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PUBLISHER Bruce G. Blair

EDITOR IN CHIEF Mohamed Elmenshawy

ASSISTANT EDITOR Paul Wulfsberg

MANAGING COPY EDITOR Whitney Parker

ADDITIONAL COPY EDITORS
Ashley Hoffman
Ugochukwu Iteogu

SPECIAL ADVISOR Hesham Sallam

MEDIA INQUIRIES
Contact our press office: + (202) 797-5287
info@worldsecurityinstitute.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS
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To request a hard-copy subscription,
write to us at:

WSI – Arab Insight
1779 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Ste. 615
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel + (202) 332-0900
Fax + (202) 462-4559

Or e-mail: info@worldsecurityinstitute.org.

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WSI CAIRO
Mohamed Elmenshawy, Director
40 A Mohamed Mazhar St. Suite #32
Zamalek
Cairo, Egypt 11211

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Arab Insight, an innovative journal that features authoritative analyses from Middle Eastern experts on critical regional issues, seeks to improve the relationship between the United States and the Arab world by cultivating a better understanding of the complex issues facing the Middle East among Western policy-makers and the public at large.

Arab Insight

رؤى عربية

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U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND ISLAMISTS

ISLAM OUTSIDE THE MOSQUE

Editors' Note

ALTHOUGH THE FACTORS accounting for the deterioration of America's reputation in the Arab and Muslim world after Sept. 11 are numerous, the U.S. position vis-à-vis political Islam remains an important factor in reinforcing the negative view of America. An important issue that has driven much of the anti-Americanism we observe in the region today pertains to an evident contradiction between U.S. discourse on democratization and political reform on one hand, and its negative response to the electoral gains made by groups like Hamas in the Palestinian Territories or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. As a result of this discrepancy, many observers have proposed alternative ways for Washington to advance the cause of democracy in the Arab world. One of the proposed ideas involves holding-off on calling for immediate elections, and focusing instead on promoting other prerequisites of political reform. Others suggested employing new strategies that would guarantee the defeat of political Islamists at ballot boxes.

Undoubtedly, there is a soaring need for a better understanding of Islamist movements in the region, given the fundamental differences among such groups. Moreover, many Islamist movements are experiencing a process of change that warrants a revision of the existing conventional wisdom about political Islam. Not only that, but many of those groups remain unknown in Western, particularly American, discussions of Islamist movements. Therefore, formulating a constructive and effective American policy toward Islam in a broad sense, but more specifically toward political Islam, will require a new and a more nuanced intellectual mapping of contemporary Islam and political Islam in the region.

Given these various demands, the editorial team of *Arab Insight* took the initiative to shed light on the topic of American policies toward both Islam and political Islam. The topic is presented in two sections:

Section I presents several Arab responses to American policy toward Islamists.

It begins with an article examining the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's view of the United States. Missing from this article are allegations of secret talks between the U.S. and the Brotherhood. Rather, the author focuses on how the Brotherhood perceives the United States and its policies. Section I also presents a short interview with one of the leaders of the Brotherhood, Dr. Essam al-Iryan. The three other articles in the section grapple with the question of why the United States accepts (or tolerates) the activities of some Islamist movements and not others. The first article addresses seeming U.S. rejection of Islamist groups in Egypt, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories. The second article looks at U.S. relations, or lack thereof, with Islamist groups in the Maghreb region. The third article analyzes the relationship between the United States and Iraq's Shiite Islamist groups, focusing on the sources of tensions in this relationship.Section II provides an overview of the position of Islamist groups and movements in their respective societies. This section covers Islamic views on issues of governance, human rights, and relations with the West. The first article attempts to define "Islamic governance," in ways that transcend conventional understandings of phrases like "Islamic rule," "implementation of Shariah" or "implementation of democracy." The second article grapples with the question of whether there is a comfortable fit between Islam and human rights. The third article analyzes Western views of Islamist movements. The fourth article examines the important transformations exhibited by the Al-Tawheed Wal-Islah movement in Morocco over the past years.

Is "Brotherhood" with America Possible?*

KHALIL AL-ANANI

Specialist in political Islam and author of the forthcoming The Political Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, *to be published in Cairo.*

"THERE IS NO CHANCE OF COMMUNICATING with any U.S. administration so long as the United States maintains its long-standing view of Islam as a real danger, a view that puts the United States in the same boat as the Zionist enemy. We have no pre-conceived notions concerning the American people or the U.S. society and its civic organizations and think tanks. We have no problem communicating with the American people but no adequate efforts are being made to bring us closer," said Dr. Issam al-Iryan, chief of the political department of the Muslim Brotherhood in a phone interview.

Al-Iryan's words sum up the Muslim Brotherhood's views of the American people and the U.S. government. Other members of the Muslim Brotherhood would agree, as would the late Hassan al-Banna, who founded the group in 1928. Al-Banna viewed the West mostly as a symbol of moral decay. Other Salafis – an Islamic school of thought that relies on ancestors as exemplary models – have taken the same view of the United States, but lack the ideological flexibility espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood. While the Muslim Brotherhood believes in engaging the Americans in civil dialogue, other extremist groups see no point in dialogue and maintain that force is the only way of dealing with the United States.[1]

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* This article was written before the U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer met with the Brotherhood's parliamentary leader, Mohamed Saad El-Katatni in Cairo. On April 5, 2007, Hoyer and El-Katatni met once at the parliament building and later at the home of the U.S. ambassador to Egypt.

1 Telephone conversation with Issam al-Iryan on Feb. 2, 2007.

The way the Muslim Brotherhood views the United States

Unlike other Islamic political groups, the Muslim Brotherhood is a pragmatic movement that relates in a level-headed manner with regional and international powers. However, the nature of its relations with the United States can be viewed as a somewhat special case. The Muslim Brotherhood has profound reservations about the United States. And Muslim Brotherhood officials doubt that they can maintain a normal liaison with the U.S. government or find a way to promote common understanding. Nonetheless, this article is about the Egyptian chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood, not other branches of the same group that exist in other Arab countries, for each independent Muslim Brotherhood group deals with the United States according to its interests and goals. In fact, some Muslim Brotherhood groups have a cordial relationship with Washington, including those of Kuwait, Syria, Jordan and Morocco. The Egyptian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, however, takes a grim view of the United States for historical, ideological and political reasons. That doesn't mean that there are no "backdoor" channels of communication between the two entities. But the mere fact that communication goes unpublicized is a sign of the fragile nature of relations between Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and the U.S. government.

"The Muslim Brotherhood views the United States as an occupation force in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it supports despotic regimes in the Arab World."

Several factors influence the Muslim Brotherhood's attitude toward the United States. One is Washington's political attitude and perceived level of trustworthiness. Another is the degree to which Washington may be willing to make the Egyptian regime stop harassing the Muslim Brotherhood and allow the latter to be "legally" integrated in political life. Besides, Washington may be using the Muslim Brotherhood as a tool to scare the Egyptian regime, and that itself cannot be good for the Muslim Brotherhood reputation.

Doctrinal and other considerations

The Muslim Brotherhood sees the United States from more than one angle, some of which are influenced by the doctrinal beliefs of the Egyptian group and its history.

a. **The doctrinal angle:** The Muslim Brotherhood sees Islam as a holistic sys-

tem incorporating life, man and the world together. This is a vision that Hassan al-Banna, the group's founder, put together from its inception. Al-Banna wanted Islam to lead humanity toward security, freedom, equality and justice. Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood sees the West as a rival that has usurped this position of leadership. It also believes that Western civilization, including American hegemony, is nearing its end.[2]

b. **The civilization angle:** Al-Banna's writings remain the main source for the Muslim Brotherhood's views of the West. Al-Banna criticized Western civilization in the strongest of terms, accusing it of decay and unbridled decadence. For him, Western civilization is a "material civilization" devoid of spiritual and moral substance.[3]

Although al-Banna's original teachings were centred on European nations, rather than the United States, his views were adopted, almost verbatim, by current Muslim Brotherhood leaders in relation to the United States. The current Muslim Brotherhood supreme guide, Mohammad Mahdi Akef, says in one of his weekly letters that "the new international system led by the United States is an old imperial system using new tools … combining seduction with repression, infiltration and domination with allegations of partnership ... and breaking up countries while calling on nations to rally against hegemony. The United States is inciting minorities, provoking border troubles, and encouraging ethnic and sectarian sedition as well as civil war. It is trying to separate Arab societies from Muslims societies. It is doing so through fanning nationalism, targeting the minds of youth, undermining the value system, and spreading feelings of frustration."

"The West pretends to be benevolent, but it has divided the world into two parts. One is the West itself 'that must remain strong, rich, armed, conquering, and productive.' The other is the rest of the world 'that must remain weak, poor, disarmed, invaded, occupied, and consuming.' The West is 'trying to impose its vision through force, just as it is perpetuating disparity

2 Hassan al-Banna, Collection of the Letters of the Martyred Imam, Message to the Fifth Conference. (Alexandria, Dar al-Daawa, 1988).

3 Hassan al-Banna, "The Fundamentals of Islam as a Social System," *Al-Shihab* 2, no. 14 (1947).

among nations. The forms of exploitation may have changed, but the system remains the same. It is a system based on racist concepts. It adopts the ideas of Darwin and Nietzsche, with the West always acting at the center, always at the helm. It is survival of the fittest, and the West wants all others to remain unfit," says Akef.[4]

Muslim Brotherhood's Dr. al-Iryan concurs with this overarching view of the West and expresses the following opinion of the United States: "It is difficult to speak of a civilization in the usual sense when talking of a country that's no more than 200 years old. Even assuming that the United States is a civilization, it is one that has been born out of exclusionist tendencies and through the eradication of the Native Americans. It is also a 'material' civilization based on the twin pillars of money and power," he says.[5]

The same view is echoed by Dr. Mohammad Habib, first deputy of the Muslim Brotherhood's supreme guide, who believes that the U.S. civilization is based on "survival of the fittest" as well as on double standards, especially when it comes to the issues of democracy and freedom.[6]

The Muslim Brotherhood views the United States as an occupying force in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it supports despotic regimes in the Arab World

c. **The political angle**: The Muslim Brotherhood views the United States as an occupying force. Mahdi Akef, the Brotherhood's supreme guide speaks of the United States in the same tone al-Banna used when talking about the British, French, or Italian occupation of Arab countries. In fact, al-Banna once wrote that "the days of hegemony and repression are over. Europe can no longer rule the East with iron and fire. Those outdated practices do not tally with the course of events, with the development of nations, with the renaissance of Muslim people, or with the principles and feelings the war has created." Akef could use the same words today, but only in reference to the United States.

Both al-Iryan and Habib agree that the United States wants to manipulate the Arab region to promote its own interests. The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq are

4 The weekly address by the General Guide, from *ikhwanonline.com*, Jan. 3, 2007.
5 Telephone conversation with Issam al-Iryan on Feb. 2, 2007.
6 Telephone conversation with Mohammad Habib on Feb. 3, 2007.

seen as evidence of U.S. intentions, the two would argue. The Muslim Brotherhood is critical of the United States' close links with Israel and believes that the United States and Israel share the same political agenda. Akef rails against the United States and "Western bias towards the Zionist entity." Habib says both America and Israel were founded on an ethos of expansionism and colonialism. Al-Iryan puts it bluntly, "One of the main reasons for our negative opinion of the United States is its ties with Israel. Its ties with Israel will remain a defining factor in our relations with the United States."

"Up until the conclusion of the Palestinian elections, the United States was sending positive signals to the Muslim Brotherhood."

The U.S. support of despotic regimes in the Arab world and its double standards in matters related to freedom and democracy offer another stumbling block in the currently sour relationship. The Muslim Brotherhood has always espoused the view that the "West" bolsters the ruling regime in most of the Islamic world while using them to promote its own interests. Muslim Brotherhood Guidance Bureau member Mahmoud Izzat says that "the policy of the United States in the Arab world is to support tyranny. U.S. deeds conflict with its rhetoric insofar as democracy is concerned."[7]

Habib equally has little regard for U.S. rhetoric on freedom, democracy and human rights. The United States is interested not in democracy but rather in its own schemes in the region, he says, referring in particular to U.S. policy towards Hamas. "The United States is not a charity organization or a reform agency."[8] In recent years, the double standards issue surfaced following the end of the Egyptian parliamentary elections, in which the Muslim Brotherhood won an unprecedented 20 percent of the seats (88 out of 454 seats). When the Muslim Brotherhood was later subjected to various acts of persecution and harassment, the United States turned a blind eye.

The course of relations

Relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the United States go all the way back to World War II, when the United States was about to inherit the British Empire and the Muslim Brotherhood was one of the most popular movements

7 Interview with Mahmoud Izzat by the *Washington Post* on June 27, 2006, cited by *ikhwanonline.com*.
8 Telephone conversation with Mohammad Habib on Feb. 3, 2007.

in the region. The British, acting with U.S. blessing, wanted to establish a rival group to compete with the Muslim Brotherhood. The new group, named Freedom Brothers, was supposed to attract the youths with its cultural, social, and liberal programs, but never quite made it. Afterwards, the United States began flirting with top Islamic figures in Egypt. At one point, a U.S. Embassy official talked with al-Banna about cooperating against the prevailing communist threat, but the gap in views proved too wide to bridge. In the late 1970s, the U.S. sought the help of Muslim countries in organizing jihad-style resistance against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The Americans wanted Anwar al-Sadat to get the Muslim Brotherhood to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, but the Muslim Brotherhood was none too enthusiastic.

Later on, the Carter administration needed help with the hostage crisis in Tehran. The U.S. Embassy asked Omar al-Telmesani, then Muslim Brotherhood general guide, to intervene and use his good offices with the leader of the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini. With al-Sadat's permission, al-Telmesani asked the Iranians to let him come to Tehran for talks. Tehran's answer was brief. "You're most welcome, but we're not going to discuss the American hostages." The visit didn't take place. The Iranians waited till Carter lost the elections to Ronald Reagan and then released the hostages.[9] In the 1980s, relations between the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood improved as the United States, with Saudi mediation, sought closer ties with Islamic political groups in the region as part of its quest to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan.

However, the Sept. 11 attacks represented a watershed in the relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the U.S. administration, so much so that one can speak of both a pre-Sept. 11 phase and a post-Sept. 11 phase in their relations.

1. **The pre-Sept. 11 phase:** This phase covers most of the 1990s. In 1995, the Muslim Brotherhood won some seats in the People's Assembly, and reports spoke of exchanges between the Muslim Brotherhood and the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. Former U.S. Amb. Daniel Kurtz said that he met Muslim Brotherhood officials or people representing them. Some Muslim Brotherhood members denied the reports at the time, but others confirmed them.[10] The talks didn't amount to negotiations, since the Muslim Brotherhood had nothing to negotiate about, but

9 Rifaat al-Said, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and the Americans … the Bogeyman," *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Dec. 16, 2005.

10 Manal Lutfi, "The Muslim Brotherhood and America… How the Doors of Dialogue Opened… and Will They be Closed?" ***Al-Sharq Al-Awsat***, Jan. 15, 2007.

involved an exchange of views as Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mamoun al-Hudeibi said at the time.[11]

Furthermore, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak confirmed the meetings when he said in 1995 that Washington had exchanges with the Muslim Brotherhood, which he described as a "terrorist" group.[12] The Egyptian regime consistently attempted to undermine any form of rapprochement between the Muslim Brotherhood and the United States. The same year, the Egyptian government arrested a large number of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and sentenced several Muslim Brotherhood leaders to three to five years in prison, including the current supreme guide Mahdi Akef, al-Iryan, Habib, and Khairat al-Shatir.

2. **The post-Sept. 11 phase:** In this phase, the United States turned against many Islamic political organizations, mainly those engaged in unbridled acts of violence. But the difference between moderate groups and violent ones was not always clear for U.S. policy-makers. When Hamas won the Palestinian elections, the United States reversed its earlier rhetoric about democracy. Up until the conclusion of the Palestinian elections, the United States was sending positive signals to the Muslim Brotherhood and all moderate Islamists. President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice both suggested that a moderate Islamic government anywhere in the Arab world would be acceptable to the United States. Here are a few samples of this view:

- Speaking to the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, director of policy planning for the U.S. State Department, said that the United States does not oppose Islamic parties and knows that democracy may bring Islamic parties to power, due to the fact that the latter were the best organized opposition groups around.[13] The remarks were in recognition of the political gains the Islamists were making in Turkey, Morocco and Bahrain.

- The Rand Corporation released a report by Cheryl Benard about the possibility of the United States supporting liberal Islam in the Middle East. The

11 Dr. Hassanein Tawfiq Ibrahim, "The Egyptian Political Regime and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt… from Tolerance to Confrontation, 1981-1996," (Beirut: Dar al-Taliaah, 1998, 87).
12 Ibid., 44.
13 Richard N. Haass, "Towards Greater Democracy in the Muslim World," Address to the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., Dec. 4, 2002.

report implied that moderate Islamists were about to become part of the mainstream political process.[14]

- Following a Middle East tour, Rice, speaking on June 23, 2005, hinted that the United States was not alarmed by the prospect of an Islamist victory in free elections anywhere in the Arab world.[15] After the Muslim Brotherhood won about 20 percent of the Egyptian parliamentary seats, some U.S. officials seemed in favor of communicating with moderate Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood. But the White House hawks and the neoconservatives were not in favor of such a course of action.

For its part, the Muslim Brotherhood didn't mind holding meetings with U.S. government officials. Al-Iryan says that the Muslim Brotherhood was willing to engage in dialogue with the United States, referring to similar statements he made to Agence France Presse to this effect, following the 2005 parliamentary elections. "The Muslim Brotherhood position is that we believe in dialogue and in cooperation among civilizations, so long as it is conducted on an equal footing. We also believe that there are common values that bind all cultures and nations."[16]

Nonetheless, the Muslim Brotherhood insists that a representative of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry be present in all Muslim Brotherhood meetings with American officials, as Akef told Al-Sharq Al-Awsat in December 2005. "Any such meeting should be arranged through the Egyptian Foreign Ministry," he said.[17] This precaution is designed to allay the Egyptian regime's fear of exchanges between the group and the Americans. The Muslim Brotherhood also wants to make sure that the Mubarak regime is not going to use its contacts with the Americans to tarnish its reputation. No direct dialogue existed between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Americans in this phase, but the relations between the two were fraught with optimism. The U.S. and the Muslim Brotherhood sought out ways to circumvent the regime's reservations, perhaps through the intercession of Muslim Brotherhood parliamentarians.

However, things changed after Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elec-

14 Cheryl Benard, "Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies," Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif., 2003.

15 "Secretary Rice's Trip to the Middle East and Europe," June 17 to June 23, 2005, multiple speeches available at http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/middle_east_north_africa/rice_trip_june_2005.html.

16 Originally in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Dec. 11, 2005; published in English at: *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 773, Dec. 15-21, 2005, http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/773/eg5.htm.

tions on Jan. 26, 2006. The Hamas victory revived old U.S. fears that a tide of radical Islam was sweeping over the region. Since then, there have been no reports of U.S.-Muslim Brotherhood exchanges. Hamas originally started out as an Muslim Brotherhood group, so the United States hardly claims to be on good terms with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt but unable to talk to Hamas. Interestingly enough, the United States refrained from denouncing the arrests of Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Egypt following the group's impressive performance at the March 2006 elections. For the time being, the United States seems to be revising its ideas about democracy in the Middle East.

The impediments of dialogue

Even if the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood were serious about talking to each other, several issues still hamper the chances of having a fruitful dialogue:

a. **The lack of trust:** Muslim Brotherhood leaders are not convinced that the United States is serious about talking to them. They also question the U.S. commitment to promoting democracy in the Arab world. Writing in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, al-Iryan said that the United States must make its position clear on a few matters before holding a dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood. First of all, it should renew its commitment to international law, refrain from interfering in the internal problems of other countries, and respect the national sovereignty of other states. Also, the United States must accept democracy even if it were to bring its adversaries to power in other countries. Washington, he added, needs to show more respect for other cultures and for the interests of other nations.[17] Undoubtedly, the Muslim Brotherhood has strong doubts about the true intentions of the United States. For example, is the United States really interested in engaging in dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood, or is it just calling for dialogue so as to pressure the Egyptian regime into taking sides with it on Iraq, Palestine and Sudan? The United States also has a history of turning the opposition against governments of the region, as happened in Iraq and Syria, with devastating results. This is something that the Muslim Brotherhood doesn't want to be part of, explains al-Iryan.

b. **The popularity factor:** The Muslim Brotherhood knows that the public mood has turned against the United States, and it doesn't want to risk its own

17 Issam al-Iryan, "In Search of Legitimacy and an Agenda," *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Dec. 16, 2005.

popularity by associating with the Americans. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood does not want the Mubarak regime to use such dialogue to defame it, something which has happened in the past. Al-Iryan recalls that in 1954, the Muslim Brotherhood conducted talks with officials of the British Embassy and this was done with the knowledge and support of Gamal Abdel Nasser's government. Afterwards, the regime accused the Muslim Brotherhood of holding secret talks with the occupiers just to tarnish its image. But in actual fact, the Muslim Brotherhood had been taking a hard-line stance in the talks with the British in order to strengthen the regime's hand, al-Iryan notes.[18]

c. **Ideological differences:** The greatest impediment to dialogue is that the Muslim Brotherhood and the United States have a significantly different world view. The Muslim Brotherhood believes that the United States is seeking world domination. Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood says it is dedicated to Islamic reformation and renaissance across the world. In his above-mentioned article, al-Iryan says that the Islamic project for renaissance aims at liberating Muslim land from all forms of foreign domination and at reforming governments in Islamic countries and establishing "Islamic" freedom and democracy.

d. **Fear of reprisal:** The Muslim Brotherhood has a precarious legal position, for it is still treated as a "banned" group. This position puts it at the mercy of the Egyptian regime, which often cracks down on groups with ties to the United States. The Egyptian regime doesn't want anyone talking to the Americans behind its back, if at all.

Prospects of dialogue

The impediments mentioned above would seem to preclude a dialogue between the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood. But the need for the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood to talk with each other may prove greater than all existing impediments. It is true that the ideological differences between the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood are unbridgeable, but self-interest may leave much to talk about. Still, any future dialogue would remain unlikely unless a few things happen first. One is that the United States would need to talk to the Egyptian regime about its repression of the opposition, including the Muslim

18 Ibid.

Brotherhood. Another is that the United States should acknowledge – yet again – that democracy may bring the Islamists to power. Also, the United States would have to distance itself somehow from Israel, for no Islamic group would want to associate itself with Israel's alter ego.

The United States has two reasons to talk to the Muslim Brotherhood: (1) it knows that the Muslim Brotherhood is a likely political alternative in the event of a "sudden" power vacuum developing in Egypt, and (2) an improvement in U.S. relations with the Muslim Brotherhood may soften the view that other Islamists have of the United States. So far, there seems to be three possible channels for talks between the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood:

"The United States has two reasons to talk to the Muslim Brotherhood."

1. U.S. officials can actually meet with Muslim Brotherhood parliamentarians, which is already happening, but all interaction can occur on a more regular basis. This is because the U.S. Congress can, for example, invite Egyptian parliamentarians, including Muslim Brotherhood members, for an official visit.

2. U.S. academic institutions and think tanks may engage in dialogue with Muslim Brotherhood officials. This is something that Muslim Brotherhood leaders welcome, but it can only happen if the regime relaxes restrictions on Muslim Brotherhood travel.

3. The United States may exert pressure on the Egyptian regime into legalizing the Muslim Brotherhood. This may sound like a tall order, considering the regime's resistance to "intervention" in internal affairs. But the United States can argue that the Muslim Brotherhood is already in Parliament and is a peaceful movement.

‹ begin part 2 ›

Interview with Dr. Issam al-Iryan
Chief of the Muslim Brotherhood Political Department

Conducted by Khalil al-Anani, Feb. 2, 2007

Q: How does the Muslim Brotherhood see the United States?

Al-Iryan:

This question can be answered on three levels. The first level is the way the Muslim Brotherhood sees the U.S. government. We believe that the United States embraces a pre-conceived idea, one that successive administrations have embraced, to the effect that "Islam is a real danger." This idea is being translated into a strategy that the United States is currently pursuing with regard to the Muslim world. Therefore, I don't think that there is any chance of communicating with the United States so long as it has this pre-conceived idea, for this idea puts it in the same boat as the Zionist enemy – Israel. The second level is in relation to the Muslim community in the United States. Here, one can say that there are two main options for communication. One is through Muslim activists, such as the Muslim-American Society, which has recently been established by some Pakistanis. The society used to be an arm of the Pakistani Islamic Group, but has recently become independent. We are holding consultations and coordinating with this group, but this is not taking place on an organizational level because this would be inconvenient for both of us. The other option is to communicate with the rest of the Muslim community in America and learn more about their affairs. The third level has

to do with the U.S. media. Since Sept. 11, there has been a growing interest in the Islamists and especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Although U.S. media focuses more on domestic affairs, I have been interviewed repeatedly by U.S. networks, including CNN. The U.S. view of this region is quite negative, unlike Europe which has a more impartial outlook, mostly because it is a cosmopolitan society.

Q: Concerning U.S. society and people, how do you see them?

Al-Iryan:

We have no pre-conceived position against the American people or the U.S. society, its civic organizations, or think tanks. We have no problem communicating with the American people, but no adequate efforts are being made to bring us closer.

Q: Does this mean that you're in favor of unofficial communication with the United States?

Al-Iryan:

Yes, there is no problem with unofficial communication conducted through non-governmental organizations or think tanks, and the Muslim Brotherhood doesn't have any reservations in this respect. We are fully prepared to communicate with any unofficial U.S. organizations and to accept invitations we may receive in this regard.

Q: What do you think of U.S. civilization?

Al-Iryan:

It is difficult to speak of a civilization in the usual sense when talking of a country that's no more than 200 years old. Even assuming it is a civilization, it is one that was born out of exclusionist tendencies and through the eradication of the Native Americans. It is also a 'materialistic' civilization based on the twin pillars of money and power.

Q: How about U.S. liberal values, don't they offer a democratic model worthy of respect?

Al-Iryan:

Please excuse my candor, but democracy in the United States is a mere façade. It is hard to speak of a U.S. model of democracy which is comparable with that of the United Kingdom, France and Germany. There is a big difference. The U.S. elections are a commercial phenomenon replete with media campaigns designed to alter public perceptions. For example, there are not equal opportunities for the candidates, because the massive campaign expenditure is beyond the abilities of any ordinary individual. Besides, the liberal values have ebbed since the 1960s and there is nothing appealing anymore about the American model which – if you ask me – is hard to replicate elsewhere anyway. It is a model based on "manufacturing politicians," or as Noam Chomsky pointed out, the Americans don't choose according to what they want, but to what they see. The worst part about U.S. democracy is that it is a "local" democracy with no interest in foreign affairs. The American people cannot determine their country's foreign policy, for this is the job of the federal government.

Q: But the U.S. society is a multi-ethnic one and as such offers inspiration to others.

Al-Iryan:

I beg to disagree. The U.S. view of others is negative, unlike the European view, which is more cosmopolitan.

Q: But America is a cosmopolitan society.

Al-Iryan:

Yes, but it is a "local" rather than an external cosmopolitan society. American foreign policy has one dimension rather than many dimensions and visions.

Q: How does Israel fit into your view of the United States?

Al-Iryan:

One of the main reasons for our negative opinion of the United States is its ties with Israel. Israel will remain a defining factor in our relations with the United States.

‹ end part 2 ›

Alone at the Ballot Box:
U.S. Democracy Promotion and Rejection of Islamists

ATEF ABOU SAIF

Atef Abou Saif has a Ph.D. from the European University Institute in Florence in Italy. He is a regular contributor to several Palestinian and other Arabic language newspapers and journals.

THE PARTICIPATION OF ISLAMIC PARTIES in the democratic process in Arab countries is one of the central issues in discussions about democracy that are taking place among the region's promoters of democracy, as well as within Arab capitals and in academia. For decades, Islamists were excluded from participating in state institutions or chose not to do so. International actors and advocates of democracy alike did not favor the inclusion of Islamists and did nothing to encourage their participation. The United States, with its long history of intervention in the region and friendly relations with many of the Arab regimes, as well as vital interests at stake, has generally opposed the participation of the Islamists in the democratic process in the fear that they will gain control of their respective governments. "The larger the Algeria scenario looms in American policymakers' minds as the nightmare to be avoided at all costs, the more U.S. policy is paralyzed; recalcitrant Arab leaders are quick to see this," wrote Tamara Cofman Wittes, a research fellow for the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, in 2004. The prevailing wisdom behind this rejection is that Islamists were thought to oppose American interests in the region. This fear deepened after the Sept. 11 attacks, and the mistaken linkage between Islam and terror became stronger.

Paradoxically, the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks opened the eyes of democracy promoters, including those in the United States, to the dangers that autocratic regimes

pose to international security. Many policy-makers and foreign observers have come to believe that bad policies, poor economies, under-development, and closed political systems are the best circumstances for recruiting young terrorists. In light of this, absence of democracy was identified as a threat to American security and to American interests abroad.

On the other hand, Islamists have become more interested in running in political elections. They realize that in the post-Sept. 11 era, cards are stacked against Muslim movements. The best way to avoid international anger is to gain legitimacy through elections. In many countries, they have done so. It remains true, however, that Islamists represent the only viable opposition force in undemocratic regimes. Finally, there is a growing realization that true democratization in the Arab countries cannot happen without the inclusion of Islamist political parties.

"The American rejection of the Islamists adds to the negative perception of U.S. policies in Arab countries and elsewhere."

However, this realization has not been fully translated into policies. The United States, for example, still opposes the integration of the Islamists in democratic processes. A large number of Islamist organizations remain included on the State Department's list of "terrorist" groups. The fundamental mistake by American policy-makers is assuming that any and every Islamist group is inherently violent or al-Qaida-oriented.

The American rejection of the Islamists adds to the negative perception of U.S. policies in Arab countries and elsewhere, and discourages any possibility of forging true democratic processes in a region that has long suffered from autocracy and the absence of basic freedoms. Talk about Islam's incompatibility with the requirements of modernity, the instrumental use of democracy by the Islamists, and the opposition of Islamist-led governments to international conventions, all add to a deteriorating image of democracy in the region. In the eyes of the Arab community, the worst among those promoting democracy is the United States.

The following analysis considers the U.S. rejection of Islamist groups in three specific countries to reflect a general picture of American policy in the region. Thus, Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine will be the focal point of the discussion. Besides Syria and Jordan, these three countries constitute one regional unit very much at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria and Jordan have been excluded from the analysis within this essay for a few key reasons. First, foreign policymaking in

Jordan is not of the mandate of the government, but rather that of a very powerful constitutional monarchy, and any change in the government will not bring a radical change to Jordan's international or regional politics. Second, the Islamists' participation in the Syrian elections is not a relevant question as democracy and elections are not issues there. Contrary to this, in the three countries under scrutiny, Islamists participated and managed to secure some success in the elections. In one country they became part of the government (Lebanon), in another they formed by themselves the first pure Islamist cabinet in the Arab world (Palestine), and in the third, they constitute one-fourth of the Parliament and are likely to increase their presence in the coming elections (Egypt). More important, in the three countries examined below, the inclusion of Islamists is expected to bring about at least a few foreign policy changes. In at least one of these countries, the changes may be dramatic.

It is not accurate to characterize the American policy toward democratization in the Middle East as a general U.S. rejection of Islamists in Arab political processes. Instead, I propose here that the U.S. policies are better understood by studying the context of each case separately. The discussion should transcend the ubiquitous arguments that there exists a cultural rejection of Islam, or that Islam "clashes" with liberal systems, Western values or civilization. I will limit this discussion to the American position towards Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and Hamas in Palestine. These three groups are the most prominent Islamist parties or movements in their countries. Moreover, each has some experience participating in recent elections.[1]

"From the very beginning, Hezbollah was categorized as part of the axis of evil, which now includes Iran and Syria."

Hezbollah: a long history of rejection

The United States not only rejects Hezbollah as a political actor in the Lebanese system, but it also perceives the "party" as a target for potential U.S. attacks. Hezbollah's relations with the United States has receded rhetoric provocation. As early as 1983, 241 American Marines, participating in a multinational peace group

1 For instance, Islamic jihad did not participate in the general elections in Palestine. Also some jihadist movements did not do so in Egypt.

were attacked by a suicide bomber. The American Embassy in Beirut was bombed in 1983 and 1984.[2] In both cases, Hezbollah was suspected of playing a role. As Daniel Byman noted, long before Sept. 11, "Hezbollah has claimed pride of places as the top concern of U.S. counterterrorism officials."[3] This being said, it is not possible to detach the U.S. position toward the party from the overall American strategy in Lebanon and the Middle East.

First, Hezbollah is active in Lebanese politics. It represents a large segment of the country's Shiite population. Although Shiites are underrepresented in the Parliament when compared to two of the other largest groups, Christians and Sunnis (Shiites have 27 seats compared to 64 for the Christians and 27 for Sunnis), their participation in the political life of the country is vital.[4] The Israeli occupation of South Lebanon contributed to the ascendance of the sect's role given that the South is a stronghold of the Shiites. As Hezbollah led the military resistance, the Israeli withdrawal from the country gave momentum to the party's internal political aspirations. Less than five years after the Israeli withdrawal, another political event hit the country and has influenced its politics ever since. Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated Feb. 14, 2005, dividing the country into two large political camps: the March 14 coalition,[5] and Hezbollah-orchestrated opposition. The turbulence in the Lebanese political system has not gone unnoticed by the United States.

"The stability of the Egyptian political system means the security of the oil supply through the Suez Canal."

Apparently, the United States does not favor any change to the Lebanese confessional political system. Such changes, if they happen, would mean more engagement of Hezbollah in the making and shaping of Lebanese policies. While the

2 This is in addition to other actions that Hezbollah was accused of organizing, such as the hijacking of TWA flight 847 and the death of an American Navy driver in 1985.

3 For example, Bush declared that any war against terrorism must include Hezbollah. Even some American officials ranked Hezbollah as team A while al-Qaida was considered part of team B among terrorist organizations. Daniel Byman, "Should Hezbollah be Next?" *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 6 (2003): 54-5.

4 Shiites represent around 34 percent while Sunnis represent around 20 percent of the population. The total Christian population stands at 36 percent; Druze, 8 percent; the remaining small sects amount to 2 percent. Figures are based on data provided in Alfred B. Prados, "CRS Issue Brief for Congress: Lebanon," Congressional Research Service, updated June 8, 2006, 2, Table 1, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/68811.pdf.

5 The March 14 coalition was named for the date of a huge pro-Harari, anti-Syrian protest, called the Cedar Revolution, one month after the slaying of the popular prime minister in 2005.

Lebanese government handles their internal conflicts carefully, fearing the spread of civil war like those they have suffered in the past, it is likely that this conflict will bring with it dramatic changes to the distribution of power within Lebanese institutions. Change is what the United States fears, and it is very much interested in influencing whatever changes do occur. If Hezbollah fails to realize its demands and if Fouad Siniora's government passes the test, this will impact negatively on the position of the party. The United States clearly supports the government's request that Hezbollah militia must be integrated with the national army and that no party hijacks the political future of the country. This means that the party is not permitted to open a war with Israel whenever it likes.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. administration is supporting the March 14 coalition. From the very beginning, Hezbollah was categorized as part of the axis of evil, which now includes Iran and Syria. Syria and Iran are believed to be the party's main supplier of arms and money, and thus its most influential sources for policy-making. Accordingly, the American war against the Iranian and Syrian regimes is viewed as a war against Hezbollah.

The United States would prefer that the Lebanese government not be lead by Hezbollah allies for several reasons. There is a growing concern in the Sunni Arab world regarding the increasing role of Shiites in Arab politics. Neither the United States nor countries like Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries favor such a scenario. From the Sunni Arab perspective, Americans were mistaken in empowering the Iraqi Shiites and disempowering their fellow Sunnis. Obviously, the creation of a Shiite belt (composed of Iran, Iraq, northern parts of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, as well as South Lebanon) is not a positive development in the region's politics. America's Sunni Arab allies are very aware of and sensitive about the issue. Thus, the stability of the Lebanese system is of regional interest and an American concern as well.

Equally important to the United States, Hezbollah is part and parcel not only of Lebanese political life but also of the Middle East conflict. The role of the party in confronting Israel during the last three decades gave the party popularity outside Lebanon. In the demonstrations in the streets of Cairo, Amman and Gaza, the circulation of photos of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of the Lebanese Hezbollah, were signs protest against American policies in the region.[6]

6 In a survey conducted by Ibn Khaldun Centre for Development Studies in Cairo, Hassan Nasrallah was chosen first in a list of 20 public figures in the Arab world as the most popular public Arab, Islamic and Egyptian figure. Available at http://www.eicds.org/english/activities/programs/pollproject.htm (accessed Feb. 2, 2007).

The party's suspected support for and financing of the Palestinian resistance has been a persistent complaint of U.S. policy-makers. Likewise, it proves the latter's accusation that the party breeds global anti-Americanism.

Many Arabs believe that the central reason Americans have rejected Hezbollah is because of the party's role in fighting Israel. The prevailing sense in the Arab world is that the only common thread of American policies in the region is the protection of Israeli security. It is thus not surprising that the majority of the Arab population considers American hostility towards Hezbollah as part of American support for Israel. The party understands this and uses it, as Hamas does, in its media campaigns to accuse rivals of being backed by the American government.[7]

Furthermore, the failure of the Israeli war against Hezbollah in 2006 was considered by the party a defeat of American influence as well.[8] To put it bluntly, America and Israel are two sides of the same coin. For instance, one party leader believes that America "wants to turn this country into a colony; a political, security and military base."

Ultimately, as the previous analysis shows, the American rejection of Hezbollah is linked to larger regional and international politics of which relations and positions towards neighboring countries rank as the most sensitive elements. Given that, the following question deserves a careful attention. If Hezbollah had engaged in a peace deal with Israel, would it remain perceived by Americans as a terrorist organization? Though many other conditions may be proposed by the United States, it is believed among the Arab intellectuals and citizens alike that a peace deal will be enough to move Hezbollah from the bloc of enemies to that of friends.

Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: a soft rejection

Muslim Brotherhood is one of the oldest political opposition groups in Egypt. Founded in 1928, the movement has managed to survive the ups and downs of its relations with Egyptian regimes for nearly eight decades. Though the movement's involvement with some violent actions in the past is evident, currently, it does not seek to control by force. Legally banned, it succeeded in winning 88 seats out of the 454 seats in the 2005 parliamentary elections. The group's relationship with the United States has never been friendly despite some unconfirmed reports

7 For example, Hezbollah accuses the Siniora government of acting on the U.S. ambassador's instructions. Aml Saad-Ghorayeb, "In Their Own Words: Hezbollah's Strategy in the Current Confrontation," *Policy Outlook*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Program, Washington, D.C., January 2007: 3.

8 The U.S. considered the Israeli war part of its "global war on terrorism."

about consultation or talks between American diplomats in Cairo and leaders of the movement. Three concerns underlie the U.S. rejection of the movement: stable relations between the United States and the Mubarak regime, the secure passage of oil and supplies through the Suez and other trade routes, as well as the need for overall regional stability and peaceful relations with Israel.

Egypt is the largest Arab recipient of American aid. American aid to Egypt amounts to around $2 billion annually. In 2002, it reached $1.9 billion; in 2003, $2.2 billion; and in 2004, it was $1.87 billion. Of all of this aid, annual military support is stable at $1.3 billion.[9] It is believed that U.S. administrations have, for many years, preferred to support friendly regimes in Egypt rather than gamble on true and genuine elections that might bring up new leaders who are opposed to American interests in the region. Thus, American endeavors to bring about democratic transformation in Egypt have never been welcomed by either the Islamic opposition or the regime. While the Islamic opposition is aware that they will not be supported by the Americans even if they win elections, the Egyptian regime understands that democratization efforts are simply a political means to exert pressure on the government to give up on certain regional issues. Accusing Washington of not being serious in its democracy efforts, the general guide of the Brotherhood wrote that the movement perceives the United States as the heir of the Western colonization.[10]

A friendly undemocratic regime is better than a noisy democratic one. The record of the United States in supporting regimes that are far from democratic is telling in this regard: cases range from Latin America to the Middle East. Thus even when the United States and other foreign democracy promoters show interest, they limit their intervention to reforming the ruling National Democratic Party, and neglect other existing political parties.

Notwithstanding this, one must not forget in all this analysis that Egypt might be a unique situation. Washington cannot and is not willing to push for a serious democratization of the largest Arab country and to topple a regime that is one of its allies in the region. Much of the security of the oil supplies depends on Egypt. The stability of the Egyptian political system means the security of the oil supply

9 Figures are aggregated from Abed Monem Said Aly, "An Ambivalent Alliance: The Future of U.S.-Egyptian Relations," Saban Center Analysis, no. 6, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., January 2006: 33, Table 1.

10 See his article in Arabic on the official website of the movement. A letter from the General Guide Mohamad Mahdi Akef, "Our Call between the Originality of the Thought and the Honesty of the Position," http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ID=13234&SectionID=210 (accessed on Jan. 20, 2007).

through the Suez Canal. The United States may not be able to accept a regime that might blackmail the international community by disrupting the passage of supplies through the canal.

Furthermore, Egypt is the most influential Arab country in the discourse of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Muslim Brotherhood opposed the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel and opposes the normalization of relations between the two countries. It might call for suspension of the treaty when it controls the legislature or even the presidency. This is not very far from the White House and State Department thinking.

Nevertheless, the Brotherhood has never used this position to mobilize uprisings or riots in the cities. In the last decade, the movement has instead focused on internal issues like constitutional reform, civic rights, public freedoms and social services. While the movement opposes American policies in the region and shares the majority of the Arabs belief that the United States is not an honest broker in the Middle East (and rather favors Israel), it does not portray Washington as an enemy. In principle, it would not reject an invitation coming from Washington for talks or consultations.

Also, there is a growing concern in American circles on the need to reconcile with the Islamists in Egypt. There is a good chance that they will become part of the government. On the other hand, encouraging the regime to crack down on them will harm the already flawed image of the White House as an advocate for democracy. U.S. involvement will be integral to encourage the movement's peaceful integration in the political system. Its integration will push the movement toward more pragmatism. In turn, this might lead the movement to be more modern and flexible in its treatment of international and internal issues. The Turkish Justice and Development Party will serve as a model for the preferred path of the movement. But for this to happen, the leaders of the movement must not feel as though they are excluded from legal participation in the system.

The American government wisely does not exclude the possibility that the Muslim Brotherhood may ascend to dominate Egyptian political life. Although the American administration would not welcome such an event, they will be prepared to deal with the new reality if it happens. Undoubtedly, the Brotherhood movement is the largest and most rooted Egyptian political opposition.

Thus, it would not be surprising if the United States decided to engage in an open dialogue with the movement on the future of the country at some point. Of course, major issues like relations with Israel, positions on the Camp David Accords and perceptions about a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict will come

to the surface. The same questions that Hamas, the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, has faced, their Egyptian Brothers will face. Some argue that political issues and relations with Israel will not be of much importance for the Muslim Brotherhood. Keeping their regime together will be much more important.

Hamas: conditions first

There are no other Islamic movements in the Arab countries that have faced as much pressure as Hamas. Now dominating the Palestinian Legislative Council after the January 2006 elections, Hamas formed the first pure Islamic government in the Arab world. Emerging in 1987, the movement gained an increased popularity in the Palestinian streets through its engagement in the national struggle against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. From the very beginning, Hamas opposed the peace treaty between the PLO and Israel and denied the legitimacy of the Palestinian National Authority because it was established as a result of the treaty with Israel.

Though Washington labeled the movement as "terrorist" and official talks or dialogue with the movement is legally prohibited, the U.S. administration has let some of its former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents and diplomats meet with representatives of Hamas. Low-level meetings took place with Hamas in 1993; in early 2004, an American convoy met secretly with the Hamas leaders in Gaza; and in 2005, meetings between the two groups took place in Beirut. Apparently, Washington was exploring ways to tame the movement. This is what an Arab writer sardonically refers to as "containing and taming Hamas through its inclusion in everyday politics."[11] According to one Hamas research center, the movement was offered a role in exchange for accepting the peace deals.

The main thrust of the U.S. rejection of Hamas is based on the latter's use of violence against Israel – attacking civilians through suicide bombings, shelling the Israeli villages along the border of the Gaza Strip with small scale rockets. Hamas has never exported its actions outside the borders of mandated Palestine. It always emphasized that its only enemy is Israel and that its main goal is to liberate the homeland and establish a state. Nevertheless, the movement does not use friendly rhetoric in reference to the United States, though it has never labeled it as an enemy. The U.S. position and its rejection of the movement were always perceived by Hamas sympathizers and within the larger Arab communities as one of the admin-

11 Moumin Bessisso, "*ihtwa' hamas syasian: iihan amrici*" [Containing Hamas Politically: An American?], *Islamonline.net*, Oct. 27, 2005, http://www.islamonline.net/Arabic/politics/2005/10/article13.shtml.

istration's strategies to support and defend Israel. Most of the Palestinian resistance movement, including the military wing of the Abbas-led Fatah, Al Aqsa Brigade, are labeled "terrorist" by the State Department. In the words of another publication of the above-mentioned Hamas research center, the American rejection of Hamas is another expression of the American rejection of Palestinian rights.

When suddenly, though expectedly, Hamas announced its intention to participate in the national elections in January 2006, the United States opposed the move. The United States expressed worries that what it labeled a "terrorist group" would be taking part in a democratic process. It made such participation conditional upon the movement denouncing violence. After an intervention from President Mahmoud Abbas, Hamas was approved to run candidates in the elections. At that time, nobody – including Hamas leaders – expected that the movement would dominate the majority of the Legislative Council. But it happened; the dilemma of the United States was that Hamas came to power through elections that were supervised by the international community. Thus, the new government is now led by a group labeled by the U.S. government as terrorist.

"When suddenly, though expectedly, Hamas announced its intention to participate in the national elections in January 2006, the United States opposed the move."

Washington's way out was orchestrating international sanctions against the Hamas-led government, starting with the cutting off of international foreign aid, stopping diplomatic communication at all levels, and most importantly imposing a set of conditions that the movement would have to meet to have the sanctions lifted. The Quartet on the Middle East, composed of the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations, stipulated the three conditions to Hamas. First, the movement must recognize the state of Israel. Second, it must renounce violence as a means of political action. Third, it must accept the peace treaties reached between the PLO and Israel. It was believed that economic hardships caused by the sanctions would lead to social upheavals and thus push the government to change its position. During the 11 months of the Hamas-led government, none of those conditions were accepted by the movement.[12]

It was believed that Hamas would not easily give in and adhere to the international conditions. From the American perspective in this scenario, though it won

12 The government resigned on Feb. 15, 2007.

the elections, Hamas was unable to govern. In other words, Hamas was not thrown out of the government because the United States wanted it, but rather because the Islamic movement did not stand for quality government. When international money does not flow and when economic hardship makes peoples lives unbearable, then it is the government that must have the political skills to secure a better life for its populace. From this perspective, the first experience with an Islamic Arab government was a big failure. Moreover, it will not be easy for other Muslim parties to claim that they can do better. These perceptions will impact the preferences of the voters. A previously quoted publication about Hamas writes that the United States is not interested in the success of the Palestinian (democratic) experience, which means "the success of a fundamentalist Islamic state." This, as the publication proceeds, goes against American interests in the region.

On the other hand, if Hamas had accepted the international conditions, the result would have been favorable for the Americans. The acceptance would have led to a plethora of changes in the movement's political stands. The American experience in taming Hamas would have set a precedent for taming other Islamic parties. In other words, had Hamas accepted the conditions to recognize Israel, join the peace process and denounce violence, the Middle East conflict and the relevant questions would not have remained obstacles in relation to other Islamist parties in the neighboring Arab countries. Moreover, other non-Arab Islamic countries, Iran in particular, would no longer have a reason to intervene in the region. After all, no one can be more Catholic than the Pope.

Despite Hamas' seeming refusal to consider the international demands, the movement has gradually moved towards limiting the goal of its struggle to establishing a state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This change was documented in the National Consensus Initiative proposed by the prisoners and endorsed by the movement. As Khalid Haroub argues after reading three main recent documents of the movement, it was a considerable departure from their original position. Though they did not meet the conditions, the movement reached a point where interests underling those conditions were met: basically accepting a two-state solution. In the Mecca Agreement on a national unity government, concluded on Feb. 8, 2005, Hamas implicitly accepted the establishment of a state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip adjacent to the state of Israel.

Values versus interests

The U.S. rejection of the Islamic political parties in the three countries discussed reflects a general pattern. In each of these three countries the issue of se-

curity and political stability is the first priority for the U.S. administrations. The preferences of the Islamists are also linked to regional security issues including the Middle East conflict (Hamas, Hezbollah and to a lesser extend Muslim Brotherhood) and oil supplies (Muslim Brotherhood), which explains in part the administration's hesitation in accepting the democratic inclusion of the Islamists. Ironically, these are the same reasons behind the Islamists' lack of trust in the American policies in the region.

"If democracy in the region is vital to American national security, as Sept. 11 taught, then Islamist parties should be encouraged to join the political process."

In essence, the United States proved ready in certain moments to cooperate with Islamist parties when it satisfied its interests. The former Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari, coming from the Al Dawa Islamist party, was backed by the U.S. administration. Simultaneously, Washington was exploring ways to tame Islamists. Hamas and Hezbollah participated in talks alongside other Islamist parties, former CIA agents and former British diplomats in March 2005.[13]

If democracy in the region is vital to American national security, as Sept. 11 taught, then Islamist parties should be encouraged to join the political process. No true democratization in the Arab world can take place without the genuine participation of the Islamist parties. Long years of oppression and imprisonment led to the growth of a strong Islamist network that fed violent groups with supporters. To counter that history, Islamists have to integrate into the political system and must have full freedom to participate in state institutions.

Washington's dilemma is the meeting of two seemingly contradictory interests: its own national security and the inclusion of Islamists in regional politics. After nearly one year in power, Hamas tells an interesting story from which the United States can learn. For instance, once in power, Islamist parties will learn to behave according to certain norms that secure the continuity of their regime in the international system. In other words, while internal support matters for winning elections, external factors, including relations with regional and international actors will matter more once power is secured. This was evident in the lessons learned by

13 The other two Islamic parties that participated are the Lebanese Islamic Group (Sunni) and the Pakistani Islamic Group.

Hamas. However, it is notable that unlike the Palestinians, not all Arab countries are dependant on external aid, which the Hamas-led government did not manage to secure from other sources. Nevertheless, when economic pressure became unbearable, Hamas did not choose to give up the Cabinet and mandate independents or technocrats to govern; rather it chose to bargain with what were for a long time its unquestionable and sacred positions. These positions were associated with values such as holiness, land, the state and relations with Israel. Hamas was advised by many Arab intellectuals and analysts to leave the government if these positions were unbending.

However, the U.S. position toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and the unlimited support Israel enjoys from Washington is worrying not only for the Islamists but also for liberal Arabs as well. For instance, Washington recently launched a massive war and invaded an Arab country (Iraq) and seems ready to strike another Muslim country because of its attempt to acquire nuclear capabilities (Iran). Additionally, it supports Israel financially, military and diplomatically despite Israel's refusal to adhere to many UN Security Council resolutions, its occupation of the land of three Arab countries, and its acquisition of nuclear capabilities. Summarizing a view expressed in the Arab press, Marina Ottaway concluded that the efforts exerted by Washington cannot be taken seriously unless it renews efforts to bring the peace process in the Middle East back on track.

In a similar vein, the presence of the American troops in Iraq and the fragmentation of the country harms the American image, including its credibility as a political partner and as an advocate for democracy. In sum, Washington has to be more sensitive to the political issues that concern the Islamic parties and toward the Arabs in general.

Finally, Washington's position on the participation of the Islamists in democratic life in the three countries has to be considered carefully. As much as democratization has an external dimension, it is an internal process when it is done well. Washington's interference in the details of the democratic process, and in particular its support of one party while attacking the others (Islamists), harms the process itself. On the other hand, Islamists and liberals alike must feel that the United States is honest in its support for democratization and that it is not a foreign policy tool used to bring American friends to power.

In this regard, the United States should consider the disarmament of Hezbollah as an internal Lebanese issue, and that achieving disarmament is linked to settling peace agreements between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. By so doing, Washington can transform Hezbollah into just one more Lebanese political fraction,

according to Byman. Similarly, Washington must not interfere in the details of Palestinian politics. Internal tension between Hamas and Fatah will bring the two movement's position closer, as was apparent during the negotiations at Mecca. The United States must lend credit to its desire to bring democracy to the region by demonstrating political will. Likewise, inclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian system should be seen positively. It will help in changing the movement's positions towards global and regional issues. Islamist groups do not deny the universality of the liberal values; they do feel uneasy, however, like the majority of their fellow Arabs, in accepting the universality of American interests. Values can build common interests, but not vice versa.

Trial and Error:
Washington and Iraq's Shiite

IBRAHIM SAID AL-BAYDANI
Director of the Strategic Center for Research and Studies. Baghdad, Iraq

THE UNITED STATES DID NOT COME TO IRAQ with the goal of achieving democracy and guaranteeing human rights. Rather, its occupation of the country was the result of regional and international motivations, goals, and interests demanded by its foreign policy focused on securing sole global leadership. It sought to secure its political, economic, and strategic interests that would ensure its rule over the world and dominance over international relations in combination with their interest in oil and the security of Israel. In addition to these motivations were the mistakes and crimes committed by Saddam Hussein that offered a pretext for and created conditions allowing the United States to reach its goals; it exploited the regime's mistakes and employed them to meet its aims. Now, the occupation of Iraq has created a massive political vacuum that must be filled, and so the United States can neither overlook the opposition parties outside Iraq nor the various components of Iraqi society and its influential forces.

When the United States was examining the opposition forces that could fill the political vacuum created after the ouster of Saddam, it could not ignore the Shiites in the South, who form 65 percent of the population and whom they abandoned in 1991. Yet, it could not hide its apprehension about establishing a regime controlled by the Shiites – whose leadership lived in Tehran – and the fact that a Shiite regime would have close ties with Iran. This is the source of its fear of the Shiites, whom the United States views as being tied to Iranian intervention and which

could ultimately end with the establishment of a religious state.

The new political situation in Iraq requires recognition of the injustice and oppression Shiites in Iraq have been subjected to, including the despotic measures limiting their participation in government and banning some religious rituals. This situation has led the Shiites to seek a greater role for the Najaf seminary in the new Iraq. This institution holds an influential position in the life of Iraqi citizens and has enjoyed the support and mobilization of Iraqi communities in the South and the central Euphrates region. Decision-makers in the United States have been forced to acknowledge its important position for the majority of Iraqi citizens. In addition, it is necessary to note that the Shiites' role in modern Iraq has a national basis and has not been isolated from other movements in Iraqi society – it has had not a sectarian hue, but rather a national character.

"The new political situation in Iraq requires recognition of the injustice and oppression Shiites in Iraq have been subjected to."

The United States appears uneasy about a Shiite leadership role in Iraq's political process given its fear of an Iranian role in post-Saddam Iraq. U.S. officials believed that major religious and ethnic forces in the country were characterized by a lack of trust and sometimes hatred for the other caused by years of oppression by Saddam's regime. The United States was thus prepared for the deployment of international forces in the regions where violence was expected to break out. In fact, it did not hide its concern that a neighbor (Iran) might seek to gain control of certain areas in the north and south of Iraq.

Iran may be facing thorny issues in dealing with post-Saddam Iraq. On the one hand, Iran views the fall of Saddam as deliverance from a despotic regime opening new horizons for Shiite expansion. Iran also believes that a religious state modeled on its own may be established in Iraq, given Shiite electoral dominance. On the other hand, Iran is worried about other consequences, such as the seminary in Najaf regaining the religious position it lost due to persecution experienced under the rule of Saddam. The re-emergence of the seminary in Najaf will weaken the influence that Iran enjoyed over Shiites around the world thanks to its seminary in Qom. Furthermore, some Shiite scholars favor the revival of an Arab leadership for the Shiite religious authority in Iraq.

We cannot, therefore, deny the reality of Iranian motivations and interests related to interference in the Iraqi situation. These motivations are connected to

Iran's political and religious role in the leadership of the world's Shiites. At the same time, however, the Shiites in Iraq cannot be treated as though they are only led by Iranian influence.

Approaching secular Shiites

The formation of the governing council and interim government in Iraq stirred up doubts and accusations due to its sectarian approach. The process took into consideration the social, ethnic, and sectarian composition of Iraqi society and might bear positive results through the creation of an opportunity for coexistence, dialogue and collective efforts. However, the fear is that it will become a set approach in the political process, excluding competent national players and causing political and national problems. The formation of the governing council was appropriate for the interim period, although the country still remains in the throes of a rebirth, as an appropriate mechanism for rule has not yet been established. Although the formation of the first government did not entirely reflect the reality of society, it did express the incumbent necessities of the transition period. However, it also created a tense balance, and did not represent a strong, cohesive government.

The lack of U.S. support for an Islamist Shiite leadership is evidenced by its attempts to find a secular Shiite alternative. The United States selected Iyad Allawi as the first head of an Iraqi government following the trial experience of the governing council. A White House spokesperson commenting on his selection as the head of the Iraqi government stated that Allawi was undoubtedly a good leader and enjoyed wide support among Iraqis.

While news agencies were reporting the selection of Allawi as prime minister, British newspapers were discussing his relationship with the American and British intelligence agencies. Among these was *The Independent*, which suggested that Allawi's mission would be to convince Iraqis and the world that the occupation had ended despite the presence of thousands of American soldiers in Iraqi territory. The mission would also be to try to convince other states that he would lead an independent government, a difficult feat given his relationship with American and British intelligence. The newspaper stated that his strong ties to the West might weaken his reputation among Iraqis, though he may have been selected as prime minister to secure a balance between domestic Iraqi parties – whether within Shiite society or even with the Sunnis – who felt marginalized at that time.

The United States placed its bets on the secular Allawi in order to contain the rising influence of the Shiite religious clerics. The selection of Allawi came following its failure with Ahmed Chalabi. The United States tried to use Allawi as a bridge

to build a relationship with the supreme Shiite religious authority, al-Sistani, but this attempt failed due to al-Sistani's wariness about dealing with Allawi and his American protectors.

This context of political activity certainly reflected on Allawi's political role and performance. Allawi retained his position among Iraqi citizens and became an important choice in the Iraq arena; his party was able to garner an impressive 40 seats in the National Assembly. Allawi's policies eventually estranged him from the majority of Shiites, and contrary to expectations that he would make further gains in the December 2005 elections, Allawi lost ground.

The American agenda also reflected on Allawi's performance. The United States has dealt extremely severely with the Sadrist movement during its confrontations in Najaf, as it considers the political and military agenda of Muqtada al-Sadr to be a major challenge to its overall strategy. For strategic purposes – in the context of limiting Iranian influence and the religious authority in Najaf – Allawi moved to form an alliance with the Baathists and Sunni religious forces. This isolated him from influence in Shiite circles, badly hurting him in the December 2005 elections, and weakening the overall trend of secular Shiism, the United States' preferred choice.

The path chosen by Allawi following the announcement of the election results cannot be separated from the assumption that they were disappointing to the United States. Allawi led a local and international campaign questioning the election results and formed the Maram bloc, which rejected them. He reappeared on the scene first as part of the national reconciliation program, then in the National Security Council, and then as opposition to Ibrahim al-Jaafari, assuming leadership of the new government, and finally calling for the formation of a national salvation government. The goal behind all of these positions was weakening the Shiite role in the upcoming government and bypassing the election results. This was a clear expression of U.S. hatred of the Islamists and their unwillingness to support a religious Shiite leadership.

In response to the results gained by the United Iraqi Alliance in the January 2005 elections, former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld downplayed fears of Iranian influencing spreading in Iraq. He explicitly stated that the Shiites in Iraq were Iraqis, not Iranian, and brushed aside concerns that a religious government modeled on Iran's was likely to appear. His opinion was supported by Vice President Dick Cheney, who said that there was no justification for the American fear that the Iraqis would embark on something that did not meet American approval.

Despite the results of the January 2005 elections and the Shiites' advance, the

United States considered Iraqi citizens' engagement with democracy to be a challenge to terrorism and an important step towards opposing the ideology of extremism and hatred. It was seen as a challenge to the approach adopted by al-Zarqawi and the Takfiris, who declare their enemies to be unbelievers, and an opportunity to build a unified, democratic Iraq.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed comfort with the emergence of the Shiites in Iraq because they represent the majority of the population and had long been oppressed. However, she did not hide her fear that Shiite dominance in government – as a result of their overwhelming victory in the January 2005 elections – might reflect on the formulation of the new Iraqi constitution and its reliance on Islamic law, which she views as limiting women's rights. She stressed her country's support of women's rights in the countries of the Middle East and the Islamic world.

The United States was unable to control Iraq without accepting the Shiites, who form the greatest force in Iraqi society. Although the Shiites did not generally employ confrontation or direct rejection of the Americans after the occupation became reality, the position of the Shiites is predominately one of dissatisfaction with the American presence. The religious authority has urged followers to embrace negotiations, dialogue, and peaceful demonstrations with the goal of holding elections – an approach led by al-Sistani. As for the Sadrist movement, the other wing of the Shiites and a large and important one, it has employed an approach and rhetoric rejecting the foreign presence in Iraq. It was driven to confront the Americans by their policy's reliance on oppression and violence, the realization that the United States was working to limit Shiite power, and because the United States failed to provide security for the Shiite community. Thus, the Shiites' disappointment grew and their negative responses to the American presence increased.

"The Shiites' disappointment grew and their negative responses to the American presence increased."

Although sectarianism is not the primary problem facing Iraq, it would be a mistake to ignore the sectarian split present throughout its history. The Shiites were excluded under Ottoman rule, which placed a Sunni political elite in power. This situation continued even following the fall of the Ottoman state and Britain's occupation of Iraq. The Sunni political elite maintained leadership of Iraqi society while the Shiites suffered from persecution until 2003. It can be said that the differ-

ences between the Shiites and Sunnis are political more than they are religious and sectarian. They are also influenced by the nature of political regimes and regional and international conflict and competition. Thus, the change that took place in 2003 allowed the Shiites to search for an opportunity they had long been denied. The deep-rooted change in the nature of rule in 2003 and the Sunnis' sense that they lost the power they had enjoyed for centuries has thus been reflected in the political, social, and sectarian reality in Iraq.

The sectarian orientation has grown significantly and rapidly since the bombing of one of the Shiite's holiest shrines in Samara on Feb. 22, 2006. There is no denying that there was a strong Shiite response to this criminal act which targeted the core of their beliefs and symbols. However, it must be said that there is a clear escalation in the amount and type of violent acts and killing that have taken on a sectarian hue or been executed under extremist sectarian slogans. The Americans, in their capacity as the occupying state holding all the cards, choices, and power, have neither been able to stop the violence nor grant the government the factors and conditions that would enable it to bring security.

"The American position towards the Shiites of Iraq is influenced by that of Sunni Arab states."

In its discourse on Iraq, the American government has attempted to avoid the phrase "civil war" in describing the current environment in the country. The reason for this may be political motivations, for a civil war would weaken the American public's support for the war in Iraq. Yet, it appears as if this characterization is now unavoidable. The term "civil war" has become widely used in American newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, as well as on NBC. Moreover, the years 2006 and 2007 witnessed a significant rise in sectarian violence. Bill Keller, executive editor of the *New York Times*, said that it was difficult to argue that the generally accepted definition of civil war could not be applied to the situation in Iraq. Gen. John Abizaid, former commander of the U.S. Central Command, told members of the Senate Armed Forces Committee Aug. 3, 2006, that sectarian violence in Iraq – and Baghdad in particular – had become the worst violence Iraq had ever seen. He warned that if the violence did not stop, Iraq would head into civil war.

The Sunni Arab states' factor

The American position towards the Shiites of Iraq is influenced by that of

Sunni Arab states. There is a great deal of debate in Jordan over the issue of "Shiafication" with the presences of thousands of Iraqi Shiites in Jordan, the regional political focus on the Iranian-Syrian axis, and Arab fear of Iranian influence in Iraq and the Arab countries. Although the issue of "Shiafication" remains limited, Jordanians view it with concern. Newspaper reports point out that the Jordanian security agencies have not concealed their fear of this phenomenon. Moreover, the Jordanian public seems to disapprove of the Iranian policy towards Iraq, Iranian sectarian interference in Iraq and Iran's support of Shiite militias. Sources have begun to speak of Jordanian-Saudi coordination in opposing alleged Iranian support of the military wing of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the Badr Organization, and the Da'wa Party. Testimonies by Iraqi officials and public figures such as Allawi, Hazim al-Shaalan, Falah al-Naqib, Ayham al-Samarie, and members of the Iraqi National Dialogue Front and the Board of Muslim Clergy, have contributed to Jordanian fears and concerns. Countries have agreed to coordinate their positions with regard to the so-called rising Iranian influence in Iraq. The statements of the Saudi foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, and his attack on the Shiites and support of the Sunnis can be read within this framework. This new coordination includes Washington, as they encourage U.S. officials to help counter Shiite and Iranian influence in Iraq.

The supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has accused the United States of provoking sectarian strife between Sunnis and Shiites. In a Friday sermon delivered in Tehran in October 2006, he stressed that the United States wanted the Sunnis and Shiites to kill each other. Surely, Khamenei does not want to fulfill the United States' accusation that Iran offering support to Shiite militias. Yet in any case, the exchanged accusations are in fact among some of the most important and sensitive issues and have become influential in the Iraqi arena.

However, there are several reasons that may drive the Americans to think about withdrawal, including the ever-rising financial and human cost to their presence in Iraq. These costs have placed a burden on the American economy and may multiply the expected federal deficit over the next 10 years. These numbers only fuel the increasing doubts over the continuing presence and activity of U.S. armed forces in Iraq. In addition, the large-scale American presence in the country is affecting the United States' ability to make important decisions on other significant issues. All of these factors have put increasing pressure on both the Republicans and Democrats in U.S. Congress to withdraw from Iraq. It is believed that even a partial withdrawal may contribute to improving the situations in Iraq and America.

The United States, therefore, has two choices before it. The first is a partial,

tactical withdrawal that allows the Americans to maintain their presence in the country, but with less effort and cost. The second is to build permanent military bases in Iraq that meet their needs. Either scenario may require the aid of an Iraqi government, possibly an Islamist Shiite one, stoking American concerns.

The United States believes that wide-scale participation by Sunni Arabs in the political process is necessary to ensure that the country is in fact democratic. In a speech given on Dec. 20, 2005, in Washington, D.C., U.S. National Security Adviser Steve Hadley stated that "there is growing recognition that failure is not an option in Iraq," and that defeat in Iraq would create a "safe haven for the terrorists" in a country with vast natural resources that could be used to fund future terrorist attacks. "There is growing recognition of the enormous benefits of success in Iraq," he said. It will deliver a decisive blow to the ideology that fuels international terrorism. A democratic Iraq will serve as a beacon of liberty, inspiring democratic reformers throughout the Middle East."

Hadley noted that the current consensus for an Iraq strategy is centered on five points: training of Iraqi security forces and subsequent transfer of increased security responsibilities; bringing Sunni Arab citizens into the political process; supporting Iraqis as they review and amend their constitution so that it becomes a national pact between various Iraqi groups; expanding the international community's support for and participation in rebuilding Iraq; and refocusing support for reconstruction and economic efforts that would create tangible benefits and jobs for Iraqis.

Hadley also said that the key to success in amending the constitution was to make amendments that address the fears of the Sunnis without creating expectations. He added that the last thing desired was for amendments or changes to take place that did not address the Sunnis' fears and then for the Sunnis to withdraw from the political process. He stressed that this would require real statesmanship from the three communities, Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.

This characterization is representative of American sentiments toward U.S. policy in Iraq. The United States strongly encouraged the Sunnis to participate in the elections and even to form a national unity government. Moreover, the United States opened communication channels with the terrorists and began to reconsider its terminology, exchanging "terrorists" for "insurgents." It must be understood that this reorientation aims to create a balance within the next Iraqi government and limit the influence and domination of Shiite political forces in the political process during the coming stage. Although the Baker-Hamilton report indicates the impossibility of acceding to all the contradictory components of Iraqi society,

and although the rights of the Sunnis can be guaranteed even with affirmation of the rights of the majority (the Shiites and Kurds), Bush has insisted on his strategy for granting more room for the participation of Sunnis in the political process and on dealing with extremists among both the Shiites and Sunnis. All of this comes within the framework of securing what will be a tense balance – one that does not allow the Shiites to dominate or hold the only keys to the solution in Iraq.

Human rights is another indicator that the United States is carefully watching in Iraq, and adds another point to their general dissatisfaction with Islamist Shiites. The 2006 Human Rights Watch report for the country stresses the deterioration of human rights in Iraq and points out the violations committed by the joint American-Iraqi forces during the quelling of terrorism and insurgency, especially those that led to the death of civilians and violations of the laws governing armed conflict. The report states that most of the claims concerning the mistreatment of detainees relate to the Iraqi Defense Ministry forces and elements of other armed forces functioning under its command.

"The rights of the Sunnis can be guaranteed even with affirmation of the rights of the majority (the Shiites and Kurds)."

Bush has also directed criticism towards the Shiites in his speeches. For example, in one speech, he said that "a country that divides into factions and dwells on old grievances cannot move forward – and risks sliding back into tyranny," and added that "we must ensure that the police understand that their mission is to serve the cause of a free Iraq – not to address old grievances by taking justice into their own hands."[1]

In the new strategy announced by Bush at the start of 2007, he described the issue of militias as the most serious aspect to American policy in Iraq, and placed what he called death squads and militias on the same level as terrorists. Since the Al-Jadriya shelter incident and until today, there has been consistent pressure placed on the Shiites and accusations against the response of some armed Shiite forces.

In addition, the large majority of reconstruction programs and policies undertaken by the Iraqi government – which is largely controlled by Islamist Shiite parties – have failed. Reconstruction projects in Iraq over the last three years have

1 Speech of U.S. President George Bush to the veterans of foreign wars, Jan. 10, 2006.

been characterized by sluggishness and ambiguity. The percentage of those actually executed is extremely limited; a Japanese study indicates that only 5 percent of all reconstruction projects have been executed. Yet, even this percentage does not go entirely to reconstruction, as administrative corruption, spending, and foreign wages skew the numbers further. The most recent study by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning shows that the costs of approved projects until February 2005 came to $2.5 billon, channeled through the United Nations and World Bank funds and bilateral aid, in addition to a U.S. grant totaling $2.9 billion, taking the total of reconstruction aid up to $5.4 billion dollars. There has been a controversy over the administrative aid accompanying construction efforts that weren't executed and for which American officials and Iraqi politicians and administrators have been blamed. There has also been talk of the disappearance of billions of dollars while the issue of security has blocked reconstruction, offering an opportunity for continued pilfering.

Yet, some Americans view the Iraqi economy with optimism, maintaining the belief that there are positive factors such as a stable currency, an independent stock market, a central bank, an investment law, and solid tax laws. Bush has described the greatest challenge facing Iraq as the reconstruction of its oil and electricity infrastructure. He has promised to continue reconstruction efforts and to assist the new government in applying reforms and installing a modern economy. He has also called on all states to return frozen Iraqi assets and has encouraged them to forgive Iraq's debt, in addition to offering loans and aid.

And thus, it is not only the al-Jaafari and al-Maliki governments who are responsible for both past failures in rebuilding efforts and for future rebuilding endeavors, but also the United States, who – based on their actions – should share a large proportion of the blame and burden. Iraqi citizens have not felt any positive developments on the ground that can reflect an improvement in life, security, or stability in Iraq.

Conclusions

- The Shiites have not succeeded in removing doubts of Iranian interference or of Iranian influence on the programs of Islamist Shiite parties. Nor have they succeeded in opening up an opportunity to cooperate with the United States and build bridges of confidence with the country. The United States continues to lack confidence that its interests might be served with Islamist Shiite parties leading the political process. Moreover, the Shiites have not been able to show their cohesion and employ pressure to

guarantee American support of their political program in Iraq. They have not been successful with ensuring security, whether due to their failure to obtain the necessary American support or to mobilize society in fighting terrorism and strengthening the state's military and security institutions. Shiite political discourse has not risen to the level of confronting campaigns of doubt, rejection and challenge. This has affected the American position, which is concerned with disruptions within the ministry of the interior. The United States has not granted the government the necessary authority, and the issue of militias has occupied the majority of concerns in America's plans for Iraq.

- The United States has not granted the Iraqi government the necessary authority, and the issue of militias has occupied the majority of concerns in America's plans for Iraq.

- The persistence of obstacles and failures in Iraqi security is driving relations between the United States and the Shiites toward conflict. The failure or success of the political arena in Iraq is pegged on solving the security crisis. A new program or strategy concerning Iraq that doesn't take into consideration a final end to the violence would neither be deemed serious nor succeed. In addition, another failure of the elected government would be a setback in relations between the United States and the Shiites and would drive the Shiites to political and military confrontation. It would bring the American military presence into a new crisis possibly even more serious than those the United States is now facing in Iraq.

- The continuation of violence, sectarian strife, and criminal, terrorist acts allows the dominance of militias and radicals over the political arena and on the ground. In turn, this brings greater strife and the continuation of killings and assassination, thwarting the American strategy. Continued failure in Iraq will push the country toward further deterioration, strife, and civil war. Encouraging the emergence of a powerful secular political force – combined with an active U.S. presence in the country – remains a choice and expectation. However, this will not contextualize through the creation of crises, the placing of obstacles, or the continuing spiral of violence. Rather, it might come to be through the creation of an atmosphere of security, stability, and development in the political process. Moreover,

the secular alternative that the United States wants to make a reality in the Iraqi political arena will not necessarily appear through confrontation with the Islamists who hold current power. The Islamist alternative, and particularly in the case of the Shiites in Iraq, carries broad influence. It must be dealt with through new realism and understanding that a united and representative government can perform a greater national role, and could lead to the emergence and development of a secular Islamic orientation.

- The fact that the American strategy pushes Iraq towards Iran makes Iraq an arena for conflict and competition between the two countries. It results in the United States not having an amicable approach towards the Shiites in Iraq. The United States cannot reconcile the success of the Shiites in Iraq with striking the Shiites in Iran. The expected military campaign against Iran has driven the United States to place pressure on the Shiites in Iraq and mobilize Arabs against the so-called Iranian influence in Iraq. And thus, Iraqi Shiites have become the victim of an Iranian agenda that has not succeeded in its attempt to preoccupy and thwart the American military presence in Iraq. They have also become the victim of an American agenda aiming to settle a score with Iran and either bar its nuclear development or change its political regime.

- The United States has raised the banners of human rights and democracy and heralded the establishment of a developed civil society in Iraq. These buzzwords have taken up a great deal of space in the speeches of Bush and other top U.S. officials. The United States is thus obliged, on behalf of its officials, the American public, and global public opinion, to do what is required to place Iraq on the path to democracy.

- When compared to the current strategy of the U.S. administration, the recommendations provided by the Baker-Hamilton report and the congressional Democrats regarding the schedule for withdrawal, granting the Iraqi government sweeping security powers, and rejecting the call for a "troop surge," as well as the call for dialogue with the religious authorities in Najaf and Muqtada al-Sadr, all appear more realistic and logical in dealing with Iraq's conditions and bringing about positive results leading toward a solution that may open new horizons and a more realistic view of Islamist Shiites in Iraq.

The Cold Embrace:
U.S. and Islamists in North Africa

DR. MOHAMED EL-GHALI
Professor of Political Science, al-Qadi 'Ayyad University, Faculty of Law, Morocco

IN THE 1990s, as the world came out of the Cold War era with its bipolar capitalist and communist camps, a new type of international system began to emerge based on economic, social, and political cooperation instead of competitive, contentious relations dominated by the arms race and the formation of bipolar alliances. At the same time, several civil wars erupted, some threatening to become wholesale regional wars, in Africa, Asia and Europe. This international situation fostered the emergence of new protest movements and strengthened others, particularly inside nations experiencing problems in managing the political and civil rights of their public. This included Arab countries, both in the Levant and North Africa.

The emergence of protest movements, particularly religiously-based movements that used Islam to legitimize their discourse, called into question the legitimacy of rulers. Local regimes were accused of corruption and an inability to meet their citizens' needs; on the foreign front, they were accused of abandoning the pioneering role played by Arab-Islamic civilization internationally, which, these movements maintained, led to the loss of Palestine and the occupation of Iraq.

The internal disorder in many Arab countries brought about by the rise of religious protest movements ultimately strengthened these movements' position, giving them the power to directly threaten the interests of Western states, whom they held responsible for supporting authoritarian domestic forces. These movements began engaging in direct clashes both through armed attacks on Western

interests and by mobilizing volunteers to fight in wars led by Western nations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Chechnya.

This situation has given rise to a discourse of total annihilation between these religiously-based movements and Western nations – a discourse that reached its peak during the administration of George W. Bush. The primary result has been the prevalence of a discourse of "insecurity," which raises the question: how and at what cost can we extricate ourselves from this instability? It has been suggested that the solution lies in opening a line of communication between Western countries and moderate Islamist movements, which has led the United States to view some moderate Islamists, such as the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in Morocco and the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, more positively.

This paper will address U.S. acceptance and rejection of Islamist movements in Arab North Africa by attempting to address two themes:

1. Why has the United States accepted Islamist movements in some Arab states to the exclusion of others? What is the political cost of this acceptance?
2. Considering the ideological framework of these movements, what are the strategic limits of America's positive attitude towards the rise of some Islamist movements? To what extent will these movements engage the positive American stance?

This paper will focus on the PJD and the Justice and Spirituality Group in Morocco, the Nahda (Renaissance) Party in Tunisia, and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria.

The legitimacy of engaging with American acceptance

To examine American acceptance of Islamist movements, a major question must first be asked: to what extent does the discourse of Islamist movements engage and respond to American acceptance, if it exists?

The intellectual frameworks of Islamist movements in Arab North Africa, like their counterparts in the Levant, are based on the well-known sources of Islamic law: the Quran, the Sunna (the Prophetic tradition), consensus and analogy. The different methodologies of these groups and the way they translate these sources into practice is what divides Salafi trends from social movements, and radical from moderate or peaceful movements.

At first glance, their shared Islamist discourse may lead us to put all these movements in one basket, but it is vital to distinguish how this discourse is used:

does the discourse use the sources to look for similarities between these Islamic movements and reality (a conciliatory discourse)? Or, are the sources used in such a way that reality is obliged to adapt and conform to the religious framework (the conservative Salafi discourse)? This is the primary criterion by which to distinguish the groups, and it will help us understand the willingness of Islamist movements to positively engage with U.S. acceptance. Here we can distinguish between the two types of discourses.

A. The conservative Salafi discourse

This could also be termed the discourse of absolute rejection. This discourse is characterized by its firm adherence to precise, particular interpretations of religious texts and its rejection of broader, more flexible interpretations. Everything outside of this particular interpretation is considered sinful and is termed a harmful innovation, which is judged according to the Prophetic tradition: "Every innovation is misguidance and every misguidance is in hell." Reality is shaped by the conduct of individuals in the community of believers, which must in turn be subjected to the rule of the legal text.

This discourse portrays every disaster that has befallen the Islamic community as a consequence of the community's deviation from the application of Islamic law and as stemming from the colonization of Arab states, for which the West bears moral and financial responsibility. As such, from the perspective of movements that adopt this discourse, the conflict with the West is not reducible to modes or method, but is at heart a conflict between Muslim civilization and an infidel civilization. As long as the West occupies Muslim territory, with its natural resources and human capabilities, fighting it in both word and deed is an individual duty for every Muslim. The most prominent purveyors of this discourse are al-Qaida, led by Osama bin Laden in the Levant, and the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in Algeria, which on Jan. 26, 2006, declared that it had joined al-Qaida and would henceforth take the name "al-Qaida in Islamic North Africa."

"These groups have adopted an outlook that requires the total uprooting of the West in Islamic lands, through combat (*jihad*)."

These groups have adopted an outlook that requires the total uprooting of the West in Islamic lands, through combat (*jihad*), striking economic interests, or taking the battle to the West, in what they consider ***jihad*** and the West terms "ter-

rorism." As such, the American initiative for them is contrary to divine revelation and must be rejected. Indeed, proponents of this view believe that those who do respond to the U.S. initiative are reprehensible collaborators.

B. The conciliatory discourse

The conciliatory Islamist discourse is moderate and renounces violence, and movements that adopt this discourse choose dialogue and preaching as the primary means to disseminate their ideas. Within this discourse, which looks for conciliatory solutions in its attempts to "Islamicize" reality, we can further identify two distinct levels in North Africa:

1. The first is a discourse of accepting the other – that is, an acceptance of the rules of the game as played by the existing political regime, meaning that groups that adopt this discourse will work within existing political institutions, whether as part of the establishment or part of the opposition, as is the case with the PJD in Morocco, which won seats in the sixth parliament (1997-2002). Initially, the party tended to play the role of the faithful opposition, but later, in the same parliament and in the seventh parliament (2002-2007), it began to take an increasingly critical stance. In its discourse and practice, the party seeks to give the impression that it is a civil, not religious party – although its intellectual framework is based on Islamic sources – and that its primary objective is to contribute to the social and economic advancement of citizens.[1]

Similarly, the Nahda Party in Tunisia, which adopts a conciliatory discourse, has expressed its desire to work within the existing political system, but this wish has clashed with the choices of the political regime, which absolutely rejects the integration of Islamist movements into official political life and refuses to distinguish between them based on their stance on the use of violence, putting them all in one basket. The discourse of the Nahda Party adopts two types of protest derived from its conciliatory bent. It opposes the regime arguing that its orientation is not consistent with Islamic values (religious, peaceful protest), and it opposes the regime arguing that it is not following through with its modernist enterprise to build the country and care for the citizenry. That is, it opposes and criticizes the regime from inside its own modernist perspective (political protest).

1 The Political Parties Law of Morocco (04/36) states in Article 4 that no party can be established on the basis of religion or ethnicity.

Among movements that take Islam as their starting point, the conciliatory discourse of the PJD and the Nahda Movement puts them in the pragmatic camp.

2. The second type of conciliatory discourse is based on a rejection of violence as a means of change, but it explicitly does not accept the rules of the game or, in turn, the legitimacy of existing institutions. Instead it criticizes by offering advice (jihad of word), as is the case with Justice and Spirituality in Morocco.

The group's supreme guide, Abdessalam Yassine, wrote three letters of advice to the regime. The first, entitled "Islam or the Flood," written in 1974, explicitly stressed the regime's need to return to Islamic law to avert a disaster. The second, "The Letter of the Century," was written in 1981, and a copy of the third, "A Memo to Whom It May Concern," was sent to the royal office. In short, it encouraged repentance, a return of the community's wealth to the community, a pledge of allegiance based on a contract between the ruler and the subjects, an end to the corruption in the administration to restore the people's trust, saving the country from debt, and a common effort to build a Morocco capable of meeting the challenges of the future. This group remains a sociopolitical opposition protest group that has not been explicitly recognized by the authorities, which prevents it from taking direct action from within official state institutions.[2]

"The second type of discourse rejects violence as a means of change, but it explicitly does not accept the legitimacy of existing institutions. Instead it criticizes by offering advice (*jihad* of word)."

The FIS differs from all of the above movements. It is an Algerian political party established in March 1989 after the constitutional amendments of 1988 introduced party pluralism. Historically, the FIS belongs to the Algerian Islamist movement and the nationalist movement that worked to free Algeria from colonial rule and establish an independent state based on Islamic principles. The party seeks to establish a civil, pluralistic system based on God's authority and popular steward-

2 Abdessalam Yassine is the group's supreme guide. His politics can be identified in several works: *Al-Manhaj al-nabawi tarbiya wa tanziman wa zahfan*, vol. 1 (Ghasht, 1981); *Li-rijal*, vol. 1 of the series *al-Ihsan*, 1989; *Muqaddimat fi-l-manhaj,* July 1989; *Al-Islam wa-l-qawmiya al-'ilmaniya*, 1989; *Nazarat fi-l-fiqh wa-l-tarikh*, 1990; *La révolution àl'heure d l'islam; Mihnat al-'aql al-Muslim*, 1994; *Hiwar ma' al-fudala' al-dimuqratiyin*, 1994; *Fi-l-iqtisad*, 1995; *Risala ila-l-talib wa-l-taliba*, 1995; *Tanwir al-mu'minat*, 1996; *Al-Shura wa-l-dimuqratiya*, 1996; *Hiwar al-madi wa-l-mustaqbal*, 1997; *Hiwar ma' sadiq amma zayghi*, 1997; *Islamiser la modernité*, 1998.

ship. The FIS stood in Algeria's first free elections in 1990 and took 853 of 1,539 districts, or 55 percent of the vote, as well as 32 of its 48 provinces, or 67 percent. It also slated candidates for the free parliamentary elections of Dec. 26, 1991, winning 188 seats, while the ruling Liberation Front won only 15 seats and the Socialist Forces Front took 25 seats. It is estimated that if the second round of elections had been held, the FIS would have won 250 out of 430 seats, but the army intervened on Jan. 11, 1992, to stop the elections. The FIS was officially dissolved in March 1992, which plunged Algeria into a cycle of violence and counter-violence, especially after the FIS established its own army, the Islamic Salvation Army. As a result, other movements and groups emerged that believed violence was the only means of gaining power and applying Islamic law, among them the GSPC.

As a result of developments, many FIS leaders came to believe that elections alone, as a conciliatory act, could not guarantee change.

Clearly, based on the foregoing categorization of Islamist movements, the conservative Salafi discourse fosters a rejection of American acceptance initiatives, which, for groups that adopt this discourse, is simply a tactic to spread doubt and division among members of the community of Islam. On the other hand, groups that adopt a conciliatory discourse, with its selectivity and pragmatism, do not reject positive engagement with such initiatives, seeing them as a means to open up to the other and achieve mutual understanding to dispel the doubts and fears that have stigmatized Islamist movements.

II. Motives for the American acceptance of some Islamist groups

The American acceptance of some Islamist groups comes in an international context that is experiencing growing pains as a result of competing interests even within one ideology, liberalism. Thus the U.S. acceptance of some Islamist groups can be attributed to both subjective and objective motives.

A. Subjective motives

These motives are related to the U.S. administration's view of national objectives and interests, which is primarily based on the principle that there are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests. To maintain its national interests, the United States has become a major player in the heart of the Arab Islamic region. In turn, considerations of national interests require finding a way to coexist with the various active agents in these countries. Given the rising role of Islamist movements in Arab politics, particularly the gains made by these movements in elections (in Yemen, Kuwait, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Algeria and Mo-

rocco), it is important to develop a defined American policy toward these groups, seen as political actors that cannot be ignored.

In fact, Islamist forces have become an essential factor that cannot be overlooked or discounted as an enemy. Pragmatism, which lies at the heart of American political philosophy, dictates an examination of conciliatory solutions based on an understanding around common interests. The example of Turkey's Justice and Development Party provides an important model that might be reproduced in the Arab world: a party based on an Islamic foundation working within a political system that upholds secularism as the basic prerequisite for joining electoral competition. The Turkish experience has illustrated the ability of an Islamist party to attain mutual understanding and coexistence, far from absolute rejection, as well as comply with basic conditions, such as maintaining Turkey's NATO obligations and preserving balanced relations with Israel, whom other Islamist movements consider an enemy of their civilization and the cause of the Arab Islamic community's troubles, protected by the United States.

Turkey's Justice and Development Party experiment constitutes a subjective motive for taking the Turkish example as the model for initiatives to help build a framework of direct interaction with Islamist movements in some Arab Islamic countries. This raises the question of the U.S. criteria of acceptance – why it interacts with some movements to the exclusion of others – which in turn leads us to objective motives.

B. Objective motives

In essence, these are found in the extent to which the conduct, discourse and practices of Islamist movements correspond to the Western democratic value system. For the United States, this constitutes the primary guarantee for trust-building.

Some practices of Islamist movements correspond to the Western democratic value system. For the United States, this constitutes the primary guarantee for trust-building.

The objective explanation of these motives now leads us to look at each individual case study.

Case one: the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria

The FIS won the Algerian parliamentary elections of Dec. 26, 1991, the results of which were annulled by a military coup two weeks later. The FIS was then disbanded in March 1992. Many saw the coup and the dissolution of the FIS as

constitutionally illegal, believing it took place with American complicity, and they based their beliefs on the assumption that Islamist movements approach elections as a means of empowerment, not as a democratic tool for the peaceful rotation of power. Partisans of this view point to the lack of any American action to reinstate constitutional legitimacy as it did after other coups in Panama and Nigeria, for example.

Based on the FIS discourse and practice at the time, the group can be classified as part of the radical Islamist trend, for which elections are only a procedural tool to gain power. The FIS was not a model on which the United States and the West could rely, and it did not meet the conditions that would lead the United States and the West to open up to it. In this context, we should note the stance of the late French president, Francois Mitterrand, toward the decision by former Algerian president, Chadli Bendjedid, to liberalize the political system and allow the formation of political parties: "I beg you to reconsider your position to license all political parties, particularly Islamist parties," Mitterrand wrote Bendjedid. "I am prepared to forgive all of Algeria's debt."[3] Since the 1992 decision to disband it, the FIS has remained outside the official political system.

"The FIS was not a model on which the United States and the West could rely, and it did not meet the conditions that would lead the United States to open up to it."

There are other Islamist forces that enjoy official existence in the political system, most importantly the Nahda Movement, part of which splintered off as the Islah (Reform) Movement in 1999, and the Society of Peace Movement (Hamas).[4] But in light of the unstable political situation in Algeria, it seems too early to discuss U.S. acceptance of any of these movements given the ambiguity of the Algerian situation and the stalemate between the authorities and anti-regime forces.[5]

3 Abdelilah Benkiran, ***al-Haraka al-Islamiya wa ishkaliyat al-manhaj***, no. 2, *Ikhtartu lakum* (Casablanca: al-Najah al-Jadid Press, 1999), 9.

4 'Arus al-Zubayr, "al-Haraka al-Islamiya al-musharika fi-l-mu'assisat al-siyasiya: halat al-Jaza'ir," study from a seminar organized by the Center for Political and Constitutional Studies, Marrakech Faculty of Law, "al-Islamiyun wa-l-hukm fi-l-bilad al-'Arabiya wa Turkiya," Marrakech, June 16-17, 2006, 123-47.

5 It is noteworthy that recently the GSPC dropped its original objective – bringing down the government – in favor of targeting Westerners and disseminating its operations over the Internet.

Case two: Justice and Development in Morocco

There are two competing stories about the origin of the PJD. To stress the party's secular line, it is said that the party grew out of the Constitutional Democratic Popular Movement (MPDC)[6]; to stress its religious line, it is said that its origins are to be found in the Jama'ah Islamiya, which in 1992 changed its name to the Reform and Renewal Movement. At the same time, its leader, Abdelilah Benkiran, declared that his movement was peaceful and accepted the monarchy.

In 1992, the Reform and Renewal Movement failed in a bid to form the National Renewal Party, whose objectives were seen by the authorities as inconsistent with existing legal and parliamentary frameworks. In turn, the movement's leaders contacted Dr. Abdelkrim Khatib and proposed that he resurrect the MPDC. Khatib agreed on three conditions: the party would (1) embrace Islam, (2) recognize the constitutional monarchy, and (3) renounce violence. The party convened an exceptional conference in 1996 to induct the Islamist leadership into the general secretariat, and since that time, the party has been seen as an Islamist party.[7]

The party partially participated in the parliamentary elections of 1997, avoiding excessive zeal and careful not to present itself as the sole alternative party, having learned from the experience of Algeria and the FIS. The party fielded candidates in only 24 of 325 electoral districts and won nine seats, most of them in Casablanca, the country's economic capital. In run-offs in other districts, the party came away with three additional seats, and two other MPs joined the party's parliamentary bloc, bringing its total number of seats to 14. When Abderrahmane Youssoufi, with the Socialist Union Party, was charged with forming a government on Feb. 4, 1998, he sought to include the party by giving it one ministerial portfolio, but Khatib preferred to remain supportive of the government, while at the same time outside of it, taking the role of the constructive critic. However, the party soon relinquished its supportive role and became an opposition party giving advice to the government, attempting to institute new political traditions regarding the way Islamist parties were treated. The party sought to become an exemplar, hoping to

6 The party was established in by Dr. Abdelkrim Khatib in 1967 after he broke away from the Popular Movement Party, led by al-Mahjub Ahradan, known for his Amazigh tendencies. Then the speaker of the Parliament, Khatib refused to consent to the king's declaration of a state of emergency, which did not please the palace. The palace in turn harassed Khatib and the split occurred. The party later faced a dead-end due to several obstacles, leading it to withdraw from politics.

7 At this time, two factions of the Islamist movement were trying to merge: the Reform and Renewal Movement (which issued the paper al-Islah, followed by al-Raya) and the League for an Islamic Future (which published al-Sahwa). These efforts were crowned by the declaration of a new organization containing both factions, the Unity and Reform Movement, led by Dr. Ahmed al-Raissouni.

win the trust of others and convince them that the party's objective was cooperation and the acceptance of divergent opinions.

The MPDC took part in the parliamentary elections of Sept. 27, 2002, using a new name announced by its national council in 1998: the Justice and Development Party. Its slogan was, "Toward a Better Morocco: Authenticity, Sovereignty, Democracy, Justice, and Development for a Comprehensive Renaissance." Its political platform relied on "incrementalism" and it refused to seek out a privileged position in Moroccan politics. Out of 91 electoral districts, the party slated candidates in only 57. It won 42 seats, coming in third after the Socialist Union Party (50 seats) and the Independence Party (48 seats). It thus became the leading opposition party. Throughout the parliamentary session of 2002-2007, the PJD has sought to present itself as a balanced party by adopting a political discourse consistent with the state's constitutional framework and exercising its oversight of government through questions in Parliament and proposing legislation. In other words, the party has worked to reconcile and resolve its conflict with other parties from within the constitutional system, not, as is thought, through a discourse based on religion.[8]

"PJD leads us to conclude that it is trying to cement a conciliatory discourse that blends Islamic values with Western, democratic values. This makes it extremely likely that the United States will open up to them."

The conduct and practice of the PJD leads us to conclude that it is trying to cement a conciliatory discourse that blends Islamic values with Western, democratic values, which suggests that it respects humanistic values whatever their source, since it ultimately sees them all as a single value system. This makes it extremely likely that the United States will open up to the party. That is, the line of communication is still open unless proven otherwise.

Case three: the Nahda Movement in Tunisia

Islamist movements' participation in politics is a good indicator of the limits and possibilities of rapprochement between these movements and the U.S. admin-

8 'Abd al-Salam Tawil, "Qira'a fi-l-masar al-siyasi li hizb al-'adala wa-l-tanmiya al-Maghribiya: dirasa fi-l-mafahim al-hakima li-l-musharaka al-siyasiya," study from a seminar organized by the Center for Political and Constitutional Studies, Marrakech Faculty of Law, "al-Islamiyun wa-l-hukm fi-l-bilad al-'Arabiya wa Turkiya," Marrakech, June 16-17, 2006, 9-87.

istration. In Tunisia, the year 1981 was a turning point, when the clash between the Islamists and the official authorities became a direct conflict. The authorities believed that the Islamists, through the Islamist Tendency Movement, wanted to dismantle the state by infiltrating the security services and taking control of religious affairs by forcibly appointing imams in mosques.[9] Despite a period of relaxation from 1984 to 1985 following an official meeting between the government (represented by Mazali) and the Islamists (represented by Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou), tensions began to resurface and the clash again erupted at the end of the Bourguiba era (1986-87). Political tension began to subside after President Ben Ali's white revolution and his assumption of the presidency following the Nov. 7, 1987, declaration. In the statement, he vowed to reclaim tradition in a way that satisfied political Islam and introduce constitutional amendments focusing on sovereignty of the law and political pluralism. He also released some 600 prisoners from the Islamist movement and issued a national pact which guaranteed the participation of various political actors and upheld democracy and Tunisia's Arab Islamic identity. In his view, "Arabization" was a cultural demand and the state was required to respect Islamic values. To acclimate to the new legal conditions (the Parties Law of May 3, 1988, which prohibits the establishment of religious parties), the Islamic Tendency Movement changed its name to the Nahda Movement.[10] The movement entered the Supreme National Pact Council in late 1988 and slated independent candidates for the 1989 parliamentary elections, after the authorities refused to recognize the movement as a political party on the grounds that its leaders still faced sentences issued against them by the State Security Court in 1987 and the fact that the party platform lacked clarifications on some cultural issues and the principle of civic equality.[11] After the elections, the movement became the second-largest force after the ruling party. The election results brought an end to the period of reconciliation between the movement and the authorities, and a new era of conflict was inaugurated (1990-2006).

9 Dr. A'liya 'Alani, "Islamiyun bi-Tunis bayn al-muwajaha wa-l-musharaka: 1980-2006," study from a seminar organized by the Center for Political and Constitutional Studies, Marrakech Faculty of Law, "al-Islamiyun wa-l-hukm fi-l-bilad al-'Arabiya wa Turkiya," Marrakech, June 16-17, 2006, 158-60.

10 For the charter of the Nahda Movement, see Rachid Ghannouchi, *op. cit*.

11 Rachid Ghannouchi is the main ideologue of the Nahda Movement. For books in which he defines his movement's political framework see: *al-Muwatana: huquq ghayr al-Muslim fi-l-dawla al-Islamiya* (Tunis: Dar al-Sahwa, 1988); *al-Haraka al-Islamiya fi Tunis: buhuth fi ma'alim al-haraka ma' naqd dhati* (Khartoum: Dar al-Qalam, 1991); *Min al-fikr al-Islami fi Tunis* (Khartoum: Dar al-Qalam, 1992); ***al-Hurriyat al-'amma fi-l-dawla al-Islamiya, op. cit.***; ***al-Haraka al-Islamiya wa-l-taghyir*** (London: Moroccan Center for Research and Translation, 2001).

This brief review illustrates the stormy relationship between the regime and the Islamist movement. This relationship has not fostered an explicit declaration of intentions, which in turn has not helped to build trust based on the recognition of the other as a competitor or partner. The lack of political openness has also not helped to provide the minimal grounds for reconciliation that might encourage a rapprochement and avoid a clash. This experience stands in contrast to the political experience of Morocco, where parties to the political equation – whether they are loyal to the regime or from the Islamist or leftist opposition – have adopted the logic of conciliation and mutual understanding to resolve political problems, particularly after 1990. These balanced relations have helped establish mutual trust that considers a culture of moderation better than a culture of militancy and conflict. In turn, this provides an entry for the U.S. administration's acceptance of the Moroccan Justice and Development Party. The PJD works within a political system that is now an ally in the new American anti-terrorism enterprise, although we must also consider the sensitive nature of such conditional acceptance for Israel, America's favorite ally. In any case, all of these conditions are still far from being obtained in the case of the Nahda Movement.

Islamic Roots of Good Governance

MAZEN HASHEM, PH.D.
University of California, Riverside

THIS ARTICLE BEGINS by introducing a definition of the phrase "Islamically good governance," and follows with an elaboration on the choice of terms:

Islamically good governance is that which:

- strives to achieve justice in society;
- aspires to maintain the dignity of individuals (both male and female) and protect group freedom, regardless of religious or national affiliation;
- steers individuals toward achieving a means of sustainable livelihood before aspiring for other luxuries;
- encourages virtue, limits vice, and rejects compulsion in matters of religion; and,
- achieves its aims through consultation, participation, representation, accountability mechanisms, and through legal conventional regulations in all social formations, low or high.

It is important to note that this definition avoids the use of three popular phrases: Islamic rule, enforcing Islamic law (Sharia), and democracy. I will elaborate more on the reasons for excluding these terms in the context of the disappointments of the modernist model of development in the Third World.

Dream of Islamic governance

The dream of the Islamic model that has not ceased to manifest in people's lives, although it has lost its ruling power. Historians do not disagree the social conscience of Muslims has always been affected by the values of Islam, regardless of how Islamic their practices were. It is evident today that Muslim peoples across the globe want Islam to play some role in the politics of their countries, despite all the attempts to suffocate and marginalize the aspirations of the masses. From Malaysia and Indonesia to Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Egypt and the Maghreb, one finds a popular desire in countries with Muslim majorities to have a voice for Islam in public life – in different forms and degrees, which raises the problem of what "Islamic governance" means. Muslim peoples have different views of Islamic governance: from a historical heritage to take pride in, to a hope for a future that merges between Islamic elements and what they regard as "positive" in the contemporary Western model. The details of such a mixture differ among people. Some want to "Islamicize" modernism, while others hold Islamic foundations and link them to different applications borrowed from the modernist model.

"It is evident that Muslim peoples want Islam to play some role in the politics of their countries, despite all the attempts to suffocate and marginalize them."

Islamist currents developed different ideologies about governance. Some of the Islamic movements inflated the political dimension in Islam and almost made it a synonym to the nation-state concept. More sophisticated views sought to discover a unique political vision of Islam. However, for the common people who are excited in the prospects of an Islamic way of life, one largely finds vague and dreamy slogans that, practically, represent a barrier to forming a political future of which the majority will approve. The purpose of this essay is to put forward a simple and clear definition to what the phrase "Islamic governance" can appropriately mean.

First, the definition at the beginning of the essay did not use the phrase "Islamic rule" because of the misunderstanding that such a term connotes. It could be understood as a reference to a political vision inspired by the values of Islam, or to theocratic rule. I will mention two sources of the second problematic meaning of Islamic governance. First, the Iranian experience that ended up with an internally-conflicting political arrangement between a legal, constitutional authority and the authority of the mullahs. Second, the popular use of the phrase "the separation of religion and state" in the media and the press, and juxtaposing it on the Muslim

experience. The complexity of the issue cannot be fully addressed here; however, it is sufficient to point out the contradiction in the phrase "separation of church and state." How can one separate two things if one of them did not exist, which was the case in Islam? A quick look at Muslim history will show that the religious scholars and clerics were not political rulers; rather they played specialized roles in various aspects of life (legal scholars, judges, consolers, preachers, etc.). Furthermore, if religion is understood as a worldview or a constellation of values, then the separation of religion from politics is not conceivable in the first place. Politics necessarily adopt one set of values, either from modern secular precepts, or those of the three God-centered religions, or of other major religions of the world, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, or a mixture of this and that.

Describing Islamically-guided governance as "Islamic" is not precise, and it raises further conceptual problems using the internal logic of Islam itself. Any form of Islamic rule will be an attempt to approach an ideal that it can never reach. Therefore, calling one form of rule "Islamic" is necessarily self-righteous. Simply put, it is a "Muslim" government, not an "Islamic" one. It would be interesting to note here that Omar, the second Caliph of Islam, disliked naming anyone Muhammad or after any of the prophets, fearing the possibility that one of them would grow up to be of a flawed character.

Sharia versus Islamic law

Secondly, our chosen definition did not use the phrase "applying Islamic law," because of vagueness and possible misunderstandings. Some people relate the concept of Islamic law with persecution of people, forcing them to perform their religious duties, and preventing them from doing actions those in power believe are religiously unlawful, corrupting, or simply frowned upon. The reasons for such misunderstandings are numerous. Many will recall the image of Taliban rule and their ignorance. Some point to the media as the main source of confusion. Nevertheless, we cannot excuse some preachers and those who pose as speakers on behalf of Islam for their problematic and uneducated utterances.

"Describing Islamically-guided governance as "Islamic" is not precise, and it raises further conceptual problems using the internal logic of Islam itself."

The Quran does admonish people to enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency. This is a call for all people to be an exemplary nation/ummah. For those

who think that such admonition is meant for forming elite religious groups should be reminded with the reality of Muslim history. The history of Muslim societies could be adequately described as a history of civil associations reflected in neighborhoods, guilds, and other local social units. Moreover, the phrase "enforcing Islamic law" may suggest forcing non-Muslims to follow it – which actually contradicts Islamic law itself.

Furthermore, the term Islamic law is surrounded by obscurity and should be differentiated from what is referred to as Sharia. In the minds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals, Sharia is premised on the major values, moral foundations, and ethical guidance of Islam. However, the common understanding, among both laymen and many preachers, is that Sharia is the accumulated body of historical work in the area of jurisprudence. The lack of a clear distinction between the two terms entails major implications at the level of practical application.

"Islamic law (fiqh) refers to historical preferences and understandings that if were correct interpretations in their time may not be suitable for the reality of today."

When Sharia is seen as a value orientation (the first definition), the issue of the inalterability of Sharia becomes understandable since it has to be reinterpreted in time and space. The resulting legal arrangements of continuous reinterpretations would share the same philosophical roots, and the larger picture would be of stability as well as adaptability.

In the second definition, however, Islamic law (*fiqh*) refers to historical preferences and understandings that if were correct interpretations in their time may not be suitable for the reality of today. Although the Muslim heritage is rich, worthy of deliberation, and full of lessons, calling it Sharia can result in contradicting the intent of Sharia itself or becoming circumscribed to what is irrelevant to our present circumstances. Therefore, the use of the term "enforcing Sharia" without further explanation of the meaning of Sharia raises doubts among some Muslims who fear stagnation and control forced upon others by those who rigidly invoke the heritage.

Perhaps even more important, using the phrase "applying Sharia" allows governments the latitude to manipulate its use. It is convenient for arbitrary forms of governments try to enhance their legitimacy by claiming that they apply punishments according to Islamic law – as if Sharia is merely a code of punishments – or

by singularly focusing on the application of personal status laws – as if Islam can be reduced to laws organizing marriage and divorce. Furthermore, such governments usually choose the most stringent forms of historical jurisprudence and stir up public support toward it for political gains. In this case, some Muslim laypeople may feel pressured because opposing the government would appear to be opposing Islam itself that they admire. Such governments may exploit the rallying behind Sharia to distract from their negligence of serving the public in vital issues such as health and education, deepening the larger social and economical problems of their countries.

"Democracy," popular but vague

Thirdly, the definition of Islamically good governance, as suggested in the beginning of this essay, has avoided use of the term "democracy," despite its popularity, because it now encompasses a wide variety of connotations for different people. Specifically, the term democracy can denote a practical aspect of organization or a philosophical view about human life. The first being the tools and procedures of administering and managing people's affairs; the second represents its liberal component that considers man as the ultimate reference and generally averts from invoking the transcendental or the non-utilitarian.

It is evident that there is little disagreement over the acceptance of the term democracy in its practical meaning. It is also well known, but often muted, that democratic practices in the sense of legality and collective decision-making were not singularly invented in the Western part of the world. Hammurabi knew something about legal codes. Several peoples throughout history, including Muslims and the Iroquois, have practiced various forms of collective decision-making.

Because of those two different meanings for democracy, its use in the definition of Islamically good governance should be problematic. One may wonder if the confusion can be avoided with using the phrase "democratic means," instead of democracy as a single word. Nevertheless, it is more constructive to discuss the elements of democracy instead of insisting on a term that might provoke confusion and turn into a mere slogan. Indeed, why not emphasize that the issue is about consultation, purposeful participation, various methods of representation, and establishing the rule of law?

Speaking of the law as an important organizing mechanism brings us to the issue of customs and to what degree they should be invoked. Taking local customs into consideration is important in communities' lives as it allows the law to be flexible – one of the major dilemmas of modern democratic practice. To mitigate the

excessive power of the state, should not governments abstain from interference as long as people are able to settle matters through local customs and tradition? This is a critical issue because law enforcement requires monitoring by the government, which eventually requires coercive means. Historically speaking, the stability of Muslim societies of the past can not be attributed to authoritarian political leadership, but rather to dense communities and smaller building blocks of families, clans, guilds, etc., organized around customs – close to what we call civil society today.

Some Islamic activists of today invoke the term *hakimiyya* – a term that has a range of meanings, including divine sovereignty and that ultimate authority belongs to God. When invoked without qualifications, the terms "democracy" and "hakimiyya" remain vague and Muslims ascribe different meanings to them.

Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, a well-known Islamic leader, tried to solve the problem of defining hakimiyya by announcing that "hakimiyya belongs to God, and political authority belongs to people." As noted before, the problem associated with the use of the term democracy may be easily solved by using it within a specific context or by coupling it with qualifiers: "democratic means" or "means of representation and political participation."

It is worth adding here that similar phrases such as "Islam is the solution" and "the Quran is our constitution" are also generalized slogans that can become a source of confusion. Islam can inspire a solution only when Muslims put forward a clear political program, and whether Islam can proffer any solution to an issue is dependent on a practical and detailed vision. When the devout say that the Quran is our constitution, this is comprehensible at the rhetorical level since the Quran is not a political or a legal document. From an Islamic viewpoint, the Quran is supposed to be a source of inspiration and to serve as a background for a civil and legal constitution. There is no doubt that the popular Islamic political imagination lacks a practical formulation of how to coordinate, maintain rights, and distribute duties in a clear and defined way. It is only appropriate here to note that the Prophet of Islam has supervised the draft of what is known as the Medina Charter, which spelled out civic organizing principles for a pluralistic society formed of different tribes and religions that existed then. Evidently it was a viable constitution or civil contract for its time and place.

Undoubtedly, making reservations about using the term democracy would seem strange for it has now become a standard political term and a staging ground in the attempt to "spread democracy" to the Islamic world. However, it is difficult to – scientifically – pinpoint evidence that shows how promising or potentially

successful such efforts may be. Interestingly, surveys show an overwhelming positive attitude toward democracy as a form of rule, while field data indicate that the public lacks confidence in the wide claims of democracy. Some evidence of this can be observed either in the press or in the spontaneous and sarcastic comments people make in their daily lives about the term democracy. This ambivalence is not due to the lack of readiness to democracy, rather an understandable response to lived realities: first, the average person knows that colonialism passed through democratic channels; second, the contemporary discourse on democracy is seen by some people as threatening since it is widening the sectarian divide instead of bridging it. The most elementary knowledge of marketing and human communication reminds us that any popular motto must address people's reality.

To add to that, calls for democracy often make the following diagnosis: that Arab, Islamic culture is inherently undemocratic and Muslims need to "understand" democracy and "ascend" to its reach, internalizing the Orientalist literature which presents despotism as an integral part of Oriental culture. Ironically, the depth of the justice dimension of Islam in the minds of Muslims coupled with the stagnation of the contemporary political Islamic discourse on one hand, and the disappointments from (Western) democratic practice on the other, makes it difficult to agree on one meaning of democracy relevant and trustworthy to Third World people. Acknowledging that the practical experience of contemporary Muslims in how to apply an Islamic political vision is still limited, lack of experience is one thing and their assumed civilizational inability is another matter altogether. The experience of East Asian countries – like China and Vietnam – serves as a good illustration. Communist socialism has failed to take root in these places. In actuality, it was Buddhism and other Eastern religions that served as a basis for public awareness and political imagination. Furthermore, it can also be said that socialism failed in several Latin American countries, especially in instances when it was based on pure Marxist principles. Today, some Latin American countries are reintroducing equalizing policies couched in the language of local cultures that highly regard public participation and egalitarianism.

"Calls for democracy often make the following diagnosis: that Arab, Islamic culture is inherently undemocratic. Muslims need to 'understand' democracy and 'ascend' to its reach."

Some suggest that we can remove the obscurity of the term "democracy" by redefining it as liberal democracy. However, considering the recent history of Arab

societies, it is doubtful that a discourse anchored in Western moral philosophy will prevail. We need to remind ourselves that this is not the first attempt to localize such Western jargon as democracy, liberalism or socialism. This is exactly what the region witnessed after the colonial period. Such slogans failed to win a place in the realm of public imagination – despite the fact that Islamic discourse then was less diverse and probably less mature than it is today. Sadly, the formation of ideological elites then who adopted Western ideals failed to connect to the hopes of the masses, paving the way for confusion and disappointment, and then to despotism. The problem of despotism among the political leadership of several Arab countries is not restricted to the monopoly of economic resources and exclusive power. Rather, it is especially deepened by the almost complete loss of cultural legitimacy, which explains to some extent the rejectionist attitude of those governed, which sometimes develops into violent resistance.

Unquestionably, there are differences in political culture, especially between the liberal-utilitarian model and that of the Islamic culture. It is not a secret that such a problem is used by the international media to give the impression that Muslim culture is fatalistic and unable or unready to receive democracy. There exists two kinds of Western political visions for the future of Muslims: a sympathetic one that affirms that Muslim peoples are also humans and that all they need is time and opportunity to digest liberal principles, and a biased one that does not hide its conviction regarding the impossibility of enlightening Muslims with liberal democracy, and sees no alternative to controlling them and their destinies to protect the world from their evil.

From the perspective of Islamic Arab culture, both schools of thought and perspectives are shallow. Even the sympathetic mind does not see that Islamic culture is looking forward to embracing justice at a deeper level than democratic proceduralism promises. Overall, the Islamic vision regards the philosophical leanings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke similarly. Both of these views, Hobbes with his theory of an overpowering state, and Locke with his principles on the rule of law, entrust the state and its structure as the ultimate arbitrator in public order instead of the ordinary social units – kinship, community, neighborhood, places of worship – on which the Islamic view (and religious societies, in general) relies. Indeed, the underlying logic of this essay is that the schism between the moral content and the practical manifestations of a political model is at the center of the problem. As long as the fissure exists, the possibility of imported methods succeeding is minimal. Success – if it happens – will be mostly short-lived. The wider the gap, the more likely a foreign political method will fail or result in conflict. It all lengthens

the journey for the development of a localized political vision. In fact, the journey may be missed altogether.

Finally, I like to equally stress that human experience cannot be sidelined. The need to evaluate and benefit from the different forms of modern democratic regulations and arrangement as developed mainly by Western experiments is beyond doubt. Practically speaking, some of the democratic principles must be put in use, simply because the model of the modern state has largely been imported. As the modern state model – by its nature, structure, and mechanisms – has predatory potentials, it must be supplemented with its adequate set of regulations, checks and balances. A political democratic order cannot stand simply on a single leg of voting, but has to be coupled with viable social institutions. We cannot afford the vague use of terms, including democracy; it is far better to talk about democratic elements. There are other related levels of meanings that democracy can point to, such as rejecting monarchy, hereditary authority, and political sectarianism, in addition to the unequivocal rejection of any form of despotism, the insistence on political decentralization and the separation of powers. These are all good reasons for the focus on the content of ideas and not on labels.

In conclusion, the restlessness and heightened aspirations that are observed of Muslim publics makes it necessary to elucidate what governance – with some measure of Islamic orientation – is about. It should go beyond the phase of labels, slogans, and semantics, to begin a process of debating certain basic dimensions (this essay suggested five at its beginning), in order to build upon and elaborate the details of a indigenous political system.

Also, and quite frankly, peace and stability in Muslim countries are dependent on the collective ability to go beyond verbally repudiating authoritarianism and incompetent rulers. It largely depends on positively drafting a national project that receives the approval of the majority of the society's factions, including non-religious individuals who accept Islam only as a civilizational, not confessional, identity. Islamic movements may have realized, and should theoretically and practically comprehend, that the reform of society is a matter that goes beyond devout worship and personal piety; it is about institutional reform, and therefore, national consensus comes above any other consideration.

Islam and Human Rights:
Revisiting the Debate

JUMANA SHEHATA

Jumana Shehata is a reporter at the Daily Star Egypt. *She is an expert in children's legal rights and holds a master of arts in international and comparative legal studies from the University of London.*

NO CONSENSUS HAS THUS FAR BEEN REACHED regarding the status of human rights within Islamic discourse. When trying to integrate human rights law, a contemporary phenomenon[1] built on universal standards, within an Islamic context, divergent opinions will naturally surface as Islamic law is largely built on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence): an aggregation of individual opinions and juristic interpretations, which differ not only from one country to another, but which also change with the passage of time.

In essence, discussion arose as cultural relativists expressed the belief that the tenets of Islam were not compatible with human rights. Some said human rights are a Western phenomenon with imperialist roots in Christianity. Because of its roots in liberalism and individualism, some claimed that human rights could not be applied in Islamic states where the role of the family and the duties an individual owes to his or her family are of fundamental importance to society.

However, in their counterargument, universalists advocate that Islam should be an active participant in the human rights debate precisely because the modern discourse on human rights is universal and not limited to Western views. The

1 The definition of human rights here is "rights due to all human beings by virtue of their humanity without distinction…" as stated in the UDHR 1948.

preamble of the Dec. 10, 1948, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), emphasizes the fact that rights are universal, "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations," and, in Article 1 of the declaration, that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights."

Despite their origins in Western history, the understanding of human rights has evolved with the participation of representatives from Islamic cultures. In 1963, a resolution was passed on a similar issue and it provided the framework for the United Nations to adopt the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, it is worthwhile to note that out of 22 state sponsors of the resolution, five were Islamic countries.

"There is a need to redefine Islam within the context of human rights to achieve reconciliation despite issues with compatibility."

Generally speaking, the conservative relativist approach taken by some Muslim scholars involves looking at human rights within the context of Islamic principles. They argue that Islam has provided a natural code for human rights, which occurred over 14 centuries ago through the Quran and other sources.[2]

In addition, the concept behind Islamic human rights is to achieve an ideal society (*ummah*) through *adl*,[3] or justice, where special merit is given for rewards, and *ihsan*,[4] where special treatment is given to the socially disadvantaged. For example, while the punishment for promiscuity is equal for both men and women, it is different among different classes of women. For the same crime, a slave woman might get half the punishment that a free Muslim woman receives, while the prophet's consort would get double that of the free Muslim woman.

Therefore, it is important within the context of Islamic human rights discourse to distinguish between non-derogative rights,[5] which assert that all human beings are equal before God, and equitable rights toward society – in which people are equal in weight but different based on specific circumstances.

2 Sunnah (traditions of the Prophet), Hadith (sayings attributed to the Prophet), Fiqh (jurisprudence) and Sharia (code of law).

3 Merit in the Quran is attained by righteousness and belief. Those who strive in the cause of God are rewarded more than passive believers. To achieve justice, "adl" or equality, in this same concept, not everyone gets the same punishment, as people have different circumstances as explained by Riffat Hassan.

4 Literally means "restore the balance by making up a loss or deficiency."

5 Such as the right to life, respect, justice and freedom.

Even though Article 1 of the Aug. 5, 1990, Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam[6] calls for equal rights for all, without discrimination on any grounds, there is no mention of gender until Article VI of the same convention. Here it restates equality in dignity, but distinguishes between the rights of a woman and the role of man as the head of the household – signifying a difference in the equity versus equality equation.

By and large, liberal Muslims approach the idea of Islam in the human rights debate as that of assimilatory universalism. While there may be differences between both Islam and human rights, this view seeks to define rights as they exist within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and make them truly universal while respecting existing religious cultures.

According to Abdullah an-Naim,[7] it's most popular propagator, liberal Muslims argue that in our world today there are no monolithic religions and that the rejection of human rights is merely a wish to remain ensconced in tradition. With a moral and political justification of rights in Islamic theology, but inconsistency with human rights, there is a need to redefine Islam within the context of human rights to achieve reconciliation despite issues with compatibility.[8]

Islamic texts can be "re-interpreted" by extracting from the Quran; differences between Suras (a chapter of the Quran) were studied in Mecca and Medina, for instance, which allowed some of the important messages of Islam to be revealed more than 14 centuries ago. Many Islamic scholars believe that interpretations of the Quran are either intended for the needs of people at the time of the interpretation, whereas others believe that the interpretations form part of the unchanging message of Islam that is intended to last throughout history.

N'aim argues that the former view enables jurists to substitute certain texts with others which have a basis in classical Islamic theology, and makes it legitimate to do so – while still respecting the political, social and economic context of its believers.

Regardless of the many arguments made in the human rights debate, the challenge remains to strike a balance between international supervision of rights, while respecting domestic jurisdiction. This may result in rights that are "binding" under international law, while application is left to the individual nation-state and

6 This is not really legally binding yet carries political weight in that it brings together Muslim states.

7 Commonly regarded as a constructivist relativist and a moderate relativist. For more information, see Jason Foster, "Reverse Moderate Relativism Applied: Third generation International Human Rights form an Islamic Perspective," University of Berkley Press, 2004: 235.

8 An-Naim believes that the value of protection of international human rights in checking abuse of states best provided by UDHR and must be achieved.

leaves room for discrepancy.

In fact, while the UDHR presents itself as a "universal" document, it contradicts itself in leaving permissible derogation loopholes by which a nation-state can deviate from its major principles. Accordingly, Article IV of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[9] declares that signatories are allowed in a situation of public emergency to derogate from established principles of fundamental rights, yet what is considered a legitimate reason, or emergency, is for the state to decide.

Flexible rules regarding reservations in the discourse on human rights are another flaw in the system. Muslim nation-states use the privilege of expressing their reservations as a way of feigning inclusion in the human rights discourse. In the end they may just be paying lip service to the international community, while denying their citizens both the rights granted to them by Islam and their human rights enshrined in the UDHR. This is clearest when looking at CEDAW,[10] particularly Article XVI pertaining to family law.

Reservations

According to Article IX of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, a reservation must satisfy a number of requirements in order to be held valid:[11]

A state may, when signing, ratifying, accepting, approving or acceding to a treaty, formulate a reservation unless:

(a) the reservation is prohibited by the treaty;
(b) the treaty provides that only specified reservations, which do not include the reservation in question, may be made; or
(c) in cases not falling under sub-paragraphs (a) and (b), the reservation is incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty.

Nevertheless, in the case of human rights treaties the issue of reservations is controversial, since the primary beneficiaries of a human rights regime are individuals and not states.

9 International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (1976) is one of the main constituents of the bill of rights together with the UDHR and ICESC.

10 CEDAW is the most comprehensive international treaty providing equal rights to men and women. It seeks to regulate state activities, and further aims to place limits on private non-governmental action.

11 The reservations regime is governed by the provisions of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969).

In its General Comment 24, the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR),[12] established under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, found that specific instances of reservations could not go against the object and purpose of the treaty in question. Moreover, the commission asserted that reservations deemed invalid are nullified, rendering the state a full party to the treaty without regard to the reservation. Finally, the commission concluded that "reservations to human rights treaties must be specific and transparent," and that interpretive declarations should not require domestic law to prevail over the provisions of the treaty.

However, there is no monitoring tool that can force a state to deal with its domestic violations.

"It would prove problematic to integrate Sharia without setting a margin of appreciation or limitations as no single body of law forms the Sharia."

This is apparent, for example, in the case of Egypt and its nationality law. The change in the nationality law 26/1975 seemed to be long awaited, and allowed women the same privilege as men when passing on citizenship rights to their children. However, when the law is carefully reviewed many loopholes are revealed.

For example, the new amendments grant children born to foreign fathers and Egyptian mothers Egyptian nationality only when they reach the age of 21 (after having resided in Egypt for at least 10 years and reached a level of proficiency in Arabic). The result is that during their early years, the child does not receive the benefit of public education at local fees (like Egyptians), or other entitlements.

Prior to this legal amendment, Egypt had explained its reservation to Article IX as a way of averting insecurity and a prejudicial future for children who carry dual nationality. However, this argument contradicts itself since children of Egyptian men married to foreign women are automatically entitled to dual nationality – without the restrictions imposed by Egyptian law. The argument further emphasizes that changing the status quo of family law violates Sharia, which will be proven incorrect.

The Egyptian example goes contrary to the principles laid down in CEDAW, and which defines discrimination against women as "... any distinction, exclusion

12 Although general comments of the treaty-monitoring bodies are not considered binding law, they embody authoritative interpretations of the text of the treaty, carried out by independent experts and widely accepted by the international community.

or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

Nonetheless, Islam also honors commitments to treaties. In fact, the first verse of Chapter V of the Quran makes the following declaration: "Oh ye who believe! Fulfill (all) obligations." Therefore when entering into a treaty, a state is obliged to honor *Uqud* (contracts or obligations) and abide by them.

Thus, even though this may be an improvement to the previous Egyptian nationality law, it certainly does not provide equality for women and therefore still violates the CEDAW without being based on religion. It violates conditions of *Uqud* and is considered an invalid reservation under the principles of Sharia. One is also forced to question whether this law came about as a result of international pressure or if it is merely a political play on religious grounds.

Nevertheless, many Islamic scholars and states would justify their reservations by arguing that CEDAW is a Western attack on Islamic countries, which secularizes women and fails to take into account the particularities of Islamic cultures and the principles of Sharia, by which family law is regulated in Muslim countries.

On the other hand, it would prove problematic to integrate Sharia *without* setting a margin of appreciation or limitations as no single body of law forms the Sharia. To the contrary, Islamic law, or Sharia, is based on *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence. Of particular note, however, is the fact that numerous Islamic states have expressed reservations on the rules stipulated in Articles II and XVI of the convention and its core provisions, which aim to eliminate discrimination and incorporate the convention into domestic policy – and serve as the framework in passing or repealing applicable legislation.

Therefore, it is ironic that the reservations have been accepted although they are in clear contravention to the object and purpose of the treaty, which aims to eliminate discrimination. Essentially, these reservations permit discrimination and therefore the aim to achieve equality under the convention must be questioned.

Besides contradicting Article XXVIII, the "impermissibility principle" found in the Vienna Convention, it also goes against the convention article that states that "neither traditional, religious or cultural practice nor incompatible domestic laws and policies can justify violations of the convention."

With the exception of Turkey, Yemen and Indonesia, all of the 40 Islamic countries that have ratified the CEDAW have based their reservations on the principles

of Sharia. However, while Bangladesh, Tunisia, Iraq, Libya, Jordon, the Maldives, and Kuwait have expressly stated that their reservations are based on the tenets of Sharia, other states, such as Algeria and Jordan, have not explicitly mentioned the issue of Sharia. Moreover, we will find that there is a significant degree of difference between the reservations of each of the parties.

For example, Saudi Arabia has only entered a reservation to Article IX of the convention, which grants equal rights to men and women to pass on nationality to their children. They have declared no reservation with regards to the other provisions establishing equality and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender.

On the other extreme, the Maldives entered a reservation indicating that the convention will be followed except for "those principles that the government may consider contradictory to the principles of Sharia." Again, Libya has made a general reservation against CEDAW and claims that it conflicts with Islamic laws relating to "personal status derived from the Islamic system of Sharia."[13]

Reservations such as this one seek to alter, if not exclude, most of the provisions of the convention. This also seems to allow space for the state party to determine what they will accept behind a religious mask.

Reservations on Article XV of the convention provide another indication of the political play between religion and inconsistent interpretations. Article XV guarantees the right to freedom of movement and domicile.

However, Egypt has entered a reservation to this clause on the basis that "according to the Quran, the husband must choose the site of the matrimonial home and the wife has the same domicile as her husband."[14] In fact, the Quran contains no provisions to that effect and eventually Egypt withdrew the reservation after domestic laws had been changed.

Furthermore, Article XVI which deals with marriage and family relations has also been subject to numerous detailed reservations. It stipulates that "state parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations" and specifies a number of rights that must be guaranteed to women in full equality. One of the more controversial provisions cited by Muslim countries in the Vienna Convention is the stipulation of equal "rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution."

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13 J. Connors, "The Women's Convention," in *Feminism and Islam*, ed. Mai Yamani and Andrew Allen (New York: New York University Press, 1996), chap. 16.

14 L. Welchman, "Islamic Law: Stuck with the State?" ed. Andrew Huxley, in *Religion, Law and Tradition* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

At one point, Egypt had filed a reservation to Article XVI explaining that under Sharia a husband had obligations in marriage: to pay bridal money, to provide for the wife and to pay compensation in the case of divorce. In return, while the wife had no such obligations and retained ownership rights over property, she was restricted by judicial decision in attaining a divorce.[15] Therefore, Islam had defined "equality" as giving equal importance to different roles.[16]

"Under the principle of Sharia, the rights and obligations of the spouses may be negotiated in the marriage contract to reflect the kind of marital relations the parties would like to have."

Moreover, under the principle of Sharia, the rights and obligations of the spouses may be negotiated in the marriage contract to reflect the kind of marital relations the parties would like to have. They are thus free to make the choice regarding the equality or inequality of the relationship. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the rights and freedoms guaranteed under international law and the principles of the Sharia.

However, it could be argued that making these rights subject to negotiation rather than being unconditional rights puts women in an insecure position particularly since societal pressures and lack of education prevent a woman from making too many demands in her contract.

Unfortunately, current interpretations of the ***Sunnah*** (the way of the prophet) that are new to Islam have allowed for a weakening of women's autonomy and status in society. Islamic states, as the implementing agents of rights, have the obligation under international law to reverse negative social conditions that serve to entrench discrimination based on gender.

Unification of International Human Rights Law with the Islamic Law

Proponents of equality would then argue that human rights concentrate on political justice by setting up basic standards and do not intend to replace religious values. However, they are political means of identifying human dignity in a legally

15 This has been altered with Law 1 of Khul divorce of 2001 allowing women to annul a marriage in return for dowry price given to her at time of marriage.

16 This is explained by Nadia Hijab as a contradiction between equality under international obligations and equality under Islamic law (48); for more information, see Nadia Hijab, "Islam, Social Change and the Reality of Arab Women's Lives," ed. Yvonne Haddad and John L. Esposito, in *Islam, Gender, and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 45-55.

binding way. Even though the scope of rights is limited, its influence goes beyond politics and laws and this is where it can clash with culture or religion.

In fact, codifying rights into law makes equal rights and freedom accessible to all, perhaps even more on the individual level than those attained through tradition or religion.[17]

Despite the importance and influence of rights and the overlapping consensus concept, it is still commonly argued that even if this is not a notion rejected by Islam *per se*, it is a challenge to achieve human rights in Islamic countries because the pre-conditions of human rights are lacking.

This latter point is best summarized by Fred Halliday's incompatibility theory. Halliday states that Islamic cultures do not play a supportive role in human rights; there exists no autonomy in society or in legal constituents of human rights practice, and there exists no secularism because Islam does not conceive of the idea of separation of church and state.

But as discussed earlier, An-Naim does not look at prospects of reconciliation of Islam and human rights as a choice, but as a must. Islamic countries comprise one-fifth of the world's citizens and simply can not be ignored. While Islamic states are pressured into accepting international human rights norms, without domestic dialogue or internal changes, a situation arises whereby the supposed beneficiary of rights – humans – may fall into an area where they are not protected by Islamic law or human rights law.

"Islamic law is therefore not stagnant and based on a dormant set of rules; it is based on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and is open to interpretation."

And since human agency[18] has been historically involved, and Islam does not in fact mean the same thing for different people at different times, there is no reason why scholarly *ijtihad* (the process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the legal sources) can not take place from classical text to include the modern human rights context.

17 Freedom, according to Kant is "the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity." Quoted in Heiner Bielefeldt, "Muslim Voices in the Human Rights Debate," *Human Rights Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1995): 587-617.

18 An-Naim talks of people's understanding and practice of their religion and not the religion as an abstract notion. Abdullah an-Naim, "The Best of Times, and the Worst of Times: Human Agency and Human Rights in Islamic Societies," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (2004): article 5.

This is made easier by the fact that Islamic law is based on several sources.[19] Islamic law is therefore not stagnant and based on a dormant set of rules; it is based on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and is open to interpretation.

This argument is further supported by the fact that a great impediment for women's rights in traditional Islamic interpretations is the lack of women interpreters of Islamic law in Muslim history. If this can be addressed today, women can play a strong role in religious struggles just as they did at the time of the Prophet.

Moreover, despite the different interpretations of rights in Islam and international norms, there are common grounds upon which to build reconciliation. In essence, the idea of human dignity has roots in almost all cultures and traditions, including the assertion that all people "are entitled to equal respect."[20]

Human dignity can provide a critical dialogue for human rights on the one hand and cultural and religious norms on the other.[21] Both classical Islamic law and human rights share the same objective of protecting human sanctity and ensuring basic non-derogative rights that are granted to everyone by birth, irrespective of their status as Muslim or non-Muslim.[22]

Also, both Islam and human rights value the principle of collectivity, even if at varying degrees. Family and duty are pillars in Islamic rights discourse. Likewise, Immanuel Kant argued that the duty of all people is to use public reason to achieve a just society. Moreover, the notion of the family is emphasized in Article XVI of the declaration which labels the family as the fundamental unit in society and thus needs to be protected by society.

Again, the collective rights concept is echoed in Article 19 (3) of the ICCPR and it talks of freedom of expression but limits it to respecting the rights of others and protecting national order and security.

Therefore, what is required is both a degree of pluralism in the human rights debate to allow for cultural sensitivities, as well a redefinition of human rights "in an exclusive Islamic framework."[23]

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19 Islamic law is based on the Quran, the text of Islam, the Sunnah, the example of the Prophet Muhammad. Ulama (Muslim scholars) interpret the Quran by means of qiyas (analogy), ijma (consensus), and ijtihad (intellectual striving). Joelle Entelis, "International Human Rights: Islam's Friends or Foe?" *Fordham International L J* 1251 (1997).

20 This idea has been echoed by many. Ali Salman in "human rights and Islam:…" portrays the Qur'anic notion that all humans are equal as they originate from the same creation (Addamiyah): 1. Ali Salman, "Human Rights and Islam: Some Points of Convergence and Divergence," Rennaissance.com.pk, Pakistan, http://www.renaissance.com.pk/octvipo2yl.html (accessed May 1, 2007).

21 Bielefeldt, "Muslim Voices in the Human Rights Debate."

22 This is derived from the Hanifa Islamic school whereby "Al Ismah Al addamiyah" cover all basic rights by virtue of birth – stated in interview with Recap Senturk on the sociology of rights.

23 Ibid.

As such, it is important to simultaneously engage in a modern interpretation of the principle of Sharia and a reformulation of the provisions of CEDAW to "adequately address the reality of diverse groups of women."

Reservations to CEDAW should be narrowed down after the authenticities of the religious practices they are based on are analyzed. "Islam" is a label given to non-Islamic practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), honor killings and even terrorism, and this leads to problems with international codes. But these crimes occur anywhere and have no Islamic rationale. They are a result of traditions and not religion.

On a parallel level, Islamic states can form a platform to gain global support in incorporating "equivalency rights" with "equality" to help emancipate women without harming their identity or beliefs. There is an obvious gap between what the Quran, Sunnah and Sharia specify, and how they are practiced. A clear example is in the application of the ***hadd*** penalty (such as the severing of hands or stoning to death).

Even though the flexibility in applying reservations may appear to offer religious pluralism, it stands in the way of achieving a nexus between Sharia and women's rights and acts only as a tool for Muslim states to force more control on their people. However, one cannot lay all the blame on a regressive interpretation of religious texts or patriarchal leaders.

International law that is traditionally meant to protect human rights does not respect Islam, and thus the question is raised about the basic reality regarding the application of power relations within international organizations.

The number and nature of reservations expressed with regard to the CEDAW indicate the existence of a certain degree of cultural conflict between international obligations and religious principles, which cannot be dismissed.

The committee established under the CEDAW must also renew its approach to state reports, particularly as it relates to cultural practices if it is to be viewed as legitimate by member states and their constituent societies. For example, one commentary documented in Article XVI condemns arranged marriages involving payment or preferment, which is obviously short-sighted in the context of Islamic marriages.

Furthermore, there is an assumption that arranged marriages in Muslim societies do not involve choice or consent. Whereas marriages are often customarily arranged in Islam, the rules of Sharia recognize the legal capacity of both men and women to contract their own marriages. Condemning such a significant cultural practice without adequate reasoning or sound logic renders the opinion of the

committee both irrelevant and illegitimate in the eyes of Islamic societies, who see such opinions as Western precepts.

This further encourages double standards and paradoxes on the ground. On the one hand, the Egyptian state allowed for divorce out of *Urfi*[24] marriage (a marriage without an official contract) with the 2000 *Khul* law (in which women gained the ability to ask for divorce).[25] *Urfi* marriage allows for marriage at any age after the onset of puberty, provided that the consent of the girl has been attained.

Previously, *Urfi* marriage had not been recognized by the Egyptian state. However, with the new law, the state is indirectly recognizing *Urfi* marriage by being forced to accept any subsequent request for annulment. The consequence is that the law now provides legal redress for the girl and her child (if there is one), especially since this type of marriage still takes place. Still, it does not recognize the age of marriage which is a provision for this kind of marriage. It can therefore be assumed that the age of marriage being set at 16 came as a result of international pressure as it remains a law on paper only (in practice it has not changed).

"A woman is entitled to her own property rights, as well as being able to receive in her lifetime any gifts in the form of money and still have a stake in inheritance, whereas the man is required to share what he has."

Similarly, the UN Commission for Human Rights was wrong to label as discriminatory "any law or custom that grants men a right to a greater share of property ... on the death of a relative." It is naïve to perceive this as inequality towards women, because in traditional Islamic culture the man is required to provide for the family. If inheritance was made equal for both genders without changing the context of application, for example, this would be a discrimination against men. Men would receive an equal share of inheritance, while being simultaneously expected to carry the burden of providing for the family.

As the context stands, it can be looked at as positive discrimination towards women. A woman is entitled to her own property rights, as well as being able to receive in her lifetime any gifts in the form of money and still have a stake in inheritance, whereas the man is required to share what he has.

24 A religiously accepted customary marriage that has not been previously recognized by the state.
25 Lynn Welchman, "Egypt: New deal on Divorce," *The International Survey of Family Law* (2004): 123-142.

It can be argued that the context in which this law existed made it possible to offer ***ihsan*** to women that needed it; but the context has now changed, and economic realities are making it harder to support all the women in a household. The question arises then, will this arrangement fail?

To entertain the idea of changing behavior where both partners in a marriage would be equal contributors would take generations of education, and may not be accepted by the majority.

The Islamic principle of "equitability," thus provides a definition of the significance of equally important roles for both genders and may differ in nature from the modern understanding of equality. Nevertheless, this is an indication of plurality of interpretation which should be respected in the international context. In order for CEDAW to make progress for all women, it must make progress to understand the Islamic notion of equity.

Notwithstanding these problems, the lack of international enforcement mechanisms for human rights makes it difficult to compel nation-states to be responsible actors. Naim believes that advocates on the ground have to gain local support and motivate populations through their culture to form pressures against their governments and ensure the enforcement of human rights treaties.[26]

An opposing view, based on a critique of An-Naim's moderate cultural relativism concept that accepts cultural difference but places international norms as the benchmark to be achieved (which may have underlying neo-colonialist implications), belittles the application of human rights norms. This opposing view also introduces a reverse paradigm of moderate relativism, where the concept of duties in Islamic discourse can be a better enforcement mechanism to human rights. This theory proposes beginning with other legal systems as the benchmark to be reached in international human rights law.[27]

Also, An-Naim's supposition that Islamic law is open to change while the human rights benchmark that he hopes to reach is based on a stagnant document, the UDHR, or limited to the UN Bill of Rights, weakens the argument.

Moreover, An-Naim does not give a framework of methodology for re-interpretation of religious texts, or who should carry them out. It could be argued, for

26 Abdullah an-Naim, "Islam and Human Rights: Beyond the Universality Debate," Lecture given on the occasion of the 94th Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law, April 2000, http://www.asil.org.

27 The example around which this theory is formed is third generation solidarity rights, in terms of how Islamic concepts of duties can be used to influence understanding third generation rights in the human rights debate. See Foster, "Reverse Moderate Relativism Applied," 1-7.

example, that on the political level, re-interpretation is already taking place, but without genuine religious motivation.

Legal reforms in Muslim countries in the area of family law, like divorce, and restrictions on polygamy have been interpreted differently, yet they all consider themselves governed by Islamic law.

Muslim governments choose to turn a blind eye to some interpretations of Islamic texts like the *hadd* penalty and *Rhibba* (which involve crimes that directly disobey the law of God, and for which perpetrators are given the most severe punishments), and choose to comply with others relating to women.

Therefore, building on An-Naim's value for reconciliation of human rights and Islam through the support of culture, and Jason Foster's reverse moderate relativism theory of taking other legal systems as benchmarks to enhance the cross-cultural dialogue of human rights, a proposition is put forward where culture is not used only as a support of human rights, but as a methodology to define and set better principles to provide clearer definitions and provide limitations that should encourage compliance.

One can extract a different limitation device similar to the margin of appreciation doctrine used by the European Court of Justice that is found in the Islamic style of *Ijma'a*, or majority consensus. The four schools in Islamic law have often differed in their rulings on certain issues, like the age of child custody, where each has their own interpretation.

By analogy, principles like "equality" in CEDAW, or "the best interest principle" in the CRC,[28] can be defined by limitations set by regions (like the four Islamic schools) that would provide each state party with different benchmarks for each issue given the different options as is in *ijtihad*, while still ensuring at least the minimum standards of human rights are attained from which a state cannot deviate, like the Islamic public policy issues that are central to all schools. This could be monitored by the committee that monitors state party reports to its respective conventions.

28 Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm.

29 Quran Sura 4:1 reads: "O people! Revere God who created you from one soul and created out of it her mate and spread from them many men and women; and revere God, through whom your demand your mutual rights, and the wombs (that bore you), (for) God watches you."

Conclusion

In essence, both Islam and international law aim to protect human dignity. The ethical voice of Islam shows clear equality between men and women in the eyes of God,[29] as is guaranteed by political and civil rights in the framework of international law. However, the rights of people toward each other and toward Islamic society, may raise problems in the interpretation of the notion of "equality." In that sense, rights in Islam can be compared to the economic, social, and cultural rights where the language is vague, and are usually considered as secondary rights in human rights discourse, compared to political and civil rights.

"Many consider the International Bill of Rights, which was drafted in Western countries, to be based on ideals that have roots in Christianity and Western history."

In application, culture plays a pivotal role in supporting human rights and may in some cases re-assess and re-define its norms. Until reconciliation occurs between the two, at best states will be forced (through international conventions) to accept human rights on paper (in their written laws as seen above), while in practice nothing will change.

In order to avoid this situation, while being mindful to avoid forcing human rights on nations in a way that results in a loss of culture in the process, we need to engage in a global dialogue on human rights to achieve standards that are a reflection of all societies. Until this can happen, however, the implementation of the current human rights standards on a parallel basis should not be halted, as they do place some sort of reaction to human rights violations worldwide.[30] An analogy can be made here with the domestic situation in Muslim countries.

Many consider the International Bill of Rights, which was drafted in Western countries, to be based on ideals that have roots in Christianity and Western history. However, it is men in Muslim countries that initially made and still make the law. Women's perspectives are not included in the formulation of these laws. Leaders in Muslim countries can and must take part in the international dialogue about human rights. At the same time, women in Muslim countries must be active participants in the law-making process in their countries.

In Islam, women have been granted many fundamental freedoms, and their

30 Bielefeldt, "Muslim Voices in the Human Rights Debate."

status was elevated at the time of the Prophet to unprecedented levels. The subsequent regression that took place was not because of the principles inherent in Islam, but because of the regressive interpretations of the religious texts that were carried out by patriarchal scholars. Many of these individuals wanted to maintain the status quo and close the door to *ijtihad* and independent reasoning. Today, that has spilled out into the choice of leaders of the states to ratify international treaties dealing with women's rights. A solution requires the removing of the "veil" placed on women in patriarchal societies by political expediency and providing a niche where both human rights activists and Muslim scholars can interact and achieve a set of standards to protect the rights of those individuals.

More importantly, human rights norms must not be taken at face value without critical evaluation and review; norms should be open to cultural questioning and must actively reform to create an overlapping consensus.

A Response to Western Views of Islamist Movements

RADWAN ZIADAH
Director of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies

THE EVENTS OF SEPT. 11, 2001, made Islam a domestic concern in the West. After having viewed it as only a foreign, religious source of agitation, the West now views Islam as a source of political and military threats.

An opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press in July 2005 showed that a majority of Americans and Europeans are concerned about the global rise of Islamic extremism. The poll covered 17 countries, and showed that 75 percent of citizens in the United States and European countries such as Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Spain and Russia are worried about Islamic extremism around the world. Most of those polled in America, the European states, and India described Islam as the most violent religion out of a list that included Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism. A total of 87 percent of the French and 88 percent of the Dutch polled considered Islam the most violent of all religions.

A total of 22 percent of those polled in the United States indicated that they held a negative view of Islam, compared to 57 percent who expressed a positive view. In France, 34 percent of those polled said they had a negative perception of Islam, compared to 64 percent who expressed a positive view of it. A majority of those polled in European states said they sensed that Islamic identity is on the rise in their countries, a phenomenon they considered a negative development.[1]

Negative image of Islam

The image of Islam as reflected by this poll can be described as extremely negative. Perhaps this stems from political and historical causes reaching much further back than the events of Sept. 11. Yet the subsequent, more deeply entrenched negativity since then has likely produced policies that aim to respond to such negative perceptions, but indirectly reflect them. Take, for example, the manner in which the Danish government dealt with the Prophet Muhammad cartoon crisis, which was a natural reaction stemming from Western preconceptions about Islam.

"The negative image of Islam stems primarily from the arbitrary judgments issued by the Western media and the political and intellectual elite standing behind it."

The construction of such an image stems primarily from the arbitrary judgments issued by the Western media and the political, intellectual and cultural elite standing behind it. Malise Ruthven, a Scottish writer and historian on religion, fundamentalism, and especially Islamic affairs, for example, blames Islamic failures on ruptures within Islamic societies as embodied in the break between a traditional past and higher education with its Western, civil content. The shaken identity of these societies leads them to play a pivotal role in hosting various forms of clashes between Islam and the West.[2]

Another example is Fred Halliday, who holds that all fundamentalist movements, and not only Islamic ones, are inimical to both modernism and democracy because they reject the "other" on principle. They combine religious and ethnic identities matched by hatred for the "other" that brings them closer to espousing racism.[3] He breaks with Ruthven in stressing that fundamentalist movements are not concerned with development or globalization, but rather they funnel their fury toward their rulers, toward moral corruption, and toward the West and Israel. Their vision of the West is based on their view of themselves and the world. More precisely, it stems from their view of their own identity, which has become solely religious.

1 See *Al-Safir*, Beirut, July 15, 2005.
2 Malise Ruthven, *A Fury for God: The Islamist Attack on America*. (London: Granta Books, 2002).
3 Fred Halliday, *Two Hours that Shook the World*. (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

Yet some go further in their analysis, reading into the social and political background that has allowed the rise of political Islam. This background is represented by the collapse of modernization plans led by the Arab regimes following independence in the 1950s, as well as their failure to liberate Palestine. This led to the Palestinian cause gaining greater importance in the Arab and Islamic consciousness. This was followed by the failure of socio-economic development, reflected significantly in the rise of poverty and the dwindling living standards of citizens in the Arab and Islamic worlds. This was accompanied by the further growth of various forms of absolute political domination that vary from one Arab state to the next, but that are similar in their failure to achieve any sort of democratic advancement. This deteriorating situation was also accompanied by Israel's rise as a regional military, economic, and technological force and the failure of Arabs to respond to any of the criticisms leveled against Israel. All of this created an environment conducive to the growth of religiosity that permeated the rural poor and middle classes, in turn creating fertile ground for the growth of extremist currents within villages and impoverished neighborhoods.[4]

While Osama bin Laden offered an alternative through the rise of extremist Islam, his vision was limited to the elite and the vanguard. It was not entirely the case with regard to the public or its followers, most of whom were raised in slums with nothing – neither water, nor work opportunities, nor healthcare, nor anything else.

This brings us to the divisions of political Islam and the serious challenges posed by the standards or methods on which these divisions are based. Differences are found in intellectual and ideological orientations, as well as those stemming from various geographic areas and others related to political positions and views. Yet most of the sanctioned divisions and standards by which researchers sort Islamist movements rest upon their position towards violence or extremism. This standard focuses on the political effect of these movements and either their ability to change through peaceful means or their adoption of various forms of violence, the latest manifestation of which has been

"Western studies that classify Islamist movements focus on the fact that there is a mainstream version that is characterized by tolerance and moderation."

4 Francois Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam*. (London: I.B. Taurus, 2003).

intercontinental violence as represented by the attacks of Sept. 11.

Searching for either deep-rooted or superficial differences between Islamist movements surely springs from a political sentiment stipulating separate dealings with each movement on the basis of its popularity, effectiveness and influence on the street. These factors might make overlooking them, or even choosing to ignore or condone them, foolhardy because it would not treat the root causes for their growth or their rising popularity that is "real," as opposed to the forms of popular mobilization some Arab regimes impose upon their societies. Such popularity is fraudulent and used to ensure society's submission, compelling it to validate "truths" presented by the regime.

In general, most of the studies that classify Islamist movements focus on the fact that there is a mainstream version that is characterized by tolerance and moderation. This is what traditional Islamic scholarship calls "Islam of the majority," from which examples are drawn in many of the scholarly works on Islamic law when reference is made to the Muslim masses. Sunni, or Orthodox Islam, is thus the middle way. The others are splinter groups the extent of whose Islamism can be measured by their proximity to the Islam of the majority in the way of beliefs and practices.[5]

And thus we find many Western politicians, including U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, describing al-Qaida as an organization that has hijacked Islam from its primary adherents, having diverged from the general guidelines of Islam that mandate moderation, tolerance, and the disavowal of violence.

As for the West in general, with the exception of some right-wing parties and personalities, it does not have a problem with Islam as a religion or the people who profess it. Yet it has suffered, particularly following the bombings that took place in London and Madrid, from those who hold a special understanding of Islam they believe allows adherents to kill their enemies due to differences over political, intellectual, religious and ideological views. The coverage these individuals received in the media – especially considering that they were raised among Western, liberal values in the major Western cities of London, Paris and Madrid – has caused a setback by unleashing a fear of Islam and its followers.

This scenario has varied depending on the degree to which the people of a given country have experience with pluralism and concepts of cultural difference.

5 Radwan Al-Sayyid, "Contemporary Islam: Its intellectual and political currents and cultural transformations around the world," London, April 9, 2005.

It also depends on the country's understanding of itself. For instance, there is a significant difference between the Muslims of Britain and those of France and their role and influence in their respective societies.

Searching for mainstream Islam

During the last three decades, the West's focus has been on Shiite Islam, which has generally been considered more of a threat than other brands of Islam. Now, however, the Western focus is directed at Sunni activity, and most Western fear stems from the perception of Sunni Islam as strict and fundamentalist.[6]

The International Crisis Group's (ICG) report "Understanding Islamism" affirms that the term "political Islam" is of American origin and came into use following the Iranian Revolution, although this supposes that there was an apolitical Islam until Khomeini surfaced and turned everything upside down, after which Islam became a force in the political life of the Middle East.[7]

The ICG report attempts to categorize the main currents in Sunni Islamist activity in a manner that goes beyond a simplified and discriminatory classification of "extremist" and "moderate." Instead, it distinguishes between movements on the basis of the beliefs held by their followers. These beliefs include different characterizations of the problems faced by Islamic societies and different views on Islamic law, as well as different conceptions of political, religious and military issues that require action. The report also defines the type of activity movements consider legitimate or appropriate. In other words, it relies on criteria that can form a source of difference and over which goals are in many cases contradictory. This approach is fundamentally different from the traditional distinction between Sunni and Shiite; it is a distinction between the forms of contemporary Islam more than that between historical Islamic traditions. The presence of such a distinction within the ranks of Sunni Islam in particular is a relatively new development that is not yet complete. It appears to be an ongoing process, as noted in the report.[8]

The report splits Sunni Islamist currents into three primary orientations. The first is termed political Islamism, in that these movements prioritize political activity over religious proselytism. They seek to gain power through political means and not violence, in particular through organizing themselves as political parties.

6 International Crisis Group, "Understanding Islamism," Middle East/North Africa Report, no. 37, March 2, 2005.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.

The primary example of this current is the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its various branches, particularly those in Jordan and Algeria.

The second current includes both revivalist and fundamentalist missionary activism. Movements in this category avoid direct political activity and neither seek power nor classify themselves as political parties. Rather, they focus on missionary activity such as preaching to reinforce or revive belief. Examples include the Salafi movement[9] that is widespread in the Arab world and the Tabligh movement,[10] which was founded in 1926 in India and has since spread throughout the world.

The third current is that of the jihadists, activists committed to violence because they are concerned with what they consider the defense of Islam, and in some cases the expansion of its dominion. This current comprises two primary groups. The first is the jihadist salafis, comprising people with a fundamentalist outlook who have been mobilized as extremists and who eschew non-violent activity related to preaching in order to join the ranks of armed jihad. The other group is the Qutbists, activists influenced by the radical thought of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian thinker and writer who is often credited with providing an ideological basis for violence in the name of religion, though this contention can be debated. In the beginning they were prepared to wage jihad against the "near enemy," the local regimes they described as infidels, particularly in Egypt. This was before redirecting their jihad to the outside world, against the "distant enemy," in particular Israel and the West, led by the United States.[11]

The report issued by the U.S.-based Rand Corporation in 2003 titled "Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources and Strategies" classifies contemporary Islamic currents into four groups: secularists, fundamentalists, traditionalists and modernists. It defines the positions of these currents towards a number of primary issues, including democracy and human rights, polygamy, penal measures and Islamic justice, minorities and the status of women. It concludes with an attempt to form a recommended strategy for the United States based on identifying partners in the development of democratic Islam, which it views as accepting American values and particularly those of democracy.[12]

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report entitled "Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring Gray Zones,"

9 The term "salafi movement" generally refers to those movements committed to a fundamentalist interpretation of the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

10 The Tabligh movement is generally considered to be an apolitical social movement that seeks to bring about a spiritual revival among Muslims.

11 Ibid.

12 Al-Sayyid Yassin, "The American Roots to a Theory of a Liberal Islam," in *Al-Nahhar*, Beirut, July 25, 2004.

differentiates between Islamist movements based on whether or not they employ violence. It holds that the moderate Islamist movements, and not the radical ones, will have the greatest influence on future political developments in the Middle East. It defines these moderate movements as those that have eschewed violence and formally renounced it, and which seek to reach their goals through peaceful political activity. The most important of these movements are the Muslim Brotherhood and its various derivatives, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party, the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, and the Reform Party in Yemen, among others.[13]

The report admits the limitations of this differentiation, and stresses that it does not assume that these movements are fully committed to democracy, that they have relinquished their goal of making Islamic law a basis for all legislation, or that they accept full equality for women. What the report refers to as "grey zones" in the thought of Islamic movements are the results of the contradiction found in the moderate Islamist movements' purposeful refusal to openly declare their positions on thorny Islamic issues. This is done so as not to aggravate the West or lose their reputations as moderate movements. Yet the report also recognizes a qualitative development within these movements' thought and in their political strategies.[14]

The United States Institute of Peace has issued several reports on *ijtihad*, the effort to exercise reason in interpreting Islamic law in a contemporary context, and on dealings with Islamists. It considers one of the primary reasons for the failure of Muslims to reconcile Islam and modernism as the fact that *ijtihad*, within the circles of Sunni Islam, has been halted for centuries. Despite this, however, there have been attempts to interpret Islam's divinely revealed texts in light of modern facts and knowledge. In order for *ijtihad* to succeed in any society, democracy and the freedom of opinion must prevail.[15] As such, a separate report authored by the Rand Corporation directs U.S. foreign policy to support "Islamic renewal," or those initiatives characterized by Islamic moderation and that adopt programs based upon religious reform and renewal within the Islamic arena.[16] The Rand Corporation report also suggests that U.S. foreign policy should generally encourage diplomacy towards the Islamic world.

13 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring Gray Zones," Carnegie Paper No. 67, March 2006.

14 Ibid.

15 The United States Institute of Peace, "***Ijtihad***: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the Twenty-first Century," Special Report No. 125, 7, August 2004.

16 Abdeslam M. Maghraoui, "American Foreign Policy and Islamic Renewal," United States Institute of Peace Special Report No. 164, June 2006.

This latter recommendation was adopted in the most recent publication of the Defense Science Board of the U.S. Defense Department. It warned that any plan for open relations must be built on a strategic basis and attempt to explain its diplomacy to the Islamic world by stressing that their embracing of moderation does not mean submitting to the American way. It also called for distinguishing the majority of Muslims who do not practice violence from those extremist Muslims who embrace the idea of *jihad*.[17]

This has materialized in U.S. support for the spread of democracy in the Middle East despite the fact that Islamists recently swept the elections in Egypt, Iraq and Palestine – a development that led Ayman al-Zawahiri, a leader in the al-Qaida organization, to condemn the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt for its participation in the elections. The United States attempted to take advantage of this apparent rupture and employ it to deepen the differences between moderate movements on the one hand and the al-Qaida organization and the extremist movements that support it on the other, so as to benefit and legitimize the "war on terrorism."[18]

The democratic victory recently gained by Islamist movements has driven the United States to form a "strategic vision" based on the encouragement of political reform in the Arab region despite the likelihood that such reform could strengthen the influence of forces inimical to America and the West. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stressed that this fact reflects a necessary transition period prior to the realization of political regimes that are more stable and open to the West. Regimes allowing for some reform would reap benefits that could include the ability to offer better choices to their peoples and the opportunity to establish more constructive relations with the rest of the world.[19]

And thus, Bush vowed to continue supporting political reform in the Middle East, even if its results run counter to the wishes of Washington. He stated, "The only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by offering the hopeful alternative of political freedom and peaceful change." Yet he also admitted that the choices decided by the region's people would not always

17 *Al-Mustaqbal*, Beirut, Nov. 26, 2004.

18 See the speech of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the United States Institute of Peace, in which she described the situation between America and the Islamic world as being a relationship in which the United States has gone to war five times since the end of the Cold War to help Muslims. "Without exception, these were wars of liberation and of freedom." Quoted in ***Al-Safir,*** Beirut, Aug. 20, 2004.

19 George W. Bush, State of the Union Address by the President, United States Capitol, Washington, D.C., Jan. 31, 2006, http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/.

20 Ibid.

conform with American views, for "democracies in the Middle East will not look like our own, because they will reflect the traditions of their own citizens."[20]

This is the position the European Union also formed following major resistance. It now holds that one must enter into dialogue with Islamist opposition organizations in the Middle East to encourage a transformation towards democracy. This was stressed in a report issued by the foreign ministers of the European Union in Luxembourg, which opened by noting that the EU had in the past preferred to deal with the secular intelligentsia of Arab civil society at the expense of the more representative Islam-inspired organizations. It thus convinced the EU of the necessity of opening a dialogue with "Islamic 'faith-based' civil society" in Arab states.[21]

Overall, this European-American congruence on the inevitability of dealing with Islamist movements can be considered a strategic move, especially if one considers the disparities that have in the past characterized American and European views on their dealings with Islamism.

21 *Al-Mustaqbal*, Beirut, April 17, 2005.

Separating Islam from Political Islam:
The Case of Morocco

HUSSAM TAMAM

Editor of the Cultural Page, Arabic section, for Islamonline.net*, and an expert of political Islam.*

THE BLENDING OF PROSELYTIZING WITH POLITICS comprises one of the foremost dilemmas facing Islamist movements throughout the world. The phenomenon has caused considerable debate and discussion among political forces who resent the Islamists' monopolization and use of the religion card. Under the banner of Islam, some Islamist movements are able to gain an immense edge in the political arena, despite having no other qualifications. Other, more missionary Islamist groups, have also struggled to define the fine line between religion and politics. In some cases, religiously-inspired activities have been vulnerable to restrictions and security clampdowns on the grounds that they form a back door through which political Islamists practice their politics.

By analyzing past political elections, we can see examples of how some Islamists tried to encourage voters to use religion as a deciding factor when they cast their ballots. The most recent example was the Egyptian parliamentary elections, in which religion exercised a strong presense. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood constituted a large portion of the candidate pool and won one-fifth of the seats in parliament; they used an unprecedented amount of campaign slogans and speeches heavily dominated by religious symbols and rhetoric.

It is not the intent of this article to enter the interminable debate over the mixture of religion with politics, nor is it an attempt to argue against or for the

right of Islamic forces to manifest their religious identity in the course of political competition. However, I would like to use the example of two organizations in Morocco that highlight the fine line between religion and politics and illustrate the way a distinction can be made between the two within an Islamist movement. It also illustrates how both a political movement and a religious movement can become dominant forces within an Islamic society without one overstepping the boundaries of the other.

The Moroccan Unification and Reform Movement (MUR) is an Islamic missionary organization affiliated with the Justice and Development Party (PJD), though the groups are independent from one another. MUR is the largest of all the Islamist factions that have agreed to participate in and adhere to the rules of the political process in Morocco, unlike the Justice and Benevolence Society, which is organizationally stronger and has a wider following, but boycotts the Moroccan political order in its entirety.

The MUR was founded approximately 10 years before a number of Islamist forces, notably the Islamic Future League and the Reform and Renovation Society, came together for a process of ideological introspection, triggered by the wave of political violence in the 1970s involving some of their members. After the meeting, the MUR became their way of officially repairing their rupture with the militant approach of Al-Chabiba Al-Islamiya (the Islamic Youth Society) and showing their dedication toward peaceful political action. In their first attempt to legitimize the organization within the political system, they sought to establish themselves as a political party called the National Renovation Party; however, the government rejected their application. Then, in 1996, the group's leaders made a historical pact with Dr. Abdelkrim al-Khatib, the leader of the Popular Democratic and Constitutional Movement (MPDC). The MPDC was restructured to incorporate MUR members and renamed the Justice and Development Party (PJD).

Although the MUR and the MPDC disagreed over the extent of their relationship and its impact on the political policy of the MPDC, they did agree to defer deliberations over the problem of blending proselytizing and politics until after the 1997 parliamentary elections.

In 1998, inspired by its electoral successes, the MUR movement began to develop a more clear perception of its relationship with the PJD. In the process, MUR leaders began to show their inclination for keeping the dissemination of their beliefs, morals, and the general shaping of society as their main functions, and to defer to the party as the organizational framework for the pursuit of political affairs.

After the Casablanca bombings on May 16, 2003, some liberal members with-

in the PJD partially blamed the MUR for helping to give rise to terrorism. As a response, MUR leaders urgently began to reassess the influence of religion within the movement and the relationship between Islam and politics within the party. MUR leaders concluded that they wanted a greater distinction between the two, a systematic differentiation between Islamist missionary action and political action. It was decided that this process would be engineered politically by PJD General-Secretary Saadedine Othmani and organizationally by MUR leader Mohammed al-Hamdawi.

This new strategic orientation was ideologically and theoretically couched in a document called "Political Participation and the Relationship Between the Movement [MUR] and the Party [PJD]." The document had been the subject of extensive deliberations within MUR since 2003 and was unofficially released in 2006.

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Based on knowledge of the central concepts of the new orientation and interviews with several of its architects, the differentiation between religious and political advocacy within the movement has matured considerably at the theoretical level. Consequently, there are strong indications that the theory has taken root within the movement and put into action.

In the course of investigating this pioneering experiment on the part of an Islamist movement, I met with Dr. Mohammed Yatim, both a prodigious scholar and an ardent political activist. He serves as the deputy chairman of the MUR and is a member of the general-secretariat of the PJD. To a considerable extent, Yatim serves as the chief theorist for both organizations and is the person largely responsible for laying the philosophical foundations for the move toward demarking the boundaries between his movement's religious mission and the political spheres in which it acts. He has authored numerous scholastic studies and articles including: *Islamic Action and Approach to Civilizational Change* and *The Islamist Movement: Between Proselytism and Politics*.

Yatim states that because his movement is grounded on the principle of the all-encompassing nature of Islam, it strives to be equally comprehensive in its aims. It seeks, for example, to participate in the realization of Islamic tenets concerning the individual, the family, the community, the state and the Islamic nation. It also seeks to contribute to the shaping of society as a whole. However, this comprehen-

siveness has not blinded the movement to the fact that it is only one of many contributors to the establishment of an Islamic state. In addition, as Yatim's movement regards Morocco as an Islamic state with a vast record of historic achievements for the advancement of Islam, he presents the movement as only a compliment – not an alternative – to other experiences.

The MUR's fields of operation are as diverse as its mission is broad: it works with individuals and with groups, engages in political, economic, and social work, as well as cultural and intellectual activities. In fact, it operates in nearly the entire gamut of intersections between human activities and Islam.

"The differentiation between religious and political advocacy within MUR has matured considerably at the theoretical level."

The diversity of the movement's activities and the breadth of its goals necessitates separation between what Yatim calls the primary functions of the movement (proselytism, inculcation of values, moral formation) and what he refers to as specialized activities (all other activities). The primary functions are those that define the movement itself – its calling and its *raison d'être* – and are what allows the movement to cooperate with all like-minded entities, whether they be the state or other movements and influential bodies. The specialized activities, by contrast, are those that reside outside the scope of the movement's core religious calling. They include, for example, involvement in politics, social work (philanthropic societies), and workers' rights advocacy. While operating within the ideological framework of the movement, these activities must be organizationally distinct. Yatim defined the relationship between the MUR (embodying the pursuit of the movement's primary functions) and the PJD (which articulates its specific political function) in a single sentence: the two "converge in frame of reference and complement each other but are functionally separate."

MUR leader Mohammed al-Hamdawi views the relationship between his movement and the PJD in similar terms. He sees it as a partnership between two independent institutions, or a strategic collaboration between an Islamic missionary movement and a political party. Both the movement and the political Party share the same ideological frame of reference, but operate differently at the structural level. To help the public understand this relationship, he compares it to a similar situation among environmentalists. All environmentalists share the same overarching goal: to protect and conserve the environment. However, on an organizational level, all function in different ways. Some organizations focus on advocacy, where-

as others work on a more political level. Yet others focus on only certain aspects of conservation – wildlife or climate, etc. In the same way, the MUR and the PJD are structurally different yet dedicated to a common endeavor: the establishment of the Islamic state.

The concept in practice

In spite of the fact that 80 percent of PJD members are also MUR members – representing some 30 percent of its active membership – MUR leaders have been keen on sustaining a total separation between the movement and the party at the administrative level.

Current MUR leader Mohammed al-Hamdawi was a PJD member, but resigned his membership when elected as chief of the MUR. Explaining his decision to field himself as MUR leader, al-Hamdawi said that he wanted both the MUR and the PJD to have modern leadership, as previously the movement's leadership consisted of male elders and leaders with theological backgrounds, whereas al-Hamdawi was a student of engineering. He felt that if he was going to serve in the MUR leadership, it was necessary to resign from the party so as to reaffirm the party's independence from the movement. In a similar spirit, the head of the PJD, Saaded-dine al-Othmani, was not considered a candidate for the MUR's executive board (the movement's highest authority) even though he remained a member of the movement's elected Shura Council.

The movement now devotes itself to the administration of its subsidiary institutions, in a manner similar to other civil society organizations, and its directives are considered binding only within the realm of these institutions' activities. On political orientation and positions, the PJD takes precedence over the MUR and the movement's leaders ask that members who also are members of the PJD defer to the party's hierarchical frameworks for political guidance. The PJD also has its own autonomous leadership (embodied in the Shura Council and an executive bureau), and its own electoral processes for selecting and regulating this leadership. The most the movement involves itself in the activities of the party is when it holds general discussions of political matters in MUR Shura Council meetings, though it refrains from intervening in the party's general policies. Leadership from neither party is obligated to the other. In order to affirm their independence even further and to impress its membership, the MUR newspaper frequently publishes official letters to the PJD general-secretary, illustrating the separation between the two parties.

In addition, the MUR opposes religious sloganeering in political party activity.

It fears that its mission will benefit from politics in the long run but that it will be jeopardized by direct involvement in daily politics. Interestingly, al-Hamdawi also believes that Islamic political action will eventually subside in the long run, not necessarily out of an inherent problem of its own, but as a consequence of the laws of social evolution and the logic of democracy. As al-Hamdawi put it, "In the most advanced democracies, a political platform lasts no more than one or two terms, after which it recedes and yields to an alternative."

"MUR opposes religious sloganeering in political party activity. It fears that its mission will benefit from politics in the long run but that it will be jeopardized by direct involvement in daily politics."

During the last Egyptian parliamentary election – in which religious sloganeering was ubiquitous – the MUR mouthpiece, *Al-Tajdid*, featured several commentaries by one of the movement's leaders Bilal al-Talidi, criticizing the campaign slogan, "Islam is the solution." MUR's motto is, "I want to reform what I can," which is amplified by the subsidiary motto defining the MUR as "An Islamic renewal drive to participate in the establishment of faith and the reform of society." The PJD motto, "Authenticity, Development and Justice," is devoid of any Islamic symbolism or plea to religious sentiments.

On formative and acculturation programs

A clear separation between the movement and the party also necessitated a level of differentiation between their respective formative and acculturation programs, as dictated by the nature of each institution. In fact, the differentiation begins at the level of membership qualifications.

Whereas the MUR strictly adheres to the character requirements of its members (members must adhere to certain codes of rectitude and have no record or even suspicion of indulging in prohibited substances or vices), the PJD is relatively flexible in this regard, as long as members adhere to the political positions and general political outlook of the party. The two organizations also differ in internal promotion practices and disciplinary action against members who fail to adhere to the codes of either the movement or the party. For example, a member may be expelled from the PJD for political reasons but still remain a member of the MUR, which is concerned solely with the ethical problems directly related to its members' commitment to the movement and its moral codes.

An illustrative example of the constitutional separation was seen during a par-

liamentary election in which the PJD participated. When MUR leaders learned that a PJD candidate, who was simultaneously a member of the MUR, was accused of purchasing votes to win the election, the movement conducted an extensive internal investigation, ending with the revocation of the candidate's membership in the movement for having breached the requirements of his affiliation. The entire procedure took place with no consultation or information from PJD leaders. Only afterwards did MUR leaders inform PJD leadership of their decision, though these leaders had no expectations that their PJD counterparts would take similar action. In fact, they did not anticipate a response from the party at all.

The separation of the two groups manifests itself in all the formative programs organized by the movement and the party. The movement's programs are designed for the advancement of its religious and cultural mission by engaging in activities such as religious education, sermons and public meetings. Political mobilization is not conducted through the movement's structures and activities. The MUR does not specifically address or organize special activities for its members who are involved in politics. Rather, it is determined to keep its proselytizing, rectifying and educational mission addressed to the public at large.

On guarantees for conformity

Naturally, some circles within both the MUR and the PJD leadership believe that mutual independence could eventually lead the organizations into conflict with one another. This anxiety is particularly strong among activists who are dedicated to the dissemination of Islam and fear the effects of the dictates of politics. This concern gave rise to considerable discussion over whether certain measures should be taken to ensure that the party defers to the ideological guidance of the movement. Ultimately, however, opinion prevailed against such measures. Not only would they be impractical to implement, but, more importantly, the very notion of regulatory mechanisms to safeguard the moral authority of the movement runs counter to the principle of independence and, in practice, would hamper the party's organizational and political efficacy. The movement decided that there can be no institutionalized guarantees to regulate party conformity to the movement and that the only guarantee for such conformity resided in the nature of the party's ideological commitments.

The relationship with other Islamic movements

The strategy of separation between proselytism and politics has proved helpful in promoting the movement's relationships with other Islamic entities. Religious

activity in Morocco engages a broad and diverse range of players, from governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Awqaf (religious endowments) and Islamic Affairs, its subsidiary agencies and academic councils, to nongovernmental entities, such as the Sufi orders and other Islamist groups, especially the Justice and Benevolence Society – the largest Islamist organization in Morocco.

Operating under the principle that they are only one of many contributors to the establishment of Islam, the MUR is prepared to cooperate with other groups who share their dedication to the faith, regardless of their political outlooks or positions. Thus, the movement welcomed the Ministry of Awqaf's project for restructuring religious activity in Morocco on the basis of common denominators of Islamic thought. The movement officially praised the government's initiative to restructure religious activity, "as opposed to uprooting it," and regarded the initiative as a step forward for Islam and one that required support from all Islamist organizations. Accordingly, MUR acted as a partner with the state in this endeavor and began to cooperate with the Ministry of Awqaf toward the realization of its objectives. Indeed, many of the members of the ministry's higher academic councils, which are among the most important bodies engaged in this project, are MUR members. For example, MUR members Ezzeddine al-Tawfiq, Mohammed al-Roki and Farid al-Ansari (recently resigned) are also the ministry's top supervisors, overseeing the training of preachers, and Al-Abadi Ahmed, the ministry's director of Islamic Affairs, had previously been a MUR leader. Through its use of media outlets, the MUR also actively supports the state's religious initiative. The MUR mouthpiece, *Al-Tajdid*, allocates considerable space to covering the news of the ministry's academic councils and praises their achievements and the efforts of their staff.

"MUR seeks to embrace everyone who has an Islamist outlook, regardless of their political positions or allegiances."

At the nongovernmental level, the MUR has made no secret of its differences with its chief competitor, the Justice and Benevolence Society, over such crucial issues as recognizing the legitimacy of the Moroccan political system and working within it, and over the broader, more visionary questions that inform their respective positions on these issues. Nevertheless, MUR leaders have resolved to transcend the logic of ostracism and antagonism and instead have accepted to work with groups even though there are certain areas they might not be in total agreement with, such as their support for the Palestinian and Iraqi resistance movements. In addition, the MUR does not fear the awkward

repercussions it may receive from working with a group that is officially banned and repressed.

Indeed, the relationship between the MUR and other Islamist organizations illustrates the principle of separation between the MUR and the PJD. The MUR has voiced its concern over actions the government has taken against the Justice and Benevolence Society – the detentions and the closures of its headquarters and "open door" centers for communicating with the public – and it has issued a formal statement condemning what it deems an excess of censorship. Moreover, it has lent its newspaper to the society – which is under siege by the rest of the media – as a forum for expressing their points of view, as exemplified by the interview the newspaper held with a spokesman for the Justice and Benevolence Society, Fathallah Arslan. The party, on the other hand, took a more pragmatic approach. As the PJD will likely take part in forming the next state government, they opted to remain silent on the subject, unwilling to antagonize the regime in hopes of retaining their continued confidence. Thus, not only has the PJD not issued a formal comment on the arrests of the Justice and Benevolence Islamists when pressed by media representatives in Tangiers, PJD Secretary-General Saadeddine al-Othmani stated that the society's "open-door advisory councils" were illegal because they had not been approved by the authorities. In other words, his position toward his fellow "brethren" Islamists was influenced by political calculations and which made the MUR put these calculations before their principles.

The logic of differentiating between proselytism and politics may also be the reason for the marked change in the MUR's relations with Moroccan Sufi orders. After years of shunning and opposing the Moroccan Sufi orders, the movement has dropped its barriers and has become open to their points of view. To a large extent, this is attributed to the fact that in the process of transforming the movement into a purely Islamic missionary organization rather than a political one, the dynamics of harmony and unison have come to prevail over the dynamics of discord and confrontation.

Differentiation at the rhetorical, operational and leadership levels

It is possible to identify three levels at which the differentiation between politics and proselytizing operates:

At the level of discourse

As a missionary movement, MUR seeks to embrace everyone who has an Islamist outlook, regardless of their political positions or allegiances. After all, the

Islamist frame of reference can not be reduced to any single political expression or be communicated through a single political discourse. Political discourse presumes diversity in opinion, political rivalries, and requires the potential for evolution and change to best suit emerging or changing political interests. In contrast, the movement is contingent upon forever adhering to the collective Islamist frame of reference for all who subscribe to it.

Therefore, the MUR made an unequivocal decision to prohibit its members who are preachers or proselytizers from participating in elections, whether as candidates or as official supporters of candidates. It further prohibited MUR leaders from taking part in PJD electoral campaigns on the grounds that the movement should represent an all-embracing Islamist frame of reference that is open to all Moroccans and should not be reduced to supporting a single political party. In addition, the decision was meant to protect the MUR from taking an antagonistic stance toward a potential political rival or being subject to the mire of narrow political partisanship.

On the whole, the movement sought to develop a general, all-encompassing, morally instructive rhetoric that was as distinct as possible, in language and substance, from political rhetoric. In addition, the MUR declares no bias except for a set of moral principles and does not allow for the organization to get entangled in direct political attacks. It seeks to maintain its focus on issues and ideas as opposed to individuals and institutions.

In a further move to curtail any overlap between the rhetoric of the movement and that of the party, MUR leaders disassociated *Al-Tajdid* from the PJD and in turn, the PJD is now in the process of founding a newspaper of its own. Both newspapers will have corresponding websites, completely unrelated and independent from one another.

At the level of operations

In their latest review of operations, MUR leaders drew distinct lines between the movement and the party. They have determined, for example, not to issue statements on specific current affairs, such as the repair of a bridge or irrigation canal, or a political or economic event. They will leave the initiative to the party and confine the movement to causes that keep with its character as a civil society organization of which all Moroccans can be a part. The MUR is an organization established for the purpose of disseminating Islamic values and shaping the character of the individual and his or her society. Such causes should be of a general and moral tenor, such as fighting injustice and unemployment, promoting virtu-

ous behavior and professionalism at work, encouraging loyalty to the nation, and supporting central Arab-Islamic causes in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan.

This operational differentiation, however, begs some difficult questions regarding whether Islamist political activists should concern themselves with questions of identity. What amount of space should be allocated to identity issues in the party's discourse? Can identity questions, in fact, become political issues, or are they purely cultural and moral ones that fall within the jurisdiction of the movement?

In the opinion of Yatim, "It is in the party's interests to minimize its involvement in identity politics and to devote itself more to refining its political and instrumental rhetoric." Nevertheless, he acknowledges the difficulty of bringing this about in practice. Identity questions are still of major concern to the public and determine, to a great extent, the party's reputation and reach. It would therefore not be politically wise for the party to suddenly forsake its attention to such issues. He added that the movement may be near a solution to this dilemma in having internalized the principle that it is the party's responsibility to take direct actions and concrete positions on the immediate concerns and problems of the people, even if identity is one of them. He called it the "Prophet Joseph" approach: Joseph presented himself to the Pharaoh not in his capacity as a prophet, but as the man best suited to solve a country's economic crisis.

"MUR draws a distinction between matters that have significance to all segments of society versus those that only pertain to a certain segment's moral or values system."

However, some issues are far too intricate and involved to be clearly assigned to the purview of either the movement or the party. Take, for example, the censorship of the arts and the government's role in protecting morals, or the prevention of offenses to public decency, an issue recently brought to the fore by the film *Maroc*. The film caused such an outcry for its sexual explicitness and its offensive portrayal of Moroccan women – which some regarded as an insult to Morocco – that the censors were forced to step in and ban the film.

On such issues, the movement draws a distinction between matters that have significance to all segments of society versus those that only pertain to a certain segment's moral or values system, obviating the possibility that they would be trampling the rights of an opposing ideological trend or point of view. Also, the party carefully chooses the types of issues it adopts as political causes. Perhaps the clearest examples of the application of this distinction can be seen when applied

to the questions surrounding the issues of women's bathing suits and prostitution. The former issue is controversial because of the religious sensitivities it arouses among Islamists and conservative Muslims in general; the latter brings to the fore the exploitation of the poor by the phenomena of prostitution rings and the sex trade industry.

To the MUR, the question of women's bathing suits falls squarely in the domain of the movement and its educational mission, but it should not be adopted by the party as a political cause. As there is a significant secular segment of the public that does not regard such attire as shameful, the issue can not be regarded as a subject of national consensus and, therefore, Islamists do not have the right to impose their moral outlook on others. The exploitation of the poor through prostitution, on the other hand, is universally abhorred by all segments of Moroccan society, including the secularist trend. Consequently, the party should be allowed to work alongside the movement in fighting this problem and adopting it as a political cause. The overlap between the operational realms of the movement and the party is permissible here because it is a clear case in which questions of morals and identity intersect with political affairs and the public's demand for a solution to a general social problem.

In all events, Yatim believes that on identity issues, the party must refrain from degrading any group or person publicly and officially – such as labeling its opponents traitors or heretics – and keep the tenor of its language as restrained as possible. This is precisely the policy that the PJD adopted on the question of *Maroc*. Rather that descending to outbursts against immorality and decadence, it turned discussion to the efficacy of government agencies in reflecting and implementing the general policies of the state.

At the level of leadership

The MUR is in the process of formulating similar criteria for a separation between the leading exponents of a religious missionary movement and those of a political party. Essentially, it believes that the former must represent the entire nation and should not endorse one political faction – the PJD in this case – to the exclusion of others.

However, application of this principle is difficult and, by the admission of MUR members, incomplete. It remains the case that most of the leaders of the party are simultaneously situated in the higher leadership positions of the movement. To name a few, Abdulllah Benkiran is a member of the PJD National Council and a member of the MUR executive bureau; Abdallah Baha is the party whip in parlia-

ment and a member of the MUR executive bureau; Mohammed Yatim is a member of the party's general secretariat and vice-chairman of the movement; and even PJD Secretary-General Saadeddine al-Othmani is simultaneously a member of the MUR Shura Council. Moreover, these leaders' presence in the movement is almost more important than it is in the party, as the party itself was only recently established and is still in the transitional phase of carving a niche for itself in the political arena. Yet, as elusive as a solution to this particular dilemma is at present, it is nevertheless possible to speak of two phases in the relationship between the MUR and the PJD leaderships. The first began in 1996, when virtually the entire MUR leadership was engaged in the restructuring of the MPDC following the merge of the two parties. This merge yielded the PJD and, in 1997, the entrance of top MUR figures into parliament, elected as PJD representatives. The second phase began after the 2002 elections, which established the PJD as Morocco's second largest political party. It was here that the party began to form and cement an organizational hierarchy and disengage itself from the movement in a manner that permitted some de-linkage at the leadership level. This de-linkage produced a partnership between the movement and the party which promoted the institutional autonomy of both entities.

Yatim is realistic, but optimistic. Although he believes it impossible to realize an acceptable differentiation of the two organizations at the leadership level before the 2007 elections, he expects that concrete progress in this direction will move forward as soon as the party's situation becomes more stable. He believes that the process will have been completed by the election year 2012.

Indeed, Yatim further anticipates that eventually the movement's relationship with the party will be restructured politically, so as to effectively place the party – from the movement's perspective – on equal footing with other political parties in the state. Once the movement's members begin to see other political parties on par with the PJD, the movement's decisions for which candidates to support will be based on issues as opposed to individual and institutional bonds. In fact, al-Hamdawi observed that the MUR has already begun to move in that direction, illustrated by its support of various actions of non-PJD parliamentarians, the most recent being the proposal by one such member of parliament to close down a number of bars. *Al-Tajdid* offered further support to this trend when it broadened the focus of its coverage of parliamentary events beyond the activities of PJD members to encompass the activities of all MPs whose ideological orientation mirrors or nearly mirrors that of the movement.

Nevertheless, according to Yatim, the only way this trend will move forward is if the party develops a general strategy for gradually lessening its dependency

on the movement. In the long run, he believes, this will be in the interests of the movement, as the party currently detracts from the movement by overshadowing its missionary character as accomplishments are immediately credited to the party. On the other hand, he realizes that the party sometimes serves to protect the movement. This political force counteracts any designs against the movement, such as those that reared their head in the wake of the Casablanca bombings in May 2003, in the form of an unprecedented campaign ultimately aimed at banning and dissolving the movement entirely.

Finally, the attempt on the part of the MUR and the PJD to differentiate between proselytism and politics is an experiment that is still largely in its conceptual phase, in spite of the numerous efforts to test the applicability of the concepts. However, in its conceptual richness, it serves as a useful starting point for the discussion of other Islamist experiences, for it resolves many of the problems that arise in the hypothetical relationship between Islamist missionary action and Islamist political action. Above all, it offers considerable hope for the possibility that an Islamist movement is capable of nurturing a course of political action, combined with the frameworks and leadership needed to guide this action, without full immersion in the political arena. Full immersion only politicizes and hence negates the all-encompassing spirit of Islam.

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Arab Insight
Editor in Chief
World Security Institute
1779 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel + (202) 332-0900
Fax + (202) 462-4559

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