Solidarity Association and the Kurdish Writer’s Association have been able to operate with greater freedoms than in previous years.²⁹ This small representation of Kurdish civil society groups is an improvement from the past, but the Turkish government must continue permitting the formation of civil society groups as an integral part in its process of democratization.

Regarding torture and ill-treatment allegations against the military and police forces, the 2005 EU report cited a decrease in the number of torture incidences.³⁰ In the last couple of years, the Turkish government has adopted a zero-tolerance policy for human rights offenders,³¹ a significant improvement for a nation cited with previously documented human rights violations. Nevertheless, the 2005 EU report connoted the need for more legislation that will bolster the protection of minorities, including the Kurds, because of continued reports of torture.³² Training programs for the military and judiciary have been established for the gendarmerie, police forces, public prosecutors, and judges, but more training and education programs are necessary to ensure greater protection of human rights.³³

More recently, the Turkish government established human rights boards in all 81 provinces and 849 sub-provinces, comprised of representatives from professional organizations, NGOs, the media, academic institutions, and local government officials. The aim of the boards is to address human rights complaints and direct such

Indeed, more reform and training programs are needed before Turkey can proclaim itself a true guarantor of human rights

complaints to a local prosecutor's office. Moreover, the government has initiated a national Human Rights High Council that is chaired by the deputy prime minister and composed of various ministry undersecretaries to further address allegations of human rights violations.³⁴ In addition to human rights councils, Turkey has also ratified six of thirteen protocols from the European Convention on Human Rights:

It abolished the death penalty and adopted measures to promote independence of the judiciary, end torture during police interrogations, and reform the prison system. In addition, Turkey has significantly reduced the scope of its antiterrorism statutes, which had been used to curtail political expression, and it amended the Codes of Criminal and Administrative Procedure. Police powers have been curbed and the administration of justice strengthened, due partly to the dismantling of state security courts.³⁵

Overall, Turkey has made significant improvement in adopting new legislative reform to help in curbing future human rights violations. Such reforms aid in the process of democratization with greater governmental transparency and will ultimately improve the individual rights of Kurds who have previously suffered from ill-treatment of the government after speaking out against its policies. Indeed, more reform and training programs are needed before Turkey can proclaim itself a true guarantor of human rights.

The Turkish government has also recently joined the European Union's Culture 2000 Program as a means to protect cultural rights of its citizens. The program endeavors to promote and preserve cultural rights through more education programs and cross-cultural exchanges, including transnational cooperation between cultural organizations across Europe.³⁶ In the long term, the program will have a direct impact on the Kurds as they seek to further preserve their cultural identity in Turkey. Acknowledgement

and acceptance of Kurdish culture also contributes to the government's improved relations with the Kurds and will help to bolster greater good will, as well as national and international legitimacy for Turkey's democracy.

In addition to the legislative reform and other ratified protocols that have directly affected Kurds, significant advances have been made in the political rhetoric employed by the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan regarding Turkey's Kurdish population. In a monumental speech given by Erdogan in the Kurdish southeastern city of Diyarbakir in August 2005, Erdogan became the first Turkish leader ever to confess that Turkey had mishandled its rebellious Kurds. "Turkey," Erdogan remarked, "needed to face up to its past. More democracy, not more repression, was the answer to the Kurds' long-running grievances."³⁷ Although Erdogan's speech was criticized by many for not including a detailed policy plan of action for the Kurdish provinces of the southeast, the landmark speech nevertheless is important because it signifies a strong warming of relations between the Turkish government and its Kurdish population.³⁸ The Turkish government is working to mend the ethnic tensions in order to further legitimize the process of democratization in Turkey.

As a party that embraces political Islam, the AKP has garnered major support in recent elections from many Kurds across Turkey. In fact, during the 2002 elections more Kurds, especially those in the western part of the country, increasingly supported AKP candidates over the traditional pro-Kurdish Democratic People's Party (DEHAP). According to several scholars, "Such a decline is reflective of the intense assimilation taking place among Kurds in western Turkey. As Kurds in

Although the AKP has made progress in beginning a process of reconciliation with the Kurds, there are many fundamental problems that need to be addressed before Turkey can be fully admitted to the EU

this part of the country feel the pull of middle class life, Kurdish nationalism loses some of its old appeal.”³⁹ The AKP has succeeded in further uniting its divided society under the influence of Islam in a secular and modern republic.

Although the AKP has made progress in beginning a process of reconciliation with the Kurds, there are many fundamental problems that need to be addressed before Turkey can be fully admitted to the EU. First, the PKK, now considered an international terrorist organization, is still active in the southeast and across the border in northern Iraq. Indeed, the PKK is not nearly as powerful compared to ten years ago because of a lack of legitimacy in the eyes of many Kurds and dried up funding from previous international supporters as the Soviet Union, Iran, and Syria.⁴⁰ The PKK, however, will continue to be a hindrance if Turkey desires to adopt further democratic measures and overcome its phobia that *all* Kurds within Turkey desire independence.

Second, unemployment in the southeast is at an all time high—some cities in the southeast have reported up to 60 percent unemployment when the national average is 10 percent.⁴¹ High unemployment has often been cited as a tool used by the PKK to attract young fighters. The EU is correct in its critique of the Erdogan government by stating that the AKP needs to adopt a concrete plan of action to further promote socio-economic development in the predominantly Kurdish provinces of the southeast. The EU and other international organizations, including the United States, are essential in helping to promote international investment and economic growth.

Lastly, the government must continue to assist IDPs who had been forced to flee the internal war of the past two decades. Assisting in the reconstruction and resettlement of IDPs in the southeast will create more good will for the government and help in the overall process of democratization.

All in all, the European Union will play a central role in ensuring that Turkey continues to implement more democratic reforms. And despite a lukewarm report by the European Commission in 2005 on Turkey’s progress in adopting reform during the past year, Erdogan’s

government has vowed to work earnestly in closer unison with the EU and uphold the enforcement of previously adopted reforms.⁴²

Conclusion

As Turkey now prepares for its final accession into the EU, the Turkish government has made a conscious effort in the last few years to pass new legislation that directly affects its Kurdish population. EU officials have expressed concern over Turkey’s efforts to integrate and provide for its Kurdish population. As demonstrated in this analysis, however, Turkey has made significant improvements during the past few years in providing more freedoms for its Kurdish population in the areas of human and cultural rights, and democracy.

Certainly, the Turkish government can do more and must do more to assist its Kurdish population. But democratization for any country is a slow process, and is achieved over a significant period of time. Moreover, democratization can be violent, a violent process that must overcome many obstacles in society and government.

Turkey and its Kurdish population have a long and complex past. If the country is not able to include its Kurdish minority in politics and government, there is very little hope for the formation of a stable and lasting democracy. The Republic’s identity under Atatürk was shaped by the idea of a “Turkish” citizenship that included a “Turkish” language. Moreover, in a post-Atatürk era, the existence of Kurds in Turkey was systemically denied by successive governments and the military. To complicate matters, the Turkish government fought an internal war against many Kurds and the PKK from 1984 to 1999. Thus, from the 1920s until approximately 2000, a majority of Turkish society was influenced by widespread anti-Kurdish rhetoric. Such

The EU is correct in its critique of the Erdogan government by stating that the AKP needs to adopt a concrete plan of action to further promote socio-economic development in the predominantly Kurdish provinces of the southeast

rhetoric has had a residual effect on society today and continues to pose major obstacles for the current government as it proceeds with democratic reforms to align itself with the EU. Nevertheless, with assistance from the EU, Turkey has overcome many obstacles in its attempt to improve relations with its Kurdish population through democracy. An ethnic divide still exists in society between many Turks and Kurds, but, with the adoption of many democratic reforms and the greater assimilation of Kurds into Turkish society, the divide is growing less apparent. Additionally, freedom of expression and freedom of association laws were passed by the Turkish parliament to bolster democratization in Turkey; indeed, such measures are essential for any democracy.

Overall, Turkey has taken action in the last five years to improve its democratic institutions

by including its Kurdish population into government and society. The future of democracy in Turkey and the inclusion of its Kurdish population into society lies at a critical juncture with the start of EU accession talks and must not be overlooked by future governments.

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

¹ Murat Somer, "Resurgence and Remaking of Identity: Civil Beliefs, Domestic and External Dynamics, and the Turkish Mainstream Discourse on Kurds," in *Comparative Political Studies* (Vol. 38, No. 6, August 2005), 592. *There is no clear data and statistics on the exact number of Kurds living in Turkey.*

² *The Economist*, "Survey Turkey," 8 June 1996 in *Turkey: Facing a New Millennium*, Amikan Nachmani (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 33.

³ Murat Somer, "Turkey's Kurdish Conflict: Changing Context, and Domestic and Regional Implications," *The Middle East Journal* (Vol. 58, No. 2, Spring 2004), 238.

⁴ Kemal Kirişçi, "The Kurdish Question and Turkish Foreign Policy," in *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, eds. Lenore G. Martin and Dimitris Keridis (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 280.

⁵ Taspinar, 62.

¹⁴ Kirişçi in *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, 281.

⁷ Taspinar, 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹ McDowall, 39-40.

¹⁰ Taspinar, 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹² *Ibid.*, 97.

¹³ Taspinar, 96-97.

¹⁴ Arthur Bonner, "Turkey, The European Union and Paradigm Shifts," *Middle East Policy* (Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 2005), 60.

¹⁵ Soner Cagaptay and Yasemin Congar, "Local Elections in Turkey: A Landslide Victory for the Incumbent AKP," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (Policy Watch #852, April 1, 2004), <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1730>>, Viewed 8 November 2005.

¹⁶ Soner Cagaptay and Emrullah Uslu, "Is the PKK Still a Threat to the United States and Turkey?," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (Policy Watch #940, January 10, 2005).

¹⁷ Kirişçi in *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, 287.

¹⁸ Kirişçi in *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, 287.

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Tajikistan Peace Negotiations

Conor McAuliffe

The 1997 peace accord that ended Tajikistan's civil war was the culmination of a hard-fought, three-year-long negotiation process – a process characterized by extended periods of deadlock, often interrupted by spasms of violence between the warring parties. Despite these difficulties, the final agreement between the government of Tajikistan and the Islamist-democratic opposition was a watershed event for the region: it represented the first and only time in history that Central Asia's neo-Communist politicians were forced to share power with an Islamic political opposition.¹

The agreement, however, was not an inevitable or organic outgrowth of the negotiation process. There was a great reluctance on the sides of both parties to settle the conflict definitively, even after the prospects of outright military victory had all but vanished. The United Nations-sponsored talks dragged on for two and a half years before internal and external forces combined to create the necessary conditions for agreement. What were these forces? How did these forces transform a negotiation deadlock into a final settlement in the course of less than six

months? What can this case tell us about the viability of agreements reached under pressure? These questions will be addressed through the lens of ripeness, a concept that Richard Haass has defined as “the existence of the prerequisites for diplomatic progress.”²

Background

Tajikistan is a landlocked, mountainous country located in western Central Asia bordering Afghanistan, China, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Its population of 7.2 million is primarily (85 percent) Sunni Muslim, although there is a sizable group of *Ismaili* Shi'a Muslims living in the remote eastern province of Gorno-Badakhshan. As the country's official language, Tajik, evolved from Persian, Tajikistan is unique in the predominantly Turkish-speaking Central Asia. As a result of its rugged terrain and lack of economic development, Tajikistan is a highly fragmented society. Political identity may be

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determined by a complex mixture of factors, the most prominent being region of origin.

While the conflict that erupted in 1992 was ostensibly a competition between neo-Communists with ties to the former Soviet regime and a coalition of new Islamist and nationalist parties, many scholars assert that the conflict was at its root a power struggle among regional identity groups.³ During the Soviet era, the Leninabad and Kulyab regions were heavily favored, and elites from these regions formed the core of the Communist party apparatus. With the erosion of Soviet central control in the perestroika era, other regional identity groups sought to challenge the existing power structure.⁴ The new political movements resulting from this period were dominated by representatives of the Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan regions, and, although these movements attempted to differentiate themselves ideologically from the Communists, they also served as vehicles for the advancement of regional economic and political interests.

The most powerful of the new movements was the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRP). The IRP capitalized on the resurgence of Islam as a social and ideological force and sought to establish Tajikistan as an Islamic state. The other main branch of new political movements can broadly be termed “democratic” and consisted of three secular-nationalist parties that were at least nominally in favor of political reform and economic liberalization.⁵ In Tajikistan’s first post-Communist presidential election, an “alliance of convenience” emerged between the Islamist and democratic factions to challenge the Leninabad and Kulyab-dominated Communist party, which remained the strongest political party in the

country. The Islamist-democratic coalition’s candidate was defeated by the Communist candidate, Rahmon Nabiev, in an election that many claimed was rigged.

After coming to power in 1991, however, Nabiev had little more than nominal control of the country, and by the spring of 1992 Tajikistan was beset with deepening divisions along complex ideological, ethnic, and regional lines. In May, anti-government demonstrations in Dushanbe by opposition supporters became violent. The intervention of Russian troops stationed in Tajikistan temporarily prevented the outbreak of full-scale civil war, and Nabiev agreed to create a coalition Government of National Reconciliation (GNR) that incorporated the opposition Islamist

and democratic parties. This new government, however, never gained the support of the traditional, Soviet-era political elites from the Kulyab and Leninabad regions and it was therefore unable to consolidate control of the country.

For the next six months, anarchy and brutal violence spread throughout Tajikistan in a

Hobbesian war of all against all. Fought largely between regional militias, it was most violent where national-level political competition intersected with local antagonisms.⁶ Nabiev was kidnapped and forced to resign in September. The Parliament cast a vote of no confidence in the GNR in a special session and elected Imomali Rakhmonov, a neo-Communist from the Kulyab region, as acting head of state. Rakhmonov, with the support of two militias opposed to the Islamist-democratic alliance, began to consolidate power and execute a violent campaign against the IRP and other opposition forces. The opposition,



now formally aligned as the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), was forced out of Dushanbe but maintained strongholds in the central Karategin region, in the mountainous region of Gorno-Badakhshan in the east, and a headquarters in Taloqan in northern Afghanistan. As the war continued into 1993 and 1994, the Rakhmonov regime and the UTO insurgency settled into a military stalemate. Although defeated in the battle for central authority, UTO military commanders nonetheless continued to wage a costly guerrilla war against the Rakhmonov regime well into 1996.

Inter-Tajik Peace Negotiations

Even as the military stalemate became apparent in 1993 and 1994, neither the Rakhmonov regime nor the UTO was committed to a negotiated settlement. The costs of war to the political leadership had not yet become critical, making compromise more attractive than the continuation of military operations. There were, however, external forces and internal considerations pushing the parties to at least begin negotiations.

The work of the UN, particularly that of the UN Special Envoys, was instrumental in bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table. The UN had been actively involved in Tajikistan since its September 1992 fact-finding mission. In April 1993, the UN increased its efforts to mediate a resolution by appointing Ismat Kittani of Iraq as Special Envoy to Tajikistan.⁷ Intensive preliminary discussions with both sides, lasting from May 1993 until the first official round of inter-Tajik talks in April 1994, worked through such issues as the venue for first round of talks and the role of third-party observers. Kittani's, as well as subsequent Special Envoys', engagement of other regional governments also played an important part in garnering regional support for UN peacemaking initiatives. Consultations with

Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan resulted in these countries becoming official observers to the inter-Tajik talks.⁸

Other strong external forces pushed the government toward negotiations. Russia, for example, was concerned with the instability on its vulnerable southern flank – its bulwark against the Muslim world. Since Rakhmonov was heavily dependent on the passive support of the 25,000 Russian troops still stationed in Tajikistan to remain in power, Russia was able to exert significant pressure on the government to enter negotiations with the opposition.⁹ Other Central

Asian governments, notably Uzbekistan, also made it clear to Rakhmonov that they preferred a negotiated settlement to ongoing instability in the region.

The interests of the warring parties themselves also contributed to their respective decisions to enter the negotiations. Although the war was not yet costly enough to compel either side to seek a permanent settlement, it had slipped into a mutually destructive stalemate where both sides were suffering a degradation of military capacities and political support caused by worsening humanitarian conditions in their respective

territories.¹⁰ The government sought to strengthen its uncertain hold on power without ceding too much to the opposition. One way it could accomplish this would be to agree to a ceasefire, consolidate its political gains, and hopefully generate enough economic growth or an aid package to further reinforce both military capacity and political stability.

Similarly, the opposition agreed to begin negotiations in the hopes of gaining concessions from the government without renouncing its ultimate goal of controlling the country. Another important factor behind the decision to negotiate was the ongoing civil strife in Afghanistan and

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the fear on the part of both sides that the instability in Afghanistan could spill over into Tajikistan and exacerbate the existing violence and instability. This was especially the case with the ethnic Pamiri wing of the opposition in Gorno-Badakhshan, where continuing flows of Afghan refugees threatened to overwhelm the already scarce resources of the region.¹¹

The inter-Tajik negotiations began in April 1994 and concluded in June 1997 with a final peace accord. The negotiations can be broken down into three distinct phases. The first phase lasted from the beginning of the talks to the August 1995 agreement signed on the fundamental principles for a comprehensive political solution. This phase of the negotiations was characterized by extended periods of political deadlock interspersed with occasional but significant advances. The ceasefire and prisoner exchange agreement of September 1994 and the general agreement on principles were the two most noteworthy accomplishments of the first phase of negotiations.

The second stage of negotiations, primarily encompassing the continuous fifth round of the negotiations, was notable for its lack of progress on substantive elements of the agreement.¹² Lasting over a year until December 1996, the second phase of negotiations was essentially a deadlock where increasing levels of national violence led to an overall deterioration of negotiations. Disagreements over the venue for the fifth round of talks occupied much of the Fall of 1995, and by the time negotiations resumed on November 30 in Ashkabad, intense fighting in the opposition-controlled center of the country (around Tavildara & Garm) overshadowed the talks. In July 1996 the government and the opposition did agree to a renewal of the ceasefire and an exchange for prisoners of war, but the ceasefire broke down shortly thereafter as a result of ongoing attacks and counter-attacks, especially in the Karategin Valley near the opposition stronghold of Garm.

In December 1996, after a year of diplomatic exertion with little to show for it, a significant breakthrough occurred, marking the beginning of the third and final phase of the inter-Tajik

negotiations. Rakhmonov flew to Khos Deh, in northern Afghanistan, to meet resistance leader Said Abdullo Nuri on December 10 and 11. The two leaders agreed to the text of a draft agreement outlining the next steps in the peace process, as well as to a renewal of the ceasefire for the duration of the inter-Tajik talks. The formal agreement was signed two weeks later in Moscow, along with another agreement delineating the main functions and powers of the Commission on National Reconciliation that would oversee the implementation of the final peace accord. Thereafter, negotiations moved rapidly; all remaining outstanding issues were resolved between January and May 1997. The issues resolved in this critical period included substantive agreements on the future status of refugees; the disarmament and reintegration of UTO forces into the national army; the legalization of the IRP; and a 30 percent quota for opposition figures in government posts. On June 27, 1997 in Moscow, Nuri and Rakhmonov signed the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, formally ending the UTO's military opposition and paving the way for the implementation phase of the accords.

As has been shown, the peace agreement did not appear overnight; it was the result of a tortuous negotiation process lasting over three years. The remarkable progress made in the first part of 1997 is even more striking when juxtaposed against the diplomatic stalemate of the prior period. The rapid conclusion of the negotiation process raises important questions about the dynamic of the negotiation as a whole. Two in particular merit attention. First, what factors account for the lack of progress in the second phase of negotiations? Second, what changed towards the end of 1996 to break the impasse?

Absence of Ripeness Prior to December 1996

Richard Haass has identified four conditions under which a conflict may be considered ripe for resolution. All four conditions in his model are necessary, and the absence of any one is sufficient to preclude agreement. The four conditions are:

(1) a mutually acceptable process or approach to negotiations; (2) the existence of sufficient concessions on both sides to convince constituents; (3) the capacity of leaders to agree to an accord; and (4) shared perceptions on the desirability of an accord.¹³ The lack of progress in the inter-Tajik negotiations between August 1995 and December 1996 can largely be explained by the fact that these four necessary preconditions were not all present. In other words, the conflict was not yet ripe for resolution.

1. Mutually acceptable approach to negotiations

The first requirement – that of a mutually acceptable approach to the negotiations – was in place as early as April 1994. From that point onward, no disagreement existed between the parties over the necessity of the UN in overseeing negotiations.¹⁴ The UN was seen as an impartial, objective mediator by both sides. The basic agenda for the peace negotiations was negotiated at the first session, establishing a shared vision for the basic outline of the peace plan and the broad issues under discussion.¹⁵ The consensus on these issues never disappeared, and continued to play an important role in perpetuating the parties' engagement in talks, even during periods when fighting was intense and no substantive advances were forthcoming at the negotiating table. The UN's mediation efforts had the full support of other important actors such as the UN Security Council, foreign governments, and other international organizations.¹⁶

2. Sufficient Concessions

Haass writes that reaching a settlement depends on "sufficient compromise on both sides to allow leaders to persuade their colleagues and citizens that the national interest was protected."¹⁷ Haass asserts that this condition is often not very difficult to achieve, but intrastate conflicts can be a more challenging environment for conflict resolution than traditional interstate wars. Civil war is often perceived, rightly or wrongly, as a zero-sum affair. The evidence on Tajikistan suggests, however, that the general outline of the eventual settlement was understood well before the parties converged on a mutually

acceptable solution in early 1997. In December 1995, at a negotiation session in Ashkabad, the UTO delegation presented a set of "elaborate proposals on political and military issues...The core of the opposition's proposals was the establishment of a council of national reconciliation for a transitional period of up to two years."¹⁸ While rejected by the government at the time, a Commission on National Reconciliation was eventually agreed to by both of the negotiating parties, but not until 1997—the Commission represents a major pillar of the ultimate agreement, and it resolved many of the outstanding political differences between the parties. The absence of a fair and reasonable formula was not a significant cause for the failure to reach a negotiated settlement during the second phase of negotiations.

3. Willingness to settle: Sufficient strength or weakness

By the end of 1995 there was a mutually accepted format for the negotiations and the basis of the final accord had already been proposed, but Haass's third prerequisite was not readily apparent. Leaders of the negotiating parties were neither "sufficiently strong to permit compromise (because of popularity or force) or sufficiently weak that compromise cannot be avoided."¹⁹ Neither Rakhmonov nor Nuri exercised effective control over all parts of their constituencies or territories. Rakhmonov, as the titular head of state, had nominal control over the Ministry of Interior forces (a poorly trained and poorly equipped group of fighters) and had the political allegiance of some militias.²⁰ More importantly, he still had the support of the Russian Border Guard troops and the other CIS army troops remaining in Tajikistan to stabilize the situation. However, as early as 1994, the Kulyab-Leninabad alliance had frayed and Rakhmonov's hold on power had become increasingly tenuous. Militia commanders that helped put him in power made political demands that had to be met to avoid the complete breakdown of Rakhmonov's influence over coercive state organs. Given the internal political crisis facing the government (even among Rakhmonov's own supporters),

...[T]he very nature of the war and the complex mosaic of identities and loyalties driving it meant that political and military allegiances were often fluid, with the result that any concession could precipitate the defection of a critical military commander or local population

Rakhmonov probably did not feel sufficiently secure in his position to make significant moves towards reconciliation with the opposition. Nor had the crisis within the regime reached the point where Rakhmonov was too weak to avoid settling with the UTO.

Regardless of whether Nuri perceived his authority within the UTO as strong enough to conclude an agreement, two specific

considerations undermined his negotiating flexibility and militated against accommodation. First, Nuri had no military constituency; he was highly dependent on a disparate network of regional military commanders whose diverse interests and ideologies needed to be considered before any compromise could be made with the regime. Second, the very nature of the war and the complex mosaic of identities and loyalties driving it meant that political and military allegiances were often fluid, with the result that any concession could precipitate the defection of a critical military commander or local population. Thus, even had an acceptable formula presented itself, Nuri would have been severely constrained in his ability to agree to it.

4. Shared Perceptions on Desirability of Accord

The fourth indicator of ripeness was unequivocally absent prior to December 1996: the Rakhmonov government did not accept the immediate need or desirability of a negotiated solution to the ongoing conflict. As one scholar notes:

One of the main conditions for de-escalation, according to experts in conflict resolution, was lacking in Tajikistan, at least in the first stages after the end of the war: 'A major influence in

bringing about de-escalation is the prospect that the alternatives now and in the future will be worse if the conflict continues unabated.' As far as the present government was concerned, the conflict was, to all intents and purposes, over, and consequently there was no need to make concessions to an enemy whose activities hampered the establishment of total control but did not pose a direct threat to the survival of the regime.²¹

The majority of the large-scale fighting had ended by February 1993, and the ongoing violence *by itself* was unlikely to dislodge Rakhmonov from his seat of power in Dushanbe. Rakhmonov's perceived security is crucial to understanding the negotiations deadlock during 1995 and 1996. The main forces that drove the government to enter into the inter-Tajik talks in the first place – Russian pressure for regional stability and the tactical gains to be had from buying time through negotiations – had been at least partially exhausted. Until late 1996, the government simply was not convinced that negotiating a settlement was in its best interest.

Appearance of Ripeness After December 1996

As late as December 5, 1996 the UN Secretary General wrote of frequent ceasefire violations that "contradict the stated intentions of the Tajik parties to resolve the conflict through political means, raising serious questions regarding their sincerity and intentions."²² Less than a week later, Nuri and Rakhmonov initialed a draft agreement for a permanent ceasefire, and by the end of January, many of the outstanding issues had been resolved.

Negotiations scholar Louis Kreisberg has suggested a three-tiered framework for analyzing the conditions that impel political leaders to move toward accommodation and accord: domestic pressures, the relationship between the adversaries, and the international context.²³ Kreisberg's framework can be used to explain the development of ripeness in the inter-Tajik negotiation process.

First Tier: Domestic Political Conditions

In 1996, the domestic political situation in Tajikistan underwent several changes that weakened Rakhmonov's hold on state power and helped break the negotiating deadlock. First, a deepening economic crisis, leading to food shortages and excessively high grain prices, generated significant popular unrest and undermined Rakhmonov's plan to use the negotiations to buy time to defeat the opposition militarily. Second, a sense of war-weariness began to pervade military commanders, fighters, and populace alike. According to one scholar of the conflict, field commanders "began to lose interest in the interminable and hopeless internecine strife" and became more concerned to "legalize and consolidate [their] gains." Finally, the regional political alliance that formed the core of Rakhmonov's support base began to deteriorate. Rakhmonov's strategic decision to hand out important government posts to members of his own Kulyabi regional identity group led to resentment from the Leninabadi elites, the other principal regional identity group in the alliance. The splintering of the government coalition ultimately undermined Rakhmonov's power base and severely constrained his negotiating leverage over the opposition. As he began to face challenges from within his own coalition, the threats to Tajikistan's territorial integrity grew more tangible, and the ongoing conflict with the UTO became less of a nuisance and more of an existential threat. Thus the breakthrough in negotiations can be partially ascribed to a weakening in Rakhmonov's bargaining position as a result of domestic political developments.

Second Tier: Relations between Adversaries

Kreisberg's second tier is mainly concerned with shifts in the balance of power between the two parties. While scholars disagree over what power relationship is most conducive to de-escalation, the consensus is that changes in this balance can often serve to break a deadlocked negotiation process. Such changes occurred in the relationship between the Rakhmonov government and the UTO near the end of 1996. The domestic

political context that undermined Rakhmonov's own position also weakened his negotiating position vis-à-vis the opposition. Furthermore, the opposition made a series of military advances in 1996 indicating "a gradually encroaching parity by the weaker party,"²⁴ and ultimately helping to convince Rakhmonov of the need to settle the civil war definitively.

Third Tier: The International Context

The third tier proved to be the most important in ripening the Tajik conflict for final resolution. Events and decisions taking place outside of Tajikistan exerted a disproportionately large influence on the course of the inter-Tajik negotiations. The most significant of these factors was the surging military campaign of the Taliban in Afghanistan, culminating in their capture of Kabul in September 1996. Another key driver toward de-escalation was the converging political interests of Russia and Iran, the two major regional powers, to promote peace in Tajikistan.²⁵ Additionally, Uzbekistan, for reasons related to its own political and security interests as the most populous and powerful of the Central Asian states, withdrew its support for the Rakhmonov regime. Uzbekistan's actions further weakened the regime and contributed to Rakhmonov's decision to settle the conflict with the UTO.

The Afghan Taliban's capture of Kabul catalyzed the Tajik peace process by rendering both sides' alternatives to a negotiated settlement significantly riskier and less appealing. Haass notes that "as a rule, crisis or near-crisis can contribute to diplomacy if there is a shared recognition that steps must be taken to avoid developments that will be costly to all concerned."²⁶ At the end of 1996, this was true for both parties. The Rakhmonov regime, already beset by mounting domestic problems, now faced

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in the Taliban a radical Islamic regime with potentially regional ambitions. The UTO, for its part, faced an equally pressing threat. Its military viability depended on the sanctuary and support it received from anti-Taliban ethnic Tajik guerrillas in northern Afghanistan who, reeling from the Taliban campaign, had retreated into their stronghold in the Panjshir Valley. Furthermore, some suspect that Afghan Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud, under pressure to secure his own supply routes into Tajikistan, attempted to cut a deal with the Tajik government, potentially cutting off the UTO in the process.²⁷ Thus, a crucial component of the UTO's military strategy was under serious pressure, including also the possibility of a Taliban incursion or full-scale invasion in Tajikistan.

The Taliban's rise was also intimately related to the second major international pressure leading to negotiation ripeness: the convergence of Russian and Iranian interest in a settlement of the Tajik conflict. Russia's primary interest in Tajikistan was quite simple: "To establish and maintain military security at almost any cost in the hope of seeing Central Asia become a stable buffer zone between their homeland and the Islamic world to the south."²⁸ Russian and Central Asian leaders were fearful that the Taliban, once in power, would attempt to spread their religious and political beliefs to other states in the region, destabilizing the existing secular, neo-Communist regimes.²⁹ Even worse, the leaders of these states were uncertain that the Taliban's "announced plans to liberate Central Asian Muslims" would be limited to religious proselytizing.³⁰ Russia's economic interest in preserving its monopoly on Central Asia's natural resources – especially Caspian Sea oil and natural gas deposits – led Russia to seek a settlement in Tajikistan in order to keep the region free of the U.S. and other Western influences.³¹

Iran also came to prioritize stability in Tajikistan. Iran was

not enthusiastic about having a violently anti-Shi'a, Sunni fundamentalist revolutionary state on its eastern border, and thus supported Afghan Shi'a factions and later the Northern Alliance. But by 1996 the forces fighting to the Taliban were close to defeat. In order for these forces to remain a viable military opposition to the Taliban, they needed a stable and secure rear base in Tajikistan, which affirmed Iran's conviction in the need for a final resolution to the Tajik civil war. Also, like Russia, Iran had an interest in keeping American and European political and economic intervention out of its perceived sphere of influence.³² Thus, Russian and Iranian interests were aligned, and both regional powers used their influence to pressure the sides to reach an agreement.

The shifting relationship between Uzbekistan and the Rakhmonov regime also encouraged an agreement. While Tashkent's support for Rakhmonov helped him triumph in the 1992 power struggle, developments in 1994 and 1995 soured relations between the two states. Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov, for example, was aggravated by Rakhmonov's inability to subdue the UTO insurgency, which was alleged to maintain close ties to the militant anti-government Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).³³ Tajikistan's instability and IMU's good relations with members of the Islamist opposition in Tajikistan meant that the IMU found sanctuary in Tajikistan even without the regime's explicit support.

The steady disenfranchisement of ethnic Uzbeks within the ruling party in Tajikistan also contributed to the rift between Karimov and Rakhmonov. Ethnic Uzbeks made up a large part of the Leninabad and Hissar regional elites who were "seemingly integrated in the regime, although they were gradually ousted by the Kulyabis."³⁴ Interestingly, Karimov contributed to the peace settlement not by engaging in it, but rather by withdrawing his support for Rakhmonov in the hope of forcing Tajikistan's

Although it has been regularly threatened by the difficulties inherent in forging a modern nation-state in a highly fragmented society, the agreement between the Rakhmonov regime and the Islamist opposition has held firm

government to listen to the demands of its ethnic Uzbeks. In the end, however, this strategy proved counterproductive. Rakhmonov's weakened political position compelled him to settle with the UTO through inter-Tajik negotiations, a process that excluded ethnic Uzbek interests.³⁵

These pressures – Rakhmonov's weakening domestic political position, the UTO gains on the battlefield, and the reaction of regional powers to Taliban and IMU advances – resulted in ripeness for a negotiated solution. While the mechanisms of the negotiations changed little from one phase of the process to the next, the third and final phase succeeded because the underlying conditions for de-escalation were now in place. Rakhmonov's political position had become so weak that his stalling tactics were no longer feasible, creating a sense of urgency to solve the problem. External pressures, particularly those resulting from the rise of the Taliban, helped convince both sides that a compromise agreement was better than the realistic alternatives.

Evaluating the Tajik Peace Agreement

Having established that the agreement in Tajikistan was reached as a result of significant internal and external pressures, the question arises as to whether this was a successful outcome, one that might even provide some guidance to the resolution of future conflicts of this variety. In order to evaluate the success of the agreement itself, it is helpful to posit some objective criteria on which to base this assessment.

1. Effectively End Combat and Addresses Underlying Causes

The first requirement of a successful agreement is quite clear: it must end the civil war. This implies a settlement of both military and political issues. On the military side, the settlement must put an end to the organized use of force by a critical mass of the warring parties. This is the principal achievement of the inter-Tajik peace process and the primary reason why it has been deemed a success. Admittedly, the situation in Tajikistan today is unstable and the agreement has been imperfectly implemented.³⁶ The 1997

agreement did not end all violence in the country; many warlords from both sides of the conflict never accepted the final terms of the agreement and still operate outside the authority of the government.³⁷ Yet the civil war between the UTO and the Rakhmonov regime did end, and the country is much more secure now than it was prior to the agreement.

While an end to fighting between the parties is crucial, a successful negotiated outcome must also address the political sources of a civil war—either by resolving them or by establishing a mutually acceptable process for doing so in the future. Tajikistan's agreement did exactly that, settling some of the less difficult issues outright (such as the future status of refugees and the integration of the armed forces), and setting up a process for the resolution of more intractable issues through a bipartisan Commission on National Recognition, chaired by opposition leader Nuri.

2. Includes All Factions

Second, a successful negotiated agreement must also include all of the principal actors. Not doing so risks creating "spoilers." In Tajikistan, the talks were specifically designed to include other states in the region as well as the principal parties. This helped reduce neighboring states' incentives to interfere in other, less benign ways and instead offered them a legitimate venue for influencing events to protect their national interests.

However, some critics of the agreement point to at least one important faction excluded from the settlement.³⁸ The dominance of the Kulyabi faction within the Rakhmonov regime, and the concomitant sidelining of the traditional political elites from Leninabad (with its large ethnic Uzbek population), did pose problems in the implementation of the accords. Still, the challenges emerging from the so-called "Kulyabization" of government³⁹ have not resulted in renewed military conflict. In recent years Rakhmonov has begun distancing himself from his Kulyabi base and promoting Leninabadis within government to temper discontent from northern elites.⁴⁰

3. Implementation & Sustainability

Though often behind schedule and infused with a degree of mistrust, the Tajik agreement's major provisions have all been implemented. The Commission on National Reconciliation was established and subsequently dissolved in accordance with the agreement's terms. An amnesty for combatants was declared and UTO fighters were successfully integrated into the new Tajikistan National Army. In 1999, the IRP was legalized and permitted to participate in elections, where they gained representation and accepted the results of the political process.⁴¹ The limited economic resources of the state have, in fact, made it very difficult for the government to establish effective control over the entire country, forcing it to cede *de facto* authority over parts of the country to warlords. This, however, is more a structural challenge to the feasibility of statehood in Tajikistan than a problem with the peace agreement itself.

Most importantly, the agreement must be sustainable - neither so fragile as to fall apart at the first crisis nor so inflexible as to preclude necessary recalibrations during the implementation phase. Although it has been regularly threatened by the difficulties inherent in forging a modern nation-state in a highly fragmented society, the agreement between the Rakhmonov regime and the Islamist opposition has held firm. The final verdict has not been delivered on the ultimate permanence of the peace agreement, but nearly nine years without large-scale fighting represents a significant achievement.

Thus the 1997 peace agreement represents at the very least a qualified success. However, subsequent years have posed significant challenges, and the success of the state-building effort as a whole is far from certain. Warlords control large swaths of the country where the rule of law has barely been implemented. Drug trafficking from Afghanistan accounts for thirty to fifty percent of the country's otherwise anemic economy.⁴² The extreme scarcity of resources has reinforced the necessity of kinship-based access networks, further eroding state control and breeding a culture of endemic corruption. There

are still unresolved questions about the relationship between Islam and the state. Rakhmonov's increasingly authoritarian tendencies and recent showdowns with warlords indicate a country in constant simmering crisis.⁴³ Yet despite all these problems, the country has remained intact and independent. Furthermore, many of Tajikistan's current woes are well outside the bounds of what a negotiated settlement to a civil war could reasonably hope to solve.

Conclusion

The extraordinary pressure exerted on the parties by the Taliban's rise is unique to the context of Tajikistan. Nonetheless, some important lessons can be gleaned from the experience of the inter-Tajik negotiations and the implementation of the 1997 peace accord:

- The case of Tajikistan provides further support for Haass' ripeness theory. Despite the valiant efforts of the UN Special Envoys and at times even of the government and UTO interlocutors, for most of the negotiation process the parties were unwilling or unable to make the necessary concessions to reach a permanent accord. Only when forces exogenous to the actual negotiations acted to alter the cost-benefit dynamic of accommodation did the parties reach an agreement.
- This does not mean that mediation efforts are futile, or that one should simply let small wars "burn themselves out." On the contrary, when the necessary forces finally converged to create the conditions for a settlement, the settlement was reached relatively rapidly. The confidence-building measures and shared premises that had been established over the course of the first two and a half years of

External pressures well short of unilateral military intervention or UN-led peace enforcement missions can be sufficiently compelling to hasten the arrival of ripeness

negotiations played an important part in the negotiated settlement.

- External pressures well short of unilateral military intervention or UN-led peace enforcement missions can be sufficiently compelling to hasten the arrival of ripeness. Pressure from external actors such as the UN, Russia, Iran, and Uzbekistan were very important in convincing the parties to enter negotiations, and later to reaching a final settlement.
- Despite the significant weaknesses of the eventual agreement, the outcome must be viewed as successful. Sub-optimal agreements, while not resolving every possible issue, have intrinsic value and are often the best available option.

- Finally, the case of Tajikistan does not provide any firm support for the hypothesis that agreements reached under pressure are inherently unsustainable. The 1997 Tajik peace accord was the result of myriad domestic and international pressures. Despite the extensive difficulties encountered during the implementation phase, the settlement has survived intact.

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

¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 91-92.

² Richard N. Haass, *Conflicts Unending: The United States and Regional Disputes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 6.

³ Olivier Roy, "Inter-regional dynamics of war," in *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, Accord, Issue 10, K. Abdullaev and C. Barnes, eds. (London: Conciliation Resources, 2001).

⁴ Iver b. Neumann and Sergei V. Solodnik, "Russian and CIS peace enforcement in Tajikistan," in *Russian and CIS Peacekeeping*, Centre of Russian Studies, Publication no. 1, L. Jonson and C. Archer, eds. Available at <http://www.nupi.no/russland/pub/Notat530.htm>. Accessed August 19, 2006.

⁵ Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), 33 & 40. These parties were: *Rastokhez* (Rebirth) National Front, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, and *La'l-i Badakhshan* (The Ruby of Badakhshan). Akiner suggests that the designation "democratic" for these parties is somewhat misleading, as the term was mostly used as a means of distinguishing the younger generation of political elites from the "old guard" communist nomenklatura they sought to replace.

⁶ Roy, "Inter-regional dynamics of war."

⁷ Ambassador Kittani was succeeded in January 1994 by Ramiro Piriz-Ballon of Uruguay. Ambassador Piriz-Ballon was later succeeded in June 1996 by Gerd Merrem, who oversaw the remainder of the Tajik peace process.

⁸ Vladimir Goryayev, "Architecture of international involvement in the Tajik peace process," in *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*.

⁹ This 25,000-man force consisted of approximately 17,000 border guards and 8,000 peacekeeping troops from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The border guards were stationed in Tajikistan from before the collapse of the Soviet Union and stayed on by agreement with the government of Tajikistan after independence. The peacekeeping force was established in 1993 by Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in accordance with Article VIII of the UN Charter (see UN Doc. S/26610, dated 30 September 1993).

¹⁰ Akiner, 40.

¹¹ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Tajikistan*, UN Doc. S/1994/379 (4 April 1994).

¹² The fifth round of negotiations was designated as “continuous” because unlike prior rounds, it had no specific start and end date, but was instead an ongoing process of engagement between the two sides in the negotiations.

¹³ Haass, 27-29.

¹⁴ UN Doc. S/1994/379 (4 April 1994).

¹⁵ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Tajikistan*, UN Doc. S/1995/720, Annex I (23 August 1995).

¹⁶ Goryayev, “Architecture of international involvement in the Tajik peace process.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Tajikistan*, UN Doc. S/1996/212 (22 March 1996).

¹⁹ Haass, 27.

²⁰ Akiner, 43.

²¹ Irina Zviagelskaya, “The Tajik Conflict: Problems of Regulation,” in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, Mohammed-Reza Djalili et al., eds. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 161. In the passage the author quotes Louis Kriesberg and Stuart J. Thorson, eds. *Timing the De-Escalation of International Conflicts* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 15.

²² *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Tajikistan*, UN Doc. S/1996/1010 (5 December 1996).

²³ Louis Kriesberg, “Timing and the Initiation of De-Escalation Moves,” in *Negotiation Theory and Practice*, J. William Breslin and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Program on Negotiation Books, 1999), 223-231.

²⁴ Kreisberg, 228.

²⁵ Rigacci Hay, “Methodology of the inter-Tajik negotiation process.”

²⁶ Haass, 141-142.

²⁷ Mohammed-Reza Djalili and Frederic Grare, “Regional Interests and Ambitions in Tajikistan: the Role of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran,” in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, 122.

²⁸ Olivier A. J. Brennenkmeijer, “International Concern for Tajikistan: UN and OSCE Efforts to Promote Peace-Building and Democratisation,” in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, 181.

²⁹ Rashid, 104.

³⁰ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 345.

³¹ Rubin, “Introduction: The Tajikistan Peace Agreement.” The discovery of the Tengiz oil field in western Kazakhstan in 1979, in addition to the oil deposits in Azerbaijan and natural gas fields in Turkmenistan, made the Caspian Sea a region of vital strategic importance for the Soviet Union, and later Russia.

³² Rashid, 219.

³³ Naumkin, 232.

³⁴ Naumkin, 230.

³⁵ It should be noted that Akiner is remarkably less confident than other scholars in speculating about Karimov’s motivations. He notes that after 1995, Karimov’s “attitude towards the Tajik leadership was characterized by frequent and abrupt reversals, alternately hostile and conciliatory. It is tempting to speculate on the reasons for this ambiguity but too little information is available on the process of Uzbek policy-making to determine for certain what motives lay behind these changes of orientation.” Akiner, 48.

³⁶ International Crisis Group, *Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace*, (Osh/Brussels: 24 December 2001).

³⁷ Akiner, 72-74.

³⁸ Rubin, "Introduction: The Tajikistan Peace Agreement."

³⁹ Akiner, 64.

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, *Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace*, 6.

⁴¹ Rashid, 242.

⁴² Rashid, 243.

⁴³ International Crisis Group, *Tajikistan's Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation?* (Dushanbe/Brussels: 19 May 2004).



The Arrival of Islamic Fundamentalism in Sudan

Lorenzo Vidino

Most studies analyzing the history of al-Qaeda have focused on the importance of Afghanistan which, under Taliban rule, became the quintessential sanctuary for a terrorist organization. Yet it can be argued that Sudan had an almost equally important role in al-Qaeda's formation. During the first half of the 1990s, when al-Qaeda was still taking shape, the organization's center of gravity was in Sudan and linked to the powerful Sudanese cleric and religious leader Hasan al-Turabi.

In fact, from April 1991 to May 1996, Osama bin Laden, along with hundreds of al-Qaeda members, lived in Khartoum laying the foundations for his formidable organization. At a time when Islamic fundamentalists and veterans of the Afghan *jihād* were *personae non gratae* in most of the Muslim world, Sudan was the only country that opened its doors to them, providing them with the perfect environment in which to continue their activities. Protected by the most ideologically-driven factions of the Sudanese regime that gained power in a bloodless 1989 coup, al-Qaeda ran training camps, established operational ties with other terrorist organizations, conducted business activities, and planned attacks

in other countries. Although their time in Africa was beneficial to al-Qaeda, for Sudan it bore heavy economic and political costs.

Hasan al-Turabi and Political Islam in Sudan

One of the Muslim Brotherhood's first recruits at the University College of Khartoum was the bright young law student Hasan al-Turabi, son of a *qadi* (religious jurist) from southern Sudan. Upon graduation in 1951, Turabi decided to continue his studies in Europe. There he obtained graduate degrees from the prestigious University of London and the Sorbonne in Paris.¹ By 1965, Turabi was back in Sudan where, thanks to his credentials, he was appointed dean of University of Khartoum's Law School.² An eloquent and charismatic man, Turabi masterfully took advantage of his new position to further the cause of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood and become the organization's secretary-general.³ The university soon became the movement's Sudanese headquarters, with Turabi as the spiritual guide of the new generation of the Sudanese elite. The cadres of university graduates who joined the Brotherhood as students were later deployed to be the vanguard of the movement outside the academic world.⁴ Some of them ran missionary and charitable organizations, aimed at gaining the sympathy of the urban masses. Others infiltrated the institutions of power, obtaining positions in government, media, and the military.

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Turabi was deeply involved in the tumultuous events that characterized Sudan's political life in the 1960s and 1970s, and after leading various Islamist political formations he spent seven years in jail for opposing Colonel Jaafar Numeiri's government. By 1977 Turabi was back in politics as Attorney General and chairman of a special committee tasked with returning "the laws to the compatibility with the *sharia*," established by Numeiri as part of his return to "the Islamic path."⁵ After years spent studying secular law, Turabi always made the implementation of a strict form of *sharia* in Sudan one of the priorities of his political activism. "The Islamic code of *sharia* provides the people with higher laws and values," wrote Turabi in 1992, and "...under *sharia*, no ruler could suppress his own people."⁶ By 1983 many of Turabi's recommendations had been accepted by Numeiri in the September Laws, a first attempt to establish full *sharia* law in Sudan. Still, many provisions were never applied and others were almost immediately abrogated.⁷

Numeiri, fearful of Turabi's growing power, dismissed him from the government in 1983, and Turabi again found himself working from outside political system.⁸ In 1985 Turabi founded the National Islamic Front (NIF), a political party that obtained meager electoral results but managed to wield a certain influence through its elite members. By 1986 Turabi was back in the government and by 1988 he was again Attorney General where he used his influence to re-introduce *sharia* law and derail the peace process in the North-South civil war.⁹

By cooperating with President Mahdi and the parties in power Turabi was ostensibly working through democratic processes. At the same time Turabi began to work on a parallel project to obtain absolute power through a meticulous, long-term NIF plan to infiltrate the state's instruments of power. They focused on the military, something previously done only on a smaller scale. After being dismissed from the Numeiri government, Turabi learned the importance of having the military on his side. He thus designated establishing links with the Army as the NIF's utmost priority. The party set aside

funds to sponsor the education and careers of selected members of the military establishment, devoting particular attention to young and ambitious officers of modest backgrounds. The Brothers even institutionalized their paramilitary branch, the "Special Organization," and opened it to serving military officers.¹⁰

The idea of establishing a NIF fifth-column in the army soon paid dividends. By spring 1989, the NIF strongly opposed President Mahdi's attempt to completely abrogate the September Laws. NIF's leadership understood that the time was ripe for unprecedented actions. Ali Osman Mohammed Taha, NIF's second in command, spent weeks with a young army officer who had received financial support from the NIF throughout his career, Brigadier Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir.¹¹ The NIF decided that Bashir, an ambitious man with no strong ideological convictions, would lead a group of officers in a coup against Mahdi. By June, as tensions over the September Laws were dividing a country already plagued by civil war and famine, the plot had been finalized in all its details. On the night of June 30, the army went into action and within a few hours the government was overthrown, and Mahdi and other top politicians incarcerated.

The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), as the new regime called itself, had very limited political experience and no vision, ideological inclination, or plan for the future. Most of them had been groomed by the NIF for a long time and were effectively puppets of the NIF leadership. As soon as it obtained power, the RCC made radical changes: the old elite was pushed aside, political parties were banned, and intellectuals opposed to the government were imprisoned. NIF and Turabi loyalists occupied most key positions and began Islamizing the country with unprecedented intensity.¹² While officially all these moves were made by the RCC and President Bashir, the role of the NIF was apparent to all. Despite official claims, various reports indicated that decisions were made by an NIF-dominated *majlis* rather than the RCC.¹³ As Gabriel Warburg noted, "the NIF's ideology and political program were implemented by President Bashir and his fellow-offices, while al-Turabi and

his colleagues soon became the power behind the throne.”¹⁴

The 1989 bloodless coup was a personal triumph for Turabi. By indirectly seizing power he could finally impose his political vision on the country. His first targets were those Muslims who embraced a different vision of Islam, such as secularists and the *turuq* (Islamic mystics). Turabi, like all revivalists, was a dogged opponent of the separation of mosque and state and considered that various sects, such as the Sufi *tariqa*, deviants from the righteous path. His convictions, which clash with centuries of Sudanese traditions, are enshrined in the NIF’s official Charter: “Muslims are a majority in the Sudan, and they are unitarian in their religious approach to life, and they do not espouse secularism or accept it politically.”¹⁵ His next steps included the re-introduction of a strict interpretation of *sharia* law, and the intensification of the conflict with the rebels in the South, which was increasingly defined in a religious term as a *jihad*.¹⁶

And while at home occupied with crafting Africa’s first Islamic state from behind the scenes, Turabi also focused on relations with the outside. Now that he had obtained power in Sudan, Turabi’s plan was to use his country as a base for Islamic revivalism worldwide. An analysis of Turabi’s thinking explains why this move was predictable. While most Sudanese perceived themselves primarily as members of a certain *tariqa*, Turabi transcends this limited affiliation and regards all Muslims only as members of the Islamic *Umma*. Moreover, the concept of nation is foreign to Turabi’s mentality, which views African nations as “only the legacy of colonialist cartographers,”¹⁷ man-made entities that break the unity of the Muslim nation. Throughout his life Turabi had kept close relations with the Muslim Brotherhood’s global network and, by his own admission, he knew “every Islamic movement in the world, secret or public.”¹⁸ It is not surprising

that Turabi would open Sudan’s doors to his affiliates throughout the world. “Fellow Muslims living in alien countries have to be supported,” declared Turabi, “...Islamic movements, already emancipated from nationalist ideology, are interacting more intensively across the world.”¹⁹ Turabi saw his country as the ideal place where this interaction among various Islamist groups could take place.

In 1991 Turabi realized his dream of uniting Islamist movements from the entire Muslim world by creating the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress (PAIC), a pan-Islamic organization that met annually in Khartoum. The creation of the PAIC was “the culmination of a quarter-century of study, political activity, and international travel by Turabi,” was described by Turabi himself in grandiose terms as “the most significant event since the collapse of the Caliphate.”²⁰ The list of participants to the PAIC’s first assembly, which was held in Khartoum in April of 1991, reads like a who’s who of modern terrorism. It encompasses radical groups such as the Philippines’ Abu Sayaf, the Algerian FIS, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and the Palestinian Hamas.²¹ The participants voted a resolution pledging to work together to “challenge and defy the tyrannical West.”²²

Turabi’s vision of pan-Islamic unity also included a successful attempt to bridge the gap dividing Sunni and Shi’a. In 1991 Turabi invited the President of Iran, Hojatoleslam Rafsanjani, to Sudan. Rafsanjani’s visit, the first of an Iranian head of state to Sudan since the 1979 Islamic revolution, was part of Tehran’s attempt to mend relations with the rest of the Muslim world and end a decade of isolation. Turabi, who had always expressed his admiration for Khomeini, saw the visit as an opportunity to create a larger Islamic front and to obtain support for his own Islamic project. The Iranians were happy to comply. After stating Tehran’s support for the jihad Khartoum

The Sudanese offer could not have come at a better time. Bin Laden was desperate to find a new sanctuary for his growing but baseless organization, and Sudan, with its newly established Islamist government, was his best and perhaps only choice

was fighting in the south and declaring Sudan “the vanguard of the Islamic revolution in the African continent,”²³ Rafsanjani signed various protocols, including one with which he pledged

The close relationship between Bin Laden and Turabi, the *de facto* ruler of Sudan, allowed al-Qaeda to flourish

\$300 million in weapons to be delivered to Sudan within a year.²⁴ Over the next months, strategic cooperation among the two countries intensified. Eventually, Tehran sent hundreds of *Pasdaran*

(Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) to Sudan to train both the Sudanese army and Arab militants training in local training camps.²⁵

By 1992 U.S. authorities talked of a “Tehran-Khartoum axis.” Analysts at the State Department warned that the NIF, “under the leadership of Hassan al-Turabi, has intensified its domination of the government of Sudanese President General Bashir and has been the main advocate of closer relations with radical groups and their sponsors.”²⁶ Sudan, traditionally playing only a marginal role in the history of Islam, found itself suddenly propelled at the forefront of the Islamic revivalist movement.

Bin Laden Moves to Sudan

Reports on the early days of Osama Bin Laden are somewhat sketchy and often conflicting. However, it is certain that by the second half of the 1980s Bin Laden had become one of the foreign *mujahedeen* leaders fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan. As the conflict came to an end, Bin Laden and his spiritual mentor, Abdullah Azzam, agreed that the organization which so successfully brought together thousands of committed *jihadis* should continue its operations beyond Afghanistan. The men decided their group would be a sort of foundation, a base (“*al-Qaeda*”) for a larger movement involved in a larger *jihad*. According to the 9/11 Commission, by 1988 Bin Laden was the undisputed *emir* of al-Qaeda, which ran training camps between Pakistan and Afghanistan and organized itself into a more functional structure.²⁷ Nevertheless, the civil war that broke out in Afghanistan as the

Soviets left forced Bin Laden to leave the country and return to his native Saudi Arabia.

Bin Laden became increasingly disaffected with the royal Al Saud family, seeing it as corrupt, un-Islamic, and pro-American. When Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Bin Laden approached the royal family and suggested that the *mujahedeen* could be deployed to defeat Saddam’s forces. When the monarchy chose instead to permit American troops on its soil, Bin Laden joined part of the Saudi clergy denouncing this agreement as un-Islamic because it placed non-Muslim forces on sacred land. Riyadh, determined to silence opposition, took away Bin Laden’s passport. He then emigrated with the help of a dissident member of the royal family, landing in Peshawar.²⁸ Pakistani authorities, however, were cracking down on Islamic fundamentalists; and Bin Laden himself was allegedly targeted for assassination by the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Afghanistan was now ravaged by the civil war and could not have been used as a base of operations by al-Qaeda.

As Bin Laden began to look for a new base of operations, a delegation from the Sudanese NIF visited him in Peshawar and suggested he relocate to their country. The Sudanese offer could not have come at a better time. Bin Laden was desperate to find a new sanctuary for his growing but baseless organization, and Sudan, with its newly established Islamist government, was his best and perhaps only choice. Bin Laden had known Turabi for a long time. The two men respected each other and shared the same militant interpretation of Islam. The Saudi knew that Sudan was in desperate need of money, and Bin Laden was glad to provide in the name of founding a truly Islamic state. The 9/11 Commission Report says, “Bin Laden agreed to help Turabi in an ongoing war against African Christian separatists in southern Sudan and also to do some road building. Turabi, in return, would let Bin Laden use Sudan in preparations for *jihad*.”²⁹

In May 1991 Bin Laden flew on a private jet from Peshawar to Khartoum where, according to the State Department, “he was welcomed by NIF

leader Hasan al-Turabi.³⁰ After a short stay in a hotel, Bin Laden established his headquarters in a rented villa in the fashionable Riyadh section of Khartoum, which was heavily populated with Saudis.³¹ In the following months Bin Laden rented other villas and some office space for his family (three wives and four sons) and his closest collaborators. A few days after Bin Laden's arrival in the Sudanese capital, Turabi held a lavish party in his honor. In his speech Turabi reportedly praised Bin Laden's endeavors in Afghanistan and announced that the Saudi would be a member and adviser of the NIF. At the very same gathering Bin Laden allegedly announced a \$5 million donation he had made as an initial fee for the membership.³² The personal relationship between the two charismatic leaders grew progressively closer. Bin Laden married Turabi's niece as his third wife³³ and began to befriend Turabi's son Isam, with whom he shared a passion for pure-bred Arabian horses.³⁴

The close relationship between Bin Laden and Turabi, the *de facto* ruler of Sudan, allowed al-Qaeda to flourish. Turabi appointed a senior member of Sudanese intelligence, Colonel Abd al-Basit Hamza, as a liaison to al-Qaeda, and cooperation between the two parties became very close. The Sudanese government immediately provided a few hundred genuine Sudanese passports for al-Qaeda members, and some of them were given actual Sudanese citizenship. While the rest of the world was hunting for them, large groups of Afghan Arabs soon settled in the friendly African country and, reportedly, by the end of 1991 there were between 1,000 and 2,000 members of al-Qaeda in Sudan.³⁵

Economic Symbiosis

While the ideological link between Turabi and Bin Laden constituted a clear motivation for Turabi's hospitality, more ordinary reasons also contributed to the decision. Turabi, a visionary with a very pragmatic mind, had long realized the importance of financial backing for his desired Islamic revival, which required a dynamic effort that encompassed education, propaganda, and overt and covert military activities. The underdeveloped Sudanese economy could not

sustain such efforts, and so Turabi looked abroad for like-minded sponsors. Bin Laden--extremely wealthy, well-connected to the Gulf elites, a fervent believer in the most conservative version of Islam-- must have been Turabi's ideal choice to bankroll his Islamic project. Turabi's reasoning was correct: From a purely financial point of view, Bin Laden's sojourn benefited the Sudanese economy, at least initially. Knowledgeable Sudanese businessmen estimate that Bin Laden brought \$350 million.³⁶ The figure is probably exaggerated, but the Saudi financier invested heavily in the Sudan.

Bin Laden had reportedly visited Sudan and met Turabi in the mid-1980s. He claimed to have surveyed business and agricultural investment opportunities in Sudan as early as 1983.³⁷ By 1990, Bin Laden had invested in "several business ventures" in Sudan.³⁸ While still in Afghanistan, Bin Laden dispatched one of his most trusted lieutenants, Mamdouh Salim, to Sudan to explore investment opportunities there.³⁹ Upon his return to Afghanistan, Salim urged that Bin Laden establish activities in Sudan and relocate his organization there. In 1989 al-Qaeda incorporated Wadi al-Aqiq Company, Ltd., a Khartoum-based import-export firm, and dispatched Jamal Ahmad Muhammad al Fadl, a Sudanese member of the organization, to Sudan to "purchase property and rent office space."⁴⁰ More substantial transactions began as soon as the Saudi settled in Khartoum.⁴¹

Reportedly, the day after the party where Bin Laden donated \$5 million to the NIF, Turabi ordered all government officials to grant complete customs exemption to the Saudi tycoon and his associates.⁴² Later, the Sudanese government ordered that all imports by Bin Laden be exempt from inspection or taxation.⁴³ Close business cooperation with the NIF and the Sudanese government immediately followed. According to the State Department, Bin Laden formed "symbiotic business relationships with wealthy NIF members by undertaking civil infrastructure development projects on the regime's behalf."⁴⁴ The first large project Bin Laden worked on in Sudan was the construction of the 700-kilometer Tahaddi road, linking Khartoum with the

northern cities of Um Durman, Shindi, Atbarah, and Dangala. The road was built by 600 men working for a company set up by Bin Laden in Sudan, the Al-Hijrah for Construction and Development, Ltd.⁴⁵ By using the Quranic term *Hijrah*, referring to the temporary exile of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina, Bin Laden highlighted how he saw his situation as leader of “true Muslims” forced into exile by infidels (the Saudi monarchy). Al-Hijrah also participated in a consortium that built Port Sudan’s new airport, the country’s second-largest. The airport was financed by the Saudi Development Bank in cooperation with one of Osama Bin Laden’s brother, Umar Mohammad, and Abu Bakr al Humayd, a top executive for the Saudi Binladen Group, the multi-billion dollar holding of the Bin Laden family.⁴⁶ According to *Al Quds al Arabi*, Bin Laden was the guest of honor at the airport’s inauguration ceremony and donated \$2.5 million to operate it.⁴⁷

Over the next few months of his sojourn Bin Laden opened more companies that operated in various commercial fields. For the Sudanese Government, custom exemptions were a small price to pay in exchange for all the benefits derived from partnering with Bin Laden. The Saudi began to invest in various fields and regions of the country, providing a much-needed boost to the depleted Sudanese economy. Bin Laden’s economic support became even more important after 1993, when the country was put on the list of state supporters of terrorism by the United States. According to reports, Bin Laden loaned the regime \$80 million to import wheat, just as a shortage was forcing millions of Sudanese to stand in line for a meager ration of bread.⁴⁸ The Saudi billionaire often paid the bill for Sudan’s oil imports and personally guaranteed the payment of some weapons purchases made by the Sudanese government. When sanctions against Sudan caused problems exporting cotton, Bin Laden reportedly stepped in and purchased large quantities of it in hard foreign currency.⁴⁹ And when the government did not have the money to pay him for the construction of infrastructure he was given rights in perpetuity to

a million acres farmland by the delta of the river Gash.⁵⁰

To conduct such high-level transactions, Bin Laden could count on a relatively efficient banking system which, more importantly, responded to the religious standards he demanded. Since the early 1970s Turabi had understood the need to develop and modernize the country’s traditional Islamic banking system and reached out to his powerful connections in Saudi Arabia for help. At the same time, leading businessmen from the conservative kingdom established the first large financial institutions that attempted to combine the needs of modern banking with the respect of traditional Islamic law (chiefly the prohibition of *riba*, interests on money lent). By the beginning of the 1980s Turabi had managed to attract various wealthy investors from Saudi Arabia, who incorporated several banks that operated under *sharia* principles. In many cases these banks were run by Sudanese *mughtarbin* who had embraced a more conservative strain of Islam while living in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

The Perfect Base for Jihad

Complacent banks, customs exemptions, tax privileges, and, more generally, full support by the Sudanese government, allowed Bin Laden’s commercial activities to flourish. But money has never been Bin Laden’s highest aspiration. He used his newfound advantageous position to solidify his nascent organization, al-Qaeda. As Don Petterson, U.S. Ambassador to Sudan during the Bin Laden era, explains in his memoir, *Inside Sudan*, “the support [Bin Laden] received from Bashir, Turabi, and the Sudanese intelligence services and military was crucial to both his business and his terrorist activities.”⁵¹ Al-Qaeda’s commercial activities were to be used simply as a tool for the more important goal of building a stronger al-Qaeda, not to make profit. If profit were made, it was reinvested in the organization.

Bin Laden worked to relocate as many “Afghan-Arab” veterans as possible from Afghanistan to Sudan, setting aside \$2 million for the task in an effort that continued at least three years.⁵² When the Pakistani government launched

a crackdown against Afghan Arabs operating on its territory in May 1983, Bin Laden financed the travel of 300 to 480 *mujahedeen* to Sudan.⁵³ The men, experienced *jihadis* who would have faced either prison or death in their home countries, found a safe haven in Sudan and many of them began to work for the companies set up by Bin Laden.⁵⁴ Their new positions as officers for Bin Laden's companies allowed many al-Qaeda operatives to travel the world and do business for the organization posing as legitimate businessmen. In this fashion, members of al-Qaeda acquired weapons, explosives, and technical equipment for terrorist operations from Belarus to China and from Malaysia to Austria.⁵⁵ Al-Qaeda even managed to have one of its operatives buy an airplane in Tucson, Arizona, and fly it all the way to Sudan. The aircraft was intended to transport American Stinger Anti-Aircraft missiles from Pakistan to Sudan, although that missile transport never took place.⁵⁶

While some Afghan Arabs worked in Bin Laden's companies, others began to organize training camps for recruits coming from throughout the Muslim world. By 1994 Bin Laden had set up at least three terrorist training camps in northern Sudan "in cooperation with the NIF."⁵⁷ Other reports suggest that al-Qaeda ran up to 23 camps in the country and that the volunteers were divided by nationality into different facilities.⁵⁸ Run by veterans of the Afghan conflict, the camps trained the new generation of *jihadis* in forgery, covert communications, weapons, and explosives. While the exact number of recruits trained in Sudan is unclear, it is known that more than 2,000 trainees came from Egypt alone despite legislation passed by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak that made it illegal for Egyptian citizens to receive unauthorized training abroad.⁵⁹

Despite claims to the contrary, the Sudanese government's involvement in Bin Laden's terrorist activities was profound. Sudan played a key role in relocating of hundreds of Afghan Arabs and militants from various Middle Eastern countries, as it was one of the few countries that allowed Arabs to enter without a visa.⁶⁰ At a time when Afghanistan was engulfed in civil war and most Arab countries were jailing returnees from

the Afghan jihad, Sudan's hospitality became crucially important. "This is a safe haven of choice," commented a U.S. official in 1992 to the *New York Times*. "They can come and go as they please. They operate here with impunity."⁶¹ Sudanese officials also made sure that al-Qaeda members traveling to Sudan could enter and leave the country without having their passports stamped. A stamp from Sudan, known for supporting terrorists, would garner attention from immigration officials elsewhere.⁶²

Cooperation also extended to chemical weapons, an endeavor that interested both parties. Jamal al Fadl, a former high-ranking al-Qaeda operative who testified at the 2001 African Embassies bombings trial, recounted a meeting in a Khartoum suburb with al-Qaeda and Sudanese army officials to discuss the joint manufacture of chemical weapons.⁶³ Al-Fadl's testimony also revealed how Sudanese intelligence officials routinely handled any problems between al-Qaeda and the local population.

Protected by the Sudanese government, Bin Laden was laying the foundations of a global terrorist movement, establishing connections with organization from throughout the Muslim world. He created the Islamic Army Shura which, according to the 9/11 Commission, was to serve as "the coordinating body for the consortium of terrorist groups with which he was forging alliances."⁶⁴ The Shura was composed of al-Qaeda's leadership and top members of terrorist organizations from throughout the Muslim world, including of the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya; the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front; Palestinian Hamas; insurgents from Libya, Yemen and Eritrea; militants from Jamat-e Islami and other Pakistani groups; and Somali tribal warriors. All trained together in al-Qaeda's Sudanese camps. Reportedly, every Thursday the groups' leadership would meet at a large farm purchased

At a time when Afghanistan was engulfed in civil war and most Arab countries were jailing returnees from the Afghan jihad, Sudan's hospitality became crucially important

by Bin Laden on the banks of the Nile to discuss future operations.⁶⁵

Iran also played a significant role in providing financial and military support at the training camps to “spread the message of Khomeini in Sudan,” as the Iranian Ayatollah Yazdi claimed.⁶⁶ The Iranians sent several top members of the Revolutionary Guard as trainers in various Sudanese camps. Members of the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah taught bomb-making skills. Tehran sent Majid Kamal formerly Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon and a key participant in

In 1997 Bin Laden told CNN that one of his proudest achievements while based in Sudan was the role of his Afghan Arabs played in the 1993 killings of more than a dozen American soldiers during the famous Black Hawk Down incident

founding Hezbollah, to supervise its Sudanese operation.⁶⁷ Al-Qaeda immediately established relations with both Iran and Hezbollah, clear proof that “Sunni-Shi’a divisions did not necessarily pose an insurmountable barrier to cooperation in terrorist activities,” as the 9/11 Commission noted.⁶⁸ Islamic internationalism, as preached by Turabi in the PAIC, materialized on

the ground in the training camps, as militants from various groups began to work side by side and establish enduring ties.

A Base for Attacks

While al-Qaeda’s Sudanese era focused primarily on creating a solid structure, the organization did manage to generate attacks from Khartoum. While not particularly sophisticated compared to the attacks that followed, they already bore the hallmarks of al-Qaeda.

After a few months in Sudan, al-Qaeda’s *majlis al shura* began issuing *fatwas*, or religious decrees, that justified the group’s operations and, in most cases, preceded an attack. The indictment of two al-Qaeda operatives charged for their role in the 2000 bombing of the USS *Cole* reveals that “[a]t various times in or about 1992, coconspirator Osama Bin Laden, working together with members of the fatwa committee of al-Qaeda,

disseminated *fatwas* to other members and associates of al-Qaeda that the United States forces stationed on the Arabian Peninsula, including both Saudi Arabia and Yemen, should be attacked.”⁶⁹ The operation came shortly after the religious decree.

In December 1992 Islamic extremists attempted to bomb two hotels in Aden, Yemen that housed 100 U.S. servicemen billeted there to support UN relief operations in Somalia. The perpetrators, Yemeni radicals who had graduated from al-Qaeda’s camps in Sudan,⁷⁰ were led by a Yemeni member of the group’s Islamic Army Shura and claimed that Bin Laden financed their group.⁷¹ The failed operation, in which only two Austrian tourists died because U.S. forces had already left, was only the first attack against U.S. forces planned in Sudan and an ominous precursor to the bombing of the USS *Cole*.

A more favorable opportunity to attack U.S. forces came in 1993 with increased American engagement in the Somali civil war. By spring, thousands of U.S. troops were stationed in Somalia, providing al-Qaeda with an unprecedented opportunity to attack. The group did not have the strength to face the U.S. army directly and thus limited its activities to active support for the most radical Somali militia groups. According to the 9/11 Commission, a Nairobi-based al-Qaeda cell smuggled weapons to Somalia and “scores of trainers,” including some of the most senior members of al-Qaeda’s military committee, entered the war-torn country and worked closely with Somali warlords.⁷² Al-Qaeda’s involvement in Somalia, unknown at the time, was confirmed by Bin Laden himself during his first historic interview with a Western media outlet. In 1997 Bin Laden told CNN that one of his proudest achievements while based in Sudan was the role of his Afghan Arabs played in the 1993 killings of more than a dozen American soldiers during the famous Black Hawk Down incident.⁷³

In June 1993 five Sudanese nationals were among those arrested on suspicion of plotting to bomb the United Nations, the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, and the FBI headquarters in New York⁷⁴ as a follow-up to the February bombing of the World Trade Center. According to

news reports, U.S. intelligence officials came to “believe that the highest levels of the Sudanese government were involved in the bombing plot.”⁷⁵ U.S. intelligence apparently concluded that Siraj Yousif, counselor to the Sudanese U.N. mission, and Ahmed Mohamed, the third secretary to the mission, were actually Sudanese intelligence officers.⁷⁶ Both Yousif and Mohamed allegedly helped the five Sudanese men arrested for plotting the “Day of Terror.”⁷⁷ While denying that he aided the plotters, Yousif admitted that he had met “several times” with Siddig Ibrahim Siddig Ali, the alleged ringleader of the plot,⁷⁸ who had boasted of “connections” that he had in Sudan’s UN delegation.⁷⁹

Evidence of official Sudanese government involvement in the plan was culled from two months of electronic and physical surveillance of the Sudanese mission. In one taped conversation between Siddig Ali and Emad Salem, a U.S. government informant, Salem asked, “The brothers who are in the Sudanese embassy – are they going to be with us?” Siddig Ali responded, “God willing, yes. There is someone who is going to help me, high-level man.”⁸⁰ The plotters planned to enter the UN garage in the Sudanese mission’s van, whose diplomatic plates would enable the vehicle to bypass security. After the attack, the Sudanese mission would help with the escape. When Emad Salem asked Siddig Ali whether they would need a visa “to get away from the scene for awhile” after they finished their “little event,” Ali replied, “Yes. For you, personally, you should have no problem because I will take you during the next few days to the office of the ambassador, have you met the consul and his deputy?”⁸¹ Federal investigators also learned that when Sudan’s ambassador to the UN, Ahmed Suliman, found out about the plot, he confronted Hassan Turabi.⁸² “Turabi told the ambassador to mind his own business.” In February 1995, federal prosecutors placed the Sudanese mission to the UN on the list of 172 people and institutions “who may be alleged as co-conspirators” in the bombing plot.⁸³

Before 1989 Sudan had been considered a close ally of the United States, but this position was reversed immediately after the coup. All

military and economic aid was cut off immediately by Washington.⁸⁴ The State Department had warned since 1992 about Sudan’s support for terrorist groups, and the House Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare had revealed that Sudan, along with Iran, had begun “active preparations for long-term terrorist operations in Western Europe.”⁸⁵ The evidence from the thwarted New York plot, combined with a wealth of information the various Islamist groups operating in Sudan, led the U.S. government to place Sudan on the list of states sponsoring terrorism. Sudan protested vehemently, claiming to be targeted because of its Islamic orientation and its support of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War.⁸⁶

Sudan’s Political Isolation and Bin Laden’s Departure

While the United States led efforts to isolate Sudan in the global community, many Middle Eastern countries also grew increasingly hostile toward Khartoum. Tensions between Egypt and Sudan had been mounting since the 1989 coup, as Cairo was troubled by Khartoum’s Islamist direction and friendly relationship with Iran. Egypt repeatedly accused the Bashir government of supporting terrorist groups operating inside Egypt. The amount of evidence collected by Egyptian authorities was overwhelming. Cairo became aware that thousands of Egyptian militants were training inside Sudan, and that Ayman al Zawahiri, then head of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (and al-Qaeda’s second in command since the two groups merged in 1998), had opened three camps inside the country with the blessing of Turabi and the financial support of Tehran.⁸⁷ But intelligence also revealed that al-Qaeda, from its Sudanese refuge, was sponsoring anti-Mubarak activities worldwide. In May 1993, a joint Egyptian-Saudi investigation revealed that Bin Laden was funneling money to Egyptian extremists to buy weapons, printing presses, and other equipment.⁸⁸ Bin Laden was also believed to have been the key financier behind the Kunar training camp in Afghanistan, providing terrorist training to Egyptian militants.⁸⁹

Sudan's relations with most other Arab and African countries also deteriorated due to terrorism. Eritrea and Ethiopia vigorously accused Sudan of supporting radical activities on their soil,⁹⁰ and Tunisia recalled its ambassador to Khartoum because of the Sudanese government's alleged support of a cell planning attacks against Tunisian targets in Europe.⁹¹ Saudi Arabia, one of the country's top sponsors, also began to voice its complaints over Sudan's open door policy towards terrorist groups. In 1994 the Saudi government revoked Bin Laden's citizenship and began to urge Khartoum to stop hosting him, intensifying its pressure after the November 1995 bombing of the Saudi National Guard in Riyadh.⁹² Pressured by their paymasters, Sudanese officials began to reassess their policies, and Bashir stated that Bin Laden's presence in the country constituted a great embarrassment to him, jeopardizing Sudan's relationship with Saudi Arabia.⁹³

Throughout the first half of the 1990s Turabi and the Sudanese government vigorously refuted the international community's allegations that terrorist organizations were operating on Sudanese territory. "As for harboring terrorists," Turabi wrote in 1992, "Let me say this: We have no interest in terrorism. The Koran is very explicit against individual acts of terrorism"⁹⁴ In some cases, though, Bashir had problems keeping his constituency and declared that it was Sudan's duty to protect *mujahedeen* who sought refuge.⁹⁵ But there is a deeper meaning to Turabi's denial: the Western-educated lawyer has always been extremely gifted in the art of *taqiya*, the art of double-speaking, and his claim that no terrorist organization was operating in Sudan was a quintessential exercise in it. From Turabi's perspective, in fact, organizations like Hamas, al-Qaeda, or Hezbollah, are not terrorist groups, but simply Islamic movements fighting for a legitimate cause. Commenting on a 1994 bombing carried out by Hamas in Israel in which 22 people

were killed, Turabi defined the attack "an honorable act."⁹⁶ Given this approach, Turabi's claim seems to be covered in a veil of *taqiya*. Technically Turabi was not lying: no group that corresponds to his definition of "terrorist" was actually operating in Sudan.

When Sudan realized its ravaged economy could not possibly withstand the international community's pressure, less ideological factions decided to sever the ties to the most extreme terrorist groups

Nevertheless, complete denials and exercises in *taqiya* had no effect. By 1996 Sudan was virtually isolated in the international community, and its friends included only other pariah states such as Iran and Afghanistan.⁹⁷ In April, the UN Security Council passed a resolution condemning Khartoum and began to implement sanctions.⁹⁸ When Sudan realized its ravaged economy could not possibly withstand the international community's

pressure, less ideological factions decided to sever the ties to the most extreme terrorist groups. A few days after the UN resolution, President Bashir, increasingly independent from Turabi, issued a stern warning to all foreign militants based in Sudan, threatening them with deportation if they continued activities against foreign governments.⁹⁹

In the weeks following the UN resolution, the pressure on Bin Laden became unbearable. Sudanese officials reportedly approached the Saudi government and offered to expel Bin Laden to Riyadh if the Saudis promised to pardon him.¹⁰⁰ Sudanese government sources later claimed that Khartoum also approached the CIA and offered to deliver Bin Laden to the United States, even though the claim has been officially denied by CIA Director George Tenet.¹⁰¹ Whatever the circumstances, it is clear that the less ideological—and, by that time, prevailing—faction of the Sudanese government were more than willing to give up Bin Laden in exchange for an end to the country's international isolation. Turabi kept repeating that Bin Laden was an ordinary man who was "striving for the sake of Islam" and had been unjustly accused of being involved with terrorism.¹⁰² Yet, at the end, he

realized he was fighting a lost cause and gave up. Turabi's son succinctly noted: "There were parties in the government that arranged his [Bin Laden's] departure with the United States. These parties are against my father's trends."¹⁰³

Most likely afraid of being deported to Saudi Arabia, Osama Bin Laden quietly boarded a chartered flight in Khartoum on May 19, 1996, along with his family and few bodyguards. After a refueling stopover in the United Arab Emirates, the party landed in Jalalabad, Afghanistan.¹⁰⁴ After five years in Sudan, Bin Laden found himself financially weakened, as most of his Sudanese businesses were liquidated by the Sudanese government (Bin Laden would later describe the NIF as "a mixture of religion and organized crime," claiming to have lost more than \$160 million in Sudan).¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the time

spent in the African country was crucial to the development of al-Qaeda. In the following years, al-Qaeda benefited immensely from the experience and contacts it developed in Sudan and grew to be the world's most dangerous terrorist organization. Al-Qaeda's five years in Sudan show just how much a terrorist organization can benefit from receiving state support and sanctuary.

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

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The Dynamics of Globalization and the Uncertain Future of Iran: An Examination of Iranians in Dubai

Jonathan Thomas

To understand the complex challenges facing the Gulf region properly, it is important to examine not just the dynamics of aggression but also the dynamics of integration and globalization. Due to multiple causes and systemic pressures, Dubai — an economically developed and integrated actor in the global economy — has become home for a substantial Iranian expatriate community. This paper will examine the causes that have propelled Iranians from their homeland, the success of Iranians in Dubai and, finally, will explore those factors that have made Dubai an attractive choice for educated Iranians. The dynamics of integration demonstrate that the role of economic development and the forces of interdependency can be important moderating factors for a region seeking development and stability.

Each year almost 800,000 workers enter the labor force in Iran. About 300,000 of those are graduates of Iran's universities.¹ But of those students, official figures estimate that only a quarter are able to find employment.² This has led

to skyrocketing rates of unemployment and the disenfranchisement of much of the educated population. Young college graduates are forced to accept jobs well below their skill levels just to survive, if they can find work at all.

Job creation has been a perennial challenge and Achilles' heel for the Islamic regime. Efforts to address the problem have been hampered not only by economic mismanagement and corruption but by the resulting capital flight as well. Today, with more than four-fifths of Iran's economy controlled by the state,³ it has been so far unable to develop the necessary mechanisms for job growth. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, for example, property rights are not adequately protected. "The rule of law in Iran is inconsistent and unsatisfactory" and "recourse to the courts is unwieldy and often counter-productive and rarely leads to the swift resolution of outstanding disputes."⁴ By failing to create an atmosphere where technology can be transferred and applied throughout the economy, the Islamic regime has

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discouraged innovation and entrepreneurship. Not surprisingly, in the five years between 2000 and 2004 Iran registered a total of only two patents.⁵

In nearly all sectors, the results have been similarly disastrous by any metric. The stock market has experienced a prolonged slump since the election of Mr. Ahmadinejad amidst nervousness over his economic plans and defiant foreign policy. Official unemployment has remained around 16 percent but actual estimates range upward of 25 percent.⁶ There have been no serious efforts to make the structural changes and massive amounts of investment that would be needed to satisfy the demand for technical employment. With experts placing the cost of each additional job somewhere around \$18,000 in investments,⁷ it would realistically be nearly impossible for Iran to produce the required investment to do so.

Additionally, there are some disincentives for the Islamic regime to fully address the problem. Just as the exodus immediately following the 1979 revolution removed potential opponents to the then-vulnerable Islamic regime, so too does today's migration serve as a pressure valve against the growing discontent of the lower and middle classes who have lost the most over the last 26 years. Educated Iranians, who might provide the resources and ideology against the ineptitude and repression of the government, have instead been forced to leave the country in search of employment. In the end, says Dr. Mehrdad Mashayekhi of Georgetown University, the clerics don't see the "brain drain" as a short-term problem at all. It is possible that they view an uneducated population as easier to manipulate politically and, ultimately, to govern.⁸

Whatever the actual cause, the actions of the regime do not show an overwhelming motivation

to address the problem. For example, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, which is charged with providing leadership in research and technology policy-making, receives only 20 percent of Iran's current research budget.⁹ Instead, the majority of that funding is given to the oil ministry. It seems unlikely that Mr. Ahmadinejad will change this course. He brings with him a socialist program of government handouts (which include a \$1.3 billion "love fund" to assist low-income families organize weddings¹⁰) and a promise that interest rates would "definitely" be lowered.¹¹

But such expansionist fiscal and monetary policies will only provide short-term gains while worsening a rate of inflation that is already possibly as high as 20 to 25 percent.¹² His hard-line rhetoric and conservatism also risk alienating potential investors and damaging the intellectual atmosphere. Eventually the regime will have to make a choice of either continuing to follow this road of self-destructive policies or making tough economic decisions that will be unpopular and painful in the short-term. Whether they will have the political support necessary to do the latter seems unlikely.

Continued Migration

The International Monetary Fund reports that of 91 developing countries, Iran ranks first with somewhere between 150,000 and 180,000 of its citizens migrating abroad every year. The IMF estimates that one in four Iranians with a college education live and work in another country.¹³ That is in addition to four million Iranians who already live abroad.¹⁴ Besides the harmful consequences for the domestic economy, there are other more subtle effects that the country will be forced to confront if this intellectual and financial capital flight continues. For example, by essentially forcing this cohort into emigration, the

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regime has deprived society of the stabilizing effect on the middle class that they would otherwise have. These individuals are not only the professionals and technocrats needed in every economy, but represent those within the Iranian economy that would create jobs for the working-class and wealth for the entire population. Without them, the government will increasingly have to contend with a growing and dissatisfied lower class.

In Iran's traditional society, these youth represent the safety and security of their aging parents. Moreover, they are viewed as a gift from God in the Muslim faith.¹⁵ And since those that currently migrate from Iran are mostly educated, they are more likely to integrate quickly into their new environment, and therefore, more completely sever ties with their networks back home.¹⁶ Even the clerical regime estimates that the damage to the Iranian economy is on the order of \$38 billion annually, or about twice the amount of revenue brought in by oil reserves.¹⁷ Some experts place that figure even higher, at \$50 billion.¹⁸

Through the fervor of a revolution, a war which tested its collective character and the promise and failure of reform, Iranian society has been plagued by leadership that has not allowed its indigenous resources and human capital to prosper

Iranian society has been plagued by leadership that has not allowed its indigenous resources and human capital to prosper. Ultimately, if the clerical government continues to eschew policies that foster and value intellectual ability, entrepreneurship, innovation, technical education, and social freedom, it will be doomed to a fate that it has long been bringing upon itself. The Islamic Republic will not be able to bear the regime's economic ineptitude indefinitely and,

More important than the financial costs, is the slow decline of Iranian culture and society. For the last 26 years Iran has been a country incapable of building a knowledge-based society under the oppressive watch of the clerical government. Through the fervor of a revolution, a war which tested its collective character and the promise and failure of reform,

whether or not the population is prepared for another Iranian revolution, the trajectory of the country seems poised for a dramatic shift.

The Success of the Iranian Diaspora in Dubai

In February 2004 an Iranian-Kish Air flight from Kish Island, Iran, to Sharjah in the UAE, crashed, killing 43 people on board. The flight was transporting Iranian immigrants returning from a trip to Kish Island where many had converted temporary visas into resident visas after receiving their work permits from Abu Dhabi. Such trips had been common practice for years as UAE laws required workers to leave the country in order to make visa conversions. Usually they would go only as far as another Gulf country such as Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, or Iran. But as the UAE's economic boom accelerated, the government loosened these restrictions, permitting visa payments and conversion from within the country.¹⁹ The move was consistent with Abu Dhabi's strategy of attracting highly skilled immigrant labor from countries such as Iran.

Unlike the migrants who flood across Iran's eastern border with Afghanistan who are *pushed* away from their homelands by violence and crushing poverty, those Iranians who find their way to places such as Dubai are *pulled* by factors such as the promise of education, political freedoms and prosperity. This class of immigrants is known collectively as mobility migrants; and they make up the majority of Iranians who seek a new home abroad. There are currently millions of Iranian mobility migrants living throughout the world. The United Arab Emirates is an obvious choice for these émigrés and has become extremely popular as an increasing number of Iranians become successful there.

Dubai in particular is an attractive destination. In 1999 the emirate opened a center for the promotion of cultural understanding in order to facilitate the contact with, and matriculation of, its foreign population.²⁰ Dubai affords Iranians the political and social freedoms that they are deprived of in Iran, while they are able to remain relatively close to their families. There is an average of 40 to 50 flights per month

between the UAE and Iran, often at low costs.²¹ The flight takes only 45 minutes to cross the Gulf, and from Dubai to Tehran takes only an hour and a half, non-stop on Emirates Airlines.

For its part, the Iranian government does little to discourage the emigration. The Iranian Club, financed by the Iranian government, is “the largest country club for a single expatriate community in the city, with nightly cultural events, soccer fields of lush grass and a renowned restaurant.”²² Located in the prosperous, and heavily Iranian, Deira section of Dubai, the club hosts musical groups, and Iranian pop stars who cross the Gulf in order to cater to the large Iranian population in the emirate. By some estimates, this community may be as large 400,000 people²³ and account for 25 percent of Dubai’s population.²⁴

According to one young Iranian quoted in the *New York Times*, “Dubai is building an environment of freedom that still fits our culture.”²⁵

Many Iranian students go to Dubai for just this reason. They are offered social freedoms and the ability to take advantage of a world-renowned education system at the Knowledge Village. As a group, Iranian immigrants often arrive in their host

countries well educated. In fact, they are usually more educated than the populations of the countries to which they travel. In the United States, for example, Iranians hold more master’s degrees than either Americans or any of the other 67 ethnic groups that were included in a recent study by the Iranian Studies Group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.²⁶ There are also now seven Iranian universities within Dubai in addition to several others that enroll large numbers of Iranian students. The Ajman College of Science and Technology, the Dubai American University and the Dubai Polytechnic University, for example, all have large Persian populations. The number of students studying in the UAE has increased nearly six times – from

1,700 to 9,000 – from 2003 to 2004 alone.²⁷ And while many of these students then go on to become successful, sometimes wealthy, businessmen in the region, most will not return to Iran with the money that they earn.

Since mobility migrants are typically more affluent, adapt more quickly to their new surroundings and have an easier time securing employment, they are also less likely to maintain contacts and networks within their countries of origin or send home remittances. Considering that some estimates place the total amount of assets controlled by Iranians in Dubai at \$200 billion, this does not bode well for the Iranian government which might otherwise reap large benefits from having such a prosperous group of expatriates only 100 miles away.

Iranian Businesses within Dubai

The Aria Media Group is an Iranian film marketing and promotion company specializing in e-commerce transactions. It offers worldwide shipping, delivery tracking and industry partnerships to guarantee its inventory. It is not located in Tehran, however, but rather in Dubai’s Media City. The Aria Group is an example of more than just a successful Iranian business in Dubai, however. Boasting more than 2,500 Iranian movies (the largest collection in the world)²⁸ the company also represents the suppression and forced exodus of culture and entrepreneurship from Iran since the Islamic revolution. And while the policies that push Iranian capital from the Islamic Republic become more institutionalized, the forces that attract much of that same capital to Dubai continue to accelerate its departure.

Although business connections between the two countries are now over 100 years old, they began to significantly accelerate following the Iran-Iraq War. Because the major Iranian ports had been severely damaged or destroyed by Iraq, commercial goods had to be offloaded onto smaller cargo ships and dhows in Dubai that were able to dock in small Iranian fishing villages across the Persian Gulf.²⁹ Additionally, due to stunted economic growth and U.S. - led sanctions, no serious domestic industries developed with the growth potential to attract significant investment

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outside of the oil and gas sectors. Finally, because the multiple fixed exchange rate system left the rial severely overvalued, exports were made very difficult.³⁰ Iranian businessmen were therefore among the first to arrive in Dubai when its markets were fully opened to foreign investment.

The Iranian Diaspora has been particularly successful in the real estate market, which was opened by Sheikh Maktoum Rashid al-Maktoum in 2002. They have only become increasingly wealthy as that market continues to be among the most lucrative in the world. Today, they control somewhere between ten and 30 percent of the buildings and construction projects in the city.³¹ According to the Damak real estate agency, Iranians rank only behind the British and the Americans “in terms of most important buyers of pre-constructions products.”³² Indeed, about a fifth of the shopping centers in Dubai have Iranian registrations and “during just one week at the end of June, 2005, Iranians bought 31 percent of the luxurious villas of al-Hamra, a tourist and residential complex located in Ras Al Khaimah.”³³

Dubai has also been a popular destination for the financial capital that has hemorrhaged from the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) since the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. His recalcitrance against the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) ultimately contributed to the organization officially finding Iran in non-compliance with its international obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in September of 2005.³⁴ Additionally, the Iranian president’s populist-socialist economic policies, and often shocking rhetoric (such as that regarding the destruction of Israel that came only a few weeks after the IAEA’s referral of Iran to the UN Security Council) led the TSE to plummet in October 2005. News reports have noted that several major shareholders immediately moved their investments into the Dubai stock market which had only recently opened to foreign investments.³⁵ Even in Dubai, where Iranian banks such as Bank-e Saderate and Bank-e Melli (the National Bank of Iran) do operate branches, most Iranian businessmen prefer to invest using the domestic Arabian banks because of their higher rates of return.³⁶

The Dubai stock market also experienced recent instability when thousands of middle and upper class Iraqis fled the deteriorating situation in that country. They brought substantial amounts of wealth, but also caused an overvaluation of the Dubai stock market. While it currently stands down 40 percent over its peak, its value has nevertheless increased over eight times since early 2002, becoming the region’s leading financial market.³⁷

There are now more than 4,600 Iranian companies, contributing to more than 45 percent of the total fixed investments in Dubai.³⁸ Moreover, as the number of Iranians in the country continues to grow, some estimates predict that by the end of 2006 Iranian investments will have topped the \$350 billion level.³⁹ And this phenomenon has not been confined to Iranian businessmen operating in the UAE, but has also led to an increase in commerce between the two countries as well. Last year, trade across the Gulf totaled approximately \$7 billion, an increase of \$3 billion in only two years.⁴⁰ This makes Iran the second largest importer of goods from the UAE,⁴¹ accounting for 20 to 30 percent of its total business.⁴²

In May 2005, Mohammad Ali Hadi, the Iranian ambassador in Abu Dhabi, asked the UAE Minister of Labor and Social Affairs to increase the visa quota for government officials from the Islamic Republic.⁴³ This change would give the Iranian regime a stronger presence in Dubai in order to monitor and affect a growing number of Iranian interests in the emirate. The President of the UAE, Sheikh Khalifa bin-Zayed an-Nhyan, later reciprocated by asking for an expansion of bilateral contacts between the two countries “as far as possible.”⁴⁴

Although there are several issues of concern between the two countries – including the Iranian “annexation” of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs (three islands previously jointly administered by both Sharjah and Iran) – the increasing financial links between Iran and the UAE have colored the discussion on nearly all other topics. Were it not for such dramatic Iranian business interests in Dubai, for example, Abu Dhabi would almost certainly pursue a stronger

course regarding the disputed islands from which a substantial amount of petroleum reserves are accessed.⁴⁵

Formed in 2005, the Iran-UAE Joint Consular Commission is a vehicle created in order to address issues of mutual concern between the two countries. It could not only handle matters such as the current island dispute, but also those related to the growing economic and business relations that have become so important. The Commission's stated goals also include cooperation on energy issues, the economy, coastal issues and even limited police and judicial concerns. The establishment of the Commission opens a permanent and official channel of communication between the two countries and might possibly be used by Iran to stem its capital losses or facilitate the repatriation of finances currently invested in the emirates.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

As long as the Iranian regime can find ways to avert economic collapse, there are few incentives that will change the course of the self-destructive policies driving Iran's educated youth, businessmen, and capital from the country. The government will continue to repress the social and intellectual freedoms of its population in the name of protecting the values of the Islamic revolution. In turn, such policies will only have the effect of further devastating the Iranian economy. Although such policies are avoidable – major companies such as General Electric have stated their desire to expand their investments in Iran⁴⁶ – as long as the situation persists, massive capital flight will take place across the Persian Gulf to the UAE.

Even without the current exodus, the Islamic Republic faces monumental demographic challenges. Over the next two generations, a shift will occur within Iranian society that will see 21 percent of its population leave the workforce and become elderly dependents. By 2050 this age group will compose nearly a third of its population.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, all indications are that this capital flight will not only continue, but will accelerate in the near future. In fact, Iranians are

currently going to Dubai in record numbers. In the last year they have spent more nights in Dubai hotel rooms (635,000) than any other group of foreigners.⁴⁸ Additionally, the “[t]otal real estate transactions involving Iranians have increased by ten percent” in comparison with one year ago.⁴⁹

As the numbers and prosperity of Iranian émigrés in Dubai continue to grow and their visibility increases, their presence will only facilitate continued migration. Although the current mass departure has greatly contributed to the present state of the Iranian economy, according to majlis member Rassoul Seddiqi-Bonabi, the government “cannot keep investors at home at gunpoint.”⁵⁰ Besides, considering the pressures currently facing the regime to create jobs, such a response would be unwise in the short-term.

The vast amount of Iranian wealth invested in Dubai is another story. The Iranian Chamber of Commerce has recently undertaken an effort to recapture some of its lost capital by concluding an agreement with the Iranian Businessmen Council in Dubai to find ways of facilitating the “repatriation of assets held by Iranian expatriates.”⁵¹ In late 2004, the Islamic regime even considered a ban on imports coming from the United Arab Emirates, although it was ultimately rejected. Nevertheless, in making the announcement, Deputy Commerce Minister Mojtaba Khosrowtaj noted a “lack of willingness [on the part] of the wealthy Iranian businessmen to make investment in the domestic market” that is attributable to the Americans and Europeans.⁵² Without a significant shift in philosophy, such measures will only serve as temporary, insufficient, solutions to a seriously ill economy.

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Meanwhile, Dubai will continue to pursue the strategies of wealth attraction, production and retention that have made it one of the successful economies in the world. Its favorable location as well as opportunistic and forward-thinking policies will assist the emirate in remaining at the nexus of economic modernity and the region's traditional Gulf culture. Much as it has for over a century, Dubai will continue to attract businessmen and capital from across the region and beyond. Already the Emirate can boast what is perhaps the highest percentage of millionaires per capita at around 1.2 percent.⁵³ Those who come in search of an accommodating business climate will be rewarded by certain opportunity and the possibility of prosperity. In the proximate future, Iranians will continue to comprise the most successful cohort of an intellectual and capital influx into the UAE.

Indicative of its perpetual optimism, contractors within Dubai have begun work on

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what will soon be the world's tallest skyscraper.⁵⁴ Although no official figures have been released regarding the size of the Burj Dubai, scale models have revealed 189 stories reaching a half a mile above the desert skyline.⁵⁵ From the top, on a clear day, visitors will be able to look out over the Persian Gulf and see all the way across to the Iranian shore.⁵⁶ This spectacular view, unmatched anywhere in the world, will serve as a simultaneous reminder of the circumstances with which Iranians still struggle at home, and their continued presence and influence throughout the world.

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

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