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An interview with Hadi Ali

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The Key to the Future Lies in the Past: The Worldview of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu

By Michael A. Reynolds

WHEN TURKEY'S JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (*ADALET ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or AKP) triumphed in that country's parliamentary election in 2002, observers declared the moment a watershed. They did so for a number of reasons, but the primary one was the belief in the AKP's potential to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam and democracy to the broader Muslim world.

The founders of the AKP were a group of relatively young politicians. Although they had spent their previous political careers as members of a movement committed to establishing an Islamic order, they renounced any desire to change the secular basis of the Turkish Republic when they created their new party in 2001. To underscore their disinterest in legislating an Islamic order they assigned to their new party the innocuous name "Justice and Development" and adopted as their party logo the anodyne image of a shining light bulb. At the same time, wishing

to underscore their identity as devout Muslims, they wore their personal piety on their sleeves and affirmed their support for the preservation and strengthening of Islamic norms in society and the loosening of state controls on religious expression. Theirs was a “soft” Islamism—they might desire the evolution of society along Islamic lines but would not seek to use the state to compel that evolution.¹ Famously, several described their party as the Muslim analogue to Europe’s Christian Democrats.²

Although the AKP garnered only 34 percent of the popular vote in 2002, Turkey’s electoral rules awarded the party an outright parliamentary majority of 363 seats out of 550. In the following two parliamentary elections—2007 and 2011—the AKP retained its parliamentary majority and increased its share of the popular vote to 47 and 50 percent, respectively. In the June 2015 elections it suffered a reverse, netting just under 41 percent of the vote and winning only 256 seats in parliament, a number insufficient to allow it to form a government on its own. Nonetheless, it still finished well ahead of its rivals. Moreover, its former party chief, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, remains ensconced in the presidential palace after handily winning Turkey’s first popularly contested presidential elections last year. At the time of writing, Turkey will hold early elections in the fall of 2015 in an attempt to break the logjam created by the June elections. The AKP will have a chance to again win an outright parliamentary majority. Even if it does not, however, the AKP, or certainly its supporters, will remain a major presence on the Turkish political landscape for years to come.

The AKP’s rule over the past thirteen years has produced a clear, albeit contradictory record on its own compatibility with secularism and with liberal democracy. The question of Turkey’s capacity to tolerate an Islamist party has been settled. By outflanking and neutralizing their strongest political rivals—the self-appointed guardians of Turkish secularism that are the Turkish Armed Forces—the AKP’s leaders fundamentally changed Turkish politics. Yet the AKP has not changed the secular basis of Turkey’s social and political order, although it has certainly altered the social and political atmosphere by permitting and encouraging greater religious symbolism and imagery in politics.

During the same period, however, Erdoğan has revealed himself both willing and able to silence and persecute his opponents and critics inside and outside the party. Thus, although the AKP’s governance has not lead to the demise of Turkish secularism, it has failed to reinforce the norms of liberal democracy as promised. Undoubtedly, the authoritarian tendencies of some of its leaders, exemplified by the jailing and sentencing of hundreds of military and naval officers and critics of the party on trumped up charges, have damaged the rule of law and the democratic

culture in the country. In addition to overseeing major changes in domestic politics, including a major initiative to resolve Turkey's Kurdish question, the AKP has presided over unprecedented economic growth and pursued an activist foreign policy in the Middle East and elsewhere. Ankara's foreign policy dynamism has at times intrigued and excited American policymakers, but it has also confused, frustrated, and alarmed them. Support for Iran, quarrels with Israel, backing of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, and tepidness in confronting the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) are just some of the issues that have concerned Washington.

In assessing the AKP, and the impact it is likely to have on Turkish politics in the years to come, it is worthwhile to examine the worldview of the party's leadership, especially its two dominant figures, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoğlu (although Erdoğan as president of Turkey is not permitted to maintain a party affiliation, he continues to retain enormous influence over the AKP).³ At the core of Erdoğan's and Davutoğlu's worldview lies Islam. Both men openly affirm Islam as the central factor that shapes and defines their perspective of the world. Accordingly, their understanding of Islam has shaped their politics.⁴ Erdoğan and Davutoğlu are neither highly unusual nor especially original in their interpretations of Islam. They are representative of a line of thought that has evolved in Turkey over the span of several generations.

Erdoğan and Davutoğlu do not adhere to a doctrinal or dogmatic political Islam. Rather, theirs is a historically informed interpretation that arranges Muslim populist and pan-Islamic sympathies in a framework drawn from the Ottoman experience. It often equates Ottoman history with the history of Islam, and at times unconsciously filters events through a Turkish nationalist perspective. It seeks simultaneously to soothe lingering metaphysical anxieties concerning the relationship between Turkey, the Islamic world, and the West and to resolve Turkey's contemporary security challenges.

Significantly, this political Islam holds as a basic tenet the idea that the civilization of the Muslim world is fundamentally different from that of the West; in fact, it regards Western culture and values as inassimilable. It further regards the Middle East as an organic whole and romanticizes the Ottoman era as a golden age for the region and its inhabitants, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. By contrast, it judges the period from the deposition of Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1909 to the AKP's electoral victory in 2002 as an infelicitous aberration when the alien principles of the West were mistakenly imported into the Middle East. And it regards the creation of the Turkish Republic as an error, and its founder, Mustafa Kemal, as less a visionary statesman and more a mistaken military officer whose horizons were limited by the falsehoods of his time. Accordingly, this worldview

sees the key to Turkey's security and prosperity as closer integration with Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors and the wider Muslim world.

And yet, despite their ambition to transcend the Kemalist legacy and restore the Middle East to its former properly Islamic equilibrium, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu are themselves products of the nationalism Kemalism inculcated. The Islamic unity that they believe to be a defining characteristic of the Middle East is more myth than reality. Although they imagine the Ottoman past as a time of harmony and prosperity underwritten by Islam, the Ottoman order, as impressive as it was, rested on coercion no less than any other imperial order. More practically, few in the region—and least of all Islamists outside of Turkey—recall the Ottoman era as a golden age or see today's Turks as rightful successors to the Ottomans in exercising regional leadership.

As a result, Ankara has experienced significant foreign policy setbacks in the past several years, particularly in Syria and Egypt, but also in its relations with Armenia and Israel. The AKP's habit of sympathetically misreading anti-Western and Islamist movements has been a notable source of woe. For example, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu embraced the Assad regime with exceptional enthusiasm in 2009, only to recoil two years later when Assad unleashed ferocious violence against Sunni Muslims in Syria. Ankara also adopted an indulgent attitude toward ISIS. In 2014, it refused to evacuate its consulate in Mosul even as ISIS was closing in on the city. But instead of finding itself as an interlocutor between the West and ISIS, Ankara found its fifty-something consular staff taken hostage in what became a major domestic embarrassment.

Born of Trauma: Nationalism and Secularism in the Turkish Republic

IN MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD AND THEIR PLACE IN IT, ERDOĞAN AND DAVUTOĞLU exhibit a strong historical sensitivity. The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923 as a secular nation-state, the manifestation of a claim to sovereignty on behalf of a new entity, the Turkish nation. To Western eyes, the emergence of the Turkish Republic appears as part of the natural order of things, an almost inevitable development.⁵ Its founders and their opponents alike considered it a radical break with the past.

The Republic's founders, led by Mustafa Kemal, did more than just establish

new institutions. They introduced a new way of conceptualizing statehood and the collective identity of the population. Previously, sovereignty had belonged to a six hundred year old dynasty ruling in the name of Islam with Sharia, the law of Islam, nominally as the supreme standard of justice and source of authority. That dynasty, the house of Osman, ruled over a population that was highly heterogeneous in terms of religious belief, ethnicity, and way of life. The *Osmanlıs*, or Ottomans, administered their populations according to religious categories. They recognized four fundamental communities, known as *millet*s: Sunni Muslim, Eastern Orthodox Christian, Armenian Apostolic Christian, and Jewish. The Ottoman state made no formal administrative recognition of linguistic or ethnic communities, a fundamental difference from practice today in most of the world.

An initial aim of the Republic's political elite was to reorient Turkish society away from doctrinal religion to the novel concept of secular nationalism. It was a radical ambition, reflected in the scope of the reforms introduced by the new elite in just over a decade. They declared Turkishness, not Islam, to be the bond joining state and society. In a testament to that shift, they moved the capital from the grand metropolis of Istanbul to a dusty town in the center of Anatolia, Ankara, which was to be transformed into a modern city along European lines. They substituted a new Latin alphabet for the Arabic-Persian script the Turks had used for centuries, and purged their language of thousands of Arabic and Persian words. They even banned the *ezan*, or call to prayer, in its original Arabic, permitting it only in Turkish translation, an innovation that was as grating aesthetically as it was sacrilegious. Moreover, these strident secularists applied new regulations to daily dress, abolished religious courts, and brought all religious schools, properties, mosques, and indeed the corpus of religious authority under state control. In undertaking these sweeping reforms, the Republican elite looked to western European states, and France in particular, as models.

These reforms are collectively known as the "Turkish Revolution." The term revolution is wholly justified in terms of the reforms' scope and impact. But as radical as these changes were, the making of the Turkish Republic had not been an overnight affair. It had been long in coming. In the first half of the nineteenth century the Ottoman imperial state began restructuring itself along western European lines in a bid to fend off its rivals, defuse or suppress separatist tendencies, and preserve its territorial integrity.

Official Turkish historiography credits Mustafa Kemal—who took the name "Atatürk" or "Father Turk" as part of his 1934 reform mandating Turks to adopt surnames—as virtually the sole progenitor of the Turkish Republic. Indeed, it presents him as the very embodiment of the Republic's principles of nationalism and

secularism. But critical to Atatürk's success in winning the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923) that made Turkey viable as an independent country was a broad cadre of army officers and civil servants who shared his conviction that radical reforms were necessary to prevent Anatolia from falling like the rest of the Empire to partition and rule by non-Muslims. Constituting the bulk of that cadre were former members of the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress, the political party that had dominated Ottoman politics in the last decade of the Empire's existence. The Unionists had received European-style education and were often literate in one or more European languages. Their education exposed them to materialist philosophies and critiques of religion, which had a profound impact on them. As officers and civil servants, they were results-oriented, pragmatic, and dedicated to the point of obsession. If nothing else, they intended to hold their state and territory together. The overwhelming majority, as much as over 80 percent, came from the Balkans and the coastal region of western Anatolia—the part of the Ottoman Empire that was most developed in terms of economic and educational infrastructure. Importantly, the Balkans had also suffered most directly from the process of imperial disintegration in the Empire's last century.⁶ It is probably not a coincidence that this part of Turkey even today consistently favors secularist nationalist parties.

The Unionists concluded that the preservation of what remained of the Empire required the vigorous adoption of Western governance, especially the centralization of government administration and law, the rationalization of bureaucracy, and the mobilization of mass society in the service of the state, particularly during war. Among their core beliefs was that religion, including Islam, was a source of error and superstition stunting technological progress. They decided, therefore, that Islam must be subordinated to the state. It could be used to support the state, but it was not to direct it. As Mustafa Kemal later preached, the surest guide to everything in the world is positive science, not religion. Moreover, the Islamic teaching that the community of Muslims, the *ümmet*, is one and the Ottoman sultans' claim as caliph to head the *ümmet* only served to embroil Turks in conflicts across the globe. For the sake of saving the state, Kemal and his followers were willing to forego Muslim solidarity in favor of a secular ethno-nationalism.

Mustafa Kemal explicitly envisioned Western Europe as the model for Turkey. To those who argued that Muslim Turks could never become like Europeans, his answer was clear: civilization is one. Its exemplars may vary across historical eras, but civilization is universal for each era. For the twentieth century, Europe defined civilization. Therefore, Turkey must emulate Europe.

It is important to understand that the conversion of Mustafa Kemal and his colleagues, and that of Turkish society more broadly, to the idea of a secular nation-

state was far from a purely intellectual exercise. Bitter experience was a key driver behind the transformation. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was an extended process of warfare and dislocation as successive waves of Muslims fled or were expelled from imperial borderlands into Anatolia. This process of collapse culminated in the “Ten Years’ War”—the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), World War I (1914–1918), and the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922). From the Turkish perspective, these wars were part of one extended struggle for survival characterized by total war, mass killing, and ethnic cleansing. The mortality rate for the Muslim population in some Anatolian provinces during World War I was astronomical, reaching up to 40 percent.⁷ Although cast by the Republic’s founders as a triumphal act of creativity, the establishment of Turkey was just as much an outgrowth of desperation and trauma.

That desperation and trauma impressed upon Turkish elites the need to apply radical reforms. Just as importantly, it readied the population to accept them, for the most part. Uprooting the influence of Islam from public and social life was a key goal of Mustafa Kemal. He and his reformers identified Islam with the old Ottoman regime. They were self-described revolutionaries, and like all revolutionaries they regarded the old regime as a colossal failure, even an embarrassment. They believed Islam to be too powerful, too influential, and too dangerous to be left untouched. But the Turkish faith was so intertwined with Turkish culture and daily life that something like a Bolshevik-style purge of religion was impossible. To attempt to eradicate Islam would only have invited counter-revolution. The Republican elite, therefore, sought to neutralize or tame Islam by subordinating it to the state. Thus, rather than destroy the religious establishment, they placed all religious personnel, property, and institutions under state control. Turkish secularism was never neutral toward religion or insistent on the separation of politics from religion. Rather, it was about ensuring the state’s control of religion.⁸

Roots of the AKP Worldview: the National Vision

BY AND LARGE, THE KEMALIST REVOLUTION OF THE 1920s AND 1930s WAS remarkably successful. Nonetheless, the state’s rigid secularism, tinged at times with hostility and contempt for Islam, rankled much of the population. Thus, when Turkey held its first openly contested elections in 1950, voters awarded the

Democrat Party of Adnan Menderes a decisive victory over the reigning Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* or CHP), in no small measure because they understood it to be pro-Islam. Among the first acts of the new government was to restore the Muslim call to prayer in Arabic. Ten years later, a conspiracy of military officers overthrew Menderes in a coup, and then executed him, in part for violating the constitution by mixing religion and politics.

Menderes's death did not mean the end of challenges to Turkish Republican secularism. Over time, the hard edge of Republican secularism softened as Turkish politics democratized and right-leaning parties exerted influence. Moreover, Turkish leaders recognized the utility of Islam for maintaining social cohesion, especially as they combated communism and other leftist ideologies. But the Turkish state continued to exercise strict control over the exercise of religion.

A significant stratum of Turkish Islamists remained dedicated to an Islamic restoration. One such Islamist was Necmettin Erbakan, a German-trained engineer turned politician. In 1969, he started a political movement; in 1975, he penned a manifesto laying out the movement's goals. In keeping with the injunction against introducing blatantly religious language into politics, he gave his movement and manifesto the seemingly pallid title of *Milli Görüş*, or *The National Vision*.⁹ The English translation, while technically correct in rendering the modern Turkish meaning, misses the title's subtle religious undertone: the word *milli* translates from contemporary Turkish as "national" but is an adjective that derives from an older Ottoman Turkish word of Arabic origin, *millet*. The primary meaning of *millet* was "one's belief, faith, nation." As noted earlier, the Ottoman administration used it to denote recognized religious collectivities or congregations. With the rise of nationalism in Ottoman discourse, *millet* and its adjectival form *milli* were employed roughly as "nation" and "national," respectively. But the two words never entirely lost their older religious connotations. Erbakan was using the term to evoke a religiously constituted and populist collective identity unmoored from rigid categories of ethnicity and race.¹⁰ The manifesto's subtle title notwithstanding, Erbakan's ultimate aspiration was a social order based on Islamic principles and law. Despite his engineering background and experience in Germany, Erbakan dismissed Western epistemology as both alien and inferior to Islamic.¹¹ In the realm of foreign policy, his manifesto called for Turkey to revive its ties to its Muslim neighbors, preserve its Muslim culture, and reject the European Union as an alien Catholic and Zionist project.¹² His outlook was Pan-Islamic, but assigned leadership of the Muslim world to the Turks. As a former member explained, in Erbakan's imagined union of Muslims, "the Turks are the bosses."¹³

To realize his vision, Erbakan entered politics and founded a series of political

parties. His first party, however, was shut down in 1971 on charges of violating constitutional provisions relating to secularism. His second party met the same fate in 1980 following a military coup. As head of his third party, the Welfare Party, he managed not only to enter parliament but also to become prime minister in 1996. Erbakan's religious outlook, policies, and political success all disturbed the Turkish General Staff. As a result, they compelled Erbakan to resign under the threat of a military coup in 1997. The next year Turkey's courts banned Erbakan from politics and disbanded the Welfare Party.

The Break from the National Vision

PREDICTABLY, WELFARE PARTY MEMBERS REGISTERED A NEW PARTY, THE VIRTUE Party. It was at this time that a cadre of former Welfare Party members decided to break with Erbakan—and his legacy of dead-end parties—and to create a new entity, one that abjured the restoration of Islamic law and accepted Turkey's secular order. The leader of the group of pious reformers was the young, charismatic Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the party they created, the AKP.

Born in 1954, Erdoğan was elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994 as the candidate of the Welfare Party. As mayor of Istanbul, Erdoğan proved himself a pragmatic and highly effective administrator. The Welfare Party's first-place finish with nearly 22 percent of the vote in Turkey's national elections the following year and its entry into the governing coalition, however, unnerved the Turkish establishment. When Erdoğan recited a poem containing religious imagery, the establishment pounced and convicted the rising star in 1998 for inciting religious hatred. The sentence put an end to his term as mayor and earned him four months in jail, along with a ban from politics.

The ban left Erdoğan on the sidelines during the AKP's first elections in 2002. The newly formed parliament, however, promptly voted to lift his ban, enabling Erdoğan to win a parliamentary seat in a by-election before becoming prime minister in March 2003. For over a decade, Erdoğan has stood astride Turkey's politics like no other figure since Mustafa Kemal. After leading AKP to convincing victories in two parliamentary elections, he trounced his opponents to become Turkey's first popularly elected president in 2014.

Erdoğan's continued electoral success, however, has come at the cost of a renewed

polarization of Turkish society. At its inception, the AKP held out the promise of bringing together Turkey's fractured citizenry not only by demonstrating the ability of devout Muslims to participate fully in a liberal democracy, but also through a politics of democratic consensus and inclusion.

Moreover, the AKP pledged to scrupulously respect the rule of law. The shorthand for the party, "AK Partisi," hinted at this good governance pledge: *Ak* is a Turkish word meaning "white" or "pure." Central to this promise was the AKP's aspiration to reverse the traditional relationship between the Turkish state and its citizens by making the latter masters of the former. As a result, the AKP initially added secular-leaning liberals, business leaders, and Kurds to its base of socially conservative and practicing Muslim Turks.

After the 2011 victory, Erdoğan and the AKP began encountering political turbulence in the form of popular protests, corruption scandals, and a bitter struggle with the powerful *Hizmet* movement of the preacher Fethullah Gülen. Rather than modify his policies, or even his rhetoric, in an attempt to maintain his broad coalition, Erdoğan opted to focus on rallying the AKP's base of religious Turks by whipping up their long-standing resentment of the Republic's liberals and former secular elites. In his rhetoric, Erdoğan has gone so far as to denounce his opponents and critics as traitors.¹⁴

Erdoğan's dominance of his party reflects a recurring pattern in Turkish politics.¹⁵ This is not particular to the AKP. When the AKP first emerged, one of its most refreshing and distinguishing characteristics was that it did not operate as the "fiefdom" of an autocratic party chairman.¹⁶ Although Erdoğan's primacy was clear, the party contained a number of other outspoken and formidable politicians who at least appeared to function as a team bound by a common vision for Turkey's future. Over time, however, Erdoğan consolidated his personal control over the party, neutralizing other leading politicians such as Abdullah Gül, his former foreign minister and predecessor as prime minister and president. Indeed, even today, after resigning the chairmanship of the AKP in order to comply with the requirement that the president have no party affiliation, Erdoğan's grip on the AKP remains strong.

The Dynamic Duo

ESSENTIAL TO ERDOĞAN'S SUCCESS HAS BEEN HIS FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER and his successor as prime minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu. A former professor of

international relations and long-time columnist for multiple Islamist publications, Davutoğlu has been an unusually close and trusted associate of Erdoğan. From 2003 onward, he served as a foreign policy advisor to Erdoğan; in 2009, he became Erdoğan's foreign minister. In 2011, Davutoğlu was elected to parliament as an AKP member. Unlike other AKP members, Davutoğlu was not a politician, let alone an ambitious or gifted one. He therefore posed no threat to Erdoğan's leadership of the party. But Davutoğlu did share with Erdoğan a worldview that was centered on Islam and that viewed neo-Ottomanism as a means to restoring Turkey's greatness and even leadership of the Muslim world. Moreover, Davutoğlu's professorial background and soft-spoken demeanor complemented Erdoğan's self-constructed image as the tough, unpretentious, and pious populist from the hardscrabble streets of the working-class Kasımpaşa district of Istanbul. Davutoğlu's energetic diplomacy in bilateral, regional, and global forums between 2009 and 2012 gave Erdoğan a truly international profile as the leader of an up-and-coming power. As a reward for his personal loyalty, and to retain a grip on the party he founded, Erdoğan anointed his loyal foreign minister his successor as prime minister and party chairman in August 2014.

Working together, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu remade Turkey's profile, transforming their country from a status quo power anxious about its territorial integrity into an actor with regional and even global ambitions. In late 2011, Davutoğlu explained to the *Financial Times* that formerly Turkey had resembled "a man with strong muscles, an empty stomach, a small brain and a shaky heart." In other words, Turkey had a strong army but also a faltering economy and poor strategic vision. Worst of all, it had no self-confidence. The AKP changed this: through a combination of economic growth and vigorous diplomacy, Turkey became a major factor in its neighborhood. It also expanded its economic ties and its diplomatic outreach to such far-flung places as East Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹⁷

The change has not been solely one of greater confidence or heightened energy, but one of orientation and goals. Whereas traditionally Turkish policymakers had zealously guarded Turkey's status as a nation-state and affirmed an ultimate, albeit sometimes ambiguous, goal of integration with the West, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu have pursued a vision of civilizational manifest destiny centered on their understanding of Islamic history. They view the Islamic Middle East as an organic whole with Turkey as its natural, rightful leader. And they regard the West as irreconcilably alien.

The Elaborator of the Vision: Ahmet Davutoğlu and his Worldview

TO BE SURE, STRUCTURAL FACTORS LIKE THE SUSTAINED GROWTH OF THE TURKISH economy since 2002 and external developments like the Arab Spring must be part of any comprehensive account of the AKP's foreign policy. Turkey's growth made foreign policy activism possible, and changes in its security environment—especially the absence of an existential threat comparable to the USSR and the fall of regimes in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Libya—invited assertiveness. The unprecedented challenges and opportunities that emerged in Turkey's surroundings over the past thirteen years demanded innovation from Ankara. Undeniably, the particular character traits of key players, including Erdoğan's imperiousness and Davutoğlu's inclination toward intellectual grandiosity, have also had an impact on Turkish policy making.

Yet it is also clear that a coherent ideational framework has informed and guided the policies of the AKP. This framework is rooted in a reading of politics and history that ascribes primary importance to Islam as the wellspring of the civilization of which Turkey is a part. In sharp contrast to past Turkish practice, the framework acknowledges no divergence between the interests of the Turks and those of the broader civilization of Islam. Indeed, it urges Turks to pursue a manifest destiny defined by Islam for their own sake. Neither Davutoğlu nor Erdoğan invented this worldview. It predated their rise and its existence made possible the otherwise highly improbable collaboration between the introverted professor and the pugnacious and charismatic politician. It will persist after their departure.

Davutoğlu has been the key architect of the remaking of Turkish foreign policy. Although he is not the originator of the ideas behind the revision, he has repackaged and popularized them in books and countless articles. According to Davutoğlu, Turkey's fundamental problem—and that of the Middle East more generally—is that for the past century it has been trying to assimilate Western norms and values. But because the metaphysical assumptions of Islamic and Western civilizations are irreconcilable, any effort by a Muslim society to absorb Western norms is bound to fail. The baleful effort to graft onto Turkish society Western norms reached a milestone in 1908, when the Committee of Union and Progress engineered the army mutiny that compelled the sultan to reinstate the Ottoman Constitution of 1878. That event, known as the Constitutional or Young Turk Revolution, marked

the ascent of an elite with radically materialist, secularist, and nationalist orientations. In 1909, the CUP deposed Sultan Abdülhamid II, a figure whom Turkish Islamists revere for his personal piety and pan-Islamism.

Although the Unionists' rule ended with defeat in World War I, their influence did not. Indeed, Mustafa Kemal and his party continued the Unionist tradition of using state power to reshape society according to modernist principles. Kemalism, in this view, represents the refinement and crystalizing of the Western, modernist project begun under the Unionists. This tradition, according to Davutoğlu, dominated the politics of the Turkish Republic until the ascendance of the AKP in 2002.¹⁸

Whereas the Republic told a redemptive story of the Turkish nation resurrected from the ashes of the backward, corrupt, and vanquished Ottoman Empire thanks to science, secularism, and nationalism, Davutoğlu asserts that the assimilation of Western ideas and concepts led Turkey into a geopolitical, cultural, and intellectual dead end. In his eyes, the electoral triumph of the AKP in 2002 was a historic moment not because it heralded the accommodation of Turkish Islamism to liberal democracy and secularism, but because it signified the reassertion of the popular Muslim will that had been suppressed since 1908.

Davutoğlu's cheerful demeanor and smooth rhetoric has at times belied his theme of the dire incompatibility of Islam and the West. He wears Western business suits, speaks English, and exudes an ebullient air. He exhibits little of the somber gravitas or sneering disdain that radical Islamists sometimes adopt. Indeed, Davutoğlu in his term as foreign minister projected an air of optimistic self-confidence, one that is quite different from the vengeful pessimism and apocalyptic tones of fundamentalist Islamists. In instances where Ankara has acted at direct cross-purposes with the U.S., one can glimpse the existence of a principled opposition to American hegemony. Yet Ankara has made no formal break with the United States or Europe, and indeed continues to collaborate with the West in numerous areas.¹⁹ Davutoğlu's *ressentiment*, however, should not be discounted; his worldview, and that of Erdoğan and millions of AKP supporters, differs profoundly from that of the West and violent radicals alike. It is distinct also from the perspective of the Muslim Brotherhood, with which Davutoğlu and Erdoğan both sympathize.

There are several distinguishing characteristics of Davutoğlu's worldview. The first is that Davutoğlu's Islamism is based not on doctrine but a mix of history, culture, and sentiment. Analysts and commentators typically overlook the last element, but it is an essential, even defining ingredient of Davutoğlu's perspective. A sense of loss pervades Davutoğlu's worldview, and it is the desire to retrieve what has been lost that motivates him.

Davutoğlu was born in 1959 in the central Anatolian town of Taşkent, a little over one hundred kilometers south of Konya, the former capital of the Seljuk Turks and the site of the tomb of one of the Muslim world's most famous mystic poets, Jelaluddin Rumi. When he was five years old, Davutoğlu moved to Istanbul with his father, but he would often return to visit Taşkent with family.²⁰

Davutoğlu recalls his childhood in Taşkent with fondness. Several elements defined his upbringing there. One is the warmth of close family ties. Davutoğlu lost his mother at a young age, but had the fortune of growing up with a loving stepmother and a dedicated and hardworking father, who was a shoemaker. The oldest of four siblings and the only male, Davutoğlu felt an early responsibility for his three sisters, and maintained that sense of filial duty even as he pursued his studies in Istanbul. His father, though uneducated, was keen to see his only son succeed in school.

A second element was the young Davutoğlu's sense of wonderment and enchantment with the natural world. His childhood fascination with the beauty of the hills, cliffs, and skies etched in him a certain religiosity and awe of the divine.²¹ A third element was the contrast he identified between the grand and colorful heritage of Islamic civilization and the grey monotony of the Turkish Republic. He later recalled, for example, the finely carved door of a neighbor's house, which had been the work of an Armenian. Such craftsmen had been part of the Ottoman landscape, but had been swept away in the Empire's last years with the arrival of Turkish nationalism and the founding of the Republic. Where the Turkish Republic taught its citizens the grim message that "a Turk's only friend is another Turk," life in Taşkent taught him that in a previous era Turks had been part of something bigger in terms of geography and culture. From his grandparents' tales and stories, he acquired a sense of connection between his village and their Turkic nomadic ancestors. His grandmother, for example, would recite an old nomads' prayer: "May you and your son be like a horde / May you and your daughter be like a tribe / May the world's states come to your feet / May they make the world submit to you."²² Davutoğlu intuited that as the Turks migrated from Central Asia through Khorasan and the Iranian plateau, they had borrowed and assimilated much of their customs and wisdom from Persia.²³

Bright and hardworking, Davutoğlu at age thirteen gained entrance to a German boarding school in Istanbul, one of the city's highly prestigious Western high schools. He was not a passive, unquestioning recipient of the German curriculum. In fact, it was here that he began to systematically compare the West and Turkish-Islamic civilization. Introduced in the classroom to such authors as Goethe, Kafka, and Brecht, he made sure to read the Turkish classics on his own. He suffered the ridicule

of classmates for his piety and rural mores. Even worse, emboldened by the Kemalist elite's hostility to religion, leftist youths at the school would haze their more religiously observant fellow students. The students who suffered the harassment, however, admired and loved Davutoğlu for his willingness to defend them.²⁴

Davutoğlu resisted the fundamental message of his high school and university that the Western way of education and life was to be admired and assimilated. One high school teacher remembers his repeated critiques of Western modes of knowledge. Davutoğlu, however, was no angry and disruptive radical. He studied hard and performed well. He subsequently gained admittance to what was then Turkey's most prestigious institute of higher education, Bosphorus University. Originally founded by American missionaries, its language of instruction and administration was English and it served as the training ground of Turkey's Western-oriented secular elite. It manifested the Kemalist belief that while culture is peculiar to each nation, civilization is singular and universal. In the twentieth century, Mustafal Kemal had taught, universal civilization was Western: secular, scientific, and liberal. Bosphorus University's faculty, generally liberal or leftist, sought to inculcate those values. Although Davutoğlu was not persuaded, he did not reject his university. To the contrary, he stayed on to pursue a doctorate. In 1994, he published his dissertation: *Alternative Paradigms: the Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*. He states his argument clearly:

The fundamental argument of this book is that the conflicts and contrasts between Islamic and Western political thought originate mainly from their philosophical, methodological, and theoretical background rather than from mere institutional and historical differences. In fact, historical and institutional differences are counterparts of these philosophico-political bases and images.²⁵

In sum, Davutoğlu rejects categorically the idea that there is a "universal civilization." The ways in which the West and the Islamic world approach and understand politics differ fundamentally, and these differences are rooted in sharply contrasting ontologies. They are neither accidents of history nor irreconcilable.

From the assertion that two civilizations are distinct in their essence it does not necessarily follow that they must collide. Yet in an essay completed in 1992, Davutoğlu warned of "an increasing tendency towards a civilizational confrontation between Islamic and western civilizations."²⁶ This was one year before Samuel Huntington popularized Bernard Lewis's phrase of "clash of civilizations" in the pages of *Foreign Affairs*.²⁷ In the same work Davutoğlu attacked the thesis

of Francis Fukuyama that liberal democracy represents the final stage of human political development. Muslims, he contends, are attached to the “Islamic belief system” and will remain so, contrary to Fukuyama’s theory. The inability of the triumphalist “endism” so popular in the West to accommodate this fact, according to Davutoğlu, is the real problem. Thus, Western analysts frame the resilience of Islam as Islam’s “revival” and construe it as a threat that must be combatted. Theories like Fukuyama’s represent a hollow optimism that is not only false but that also sustains an international order in which the “Euro-Christian and Judaic powers” dominate Muslims. It should be noted that Davutoğlu in the early 1990s did not argue that major conflict was inevitable or desirable. A “civilizational vivacity,” or mutual co-existence, is possible, he affirmed, but only as long as the “civilizational challenge” did not generate “prejudices and pragmatic hypocriticism [sic].”²⁸ Conflict is not foreordained, but tensions can only be contained, at best.

Davutoğlu’s belief that a metaphysical rift separates Islamic from Western civilization was not a passing intellectual fad. It has been the theme of his career. Thus, for example, in the introduction of a book on Ottoman history published in 2012, Davutoğlu informs his reader that the “greatest methodological obstacle to understanding the Ottomans is the dominant universalizing paradigm that begins with ancient Greece and Rome and passes through the Christian Middle Ages to the modern age.” Too many historians, he warns, have consciously or unconsciously employed the Roman order as the guide by which to judge and evaluate other historical subjects. The application to the history of the Ottoman Empire of the conceptual and chronological frameworks that emerged out of the study of Western history is illegitimate and must inevitably fail.²⁹ The use of the West as a template for historiography is problematic when writing the history of any of the several non-Western civilizations, but it is especially so when writing Ottoman history, as the Ottoman looms only as a foil, a disruptor, or “spoilsport” in the “egocentric” historical narrative of the West.

Davutoğlu posits that multiple geographical “basins” have given rise to full-fledged civilizations. Among the birthplaces of civilization Davutoğlu identifies are Anatolia, Palestine, Central Asia, Tibet, and Indo-China. A defining characteristic of Ottoman civilization is that it was a new representative of the ancient. He sees the Ottomans as having had the mission of recovering an ancient consciousness and gathering together the heritages of multiple peoples. To illustrate this point, he invokes the varied nomenclature for Ottoman sultan. In addition to sultan, an Ottoman sovereign was known also as *caliph* (Islam), *padishah* (Iran), *hakan* (Turan), and *Caesar* (Rome). The Ottoman mission of reviving and preserving ancient consciousness contrasts starkly with the program of the West. The

roots of Western civilization, Davutoğlu writes, lie far from the elements of ancient civilization. Indeed, in order to reinforce its own hegemony, the West seeks not to preserve but to dissolve ancient cultures. Accordingly, the West came to see the Ottomans as the last point of resistance.³⁰ Needless to say, Davutoğlu's formulation of the basic impulses behind Western and Ottoman civilization points to the West as an entity whose influence must be resisted and rebutted.

It would be a mistake to dismiss Davutoğlu's take on Ottoman civilization as purely academic and irrelevant to policy. The theme of Davutoğlu's major work, *Strategic Depth*, is the importance of history to understanding policy. It is a theme he continues to sound as a policy maker. Hence, when he addressed in 2013 an audience in Diyarbakir, the center of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, he titled his remarks, "The Great Restoration: Our New Policy Understanding from the Ancient World to Globalization." In his address, Davutoğlu called for the rebirth of the pre-World War I Ottoman order, in which he claimed Turks, Arab, Kurds, Christians, Chaldeans, and Yezidis served and fought together against the invading Europeans. The dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire, however, condemned the Middle East to nearly a century of division and despotism. In the wake of the war, the imperial powers imposed their will upon the peoples of the Middle East, dividing them up into artificial nation states. They then subjugated the Middle East by propping up despotic regimes. He declared the past one hundred years since the rise of the CUP an aberration, a "parenthesis" that "must be closed." As Davutoğlu warned, "[t]he future cannot be built with recently created concepts of state that are based on nationalist ideologies wherein everyone accuses everyone else and that first appeared with the Sykes-Picot maps, then with colonial administration, and then on artificially drawn maps. We will shatter the state of mind that Sykes-Picot created for us."³¹

Abdulhamid II

ALTHOUGH FOR DAVUTOĞLU AND THE AKP THE LAST DECADES OF THE OTTOMAN Empire are a tale of tragedy and collapse, they do find in the period a hero and role model: the deposed sultan, Abdulhamid II. The esteem the AKP holds for the sultan is unusual. Kemalist historiography portrayed Abdulhamid as a villainous figure, and did so for several reasons. Most obviously, he ruled as a despot, not only blocking efforts to liberalize Ottoman politics but also expanding the autonomy and autocratic powers of the sultanate. He suspended the Ottoman Constitution

of 1876 just a little over a year after its promulgation and disbanded the Ottoman General Assembly, or parliament. He forcibly suppressed dissent, censored newspapers, and incarcerated and exiled his critics. His repression drove reform minded civil servants and military officers underground where they formed secret societies and conspired against him. The CUP was the most prominent of these underground organizations. It targeted Abdulhamid and his regime as the major obstacle to the salvation of the Empire. In fact, the Unionists engineered the army mutiny in the Balkans that compelled him to restore the constitution in 1908. The following year they forced him to abdicate his throne.

Although Abdulhamid had no major diplomatic achievements, he was a champion of Islam. He was personally devout, and also made conspicuous public use of Islamic rhetoric and symbolism to rally the support of Muslims inside and outside his empire. Most famously, he revived the largely dormant practice of using the title of “Caliph” alongside that of Sultan.³² The possibility that war with the Ottomans might impel the Muslim subjects of the European empires to rebel was one of the few deterrents against Great Power attack that he possessed.

Where conventional Turkish historiography condemns Abdulhamid for being a paranoid ruler more concerned to build up his autocratic regime and suppress opposition than overhaul the empire’s structures and rejuvenate its strength, Davutoğlu hails Abdulhamid as a visionary statesman. Davutoğlu contrasts the empire’s maintenance of territory under his reign after 1878 to the loss of territories in North Africa and the Balkans after 1908.³³ Although the conventional portrayal of Abdulhamid as a simple reactionary was misleading in its own right—in fact, he energetically pushed through a number of modernizing reforms—Davutoğlu’s case for greatness is unconvincing. Abdulhamid’s ability to hold on to territory owed more to a favorable international environment than to his own efforts, and his unwillingness to enact fundamental military and other reforms over the course of some three decades contributed to the disastrous Ottoman defeat in the first Balkan War of 1912-1913. In other words, Davutoğlu’s reverence for the sultan is informed more by his role as a symbol of Islam and bugbear for Kemalist secularists.³⁴

A Republican Problem: Kurds

AS DAVUTOĞLU SUGGESTED IN HIS 2013 SPEECH IN DIYARBAKIR AND THROUGHOUT his writing, the founders of the Republic were at best misguided in their

embrace of secularism and ethno-nationalism. At worst, they were active collaborators in the perpetuation of the West's division and domination of the Middle East. On this fundamental point Davutoğlu's vision departs radically from that which guided the Republic. Whereas Mustafa Kemal and the founders of the Republic believed that creating a homogenous nation through the cultivation of Turkish nationalism among the inhabitants of Anatolia would strengthen the state's grip on its territory, Turkey's Islamists concluded from Turkey's chronic struggle against Kurdish separatism that this approach was conceptually bankrupt and counter-productive.

The overriding goal of the founders of the Turkish Republic was to halt the process of dissolution and partition that had destroyed the Ottoman Empire. Toward that end, they renounced the imperial Ottoman order and sought to replicate the Western model of an ethnically homogenous and secular nation-state inside Anatolia. Far from acting as a prophylactic against disintegration, however, the Kemalist adoption of the Western model only perpetuated the process of fissure. Republican Turkey's suppression of Kurdish identity has not assimilated the Kurds; just the contrary, the emphasis upon Turkishness as the sole public identity for Muslims awakened and stimulated ethnic consciousness among the Kurds and alienated them. The result has been a protracted violent conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish organizations. The most sustained armed challenge to the Turkish Republic has come from the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, which began mounting a sustained campaign of violence, including terror and guerrilla tactics, in 1984. The inability of the Turkish Republic to vanquish the Kurdistan Workers' Party even after the capture, trial, and imprisonment of its founder and leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999 underscored Kemalism's failure on the Kurdish question.

For decades, Republican elites refused to acknowledge that ethnicity was an irreducible part of the Kurdish conflict. Instead, the preference was to blame outside agitators and a lack of socio-economic development. While these causes have played a role—Turkey's neighbors such as the Soviet Union, Syria, and Greece lent active support to Kurdish separatists and poverty was a source of discontent in Turkey's Kurdish southeast—they are not the drivers of the conflict. Turkey's Islamists were among the first to acknowledge openly that there was an irreducible ethnic component to the conflict.³⁵ As the war with the PKK entered its seventh year, Erdoğan, then a member of Erbakan's Welfare Party, commissioned a report on the Kurdish issue. Among the report's conclusions was that what the Turkish establishment preferred to call the "Southeast question" was in fact the "Kurdish question." The Kurds were a people who spoke a language distinct from Turkish, and Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast provinces were part of historical

Kurdistan. Describing the approach of Turkey's official ideology as "denialist, assimilationist, and oppressive," the report called for the Welfare Party to openly question that policy and condemn "state terror" alongside the PKK's terror. The Kurds, it advised, did not want to break from Turkey but to live in a free and equal society. The report urged party members to pay attention to human rights, use the word "Kurd," and emphasize common religious bonds.³⁶

Recovering the Leading Role

A CENTRAL FOREIGN POLICY ASPIRATION OF ERDOĞAN AND DAVUTOĞLU HAS been for Turkey to recover the Ottomans' primacy in the Middle East. This is not, as skeptical outsiders often assume when pejoratively invoking "neo-Ottomanism," simply a bid for Turkish hegemony, even if this aspect is not entirely absent. The aspiration instead springs from a reading of history that sees the Ottoman period as a felicitous era in which the region's inhabitants, including non-Muslims, thrived under the benevolent rule of the sultans. Ottoman legitimacy rested on the organic bonds fostered by a shared Muslim identity and the Ottoman knack for melding the traditions and customs of their neighbors. Central to this enterprise was the guiding wisdom and justice of the sultan.

The disintegration of that order was a calamity not only for the Turks but for all of the sultan's subjects. It follows that a strong and dynamic Turkey should again provide leadership and restore order to the region. As Davutoğlu has emphasized, today's Turks have a "historical responsibility" to take the lead in the region. Thus, when speaking in 2012 about crises stretching from Tunisia in North Africa through the Balkans, Davutoğlu tied the disorder and suffering to the Ottomans' loss of the Tripolitanian and Balkan wars a century earlier. He informed his Turkish audience that "we carry a great historical responsibility upon our shoulders" and "whatever lands we lost between 1911 and 1923, from wherever we withdrew, we will in those lands meet again with our brothers between 2011 and 2023."³⁷ His choice of 2023 is not arbitrary: that year marks the centennial of the Turkish Republic.

Whereas the Kemalists taught that Turks should zealously guard their sovereign independence from the affairs of their neighbors and outside powers, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu have consistently sought to frame Turkey's fate as inextricably linked with those of its neighbors. Curiously, they have done this most dramatically not

while abroad or during press conferences with visiting foreign leaders, but in their campaign victory speeches. When celebrating the AKP's victory in the parliamentary elections of 2011, Erdoğan hailed the inhabitants of "Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, Cairo, Tunis, Sarajevo, Skopje, Baku, Nicosia and the capitals of all friendly and fraternal nations." He went on to say: "Believe it, Sarajevo was as much a winner as Istanbul in these elections, Beirut has won as much as Izmir. Damascus has won as much as Ankara. Ramallah, the West Bank, Jerusalem, [and] Gaza as much as Diyarbakir."³⁸

Erdoğan's framing of the AKP's triumph in Turkey's national elections as the general will of the Middle East was not a one-time flourish. Following his election to the presidency in 2014 he employed the same rhetoric: "My brothers, today not just Turkey, but Baghdad, Islamabad, Kabul, Sarajevo, and Skopje have also won. Today Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, today Ramallah, Nablus, Gaza, and Jerusalem have won."³⁹ As the rhetoric of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu makes clear, they see the AKP and its cause as part of a larger drama that extends across a geographic and historical space much bigger than the Turkish Republic. After the AKP's disappointing showing in the national elections of June 2015, Davutoğlu posed the following question to the party membership: "Will you push forward this holy march that has gone for centuries from Malazgirt?"⁴⁰ Malazgirt is a reference to the decisive battle of Manzikert in 1071, when Turkish tribes overwhelmed the Byzantine army and opened Anatolia to Turkish settlement.

In these speeches, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu rarely employed crude or aggressive rhetoric. With the exception of Erdoğan's references to cities inside Palestine and Syria, the invocations of peoples and lands outside of Turkey are celebratory and reinforce the AKP memberships' self-perception as the vanguard of an imagined populist Islamic revival unfolding throughout the greater Middle East. It is not a principally illiberal vision, although its historical and geographical dimensions clash with the nation-state, arguably the essential arena for liberal politics. It is worth noting that in line with the interpretation of the Ottoman period as the pinnacle of Muslim glory and a pluralist civilization wherein non-Muslims thrived, Erdoğan in his presidential victory speech underscored that Turkey's Muslims, Christians, Jews, Assyrians [Christians], and Yezidis were before all citizens of Turkey, as were members of all Turkey's constituent ethnic groups. Similarly, both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu stress that they see themselves as the leaders of all Turkish citizens.⁴¹

Inevitably, however, the political and historical animus from the days of the National Vision reveals itself. In his 2011 election speech, Erdoğan diminished the historical role of Mustafa Kemal, pointedly employing the phrase "Ghazi

Mustafa Kemal and his friends.” This formula belittles the cult of Atatürk in three ways. First, the mention of “friends” both undermines Mustafa Kemal’s image as a lone demigod while cleverly reducing the founders of the Republic to a small clique based on personal relations. Second, by declining to use Mustafa Kemal’s adopted surname, Atatürk, Erdoğan snubbed his secularist and nationalist revolution. Lastly, by including the religious title “Ghazi”—bestowed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1920 upon Mustafa Kemal for his efforts defending Anatolia’s Muslims—Erdoğan reminds his listeners of the historic role Islam played in bonding Turks (and other Muslims) together.⁴²

A more recent example of Erdoğan’s displacement of Mustafa Kemal in favor of Islam as the element that binds and drives Turkish society is a video produced to commemorate the centennial of the Battle of Gallipoli of 1915. It was Mustafa Kemal’s prominence in this titanic nine-month battle that catapulted him to fame throughout Anatolia and beyond. Whereas conventional Turkish historiography celebrated this battle as a triumph of the Turkish nation and of Kemal in defense of the homeland, the centennial video portrays the battle as one for Islam. In a voice-over, Erdoğan reads a poem filled with religious imagery—a twist of fate the formerly jailed Turkish president must certainly have relished—while the video shows a soldier issuing the call to prayer. Throughout, the images fluctuate between depictions of soldiers in battle and contemporary Turks in prayer, making clear that Islam is what inspired the soldiers and what has tied Turkey together over the generations. The image of Mustafa Kemal does appear, but for mere seconds and only at the end; he is an afterthought overshadowed by Erdoğan’s voice and the sight of Erdoğan praying over the graves of dead soldiers.⁴³

Perhaps more minatory has been Erdoğan’s and Davutoğlu’s willingness to revive historical sectarian divides and link Mustafa Kemal’s CHP to Syria’s Baath Party. Erdoğan has not hesitated to associate today’s CHP with the repression and atrocities of Turkey’s past. From the beginning of the Republic in 1923 until the country’s first freely contested election in 1950, the CHP presided over a single-party state. Among the most controversial acts of the Republic in that period was the army’s suppression of an alleged Kurdish rebellion in Dersim province in 1937.⁴⁴ Discussion of the Dersim operation was long taboo; in 2011, however, Erdoğan and the AKP decided to use the episode to paint the CHP as repressive and intolerant. The line of attack was simple: the CHP was the author of a savage act of repression. As one pro-government newspaper summarized it in a headline: “At Every Level of the Dersim Massacre the CHP is Present.”⁴⁵

To drive home the attack, Erdoğan read aloud in parliament several state documents on the repression of Dersim. In case anyone missed the point, he turned

to the head of the CHP party, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, and declared, “The owner of this bloody work is the CHP.” Next, after apologizing to the people of Dersim in the name of the state, he challenged Kılıçdaroğlu to apologize in the name of his party.⁴⁶ It was a devilishly clever political move. Whereas Erdoğan and his followers had always posed as victims of the Kemalist state and had nothing to lose by apologizing in its name, Erdoğan knew that the head of the CHP could never disown his party’s history so easily. The fact that Kılıçdaroğlu is himself a native of Dersim made Erdoğan’s critique all the more biting.⁴⁷

One great irony is that most of Dersim’s inhabitants are Alevi Kurds. Alevis are not Sunni Muslims, and as such had a long history of conflict with the Ottomans, who did not recognize their belief and regarded them with suspicion. The Dersim Alevis’ presumed reputation for disloyalty carried over into the Republican period; at that point, however, their Kurdishness became the more problematic aspect of their identity.

Double-Edged Blades: Sectarian Identities, Domestic Politics, and Syria

TURKISH ISLAMISTS OF VARYING KINDS HAVE LONG NURTURED SUSPICIONS ABOUT the country’s Alevi religious minority. In particular, they suspect the Alevis of having avidly supported the Kemalist order for the sake of keeping the Sunni majority down. It is not an allegation without logic. The introduction of a secular order undoubtedly did have a special attraction to the Alevis, as it promised relief from persecution on the basis of religion and offered them the opportunity to participate fully in public life. No empirical research, however, confirms this, and the fact is that the Kemalist order drew plenty of support from Sunni Turks as well.⁴⁸ This suspicion does, however, cohere with Davutoğlu’s argument that from 1908 onward, Turkey and the rest of the Middle East began to fall under the control of minority elites who were agents of the West and hostile to Islam. The imperial powers, so the argument goes, used these elites to subdue and control the region’s Sunni majority.

Historically, the Baathist regime in Syria has drawn heavily on its Alawite religious minority for support. The Baath Party’s emphasis on ethnic Arab identity

allowed Baathist Alawites to identify positively with their state and their Sunni Arab fellow citizens. The current civil war in Syria, however, revived sectarian strife and, according to some in Turkey, laid bare Alawite suppression of the Sunni majority. The spillover of sectarian tension into Turkey was perhaps inevitable. But AKP leaders have at times deliberately fanned the flames. In September 2011, when Kılıçdaroğlu criticized Erdoğan's condemnations of Assad as meddling in Syria's internal affairs, AKP members of parliament and Deputy Party Chairman Hüseyin Çelik blasted the CHP head by stating openly what many AKP members already believed:

There is a genetic relationship between the CHP and the Baathist regimes in the Arab countries. The CHP is Turkey's Baath Party. And the Baathist parties with their authoritarian structures are, you know, of the same character as the CHP's rule in the past.⁴⁹

The CHP has consistently opposed a Turkish intervention in Syria. The principle of abstaining from interference in the affairs of Turkey's neighbors was a staple of Kemalist foreign policy, summed up in the well-known aphorism of Mustafa Kemal, "Peace at home, peace in the world." Allegations of a link between the CHP and the Baath Party, however, insinuate that the motive behind the CHP's reluctance is not so much concern about getting trapped in a neighbor's civil war as a sectarian sympathy for the Assad regime, and even a loathing for its primary victims, Sunni Muslims. Lest one dismiss Çelik's allegations as overheated rhetoric from an unlettered populist nationalist, it is worth noting that he is a former professor of Ottoman history who studied at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, the author of multiple books on history, and a Turkish citizen of Arabic and Kurdish descent.⁵⁰ AKP members, including Davutoğlu, have continued to accuse their political rivals of being in league with Assad. Campaigning in Urfa before the June 2015 elections, Davutoğlu disparaged the CHP and HDP as Alevis and Kurds, respectively, and even went so far as to condemn them as "Assad's representatives in Turkey."⁵¹

Exploiting the Alevi-Sunni rift can rally the AKP's base of devout Sunni voters, but it clashes with the party's, and Davutoğlu's, more general message of inclusion. To be sure, the conviction that they represented a pious Sunni majority that had suffered persecution for roughly a century facilitated the AKP's embrace of the rhetoric of democracy and pluralism. They were able to invoke the concepts of liberalism and tolerance to justify loosening or dismantling parts of the Kemalist state, such as the Turkish Armed Forces' oversight of politics and bans on head-

scarves in schools and the workplace. Democracy in this context meant primarily the right of the majority to assert itself politically.

Similarly, the AKP's enthusiasm for inclusion rests not so much on a principled respect for variation in lifestyles, identities, and faiths as much as it has on the belief that, as expressed in Davutoğlu's writing, Islam in the Middle East has always constituted a natural and organic bond between peoples and will in the future. In other words, attributes such as ethnicity that have been used to divide and rule the populations of the Middle East will recede in salience once Islam is permitted to flourish again. Appeals to Muslim solidarity and shared religious, cultural, and historical ties are tools that the AKP has used to attract Kurdish voters with some success. Prior to the 2015 elections, the AKP was the only non-Kurdish party to compete successfully in Turkey's heavily Kurdish southeast. Although support for the AKP in the southeast fell sharply, the party continued to employ the tactic of appealing to the Kurds' Muslim identity.

Davutoğlu and Erdoğan have been particularly enthusiastic about invoking the name of Saladin, the famous founder of the Ayubid dynasty and Muslim commander who recaptured Jerusalem and Palestine from the Crusaders in the twelfth century. In May 2015, they presided at the opening of the Selahaddin Eyyubi Airport in the remote and underdeveloped southeastern province of Hakkari.⁵² By recalling the exploits of Saladin, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu appeal not only to Kurdish pride but also subtly claim his legacy as a liberator of Jerusalem, thereby also reminding audiences of the Palestinian cause. Moreover, they underscore to Muslims inside and outside of Turkey that Islam is a multi-ethnic religion encompassing many nations. Indeed, Davutoğlu even went so far as to declare he would no longer refer to the chief of the pro-Kurdish HDP Selahattin Demirtaş by his first name because that name recalled the Kurdish liberator of Jerusalem. As he put it, "He [Demirtaş] calls Jerusalem 'the holy site of the Jews.' Ignoramus, be ashamed in the name of Saladin, Jerusalem is our holy land."⁵³

The AKP, Palestine, and Israel

THE AKP'S UNDERSTANDING OF PALESTINE, ISRAEL, AND TURKISH-ISRAELI relations is a large topic in its own right. These questions tie together several strands of Erdoğan's and Davutoğlu's thinking. The sharp deterioration in relations between Israel and Turkey during the AKP era is, although by no means

solely the work of Ankara, one of the most dramatic illustrations of the shift in Turkish foreign relations. In *Strategic Depth*, Davutoğlu makes clear his principled opposition to Israel. The rise of Islam formed the Middle East into an organic whole, one with a distinct culture and civilization. It maintained this unity largely until the end of the Ottoman era, when the Western powers introduced and imposed ethno-nationalism among other alien ideologies. In his view, Israel's presence in the Middle East is inherently destabilizing because that country is non-Muslim and because in its Zionism it embodies nineteenth century European nationalism. Moreover, Davutoğlu believes that Israel has not only worked actively to keep the Muslims of the Middle East divided, but it has also, like the Western powers, collaborated with regional authoritarian regimes to suppress Islamist movements. As Davutoğlu notes, it was no coincidence that Turkish-Israeli relations were at their closest when the Welfare Party was driven from government and shut down.⁵⁴

The belief that the Western powers have helped suppress Islamist movements, including their own, is a central component of Erdoğan's and Davutoğlu's worldview. As Davutoğlu argued in 1997:

The logic is simple: A democratic system in the Muslim world can open the way to anti-Western regimes. Such reasoning reveals that the basic motive of the West is more its own interests than democratic values. Retrograde military-bureaucratic elites of some Muslim countries have exploited this fear and have collaborated with global system forces to destroy the democratic processes in the Muslim world.⁵⁵

This perspective helps explain the AKP's sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. The AKP sees those organizations as grassroots movements of pious Muslims who were disenfranchised and suppressed, often on trumped-up and false charges of terrorism and subversion. Under the AKP, Ankara has been supportive of Hamas. In Egypt, General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi's toppling of Muhammad Morsi's government in 2013 both infuriated and frightened AKP members who recalled their own history of military coups. In striking fashion, Erdogan has repeatedly identified himself and the AKP with the Muslim Brotherhood's opposition to Sisi. At AKP political rallies, for example, he would often employ the four-fingered hand signal that symbolizes resistance to Egypt's military government.⁵⁶

Children of the Turkish Revolution

IN THEIR POLITICAL RHETORIC AND POLICIES AT HOME AND ABROAD, ERDOĞAN and Davutoğlu have distinguished themselves from their predecessors by their willingness to eschew a narrow Turkish nationalist perspective in favor of pan-Islamism or liberal cosmopolitanism.⁵⁷ Erdoğan and Davutoğlu draw guidance for their more inclusive vision from the teachings of their Islamic faith and inspiration for their vision from Ottoman history. They believe that peoples of varied ethnicities and religions lived side by side in relative harmony under the sage rule of the Ottoman sultan, who governed in scrupulous accord with the precepts and strictures of Islam. A saccharine interpretation of history is not held any less passionately. Erdoğan famously lambasted the directors of a Turkish television soap opera set in the court of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent—for depicting scandalous palace intrigues in classic sensationalized soap opera fashion: “We do not have any such ancestry.”⁵⁸

Significantly, Erdoğan does not see his country’s lineage as ending or beginning with the Ottomans. In a bizarre yet telling display at the sprawling new presidential palace, Erdoğan greeted the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, while accompanied by sixteen men dressed in historical costumes. Each man was supposed to represent a famous Turkic state in history. While Erdoğan beamed with pride, Abbas appeared disoriented, and understandably so. Whereas Ankara’s neo-Ottomanism pays homage to four centuries of Turkish-Arab unity, Erdoğan’s prideful display of Turkic states from Central Asia and elsewhere could only alienate a Palestinian leader, since it underscores the differences between Turks and Arabs in their ethnic origins and historical experiences. Additionally, it is worth noting that the very notion of sixteen Turkic states was the invention of a Turkish nationalist who in 1969 sought to give an apocryphal explanation for why the seal of the Turkish presidency has sixteen stars. Additionally, the very notion of sixteen Turkic states was invented and popularized by a Turkish nationalist in 1969 to give an apocryphal explanation for why the seal of the Turkish presidency has sixteen stars. Unwittingly, Erdoğan revealed at a stroke how Turkish nationalism has stamped his view of history and identity.

Conclusion

OVER THE COURSE OF MORE THAN A DECADE, RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN AND Ahmet Davutoğlu have together decisively changed Turkey's domestic politics and foreign relations. The two formally and openly proclaim Islam to be at the center of their identities and worldviews. Guiding their conduct of policy has been a vision of Turkey's past and future that is inextricably intertwined with their interpretation of Islam and that differs starkly from those of their predecessors. According to that vision, the interests of Turkey and the broader Muslim world are bound together and mutually reinforcing. The fundamental sources of political instability, economic underdevelopment, and conflict that have plagued Turkey and the Middle East are Western political domination and Western ideas.

As Davutoğlu contends, Turkey constitutes an organic and inalienable part of Islamic civilization. Since the metaphysics of Islamic civilization differ fundamentally from those of Western civilization, the two civilizations and their institutions are irreconcilable and incompatible.

By definition, this is a radical view, but it is important to underscore that, in Davutoğlu's case, it is not anger or militant righteousness that colors his outlook, but rather a sentimental attachment to his birthplace, people, and faith. He also possesses a keen sense of loss as it pertains to the richness of Ottoman Islamic culture under the Kemalist order. Thus, Erdoğan's and Davutoğlu's worldview is rooted in a quasi-mythological understanding of Turkey's past and its Ottoman legacy. In this way, it is substantially different from the most common forms of Islamism in the world. Even so, the two instinctively sympathize with Islamists, including radical ones, seeing them as fellow Muslims who have suffered at the hands of Western-backed authoritarian regimes (even if, as in the case of Syria, the description of "Western-backed" is an enormous stretch). This misplaced sympathy undoubtedly informed Ankara's relatively indulgent attitude toward ISIS, even if that policy is also bound up with Ankara's efforts to contain Kurdish separatism in Syria. Davutoğlu's instincts are not, however, entirely impervious to reality. Speaking at an AKP party meeting to discuss Turkey's military operations against ISIS and the PKK, he described ISIS as not only a physical danger to Turkey, but "a threat directed at our faith, an ideological threat." Yet it is also noteworthy that for Davutoğlu the dimensions of that ideological threat are limited to the damage that ISIS does to the image of Islam.⁵⁹ Reckoning with the profound doctrinal and

theological splits in contemporary Islam would undermine the unity that he and Erdoğan assume to be an essential aspect of Islam.

The Arab Spring initially held the promise of becoming the clearest fulfillment of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's vision. Soon after Turkey began expanding its ties through the Arab world, popular Sunni Arab movements mobilized under slogans of democratization and Islamism against their authoritarian regimes. The emergence of a united and democratic Sunni bloc in the Middle East and North Africa with Turkey at its head appeared to be in the offing. Instead, the aftermath of the Arab Spring has revealed its flaws. Syria is perhaps the best example of this. Whereas in 2009 Erdoğan and Davutoğlu expressly declared that the two countries share a single history and future and began pursuing a strategic partnership complete with joint ministerial cabinet meetings, by the end of 2011 Erdoğan was calling for Assad's overthrow. Assad's resilience, however, has upended Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's ambitions. Turkey now finds itself honoring its cultural and religious ties to its neighbors by hosting 1.7 million Syrian refugees, a tremendous economic and social burden.⁶⁰ Ankara's pan-Islamic orientation has led not to strong and productive ties with Muslims abroad but instead to domestic sectarian tensions. It also facilitated ISIS' emergence on Turkey's border and inside Turkey, complicating Ankara's current struggle against the radical Islamist entity. Whereas ideas of religious solidarity and fraternity rooted in history may have spurred the AKP in 2009 to undertake a major and unprecedented opening to resolve Turkey's Kurdish question,⁶¹ Ankara's reluctance to aid Syrian Kurds in Kobane against ISIS decisively alienated Turkey's Kurds from the AKP.⁶² Attempts to rally Kurdish votes through such gambits as celebrating Saladin as a hero for liberating Jerusalem proved fruitless in the 2015 elections, and can serve only to antagonize Israel needlessly. The AKP's soft Islamist vision, filtered through an Ottoman and Turkish historical experience unknown to younger generations of Arabs and others outside Turkey, can have only limited appeal.

Despite these mounting difficulties, there is no indication that Erdoğan or Davutoğlu have reexamined the assumptions underlying their policies. This is unsurprising, as those assumptions are built into identities they forged decades ago. Although their personalities and working relationships are unique, the worldview they represent, with its mixture of Ottoman-inspired pan-Islamic cosmopolitanism and Turkish national pride, is not. Many, probably most, AKP voters subscribe to it as well. It will retain influence in Turkish politics for some time to come.

NOTES

1. This article employs the word “Islamist” in a broad fashion to refer to any individuals or groups who aspire to refashion or reform society in such a way as to bring it more in line with what they regard as Islamic. The term here is not limited to those who seek the imminent establishment of Islamic law or rule.
2. Özdemir İnce, “Müslüman Demokratlar,” *Hürriyet*, November 17, 2002, available at <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=110123>;
William Hale, “Christian Democracy and the AKP: Parallels and Contrasts,” *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 6 no. 2 (June, 2005), p. 293-310; see also M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
3. As Davutoğlu underscored on the AKP’s fourteenth anniversary on August 14, 2015, those who wish to see some difference between the AKP and the president will have to wait.
4. For the sake of narrative ease, this article treats Erdoğan’s and Davutoğlu’s worldviews as effectively indistinguishable.
5. Bernard Lewis’s seminal *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* was for decades the authoritative work on modern Turkey. It narrates the story of the genesis and formation of the Turkish Republic largely as a one of the discovery of ethnic identity overlapping with the process of secularization, a familiar theme in European historiography. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, [1961], 2002). For a more recent synthesis that assigns religion more lasting influence, see Carter Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
6. Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk’s Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 107.
7. Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1921* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), p. 230.
8. For a comparison of the Turkish, American, and French understandings of secularism, see Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
9. Necmettin Erbakan, *Milli Görüş* (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1975).
10. M. Mustafa Uzun, ed. *Erbakan’ın Dilinden Milli Görüş* (Istanbul: Ravza Yayınları, 2013), p. 11.
11. Necmettin Erbakan, *Davam* (Ankara: Milli Gazete, 2013), p. 70.
12. Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 86-87.
13. Fulya Atacan, “Explaining Religious Politics at the Crossroad: AKP-SP,” *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 6, no. 2 (June, 2005), p. 190.

14. For just one example, see “Başbakan Erdoğan, ‘İhanet şebekesini millete belgeleriyle tanıta-
cağız’” *Türkiye Gazetesi* (June 16, 2013), available at [http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/poli-
tika/45672.aspx](http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/poli-
tika/45672.aspx).
15. For an insightful study of this phenomenon, see Jenny B. White, “The Turkish Complex,”
The American Interest, Vol. 10, no. 4 (February 2, 2015), available at [http://www.the-american-
interest.com/2015/02/02/the-turkish-complex/](http://www.the-american-
interest.com/2015/02/02/the-turkish-complex/).
16. Morton Abramowitz and Henry Barkey, “Turkey’s Transformers,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, no.
6 (November-December 2009), available at
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2009-11-01/turkeys-transformers>.
17. Daniel Dombey, “Ahmet Davutoğlu: Renewed Confidence is on Display,” *Financial Times*,
November 21, 2011.
18. The Dutch historian and leading expert on Turkey, Erik Jan Zürcher, broke with the con-
ventional periodization that identified the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 as a key
rupture and argued instead that the period from 1908 to Turkey’s first openly contested elec-
tions in 1950 should be considered as one: the “Young Turk Era.” Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey:
A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, [1993] 2005).
19. BBC News, “Iran signs nuclear fuel-swap deal with Turkey,” May 17, 2010, available at
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8685846.stm..
20. Tolga Yanık and Mehmet Emin Eroğlu, “Davutoğlu’nun bilinmeyenleri,” *Doğan Haber Ajansı*,
August 21, 2014, available at http://www.dha.com.tr/Davutoğlunun-bilinmeyenleri_739261.html.
21. Gürkan Zengin, *Hoca: Türk Dış Politikası’nda ‘Davutoğlu Etkisi’* (Istanbul: İnkilap, 2010), p.
27; Abdurrahman Boynukalın, “Taşkentli Yörük Ahmet,” *Yeni Şafak*, August 25, 2014, avail-
able at <http://www.yenisafak.com/politika/taskentli-yoruk-ahmet-678848>.
22. Tolga Yanık and Mehmet Emin Eroğlu, “Davutoğlu’nun bilinmeyenleri,” *Doğan Haber Ajansı*,
August 21, 2014, available at http://www.dha.com.tr/Davutoğlunun-bilinmeyenleri_739261.html.
23. Gürkan Zengin, *Hoca: Türk Dış Politikası’nda ‘Davutoğlu Etkisi’* (Istanbul: İnkilap, 2010),
p. 28-29.
24. Abdurrahman Boynukalın, “Taşkentli Yörük Ahmet,” *Yeni Şafak* (August, 25, 2014), available
at <http://www.yenisafak.com/politika/taskentli-yoruk-ahmet-678848>.
25. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs
on Political Theory* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), p. 2.
26. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World* (Kuala Lumpur: Mahir
Publications, 1994), p. 117.
27. Samuel P. Huntington, *Foreign Affairs*, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 72,
no. 3 (Summer 1993), available at
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1993-06-01/clash-civilizations>.
28. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World* (Kuala Lumpur: Mahir
Publications, 1994), p. 1-8, 116-117.

29. Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Medeniyetler Arası Etkileşim ve Osmanlı Sentezi,” in Coşkun Çakır, ed. *Osmanlı Medeniyeti: Siyaset, İktisat, Sanat* 3rd. printing (Istanbul: Klasik, 2005, 2012), p. 3, 9.
30. Ibid., p. 10, 12-13.
31. Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu’nun Diyarbakır Dicle Üniversitesinde Verdiği, “Büyük Restorasyon: Kadim’den Küreselleşmeye Yeni Siyaset Anlayışımız” Konulu Konferans, Mart 15, 2013, Diyarbakır, available at http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-ahmet-Davutoğlu_nun-diyarbakir-dicle-universitesinde-verdigi-buyuk-restorasyon_kadim_den-kuresellesmeye-yeni.tr.mfa.
32. Sultan Selim II had begun the practice following his conquest of Mamluk Egypt in 1517 of taking the title of Caliph from the vanquished Mamluks. The Mamluks’ claim to have inherited the title from a descendant of the last Abbasid Caliph, however, was tenuous. The Ottoman practice of invoking the title of Caliph fell into disuse in part because the Ottoman claim was quite weak.
33. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 35, 53, 67-68,
34. When Prime Minister Davutoğlu was on a recent visit to the city of Eskişehir, AKP supporters hung a banner with the image of Davutoğlu on one side and that of Abdulhamid on the other and in the middle the words, “My Padishah, my Sultan, Abdulhamid, my entrusted possession [emanetim] you can know sleep in secure hands. “Davutoğlu’nu Abdülhamid Afisiyle Karşıladılar,” *Haberler.com*, December 7, 2014, available at <http://www.haberler.com/Davutoğlu-nu-abdulhamid-afisiyle-karsiladilar-6754341-haberi/>.
35. Hüseyin Yayman, *Şark Meselesinden Demokratik Açılıma Türkiye’nin Kürt Sorunu Hafızası* (Ankara: SETA Yayınları, 2011), p. 17-18.
36. Ruşen Çakır, “Erdoğan’ın 1991 yılında Erbakan’a verdiği Kürt raporu,” *Vatan Gazetesi*, December 27, 2007.
37. “Kaybettiğimiz Topraklarda Buluşacağız,” *Habertürk* (22.01.2012), available at <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/708252-kaybettigimiz-topraklarda-bulusacagiz>.
38. “Başbakan Üçüncü Balkon Konuşması,” *Hürriyet*, June 13, 2011.
39. “Erdoğan’dan Tarihi Balkon Konuşması,” *Medyagündem*, August 11, 2014, available at <http://www.medyagundem.com/erdogandan-tarihi-balkon-konusmasi/>.
40. “Başbakan Davutoğlu’dan Balkon Konuşması,” *Milliyet*, June 8, 2015.
41. Ibid.
- 42 “Başbakan Üçüncü Balkon Konuşması,” *Hürriyet*, June 13, 2011.
43. The video can be found at the website of the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak*: <http://www.yenisafak.com/video-galeri/iste-erdoganin-siir-okudugu-canakkale-filmi/2032455>. It is also available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2WQHj6iwuY>.
44. Although officially renamed “Tunceli” in 1935, the province is still popularly known as Dersim.
45. İsa Tatlıcan, “Dersim Katliamının Her Aşamasında CHP Var,” *Sabah*, November 16, 2014,

- available at <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2014/11/17/dersim-katliaminin-her-asamasinda-chp-var?paging=3>.
46. "Erdoğan Dersim için özür diledi," *Milliyet*, November 23, 2011, available at <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Erdoğan-dersim-icin-ozur-diledi/siyaset/siyasetdetay/23.11.2011/1466430/default.htm>.
47. "Erdoğan Dersim için özür diledi," *Milliyet*, November 23, 2011, available at <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Erdoğan-dersim-icin-ozur-diledi/siyaset/siyasetdetay/23.11.2011/1466430/default.htm>.
48. Research on voting patterns does indicate that Alevi voters tend to prefer parties with more secular orientations. See, for example, Ali Çarkoğlu, "The Nature of Left-Right Ideological Self placement in the Turkish Context," *Turkish Studies* Vol.8 no.2 (June 2007), p. 263-264.
49. "Çelik: CHP, Türkiye'nin Baas Partisi'dir," NTV, September 8, 2011, available at <http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25248421>.
50. His website address is: <http://huseyincelik.net>.
51. "Başbakan Davutoğlu Urfa'da konuştu," *Habertürk*, May 10, 2015, available at <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1076559-basbakan-Davutoğlu-urfada-konusuyor>.
52. "Erdoğan ve Davutoğlu, Yüksekova'da 'Selahaddin Eyyubi Havalimanı'nı açtı," *Milliyet*, May 26, 2015, available at http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/Erdoğan_ve_Davutoğlu_yuksekovada_selahaddin_eyyubi_havalimanini_acti-1366411.
53. "Davutoğlu: Ona artık Selahattin Demirtaş demeyeceğim," *Milliyet*, May 5, 2015, available at <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Davutoğlu-ona-artik-selahattin/siyaset/detay/2052772/default.htm>.
54. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 89, 260-61, 497.
55. Alı Balcı, "Komşularla Sıfır Sorun Sadece Bir Dış Politika ilkesi Mi?" *Star Gazete*, August 19, 2012.
56. "Erdoğan'dan R4BIA selamı," *Yeni Şafak*, August 17, 2013, available at <http://www.yenisafak.com/politika/erdogandan-r4bia-selami-555742>.
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58. "Başbakan Erdoğan'dan Muhteşem Yüzyıl'a ağır eleştirisi," *Hürriyet*, November 25, 2012, available at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/22009998.asp>.

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61. Michael A. Reynolds, *Echoes of Empire: Turkey’s crisis of Kemalism and the search for an alternative foreign policy* (Washington, DC: Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institute, 2012).
62. Henri J. Barkey, “The Meaning of Kobani,” *The American Interest*, October 18, 2014, available at <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/10/18/the-meaning-of-kobani/>.

Political Islam in Turkey and the Naqshbandi-Khalidi Order

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IN THE PAST TWO DECADES, TURKEY HAS EMERGED ON THE GLOBAL SCENE. It has enjoyed dramatic economic growth that has catapulted it into the exclusive G20 club of major economies; and under the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkey has enjoyed unprecedented political stability. For the past fifteen years, the AKP has formed a single-party government, a remarkable feat given Turkey's tumultuous politics.

The AKP's tenure was at first lauded in the West as the triumph of democratic forces over semi-authoritarianism. The AKP inherited a system in which Turkey's General Staff and high judiciary often dictated terms to officials. But over time, the AKP moved to change Turkey: it steadily turned away from Europe, focusing on Turkey as a Middle Eastern power with a growing Islamist and Sunni sectarian ideological character. Over the past five years, the AKP has also moved on the domestic front, infusing the education system with Islamic themes. In scenes that

would have been unthinkable only a few years ago, President Erdoğan brandished his Quran at public rallies during the June 2015 electoral campaign, often beginning his remarks with Quranic citations.

This article is not a study of the policies of the Turkish government; it is an inquiry into the religious and ideological environment informing Turkish political Islam. Turkish political Islam, and with it Turkish politics, is increasingly based on powerful religious orders and brotherhoods, collectively termed *tarikats* and *cemaats*, respectively. These communities constitute the deep structure of Turkish power, and share a common ideological source: they belong to, or stem from, the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order. While they differ from one another in interpretation and tone, the Naqshbandi-Khalidi groups have formed Turkish political Islam, and through the AKP, the Khalidi worldview has become the dominant political force in Turkey today. With only slight exaggeration, the ruling Justice and Development Party as well as the government it has led could be termed a coalition of religious orders—a fact generally ignored by analysts of Turkish politics. This article discusses the background of the religious orders in Turkey, focusing on the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order, before studying the various offshoots that have assumed important roles in Turkish politics today.

Religious Orders in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Republic

RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND COMMUNITIES HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN Turkish politics and society since the Ottoman period. These are part of, or offshoots from, the mystical Sufi tradition in Islam, called *Tasavuf* in Turkish. This tradition is based on receiving spiritual guidance from masters forming part of a chain of teachers going all the way back to the Prophet Muhammed. As a result, various masters formed congregations, some of which evolved into large orders (*Tariqat*) that span countries and continents. In turn, these orders are subdivided into sub-orders or branches (*kol*) and further into various lodges (*dergah*). The Naqshbandi order is among the largest such orders in the world, and throughout history has played a critical role in the spread of Islam. In the modern period, there have been offshoots of these orders, which are not strictly Sufi congregations,

but religious communities of a more modern rather than mystical nature. The Nur movement and its offshoots, the Fethullah Gülen movement, is a case in point.

The role of these orders has undergone several phases. Prior to the nineteenth century Western-style reforms, they were tied closely to the Ottoman bureaucracy; importantly, however, they never played a direct political role. In the late Ottoman period, they gradually weakened as Western educational and secular principles gained ground. In the early years of the Turkish Republic, they were systematically suppressed. From 1950 to 2002, they gradually re-emerged on the political scene, effectively usurping power from 2002 onward.

The ebb and flow of the influence of religious orders dates back to the Ottoman defeat at Vienna, and the ensuing military losses to Western powers. This set in motion a process of renewal and reform, which gradually led to the decline of the influence of the Ulema, the clerical establishment. Paradoxically, the Orthodox Naqshbandi order initially benefited because the destruction of the Janissary corps in 1826 also led to the closure of the heterodox and moderate Bektashi order, which had enjoyed considerable influence in the bureaucracy. The Naqshbandi-Khalidi order filled the void left by the Bektashis in the bureaucracy and Ottoman intellectual life.

At the same time, the growth of schools providing Western-style secular education negatively affected the Islamic madrassah system. This secularization threatened the influence of the Ulema over the Ottoman Empire, motivating the religious orders in their ideological opposition to Westernizing reforms.

The purge of the Bektashis led the Khalidi sub-order of the Naqshbandi order, named after Khalid al-Baghdadi, to briefly gain in importance. Baghdadi reformed this order in the early nineteenth century, dispatching a large number of disciples—116 in all—to spread his teachings across the Ottoman Empire and beyond, including destinations as far away as Indonesia and Afghanistan. The impact of the order on Turkish society and politics far surpasses what is usually assumed; its ideas have exerted strong influence on numerous spinoff movements, including practically all of the politically relevant Islamic social movements in the country today. Almost all religious orders and communities in Turkey hail from the Khalidi order. The most well-known of them is the Iskenderpaşa lodge in Istanbul, which produced the *Milli Görüş* movement—the “National Outlook” movement created in the mid-1960s which produced Turkey’s Islamist political parties and was led by Necmettin Erbakan. But the Menzil, Nurcu (including the Fethullah Gülen community), the Süleymancı, and Işıkçı groupings, among others, also all trace their lineage to the order.

While the religious orders and schools saw their influence over politics and administration decline in the last century of the Ottoman Empire, they mostly maintained their influence on social life. Moreover, the duality between modern schools and madrassahs gave them a role in education. But with the creation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the sultanate and the caliphate were abolished. In 1924, the Law on Unification of Education (*Tevhid-i tedrisat kanunu*) similarly abolished all schools providing religious education. Following the 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion in the east, led by a Naqshbandi sheikh, a November 1925 law closed all religious orders, lodges, and monasteries. This ended legal recognition of all religious orders. Furthermore, the transition to the Latin alphabet in 1927 curtailed the influence of religious figures on the state, and especially on the education system. This was not a coincidence: Atatürk and his followers explicitly sought to neutralize religious orders and brotherhoods, as well as the influence of their members.

Naturally, this radical revolutionary secular movement generated a backlash. The religious groups were forced underground and adapted their strategies to a long-term struggle. Especially in the eastern parts of the country, where government writ was weak, the Naqshbandi brotherhoods continued their activities surreptitiously. As religious education was outlawed, many students went abroad for religious education, primarily to Islamic centers in places such as Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus or Medina. A significant portion of these students reimported Salafi Islamist thinking and the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood upon their return to Turkey. While not as strong as in the Arab world, hardcore conservative views soon developed in Turkey, and found expression in the political scene. Importantly, these ideas cross-fertilized with the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order's views, in spite of the order's Sufi status. In practice, the order's orthodoxy and politicized nature made it an ally rather than an enemy of the Salafi-influenced ideas, including those of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The hardcore secularist policies of Atatürk's time, often termed Jacobin in nature, did not outlive him: even in the period between his death in 1938 and the introduction of democracy in 1950, pressure on religious groups eased somewhat. With the advent of multi-party democracy, secularism surrendered its monopoly on power. The Turkish state rapidly adjusted to both the demands of society and those of international politics. Across society, voluntary secular associations were weak and Islamic groups constituted the leading organized political forces, rivaled only at times by leftist outfits and trade unions. Moreover, given Turkey's fear of Soviet encroachment, the state from the 1950s onward leaned increasingly on Islam as a bulwark against communism. This trend was true before the 1980

military coup, but it was greatly enhanced during military rule in the early 1980s, when Sunni Islam and Turkish nationalism fused together to form a new state ideology. The governing elites always intended to retain control over religion; gradually, however, they lost control to the religious brotherhoods and communities.

From the 1950s onward, Islamic organizations re-emerged. To reduce the growing shortage of clergy, the state created faculties of theology and Islamic institutes. In parallel to these state-controlled organizations, the religious brotherhoods gradually started emerging from underground. This period saw the organization of religious communities such as the Nurcu, Süleymancı, and Işıkçı.

The Naqshbandi-Khalidi Order and the Iskenderpaşa Lodge

SUFI ORDERS ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR ESOTERIC NATURE, IN CONTRAST TO ORTHODOX Islam. This has often implied an emphasis on mysticism over literalism and strict interpretation of Sharia law. It would be a mistake, however, to view the Naqshbandi order through this lens. It stands out among Sufi orders for its compatibility with orthodox, official Islam. Indeed, the Naqshbandi differs from most Sufi orders, almost all of whom trace their *silsila*—their chain of spiritual transmission—back to Muhammad via his son-in-law Ali, who is the first imam in the Shia branch of Islam. By contrast, the Naqshbandi is the only order to trace its chain of transmission through the first Sunni Caliph, Abu Bakr. This explains the order's firm allegiance to the orthodox Sunni tradition, and its strict adherence to Sharia, with mysticism only a second story subservient to the fulfillment of formal Islamic duties.¹

A central figure in the order's development is the seventeenth century Sheikh Ahmad al-Sirhindi, who reinforced the orthodoxy of the order and its opposition to Shiism while strictly regulating *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) "within the bounds of the Quran and Sunna."² Sirhindi advocated an "activist Sufi practice that encouraged political and social life at the expense of older Sufi practices of withdrawal from public affairs."³ In the nineteenth century, this thinking would be picked up by Khalid-i-Baghdadi, a sheikh of Kurdish descent from present-day northern Iraq who was initiated into the Naqshbandi in India in 1809. He developed a new branch of the order known as the Khalidi branch, or *Khalidiyya*, which reinforced Sirhindi's ideas with a powerful rejection of foreign rule, or non-Islamic

ideas. From the North Caucasus to Indonesia, this struck a powerful chord among Muslims subject to European colonization. In the Ottoman lands, it resonated with a population chafing under European-imposed “capitulations,” or preferential treaties. Soon, the Khalidi order began to eclipse others in prominence in the Ottoman Empire. It became a public force in the 1820s, urging “the reinstatement of Islam as a guideline for reform” and the “promotion of a stricter use of the Sharia.”⁴ As the Westernizing reforms of the Tanzimat period won the day, the Khalidi order positioned itself firmly in the political opposition.⁵

This opposition continued into the Republican era. One of Baghdadī’s disciples, Ahmad Süleyman al-Arwadi (d 1858), was dispatched to Istanbul, where he initiated the prominent Naqshbandi Ahmad Ziyauddin Gümüşhanevi (1813–93), who started what later became known as the Iskenderpaşa lodge. One of Gümüşhanevi’s successors was perhaps the most important Islamist of Turkey: Mehmet Zahid Kotku (1897–1980), a son of migrants from Dagestan. Initiated into the Khalidi order in 1918, Kotku was given *ijazah* (grant of authority) to become a sheikh in 1952 and took up preaching in Istanbul. He took over the Iskenderpaşa mosque in 1958, where he remained until his death.

In the three decades that followed, Kotku became the informal leader of Turkish political Islam, promoting the Khalidi doctrines in the new environment of multi-party democracy. Kotku was influenced by anti-colonialist thinking, urging his disciples to unshackle Turkey from foreign “economic slavery” by developing indigenous industry. He understood the importance of modern science and technology as much as he opposed the cultural values of the West, arguing that by imitating the West, the Turks had “lost the core of [their] identity.” He believed Muslims “should try to capture the higher summits of social and political institutions and establish control over society.”⁶ In the bureaucracy, Kotku’s followers successfully ensconced themselves in the State Planning Organization, allowing them to influence economic and social policies and municipal personnel appointments.⁷

It is difficult to overstate the role of Kotku and the Iskenderpaşa lodge. He parted with his immediate predecessor, Abdulaziz Bekkine (1895–1952), who had prohibited the mixing of Islam and electoral politics. He encouraged a generation of pious Muslims to take positions in the state bureaucracy, and started the process of infiltration and takeover of state institutions that would help political Islam dominate Turkey. As the Turkish scholar Birol Yeşilada has observed, “The Nakşibendis always emphasized the need to conquer the state from within by aligning themselves with powerful sources of capital and political actors.”⁸ More directly, Kotku eventually formally sanctioned the split of the Islamist wing from Turkey’s center-right, giving his blessing to Necmettin Erbakan to form the

National Order Party in 1969. A leading Islamist of the time relates that Kotku told Erbakan that “the country has fallen into the hands of freemasons imitating the West ... for the government to fall into the hands of its true representatives within the boundaries of laws, forming a political party is an inevitable historical duty for us. Be part of this enterprise and lead it.”⁹

The roster of Kotku disciples and Iskenderpaşa members who attained prominent political positions include not just Erbakan, but subsequent President Turgut Özal, his more conservative brother Korkut Özal, subsequent Prime Minister and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, his Interior Ministers Abdülkadir Aksu and Beşir Atalay, and close to a dozen other ministers during Erdoğan’s tenure.

Erbakan’s political ambition gradually strained the relationship to the Iskenderpaşa community, causing the latter to recede from politics.¹⁰ As long as Kotku was alive, this public rift was contained. But in 1978, two years before Kotku’s death, Korkut Özal, then a senior figure within the National Salvation Party, led a quiet rebellion against Erbakan’s style of management, claiming to have received Kotku’s blessing for his revolt.¹¹ Following Kotku’s death, leadership of the community passed to his son-in-law, Professor Esad Coşan. Coşan further distanced the order from Erbakan, and for all practical purposes severed the link between his lodge and Erbakan’s politics. The lodge itself subsequently declined in influence; Coşan left Turkey for Australia following the 1997 military intervention, where he died in a car accident in 2001. He was succeeded as sheikh by his son, Nurettin Coşan, who remains in Australia. While the religious leadership of the lodge is a thing of the past, its lay followers constitute the core of the AKP’s leadership, underscoring its outsized influence on Turkish politics.

The Offshoots of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi Order

WHILE THE ISKENDERPAŞA ORDER BROKE GROUND BY TAKING POLITICAL ISLAM INTO politics as a separate force, its potential remained unfulfilled largely because many other religious communities declined to join forces with it. Prior to studying the evolution of political Islam in Turkey, it is therefore relevant to briefly review the offshoots of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order, whose total membership far exceeds that of Iskenderpaşa.

The Nurcu Movement

The Nurcu community views itself not as a religious order but as a school of exegesis. It was founded in the early twentieth century by Said-i Nursi, a preacher born in the Kurdish-dominated areas of eastern Turkey. While Nursi would very much develop his own ideas, his early studies were influenced greatly by Naqshbandi-Khalidi sheikhs, in whose madrassahs he studied. He was formally initiated into the Naqshbandi order, eventually receiving his own *ijazah* from a Khalidi sheikh in Doğubeyazıt. Nursi aimed to open a madrassah in Van, in eastern Turkey, in which he would combine the teaching of religious subjects with mathematics and science. To receive support for his plan, he went to Istanbul and then on to Salonica, today's Thessaloniki, Greece, to join the Committee for Union and Progress. All Nurcu (literally followers of light, since Nur means light in Turkish) communities that followed, including Fethullah Gülen's global movement, have pursued this ambition: to raise new generations trained in both religious education and modern science, thereby closing the gap between the Muslim world and the materially more advanced Western world.

While Nursi was persecuted in the early days of the Republic and sent into exile, he redoubled his efforts in the 1960s, during the reign of the Democrat Party. Nursi's students subsequently spread all over Turkey, and began setting up circles to study his *Risale-i Nur*, a multi-volume exegesis in which Nursi expounded on the meaning of the Quran. Nursi's writing stood out for its organization; rather than following the Quranic organization of longest to shortest verses, he organized his writing logically. After Nursi's death, however, his movement split into the Okuyucular (readers) and Yazıcılar (writers) factions, which divided over the methods for teaching the *Risale*. For a variety of reasons, further splits occurred. Today, there are approximately forty different Nurcu groups in Turkey and abroad, a dozen of which remain influential, the largest and most important of which is the Gülen group.¹²

The Nurcu emerged as a civil society initiative, which was even illegal from 1965 until 1985. Under the government of Turgut Özal, himself a Naqshbandi-Khalidi follower, the criminalization of the propagation of Sharia was abolished with changes to Article 163 of the Turkish penal code. This legal mechanism had been used to block most religious activities in Turkey. Its removal allowed Nurcu groups to spread beyond informal study circles in members' homes, or *sohbet*, to begin organizing foundations and associations as well as student dormitories, known as *yurt*. These provided an ideal environment for informal religious edu-

cation, and made the Nurcu perhaps the best-organized and most widespread religious movement. With some exceptions, the Nurcus have tended to abstain from direct party politics; until the creation of the AKP, they supported secular center-right parties rather than the Islamists of Necmettin Erbakan.

The Fethullah Gülen Movement

While the Gülen movement is a Nurcu group, its sheer size and influence alone means it deserves separate treatment. Fethullah Gülen is the most prominent religious figure to emerge from the Nurcu movement. He began his activities in Izmir in the 1960s; at the time, a religious vacuum obtained, owing to decades of state policy. A generally more permissive environment had crept into Turkey as well. Gülen took advantage of this setting. His movement refers to itself as the *Hizmet* movement, literally meaning “service,” a term taken from Said Nursi’s concept of *Hizmet-i imaniye ve Kur’aniye*, or service to the faith and Quran. Its aims include the creation of a “golden generation” through education. Already in the movement’s first publication, *Sızıntı* magazine, Gülen urged his followers to focus on the education sector. The *Işık evleri*, or private student residences, were the first education institutions of the movement. This is where the *Risale* was taught in a programmatic and systematic manner. In 1982, as Özal facilitated the establishment of private educational institutions, Gülen moved to turn a student dormitory into his first school, the *Yamanlar koleji* in Izmir.

The number of schools grew rapidly over time, attracting particularly the children of conservative and center-right elites who sought a better education than the state could offer in a culturally conservative setting. In the early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity to export this model to the predominantly Turkic-speaking states that had just gained their independence. Azerbaijan was the first among them, followed by Kazakhstan, where the movement rapidly built 29 schools. Today, the *Hizmet* movement runs an astounding 1,200 schools in 140 countries. Aside from schools, the movement has operated hundreds of preparatory courses for Turkey’s university entrance exam, as well as several universities, including the flagship Fatih University in Istanbul. The movement controls financial institutions such as Bank Asya and Asya Finans; a large business association, TUSKON; and a number of charitable organizations operating both in Turkey and abroad. It also controls a considerable media empire including Turkey’s largest-circulation newspaper, *Zaman*, as well as other news-

papers, magazines, and television and radio stations. Many pious followers of Fethullah Gülen, who explicitly reject the notion of political Islam, embody the compatibility and overlap of Islam and liberal democracy. In fact, for many of them, the former nourishes the latter.

The *Hizmet* movement stands out compared to most religious communities in Turkey for other reasons, too. Generally, they take a pro-Western worldview. Gülen himself and his entourage reside in self-imposed exile in the United States, and their policy stances on international affairs differ greatly from the other orders. Indeed, if the private and social lives of Gülen followers differ little from other religious communities, their attitude toward the West does. They are generally pro-American and support Turkey's European Union integration; even more uniquely, they appear largely devoid of the anti-Semitism that is entrenched in the other orders and movements. In this sense, they diverge considerably from the Naqshbandi-Khalidi movement's roots.

As noted, the Gülen movement stayed away from electoral politics, focusing instead on increasing its presence in the state bureaucracy. The *Hizmet* movement's considerable success in this regard would initially make it Erdoğan's main partner, but also his eventual nemesis.

The Süleymancı

After the banning of religious education in 1925, a group under the leadership of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan vowed to continue teaching the Quran to individuals and small groups. Tunahan received his own religious education in the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order. This movement came to be known as the Süleymancı, which aimed primarily at providing Quranic education and keeping the mosques open. In a number of places where there were too few officially sanctioned imams, the movement dispatched its own to keep mosques functioning. After Quranic courses were permitted in 1947, students from the movement spread across Turkey. Today, the movement stands as one of the most broadly organized in Turkey and Europe—in Germany alone, the movement controls several hundred mosques and Quranic schools.

Upon his death in 1959, Tunahan was succeeded by his son-in-law, Kemal Kaçar, who accelerated the process of expanding Quranic courses and student dormitories. This was facilitated by the movement's support for Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party, through which Kaçar served as a member of parliament

for three terms. Upon Kaçar's death in 2000, a struggle for leadership broke out between the brothers Ahmet and Mehmet Denizolgun, Tunahan's grandsons from his other daughter. This led to a split in the movement, but not to its withdrawal from politics: the brothers simply supported different parties. Mehmet became a founding member of the AKP, while Ahmet—who controlled most of the movement's support—shifted political affiliations. He was elected to parliament in 1995 on the Welfare Party ticket, but quit the party following the 1997 coup. He kept his seat in parliament, and was briefly appointed Minister of Communications for the Motherland Party (ANAP) under Mesut Yılmaz's government in 1998. The movement supported the shrinking ANAP in 1999 and 2002; in 2007, Ahmet Denizolgun ran on the ill-fated Democrat Party ticket; in 2011 and 2015, his block supported the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), with the movement's vote purportedly a crucial factor in helping the MHP overcome the 10 percent threshold in 2011.¹³ Thus, the group stands out in that a large portion of it never supported the AKP.

The Menzil Order

The Menzil are a Naqshbandi-Khalidi community based in Adıyaman that quickly branched out into Ankara and Istanbul. It began to spread rapidly after the 1980 military coup, partly because of its reputation as a religious order supportive of the state. As a result, it spread across western Turkey as one of the fastest-growing religious orders in the country. Like many religious communities, it tended to support center-right parties until the creation of the AKP. In fact, many former right-wing activists whose death sentences were commuted after the coup joined the Menzil order. Moreover, the late founder of the National Unity Party, Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, was close to the order. In the AKP government, two ministers have been known to represent Menzil: Energy Minister Taner Yıldız and Health Minister Recep Akdağ. In 2005, the movement created a business association, TÜMSIAD. In a testament to the order's clout, TÜMSIAD boasts 15,000 members, and in June 2015, TÜMSIAD leader Hasan Sert was elected to parliament as an AKP member.

Religious Orders and Turkish Politics from Erbakan to Erdoğan

TURKISH POLITICAL ISLAM HAS EVOLVED BASED ON THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF these religious orders. While their total membership is unknown, they number in the millions; and since members tend to take guidance from their leaders and vote as reliable blocs, they have often played a decisive role in Turkish politics. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the Islamist parties led by Necmettin Erbakan struggled to unite Turkey's religious orders and communities, many of which continued to support parties of the center-right. These parties were secular and pro-Western in orientation, but respectful of religion and eager to court pious voters.

The Narrow Base: Necmettin Erbakan and Milli Görüş

Necmettin Erbakan was the person who would realize Sheikh Kotku's ideas. Born into a religious family in Sinop in 1926, Erbakan went on to earn a Ph.D. in engineering in Germany. Seeking a political career, Erbakan tried to win a slot on the center-right Justice Party's list in the 1969 parliamentary elections, but Justice Party leader Süleyman Demirel, his former university classmate, vetoed the move. This personal rift mirrored a growing fissure between the Islamist wing of the Justice Party and its leadership, which had so far maintained an uneasy "big tent" of liberals, Islamists, and Turkish nationalists. Increasingly, Islamists and nationalists betrayed deep frustrations with the party's pro-Western tendencies and ties to big business. This played a role in the break between the Islamists and the Justice Party following a failed attempt by Islamists to take over the party in 1968. Simultaneously, the nationalists formed their own party, the MHP.

Erbakan ran as an independent candidate in the 1969 elections and won a seat in parliament. With Kotku's blessing he then founded the National Order Party. Upon its closure, he founded the National Salvation Party, which played a significant role in Turkish politics throughout the 1970s. The party received nearly 12 percent of the vote in 1973, and subsequently was a junior partner in various coalition

governments from 1973 through 1979. In the aftermath of the 1980 coup Erbakan was banned from politics, but in 1987, he began rebuilding political Islam through the Welfare Party, which became the largest party by a razor-thin margin in 1995 thanks to the fragmentation of the center-right. Erbakan served as prime minister in a coalition government from 1996 to 1997, but was removed from power after the February 28, 1997 military intervention, which subsequently led to the party's closure and earned Erbakan a lifetime ban from politics.

The views underlying Erbakan's long political career have been remarkably consistent and deeply influenced by the Khalidi order's teachings, as well as global political Islamic movements of the Muslim Brotherhood tradition. The movement rests on an urge to build a powerful, industrialized Turkey that serves as the natural leader of the Muslim world. While accepting the contributions of modern science, and even arguing that modern Western science was based on Islamic knowledge, Erbakan vigorously opposed Western culture. Erbakan also viewed international politics from an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist perspective: Turkey and the Islamic world were being exploited by the West, which in turn was controlled by a global Zionist world conspiracy. In Erbakan's posthumously published memoirs, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories occupy a central place, just as they play a crucial role in the movement's ideology. Erbakan believed that Turkey needed to build its own heavy industrial base, yet the Western powers had prevented this at every step. Instead of seeking an alliance with the West, therefore, Turkey should form and lead an Islamic union of states.¹⁴

Erbakan was a divisive figure. When he set out, he sought to build a coalition with the Nurcu and Qadiri brotherhoods, but this fell apart in the mid-1970s owing to his domineering personality. Eventually, significant figures from the Iskenderpaşa community itself left the movement. They looked elsewhere, and eventually lent their support to Turkey's center-right parties. In the 1990s, the ANAP, led by Turgut Özal and later Mesut Yılmaz, but also the True Path Party (DYP), led by Süleyman Demirel and later Tansu Çiller, profited most from these defections. The aversion toward Erbakan and *Milli Görüş* was so pronounced that when the two center-right parties gradually collapsed under mismanagement and corruption in the late 1990s, many religious communities in the 1999 elections instead preferred to lend support to either center-left leader Bülent Ecevit and his Democratic Left Party, or the MHP.

A Coalition of Religious Orders: Erdoğan's AKP

The fragmentation of the religious orders ended with the formation of the AKP. Even though the leaders of the newly formed party—Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül—were Iskenderpaşa members, they broke with Erbakan over his leadership style and his unwillingness to compromise. Most importantly, they realized that in order to achieve power and defeat Turkey's secular establishment, they needed to broaden the movement's base. The nascent AKP also benefited from a series of developments. First, Turkey's center-right had fragmented into two parties, the DYP and ANAP, whose programs were practically identical, but whose leaders were prone to infighting. Since their leadership was also susceptible to corruption, the two parties gradually destroyed one another, leaving an enormous void in the traditional center of Turkish politics. Second, the 2000-01 financial crisis, which included a currency devaluation of nearly 40 percent, led to a "throw them all out" sentiment among the Turkish people. And finally, in the environment following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, Western leaders, and in particular the United States, eagerly sought to cultivate "moderate Islam." The AKP became the main beneficiary of this realignment, which favored the party over the increasingly stagnant and unelected secular establishment.

The AKP actively and purposefully sought to build a big-tent party that could capture the different constituencies that had supported the center-right. This included outreach to non-religious voters, especially in the initial phases. But more than anything else, Erdoğan's power rested on a coalition of religious orders and communities. Erdoğan's tactics did not differ from those earlier center-right parties who had eagerly courted religious communities. The difference was that now a core elite from the *Milli Görüş* tradition did the courting, urging all religious communities to unite under one roof. By skillfully handing out favors including political appointments and a share of the economic pie (in particular, government contracts in construction), Erdoğan built a model of political leadership that was strongly dependent on the support of religious orders and communities.

The Milli Görüş, the Naqshbandi and the Muslim Brotherhood

The emergence of political Islam on the Turkish scene derives from the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order; but it is also closely connected to the emergence of political Islam elsewhere in the Muslim world, particularly the rise of the Egyptian Ikhwan al-Muslimeen, the Muslim Brotherhood. Numerous scholars have noted the influence of Brotherhood thinkers Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, as well as Abu Ala al-Mawdudi, founder of the South Asian Jamaat-e Islami, on Erbakan and the *Milli Görüş* movement.¹⁵

This connection may seem contradictory, since the Ikhwan—which in many ways leans toward the purist Salafi Islam—is in principle opposed to Sufi orders and their esoteric nature. However, this mutual hostility between Sufism and the Brotherhood does not appear to apply to the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order. Indeed, the Khalidi order's deep Sunni roots, its strong attachment to Orthodoxy and the Sharia, and the movement's heavy politicization make it highly compatible with the views of the Brotherhood. In many parts of the Middle East there is cross-fertilization between the two organizations.

This connection is visible especially in Germany, where both the Brotherhood and the *Milli Görüş*—forced into exile by their respective governments—developed intricate links, including intermarriage between the Erbakan family and Brotherhood leader Ibrahim al-Zayat. Through close practical cooperation, these organizations took on a dominant role in German Islamic organizations.¹⁶ In this sense, Erbakan became what one scholar called “a crucial conduit of the Muslim Brotherhood into Turkey.”¹⁷ The effect of this was to make “Turkish Islamic thought more universally oriented despite its inward-oriented nationalist-local leanings ... thus the understanding that Islam is not something limited to personal life but also has public claims, took root in the Turkish form of Islamism.”¹⁸

Erbakan developed connections with Brotherhood organizations all over the Middle East and North Africa, and Erdoğan continued to develop these linkages.¹⁹ Thus, leading Brotherhood figures began appearing at the Welfare Party's conventions in the 1990s.²⁰ Attendees at Erbakan's 2011 funeral reads like a “who's who” of the global Muslim Brotherhood, including Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal and the Brotherhood's former spiritual guide, Mohamed Mahdi Akef.²¹ The ideological continuity between the Brotherhood and the AKP is demonstrated by the fact that leading representatives of the various branches of the

Brotherhood, including Hamas, have been honored guests at AKP conventions.

The *Milli Görüş* was never an integral part of the Muslim Brotherhood, but the Brotherhood certainly considered it something akin to the Turkish version of the Brotherhood, much as it viewed the Jamaat-e Islami of Pakistan. Thus, despite its nominally Sufi origins, the Naqshbandi-Khalidi character of the AKP's leadership in no way insulates it from the radicalization of political Islam in the Middle East. Quite the contrary, the Khalidi order's Arab and Kurdish roots explain the AKP's more radical currents, including its foreign policy toward Hamas, Syria and Egypt.

The Rise and Fall of the AKP-Gülen Alliance

Among the various religious groups that underpin Erdoğan's rule, the Gülen movement has played a unique role. It stayed out of politics and at a distance from Erbakan. But from the 1970s onward, the movement built a significant following in the bureaucracy, not least because its members had received a high-quality secular education, unlike many in the other orders. The movement was especially well represented in the judiciary and police. In the 2002 elections, the Gülen movement lent its support to the AKP, but continued to maintain its distance. The movement's politicization began in earnest after 2007, when a confrontation occurred between the AKP and the Turkish military. This solidified the informal alliance between the AKP and the followers of Fethullah Gülen, who harbored strong resentments against the military and judiciary for persecutions launched in the aftermath of the 1997 military intervention. The Gülen movement made common cause with the AKP's leadership, and deployed its assets in the bureaucracy, particularly in the judicial system and police, to stage a counter-attack on the secularist elites that sought to bring down the AKP government, including through an effort to have the courts close the party down.

As a result, the AKP and the Gülen movement jointly developed the massive Ergenekon and Balyoz court cases, which landed hundreds of military officers, bureaucrats, journalists and academics in jail on charges of seeking to overthrow the government.²² It now appears that the Gülen movement, which was able to mobilize hundreds, if not thousands, of followers in the government bureaucracy, used this opportunity to seek an ever-growing level of influence over state institutions. After the 2010 constitutional referendum, the movement was able to capitalize on the changes in the judicial sector to effectively take control of both the

police and the judiciary. This conflicted with Prime Minister Erdoğan's increasingly bold efforts to centralize power: he had decided that Turkey needed a super-presidential system of government in order to turn himself into an elected sultan. Clearly, in such a scheme, he saw the Gülen movement as just another religious community he could subordinate to his interests. The Gülen movement, it seems, had other ideas. Its representatives say they objected to Erdoğan's undemocratic aspirations on principle; critics would retort, with considerable evidence, that they wanted to be co-owners of the state, effectively exercising a veto power on government policy. The former explanation is undoubtedly true for many of the movement's more democratic followers. But judging by the abuses committed in the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, it is clear that the movement's representatives in the bureaucracy were more interested in power than democracy.

This tension ultimately led to a prolonged power struggle. It began when prosecutors affiliated with the *Hizmet* movement attempted to detain the head of Turkish intelligence, Hakan Fidan, one of Erdoğan's closest confidantes. In response to this challenge, Erdoğan methodically worked to break down the movement's influence by transferring, demoting, and firing many officials. At the same time, Erdoğan took on the movement's educational institutions. This confrontation turned ugly in December 2013, after the *Hizmet*-affiliated prosecutors accused four government ministers of large-scale corruption and arrested many of their associates and family members, and prepared to strike against Erdoğan's family, a move that the latter narrowly prevented. This led the government to seek a tactical alliance with secular and nationalist forces in the judiciary.

Erdoğan had not expected this *Hizmet* attack, but moved on the offensive at home and abroad. Abroad, he tried to convince foreign leaders from Central Asia to Africa to close the same *Hizmet* schools he had only recently urged them to open. At home, he forged an unlikely and unholy alliance with the same army he had only recently undermined with the help of the *Hizmet*. In the process, hundreds of civilians and officers that had been sentenced to long jail terms in the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases were freed. Erdoğan went as far as openly admitting his mistake and implicitly apologizing to the military in a speech at the Turkish Military Academy. However, Erdoğan's claim to have been misled by the *Hizmet* is disingenuous given the determination with which he supported the purges of the military establishment. At the time of writing, dozens of alleged followers of Fethullah Gülen had been thrown in jail by special courts set up for that purpose.

This internecine struggle in the Islamic conservative milieu is important because it is unique: it is by far the biggest fight ever to occur between Islamic groups in Turkey. Never before had competition between religious groups led to a total break-

down in relations; but then again, never before had religious groups enjoyed practically unchecked power in the country. The impact of this struggle will be felt for decades to come. And while the byzantine shifts of political alliances are bewildering to the outside observer, one thing seems certain: Turkish politics is now defined by the relationships among and between religious orders and communities.

Controlling Official Islam and Islamizing Education

IN THIS CONTEXT, AN IMPORTANT AND OFTEN UNDERRATED ELEMENT IS THE Erdoğan government's attempt to take control of the institutions of official Islam in Turkey, and to ensure religious dominance of Turkey's education system. Given the dominance of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi movements over Turkey's ruling party, this has major implications.

Whether in Ottoman times or during the Republic, the Turkish state has made control of religious affairs a priority. In Ottoman times, this function was fulfilled by the Ulema under the leadership of the Sheikh ul-Islam; following the creation of the Republic, the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, or Directorate for Religious Affairs, fulfilled this role. While the *Diyanet* only recently became a powerful institution in Turkey, it has long kept control over the religious sphere. All imams in every mosque across Turkey were appointed by the *Diyanet*, which sanctioned their Friday sermons. This provided an important counter-balance to the lack of hierarchy within Sunni Islam, which has led to the often chaotic proliferation of more or less radical religious groups across the Muslim world. Whereas Muslim youths in Europe are often subject to radicalization in mosques run by radical imams, the role of the *Diyanet* in Turkey considerably reduced this risk. But as noted, the cadres of the *Diyanet* were often insufficient to man all the mosques in the country, and the *Diyanet* itself was the subject of infiltration by various religious communities. On the whole, however, the hierarchical nature of the organization fulfilled an important function of moderating and controlling religion in Turkey, and state authorities always ensured that religious communities did not achieve total control over the *Diyanet*.

Under the AKP, however, the *Diyanet* has undergone a process of rapid change. The most obvious is the exponential growth of the institution. In less than a decade, its budget has quadrupled, amounting to slightly more than \$2 billion

while employing over 120,000 people. That makes it one of Turkey's largest state institutions, bigger even than the Ministry of Interior.²³

As the *Diyanet* has grown, the proportion of its personnel that were regular government bureaucrats has decreased, and it is increasingly staffed by graduates of Imam-Hatip schools (imam and preacher schools originally created to provide manpower to Turkey's mosques) and the theological faculties. Unsurprisingly, these have come under the influence of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order and its offshoots.

The *Diyanet* has also come to be used as a political instrument. Until late 2010, led by a secularist-appointed chairman, the *Diyanet* largely stayed out of politics. But this chairman responded to Erdoğan's efforts to involve the organization in the legislative process by saying that "consulting the *Diyanet* on legislation is counter to the principle of secularism."²⁴ As a result, Erdoğan appointed his own handpicked candidate, Mehmet Görmez, who has been considerably more pliant toward the AKP leadership's wishes.

As the size of *Diyanet* grew, so did its social role. In 2011, the *Diyanet* began issuing halal certificates for food products; the next year, it opened a television station. The *Diyanet* now produces fatwas, including on demand: it established a free telephone hotline that provides Islamic guidance on everyday matters.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, the number of fatwas being issued is rising rapidly. Legally speaking, the *Diyanet*'s rulings carry no weight. Following them is entirely voluntary. However, it certainly has an effect on the conservative masses.

Imam-Hatip schools have in recent years even come under the direct influence of President Erdoğan through the Foundation of Youth and Education in Turkey, which is run by his son, Bilal. This foundation accepts donations (including a \$99 million donation from a likely Saudi source) and has been remarkably successful at obtaining, often through cut-rate leases, land owned by government institutions for educational purposes.²⁶

In 2002, 65,000 students were enrolled in Imam-Hatip schools; today, the figure is over one million, a dramatic increase that occurred especially after legislative amendments in 2010 and 2012 made it possible to transform secular high schools and middle schools into Imam-Hatip schools. Meanwhile, reforms introduced in 2012 have increased the required amount of religious content taught in secular schools. Courses on Islamic history and the life of the Prophet have been added to the curriculum.

While some of these religious courses remain elective rather than compulsory, it is easy to imagine—especially outside the secular enclaves of western Turkey—how pressure from peers and school officials is likely to ensure that few students abstain from them. These religious reforms have been both offensive and defensive

in nature: offensive, since they aim to shape and mold the views of the population in the AKP's favor; but also defensive, because they coincide with efforts to curtail the Gülen movement's schools. Indeed, these reforms were prompted by the realization that the Gülen movement's schools were producing individuals with superior education and capability, but who lacked loyalty to Erdoğan and the AKP.

Under the AKP, official Islam and the education system as a whole has undergone monumental changes with far-reaching consequences. These changes, from the mosque to the classroom, are intended to enable Erdoğan and his entourage to shape and mold the worldview of generations of Turks. And that worldview, with some idiosyncratic twists, is based on the heavily anti-Western Naqshbandi-Khalidi tradition. In other words, Turkish official Islam and its education system are gradually being taken over by the Khalidi worldview, both in terms of political control and through newly indoctrinated cadres. Moreover, under the AKP, the *Diyanet* has become increasingly politicized. In numerous mosques, reports surface of sermons given by imams that support and glorify AKP and President Erdoğan.

In sum, recent education reforms have increased the religious content of the education system, leading many schools to be transformed into Imam-Hatip schools, to the point that 10-15 percent of Turkey's middle and high school students now study in such schools. Their education, as well as the sermons of the mosque imams, have come to be increasingly marked by the beliefs of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order, and politically aligned with the AKP. It is obvious that this will have profound consequences of a political as well as socio-cultural nature for decades to come.

Conclusions

FOLLOWING THE CREATION OF THE AKP, PRACTICALLY ALL ISLAMIC ORDERS AND communities for the first time lent their support to a single party. This party's core leadership has its roots in the *Milli Görüş* movement, itself a creation of the Iskenderpaşa branch of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order. But whereas the parties of the *Milli Görüş* tradition remained centered on the order, the AKP evolved into what is now essentially a coalition of religious orders and communities. Secular and liberal elements in the party—many of which were opportunistic fellow travelers to begin with, or made common cause with the AKP because of their common enemy in the military establishment—have been purged as they grow

obsolete. The danger of politics constructed on religious orders was illustrated by the intra-Islamic conflict between the AKP leadership and the Fethullah Gülen movement. While there are clear ideological differences between the AKP and the Gülen movement, the struggle between them should not be mistaken for an ideological one. The competition is primarily over power.

The rise of the AKP has been paralleled by the rise of religious communities as political forces. These groups have played the role of voluntary associations in a Tocquevillean sense, filling the vacuum arising from the weakness of secular voluntary associations in Turkey. But unlike most voluntary associations in the West, these groups are motivated by a strong political agenda, which includes reshaping society in their own image.

In this regard, an important paradox should be noted. Traditionally, Turks have tended toward relatively liberal schools of thought in Islam, such as the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, which grants considerable space to the interpretation of religious law. By contrast, Arab and Kurdish Islam has tended toward the more Orthodox schools of thought—the Hanbali and Shafi'i schools of thought, based on the Ashari tradition, which are much stricter and allow considerably less room for interpretation.

Secularization efforts since the mid-nineteenth century have had an effect on Turkish Islam exactly contrary to their intent. They occurred in parallel with the rapid spread of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi order and its offshoots across Turkey, which brought an understanding of religion deeply colored by Arab and Kurdish traditions to the country. The creation of the Republic of Turkey and the radical policies of secularization in the field of education led to a breach with the more liberal religious approach that had formed the core of official Ottoman Islam. With the introduction of electoral democracy in the 1950s, the religious vacuum came to be filled by social movements that were almost without exception products of the Naqshbandi-Khalidi tradition, and thus brought Turkey more in line with Middle Eastern interpretations of Islam. Indeed, to a considerable degree, this explains the foreign policies of the AKP government, whose ideological character is radically different from the Ottomans. The Ottomans were seldom if ever motivated by religious zeal. What this suggests is that if Turkey's religious, educational and political space comes to be controlled entirely by Naqshbandi-Khalidi ideology, Turkey will irrevocably become a Middle Eastern country.

In June 2015, the AKP received a major blow, when it lost its majority in parliament and saw its voter base cut by one fifth, to slightly over 40 percent of the electorate. The election was more a referendum on Erdoğan's ambitions than an ideological contest, since it served as a referendum on his design to create a pres-

idential system. Sixty percent of Turks oppose Erdoğan and the AKP; however, the sharp divisions between the three opposition parties—particularly between the Turkish nationalist MHP and the Kurdish nationalist HDP—render the prospect of a non-AKP government unworkable. Therefore, the AKP remains the dominant political force in Turkey, and looks set to remain the senior partner in any coalition government in the near term. Turkish politics are once again raucous and unpredictable, and even if the AKP manages to form a coalition government, either with the Nationalist MHP or with the center-left CHP, the life expectancy of such a government is short. Be that as it may, the AKP’s electoral setback is unlikely to generate a process that unravels its reforms. Any coalition government in which the AKP is a senior partner will be unlikely to revise the changes the party has introduced in education and in the Directorate of Religious Affairs. In the absence of such reforms, the question is when Turkey will pass a point of no return, when the worldview and outlook of its population will be fundamentally changed.

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The Brotherhood Divided

By Samuel Tadros

“**A** COUP INSIDE THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD” SCREAMED THE HEADLINE of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood-sympathetic Masr Al Arabia website on May 28, 2015.¹ In a few minutes the Brotherhood’s world was turned upside down as members and supporters struggled to cope with the news. With no leadership to comfort the anguished, members turned to social media to search for news and guidance. Denial was the true believers’ first reaction, but soon their worst fears were born out by Mahmoud Hussein, the secretary general of the Muslim Brotherhood, who took to his Facebook page to confirm that Mahmoud Ezzat had taken over the group.²

The fact that the powerful secretary general of the Brotherhood could not post his statement on any of the Brotherhood’s media outlets clearly indicated that something was amiss. With the struggle now in the open, it was only hours before the other side responded. Mohamed Montaser, the alias of the official Brotherhood spokesperson, published his own statement, only this time on the Brotherhood’s official website: “We affirm that the group’s institutions, which was elected by its base last February, manages its affairs and that only the official spokesman of the group and its official outlets represent the group and its opinion.”³ His written statement was followed by an audio appearance on al-Jazeera, where he declared, “if you see the Muslim Brotherhood deviating from the revolutionary path do not follow us and do not follow the Muslim Brotherhood.”⁴ What had been simmering for months burst into the open: no longer was the Brotherhood’s struggle limited

to the regime, but it now included an internal dimension. The Brotherhood's house was divided.

For those not following the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood closely over the past two years, and to those accustomed to a tight-knight Brotherhood that allows no open dissent, the sight of such open infighting must have seemed astonishing. After all, the Brotherhood, which has long prided itself for being a strong *Gama'a*, had maintained an organizational structure that extended from the *Usra* (family) unit to the six levels of membership. In fact, this carefully maintained structure had allowed it to survive decades of repression and dominate post-revolutionary Egyptian elections. Though the mighty had fallen from power, surely two years were not enough to bring down what had taken eighty-five years to build.

In reality, the Brotherhood's collapse is hardly surprising. In order to understand the current turmoil and dividing lines, as well as the Brotherhood's potential future, one need not go far into the Brotherhood's past. Instead, we only need to follow the Brotherhood's footsteps on its downhill path from Mohamed Morsi's presidential palace on the night of July 3, 2013, first to the trenches in Cairo's Rab'a square, past its demonstrations inside Egypt, past its satellite channels and outreach outside, and into the abyss.

The Coup is Reeling

UNTIL HIS LAST HOURS AS PRESIDENT, MOHAMED MORSI WAS CONFIDENT THE MILITARY would never move against him. After all, he had personally selected the army commander and done everything he could to placate the army in the new constitution. Even after the military issued its 48 hours ultimatum, the Brotherhood twitter account was assuring supporters on July 1, 2013: "Opposition would like to interpret military statement as a coup against president, it's not. Military is patriotic institution."⁵ As June 30 was approaching, and in preparation of opposition demonstrations, the Brotherhood had gathered its supporters into two squares, al-Nahda and Rab'a, in greater Cairo. Confident of its command of the masses, expecting a low turnout of opposition demonstrators, and imagining a repetition of what had transpired six months earlier when Morsi issued his controversial decree immunizing his orders from judicial oversight, the Brotherhood had prepared the sit-ins just in case the opposition attempted to attack the presidential palace. Otherwise, the Brotherhood had no plans should its supporters be confronted by tanks instead of demonstrators.

But if Morsi could do little but scream “Et tu Brute,” the Brotherhood was not about to follow with “then fall, Caesar.” As arrests were being carried out by the military, the Brotherhood’s world suddenly shrunk to Nahda and Rab’a squares as it scrambled to plan ahead. During the previous year the Brotherhood had gone out of its way to ally itself with other Islamists. By and large, its efforts had paid off. The 2012 constitutional battle and the Syria rally were a precursor of what was to come. Now, in Nahda and Rab’a, Islamists of all stripes rallied to the Brotherhood’s cause. In camp tents, Brotherhood members, Gama’a Islamiya, Cairo’s Activist Salafists, and Revolutionary Salafists mingled. Differences between various currents of Islamists seemed not to matter. The month was Ramadan and the camp was the closest thing to an Islamist utopia.

The mixing of Islamists had an effect on the speeches. Speakers, in English, portrayed the struggle as one of democracy against a coup while others, in Arabic, cast the struggle in the language of jihad. This was not merely the Brotherhood’s famous two discourses in two languages, but the result of genuine confusion and disorientation. Two attempts to widen the camp were met by military force, but beyond that the Brotherhood did not move. For forty-one days following President Morsi’s removal, the believers awaited their salvation. As some proclaimed sightings of the Archangel Gabriel, rumors, especially happy ones, spread faster than lightning: the commander of the second army is against the coup and will move soon and there are major defections from the army. There was no end to the rumor mill. One slogan captured the hope of the protestors—the coup is reeling. The devout waited.

Take Off Your Shoes When Entering Rab’a for its Ground is Soaked with the Blood of Martyrs

SALVATION WAS NOT MEANT TO BE. INSTEAD, FOR THOSE WAITING, DARKNESS covered the face of the earth on August 14, 2013. Security forces attacked the Rab’a camp, turning the scene into the bloodiest massacre of Egyptians by the state since Mohamed Ali’s massacre of Mamluks in 1811. The real numbers may never be

known, but close to a thousand likely died in Rab'a. The Brotherhood would speak of a larger human toll: numbers are for historians, emotions for the living.

For the Brotherhood's supporters abroad, Rab'a became a four finger symbol, popularized by Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, but for those who lived through the event, Rab'a became something else. A video of the first Islamist demonstration that managed to break the security barricades and reach Rab'a on October 5 shows men falling to the ground and weeping and kneeling while others dance hysterically.⁶ If the Shi'a look to Karbala, the Brotherhood have Rab'a, a moment in which time stops and the world stops turning. Rab'a became a place of mourning, but also a place of rebirth. Those who shared the square and the blood with Brotherhood supporters were brothers, those who did not traitors. In the tents and in the blood, Rab'a became a melting pot, where ideas flowed freely and bonds were created. Given the Brotherhood's lack of a deep ideological foundation, it is no surprise that ideas flowed only in one direction: from Salafists to Brotherhood.

“Our Peacefulness is Stronger than Bullets”

THOSE WORDS WERE UTTERED BY THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD'S SUPREME GUIDE, Mohamed Badei, in Rab'a. Still disoriented by the coup and the subsequent raid on Rab'a, what remained of the Brotherhood's leadership soon turned the slogan into a strategy. The January 25, 2011 Revolution would be replicated, they assumed, as large scale protests across the country would force the military regime to its knees. The how was never clear, though. Was it international pressure that would force the removal of the new president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, a split in the military, or would it be the collapse of the security forces? These were questions for which the Brotherhood had no answers.

Ultimately, a slogan cannot replace a strategy. In reality of course, the January 25 Revolution was neither peaceful nor could it have succeeded had it not been for the weakness of the Mubarak regime. Moreover, Sisi is anything but Mubarak. The massive protests soon began to draw fewer numbers as the crackdown intensified. Most of the population hardly noticed the protests as they resumed their lives unperturbed by the ongoing confrontation. The Brotherhood's social isolation was growing. The regime's propaganda certainly helped, but the Brotherhood

had doomed itself through its discourse during its own short rule. Ali al-Haggar's song, "We are a peoples and you are a peoples," captured the growing feelings at the time on both sides.⁷

For a moment universities seemed to hold the most promise for the Brotherhood. A generation had opened its eyes to the world of post-revolutionary Egypt, where politics was synonymous with street fighting. But the moment was brief: restless youth were met with deadly force as the regime pacified the campuses. Things might have been a bit different had the Brotherhood been able to transcend the Islamist and non-Islamist divide, but memories of the Brotherhood's rule were still fresh. The believers were still committed, but the rest of the country had soured on the Brotherhood. Facing the regime juggernaut, the Brotherhood could count only on Islamists to stand by its side.

Developing a strategy to bring down the regime would have been a monumental task in normal circumstances, but the times were anything but normal. Tens of thousands of Brothers were imprisoned, but the real crisis was its leadership structure. For decades the Brotherhood had prided itself on its leadership structure and ability to absorb and continue after each crackdown by the Mubarak regime. This time, however, was different. The crackdown was not limited to a few leaders that could be replaced; it took out entire levels of the Brotherhood organization. Those not in prison were on the run, moving from house to house as the regime searched them out. The immediate task, therefore, was not to replace arrested leaders, but to assist those still free in their attempts to escape. Many low ranking members were able to leave through Cairo airport, but for leaders the path would have to run through Libya or Sudan.

As time passed, and as members made their way to Qatar and Turkey while others absorbed the shock of the coup and Rab'a, internal pressures began to mount. The spirit of rallying around the leadership was replaced with questions. How will the regime be brought down? Many could still not abandon the parallel, often conspiratorial world in which they lived.⁸ But for a growing number of Brothers, tangible questions pertaining to the future could not be postponed. In December 2013, the regime had declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, ending any illusions that some still harbored of a possible reconciliation. The United Kingdom opened an inquiry into the Muslim Brotherhood and its activities; making matters worse, Qatar asked some Brotherhood leaders to leave the country in September 2014 due to pressure from the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia. While Qatar would continue backing the group, the screws were tightening on the Brotherhood.

In June 2014, the Islamic State took over Iraq's second largest city, Mosul,

sending shockwaves around the world. For the first time an Islamist group had managed to achieve what all others had failed to do: control and govern sizeable territory, and not in some remote outpost called Afghanistan, or in a backward long forgotten land called Somalia, but in the heart of the Arab Muslim world. The impact was immediate. Success is always the best recruitment tool. Before Mosul, jihadism may have been an appealing theological concept, but for the first time it had achieved success. For the first time it was possible to think of an Islamic State, which could not have picked a better moment to ideologically challenge the Brotherhood. Demoralized, facing regime decapitation of their leaders and organization, Brotherhood members began to wonder.

The Muslim Youth Uprising

THE FIRST STEP ON THE ROAD TO VIOLENCE WAS TAKEN EARLY. EVERY PROTEST was met by force from the security forces; demonstrating was fast becoming a dangerous activity. Soon, protesters started demanding protection. As men faced arrest, women became disproportionately represented in the protests and sending them out became an act of madness. The leadership relented and protest protection units were formed.⁹ If the regime used civilian thugs to attack Brotherhood marches, they would be met by units armed with rocks and Molotov cocktails. The units would alert protesters to the presence of police. Who could possibly disagree with self-defense?

Events on the ground, however, moved faster than the leadership. The mixing of Islamists that had begun in Rab'a was beginning to show results. The Brotherhood had always been first and foremost an organization. Its founder, Hassan al-Banna, had left few works that could fill the ideological void and since the passing of its leading member, Sayed Qutb, the group had not produced an intellectual. As a result, the Brotherhood placed great emphasis on discipline and organizational cohesion, forcing any independent minds outside of its ranks. In order to broaden the tent, Banna had intentionally left many key theological and political questions unanswered.

None of his successors had the intellectual ability to fill the void even if they had wanted to do so. In normal circumstances, Brotherhood cohesion was maintained through the family structure and leadership command, but neither was functioning due to the crackdown. What began as the sharing of tents in Rab'a soon morphed into a mixing of ideas. Some would abandon the Brotherhood

altogether and join jihadist groups, but these were few in numbers. The greatest impact on young Brotherhood members would come from Revolutionary Salafism.

Rifa'i Sorour had been an early member of the first Egyptian jihadi cell in 1966.¹⁰ Influenced by the street protests that took place following the defeat of 1967, he broke with jihadis to argue that working with the masses was the most suitable methodology.¹¹ He later refused the nomination to become the leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and instead devoted his life to creating a theoretical framework for the jihadi movement following the assassination of Anwar Sadat.¹² His life work, spanning three decades of active writing, successfully merged Salafist tenets, jihadi discourse, and revolutionary methodology. Sorour soon acquired a devoted following. Among his students were Khaled Harbi and Hossam Abu al-Bukhari, both of whom would emerge as key Islamic activists during the revolution. The revolutionary moment had given his ideas a movement in the form of the large following that gathered around Hazem Salah Abu Ismail's presidential bid. Now, at the Brotherhood's moment of crisis, with tens of thousands of its members lost and shopping for a new idea, his theories found a large audience.

It was not a coincidence that Matariyah district in Cairo remained the only Cairo neighborhood where Islamist protests continued and where clashes with police were a weekly phenomenon. Sorour's residence had been in Matariyah for decades; it is where his followers exerted the most influence on Brotherhood members. Each week, following Friday prayers, a number of protestors were killed in violent confrontations. Dividing lines were being eroded by the shared struggle and bloodshed.

In November 2014, the Salafi Front, a small hardcore Salafi group founded in the aftermath of the revolution by Salafis frustrated with their leaders, called for a day of protests that it dubbed the Muslim Youth Uprising. The protests would be unabashedly Islamist, motivated by pure Islamist slogans that called for upholding Egypt's Islamic identity against secularism. Before long, the call was echoed across social media by young Islamists, Brotherhood and non-Brotherhood alike. The Brotherhood leadership was cornered. Should they come out against an Islamist demonstration, and on what grounds? On the other hand, the demonstration risked undoing all of the Brotherhood's efforts at labeling anti-coup activities as non-Islamist in nature. The Brotherhood vacillated until it finally came out against Islamizing the protests. Its statement declared that protesters were only to "raise the flag of Egypt and the usual revolutionary slogans."¹³ The uprising failed to gather steam and the day passed with clashes limited to the usual areas, but the Brotherhood's respite was brief. One week earlier, protesters in Matariyah had chanted for ISIS as one of them raised the black flag.¹⁴ The lid was about to blow.

Putting the House in Order

FOR A HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION THAT PUTS GREAT EMPHASIS ON STRUCTURE, the prospect of operating without leadership is a nightmare. As occupied as the remaining Brotherhood leadership was with finding a strategy to defeat the regime, the sustainability of the struggle and the very existence of the Brotherhood depended on their ability to replace those arrested with new leaders. Both for those who managed to escape and those still on the run inside Egypt, the task of putting the Brotherhood house in order could not be delayed.

In February 2014, the Egyptian Brotherhood held major elections in order to replace those arrested on the local and national levels. How the group managed to conduct these elections in such circumstances remains a mystery and testifies to its resilience. Unable to gather voters in one location, the elections were likely conducted by passing the vote from one person to the next. In the event, Mohamed Badei remained supreme guide despite languishing in jail, though effective control of the group passed to Mohamed Taha Wahdan.¹⁵ The fifty-four year old Wahdan, an agriculture professor, was previously responsible for the important Upbringing Division inside the group and had been elected in January 2012 to the Guidance Council. Other elected leaders include Guidance Council member Mohamed Kamal, parliamentarian Hussein Ibrahim, October 6 city Brotherhood leader Aly Batikh, and the Giza Brotherhood leader, Saad Eliwa (elected to the Guidance Council in January 2013). What was the fate of the previous Guidance Council members who remained outside of prison, such as Secretary General Mahmoud Hussein, Deputy Supreme Guide Mahmoud Ezzat, Deputy Supreme Guide Mahmoud Ghozlan, and Brotherhood religious authority Abdel Rahman al-Barr? No clear answer was provided. In December 2014, rumors began circulating that Mahmoud Hussein had been removed or sidelined as secretary general. The reason given was his statement against the Muslim Youth Uprising.¹⁶

Following the coup, the Brotherhood formed the National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy as an umbrella group for parties opposed to the new regime. In addition to the Brotherhood, the alliance included al-Wasat Party, the Salafi al-Watan Party, Gama'a Islamiya's Building and Development Party, the Salafi Fadila and Asala parties, and other smaller groups. As months passed, the alliance began to crumble with most parties leaving it. In need of a new umbrella and eager to shed the Islamist label by positioning anti-coup activities as pan-Egyptian (Islamist and non-Islamists alike), the Brotherhood in August 2014 initiated the Egyptian Rev-

olutionary Council.¹⁷ The council included a few non-Islamist faces that would be beneficial for the Brotherhood's image in the West. Similarly, in December 2014, the Brotherhood gathered those parliamentarians who had managed to escape to Turkey and announced the reestablishment of the Egyptian parliament in exile.¹⁸ Neither move had much of an impact on developments in Egypt nor did many take either seriously, though the Egyptian Revolutionary Council proved useful to the Brotherhood in its attempts to secure meetings in Washington in January 2015. Putting pressure on the regime abroad remains a top Brotherhood priority.

Simultaneously, the Brotherhood devoted considerable energy to building a media infrastructure capable of carrying its message both to Egyptians and the West. Realizing that it cannot be totally dependent on al-Jazeera, despite the continued support the channel has shown them, Egyptian Islamists began forming satellite channels from Turkey. In 2013, Mekameleen TV ("We Continue") began broadcasting.¹⁹ It was followed in December 2013 by Rab'a TV²⁰ and in April 2014 by al-Sharq TV ("The East").²¹ While all of these channels are pro-Brotherhood, the group desired a TV channel completely under its own control. Thus, in August 2014 it launched Misr Alaan TV ("Egypt Now").²²

These satellite channels target Egyptian audiences. Therefore, the Brotherhood focused on building an English language media arm, one that would not appear to be controlled by it directly. The task was carried by the London office. In July 2009, Brotherhood affiliates established Middle East Monitor to focus mainly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²³ Following the coup, the website shifted to focusing on Egypt, thereby providing Western readers the Brotherhood's point of view. To supplement the message, Brotherhood affiliates launched Middle East Eye in February 2014.²⁴

With thousands of its members leaving Egypt, the Brotherhood was also in desperate need of organizing its expatriates. Initially, the Brotherhood focused on providing them housing and jobs. As conditions stabilized abroad, the focus shifted to creating the necessary structures to organize all international efforts. In January 2015, elections were held for Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood members no longer living in Egypt.²⁵ The new body, called the Administrative Office for Egyptians Abroad, comprised three members from Turkey, two from Qatar, one from Malaysia, and one from Sudan, thereby representing the countries to where members had escaped and settled down.²⁶ In April 2015, the office headed by Ahmed Abdel Rahman, formerly the secretary general in Faiyum governorate of the Freedom and Justice Party, was announced to the world.²⁷ In his first interview on al-Jazeera on April 22, Abdel Rahman declared that the new office would be solely responsible for managing the current crisis facing the Brotherhood in Egypt.²⁸ Lastly, in January 2015, the

Brotherhood announced that it now had only one designated official spokesman, Mohamed Montaser. The name was an alias,²⁹ with an insider suggesting that in reality several people had access to the Montaser social media accounts.

Many questions remained unanswered. Many potential conflicts were looming on the horizon. What roles did the previous Guidance Council members now have in the Brotherhood? Was Mahmoud Hussein still the secretary general of the group? And what exactly was the role of the new office abroad? Up to that point, and in similar historical crises that the Brotherhood had faced in various countries, members residing abroad were overseen by the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, currently run by its secretary general, Ibrahim Mounir. Based in London, the seventy-eight year old Mounir had left Egypt and managed the Brotherhood in Europe for decades. What role would he have now? The seeds were planted for conflict.

All That is Below Bullets is Peacefulness

AS IMPORTANT AS IT WAS FOR THE BROTHERHOOD TO PUT ITS HOUSE IN ORDER, the group could not ignore developments in Egypt and the growing pressure from its youth for a strategy to defeat the regime. In the absence of a strategy, Brotherhood members were growing restless. Their leadership had led them into a dark tunnel with no end in sight. The regime's crackdown had certainly contributed to growing radicalization, but the problem went beyond that. The comradeship young Brothers shared with other Islamists during the previous year was beginning to bear fruit. Keen on portraying the struggle as one between Islam and the regime, the Brotherhood had courted Salafis and pushed them forward on its media platforms. Could a young Brother be blamed if he took the words of sheikhs like Mohamed Abdel Maksoud seriously if the group was hosting him on its channels? Could a young brother ignore the ranting of Revolutionary Salafist Mahmoud Fathy if the Brotherhood included him in its Anti-Coup Alliance?

The revolutionary upheaval that Egypt had undergone for the past few years had removed old constraints. Throughout the previous years, revolutionary forces had employed violence when it suited them, from torturing so-called "thugs" in Tahrir square to attacking police stations. Molotov cocktails had become the typical accessory for a day of protesting. While the Brotherhood had rejected vio-

lence against the regime in the past, its nonviolence was an act of expediency, as Ibrahim al-Hodeiby argues.³⁰ When circumstances necessitated the use of violence, as in the case of the Itihadiya clashes during Morsi's rule, the Brotherhood did not shy away from it.

The coup and the Rab'a massacre answered the question for many. As one Brotherhood member proclaimed: "We don't need law; we need revolutionary courts. We don't need diplomacy; we need clarity."³¹ The sentiment was not limited to young members. Fifty-six year old Amr Darrag, often described in the Western press as a Brotherhood moderate, declared that "the main lesson I learned is that gradual change would no longer work."³² If Morsi was to be faulted, it was not because he and the Brotherhood ruled in a non-inclusive manner and alienated everyone else, but because he was not revolutionary enough and had not crushed the state institutions that had overthrown him. In his first media appearance, the new head of the Brotherhood's office abroad apologized to the Egyptian people for adopting a reformist route.³³

As time passed, the pressure mounted. The protection units formed to protect Brotherhood demonstrators soon engaged in non-defensive acts. Why limit oneself to hurling a Molotov cocktail at officers who are disrupting a march when one can just throw it at a police station instead? It was the same police that was being targeted after all. And if the police were a permissible target, surely attacking infrastructure could be easier to rationalize given that it did not involve attacking individuals. Low-scale violent attacks became more frequent. A police station here, a police car there, it could all be theoretically justified. Egypt's electricity grid became a favorite target with small bombs destroying electricity towers. Groups sprung up out of thin air: "Popular Resistance," "Anonymous," and "Revolutionary Punishment."³⁴

Whether early attacks were planned or spontaneous remains an open question, but there is little doubt that as the pace of attacks accelerated and grew in sophistication, the Brotherhood's new leadership signaled a green light. In his analysis of the Brotherhood's strategy, Abdelrahman Ayyash writes, "the Muslim Brotherhood leadership appears wary of losing ground to its youth wing by outright opposing the use of violence."³⁵ Given the regime pressure, the Brotherhood leadership reasoned that a complete rejection of such tactics would result in either a major split within the group or in the loss of a significant portion of its membership.³⁶ In the internal elections, many youth were elevated into leadership positions as a means of alleviating pressure from the leadership. In all cases, they were the ones leading the action on the ground. The regime crackdown had necessitated a decentralization of local operations, and communications between

leadership and members were constrained. The leadership could do little besides push these members into leadership positions.³⁷

Besides, the leadership could have it both ways. Officially, the Brotherhood would not claim violent acts and maintain its pledge to nonviolence; in reality, the special units would bleed the regime to death. The new slogan, “All that is below bullets is peacefulness,” replaced the old slogan, “Our peacefulness is stronger than bullets.” After all, as a Brotherhood member lamented, “our peacefulness is not stronger than bullets.”³⁸ Allowing the special units to conduct these attacks would hurt the regime without committing the whole group to the path of violence.³⁹ The calculation would prove mistaken as violence spiraled out of control.

It is at this critical moment that Shahid Bolsen would emerge on the Egyptian scene. As ideologues go, he was certainly odd. An American convert to Islam, he had been imprisoned in the U.A.E. for murdering a German citizen after luring him with the promise of sex with his maid. Following his October 2013 release, he made his way to Turkey. Through his friendship with U.A.E. Umma Party leader Hassan al-Dokki he was introduced to Fadila Party leader Mahmoud Fathy. Sharing a flat together, the two men clicked. Fadila had always adopted a heavier social justice component than other Islamist parties, and Bolsen’s odd mixture of Islamism and anti-capitalism and anti-globalization fell on welcome ears. Through Fathy, Bolsen would be introduced to other Egyptian Islamists; and through social media, his discourse would find a new audience. Bolsen’s rants proved appealing. Instead of attacking police stations, he instructed new groups to attack multinationals, KFCs, banks, and mobile operating companies. In Bolsen’s vision, the response to the coup should be “a campaign of targeted system disruption against multinational corporations that will slash profits and increase the cost of doing business, thus forcing them to withdraw their support to Sisi.”⁴⁰ If Bolsen was insane, the times were certainly equally insane for the Brotherhood.

The Genie’s Out of the Bottle

ON MAY 19, 2015, ABDEL RAHMAN AL-BARR PUBLISHED TWO ARTICLES AFTER months of complete silence. The first followed the expected lines: Morsi is the legitimate president, retribution is necessary, the coup leaders will be put on trial, the army has to withdraw from politics, and the police force needs to be reformed. The regime, he continued, was the one who wanted violence and was in fact be-

hind the terrorist attacks which it planned in order to blame the revolutionaries.⁴¹ The article was a prelude for his second piece, in which he argued that the regime wanted to drag revolutionaries to violence in order to convince its international sponsors that it is fighting terrorism. Barr argued that this would allow the regime to legitimize its own violence and maintain loyalty amongst the troops. The Brotherhood had warned that some who suffer from the regime's injustices would fail to understand the need for non-violence. This is precisely what the regime wants and revolutionaries should be aware of the violence trap.⁴²

If anyone doubted that there was a message being sent, those doubts were put to rest three days later when Deputy Supreme Guide Mahmoud Ghozlan similarly published an article following months of silence. Ghozlan went straight to the point: the Brotherhood is for peacefulness and rejects violence. It is for collective work, Shura, and rejects tyranny and individualism, as well as takfir. We will not abandon nonviolence, he proclaimed, and killing is strictly forbidden.⁴³ A message was clearly being sent, but the article's comment section filled with disgruntled Brothers cursing its contents. Two days later, two articles were published in the same venue in response. Nonviolence cannot be adopted in the face of violence, these authors argued. That would not be peacefulness, but servility, humiliation and an abandonment of the path of jihad. No religion would accept that. Adopting such pacifism would make the Brotherhood no different than the Nour Party, which supported the coup. The coup had demonstrated that peaceful democratic change was a trick and change cannot take place through demonstrations or denunciations of the coup. Rights are not given but taken by force and jihad, a force that terrorizes the enemies of God. Ask Algerian Islamists, Morsi, Yemen's Islamists, and Hamas if democracy worked for them, these writers argued. One author summarized the argument by stating that when he gave his allegiance to the Muslim Brotherhood he gave it to its slogan, "jihad is our way."⁴⁴

The Muslim Brotherhood coup was announced four days later, with reports of seven members of the pre-coup Guidance Council meeting inside Egypt, including two deputy supreme guides, Mahmoud Ezzat and Mahmoud Ghozlan, as well as the group's mufti, Abdel Rahman al-Barr. The very fact that Ezzat was inside Egypt shocked members and observers alike. He had disappeared completely as the coup took place and most observers assumed that he was in Gaza. Other decisions quickly followed. Besides Mahmoud Hussein referring to himself as the secretary general of the Brotherhood, it was announced that the office abroad would fall under the command of the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁵ Framing all that was a clear message that the Brotherhood's usurpers lacked legitimacy and had diverted from the right path.

If the old guard expected the new leadership to toe the line, they were in for a huge surprise. This was not your father's Muslim Brotherhood where members would salute and obey. Social media was abuzz with curses as Brotherhood members tweeted under the hashtag, "We will not turn backwards." Mohamed Montaser has echoed these sentiments. Adopting the revolutionary path was a strategic decision and there would be no turning back.⁴⁶ The unbreakable Muslim Brotherhood was about to be broken.

What had driven Ezzat and his colleagues to make their move knowing that even their meeting would pose a security risk? (That risk was made real a few days later when security forces finally apprehended Ghozlan and Barr). In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, some attributed the dispute to an alleged secret visit by Mahmoud Hussein and Ibrahim Mounir to Iran.⁴⁷ Hussein quickly denied the rumor.⁴⁸ In reality no visit to Iran was necessary; the storm had been gathering for months.

At the heart of the struggle were two issues: organization and strategy. On the organizational front, the old guard contended that no new elections for the Guidance Council had taken place. Instead, facing the regime crackdown, what remained of the Guidance Council had added six new figures to a crisis management committee but not to its membership. These crisis managers then overstepped their roles and crossed the line.⁴⁹

But if that was the case, why had they been silent since February 2014 when the elections were held? Moreover, Ibrahim Mounir had himself touted these elections in one September 2014 interview.⁵⁰ In truth, the organizational problem for the old guard was not the election in Egypt, but the one that took place abroad and resulted in the creation of the Administrative Office for Egyptians Abroad. The clash between Ibrahim Mounir and the new body had spun the old guard into action. Mahmoud Hussein had similarly been marginalized by the new office, which in April had attempted to wrestle control of the Brotherhood's financial portfolio from him.⁵¹

But the organizational struggle was the less important factor in pushing the old guard to go public. It was developments in Egypt pertaining to the strategy to confront the regime that drove these men to break their silence.

One day prior to the coup announcement, a statement titled *Nidaa al-Kinana* (Egypt Call) signed by 159 religious scholars from across the Muslim world was released.⁵² Signatories included a who's who of international Brotherhood religious scholars, as well as Egyptian Salafis who had sided with the Brotherhood since the coup. These included Cairo Activist Salafi Sheikh Mohamed Abdel Maksoud, Salafi Call's former leader Sa'id Abdel 'Azeem, and Sorouri Atiya 'Adlan. The

statement opened by declaring its intent to explain the religious position to the Egyptian regime. The ruling regime in Egypt was declared criminal and murderous, as it had committed sins and breached forbidden things. It was the religious duty of the whole Muslim Umma to resist the regime. The religious verdict extended not only to the rulers, but to judges, officers, soldiers, select religious leaders, the media, and politicians. All of them were deemed murderers and the religious edict on murderers (death) was applied to them. To call it a declaration of war is an understatement. Brotherhood spokesman Mohamed Montaser endorsed it, calling it “one of the main bases determining the correctness of the Brotherhood’s path.”⁵³ The website hosting the statement invited anyone agreeing with it to add their endorsement. To date, over 626,400 people have done so.

The old guard’s attempt to regain control was not simply an act driven by a paternal sense of ownership and belief that they alone knew the Brotherhood line, as some have argued.⁵⁴ Instead, it was driven by a real fear that violence on the ground was growing out of control and risked dragging the whole group into the abyss. Celebrating six months of attacks, the Revolutionary Punishment movement boasted of killing or wounding 157 and 452 security personal, respectively, while destroying 162 cars and 53 buildings of “Camp David’s military.”⁵⁵

While younger members look to Syria with admiration, the old guard remains afraid of the Syria of the 1980s. At the time, the Brotherhood had taken up arms against the Assad regime; the result was its complete annihilation across the country.⁵⁶ The old guard had learned that a clash with the state was a losing proposition with profound ramifications for the whole organization. Keeping the group intact until circumstances in Egypt change remains a top priority.⁵⁷

At the heart of the Brotherhood crisis sit two competing visions. Neither side can claim a coherent strategy. The old guard believes that the Egyptian regime should be given a chance to implode on its own. In this view, a combination of economic decline, security failure, and growing discontent will lead either to self-destruction, an internal coup, or Western intervention by pressuring for reconciliation.⁵⁸ To maintain momentum, demonstrations need to continue even if they do not produce immediate results. Simultaneously, the Brotherhood needs to keep the pressure on the West by warning that the fate of Iraq and Syria awaits Egypt if they don’t move. By maintaining a semblance of non-violence, the Brotherhood can continue to claim that it is the moderate alternative to the Islamic State. It is betting on time and changing regional dynamics, especially a rapprochement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia under King Salman.⁵⁹ It is this perspective that informed Yusuf Nada when he penned an open letter to Egyptian officers warning them that Egypt is on the road to failed state status, like Iraq, Syria, Libya and

Yemen. Nada called on the army to revolt in return for the Brotherhood abandoning Morsi's legitimacy.⁶⁰

On the opposite side, the new leadership, and behind it the Brotherhood's rank and file, believes that only by bleeding the regime can it be brought to its knees. If the old guard warned of repeating the crisis of 1954 when Nasser crushed the group, it is precisely their leadership and actions that led the Brotherhood to a situation today that is worse than 1954.⁶¹ A regional deal is precisely what they fear as it would mean that all their sacrifices would have been in vain and their tormentors would not be punished. Their war with the regime is no longer about Morsi and the coup; in fact, Sisi's removal would solve nothing for them. Instead, the struggle is an ideological one between Islam and apostasy, between right and wrong, between them and the "Army of Camp David" and its "Zionist masters." Such a struggle stems from a worldview that allows no compromise.

Conclusion

IN THE DAYS FOLLOWING THE BROTHERHOOD IMPLOSION, THE EGYPTIAN REGIME not only arrested Ghazlan and Barr from the old guard, but also managed to arrest Saad Eleiwa from the new leadership on June 18. This followed the arrest of the new effective Supreme Guide Wahdan on May 27. With leaders from both sides taken out of the scene, the media war went silent. But behind the scenes the infighting continued. The fight raged between Brother and Brother, between father and son; "the clash of ideas was splitting the Brotherhood into two."⁶²

The Brotherhood may still hope to have it both ways. Before the clash, the Brotherhood's statement endorsing jihad in Arabic on January 27 was removed from its website; and the group issued a statement three days later, in English, denouncing violence.⁶³ On May 17, Mohamed Montaser called for a revolution to cut heads. Following his statement committing to the revolutionary path on May 28, he seemed to backtrack on June 25 by calling on the Brotherhood youth to be careful not to slip into a cycle of violence.⁶⁴ His shift was in response to the horror of the Revolutionary Punishment's assassination of a civilian which it accused of cooperating with the regime,⁶⁵ and a realization that such acts would tie the Brotherhood to violence and end any prospect of the Brotherhood regaining public support. The shift was short-lived, however. Following the regime's liquidation of nine Brotherhood leaders on July 1, Montaser released a statement that declared "the Muslim Brotherhood affirms that the assassination of its leaders is a turning point

that has ramifications and by which the criminal, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, founded a new phase in which there cannot be control on the anger of the oppressed segments that will not accept to die in their homes and between their families.”⁶⁶

Can any of the competing leadership camps stop the cycle of violence and maintain the group’s cohesion? What will become of the Muslim Brotherhood? Will the old guard win or will the youth take over the group? Can balance be maintained or will the Brotherhood finally breakup? One thing is certain: the current balancing act is impossible to sustain over the long run. On July 2, one Brotherhood leader, Ashraf Abdel Gaffar, was adamant that the Brotherhood did not endorse complete peacefulness and that peacefulness was not absolute. Instead, it allowed for tactical operations such as bombing power stations.⁶⁷ The next day he doubled down, arguing that peacefulness as adopted by the Brotherhood comes in degrees that includes anything but murder and that blocking roads or burning police cars was acceptable. After all, the army, he argued, was working for Israel.⁶⁸ The radicalization of the Brotherhood rank and file is now beyond the ability of any leadership to control. As Abdelrahman Ayyash argues, the Salafist-Jihadist discourse has insinuated itself among Brotherhood members.⁶⁹ Following the Brotherhood’s open clash, its nemesis, Salafi Call leader Abdel Monem al-Shahat, lamented the slow rise of violence and takfiri discourse within the group. Young members were now being led by satellite channels and takfiri sheikhs who appeared on their screens. These included Salama Abdl Qawy and Wagdi Ghonim.⁷⁰

In the aftermath of the Brotherhood clash, an article by Mohamed Abbas went viral on social media. In his article, he called for a fourth founding of the Muslim Brotherhood, noting that the group had seen three previous foundings at the hands of Hassan al-Banna, Sayed Qutb, and Omar al-Tilmisani. This time the founding would not take place at the hands of an exceptional leader as the base was now driving and leading the group together with Islamists from outside the Brotherhood. Tilmisani’s methodology of operating within the system and competing in elections was finished. The Brotherhood now realizes it has been deceived with concepts like democracy, inclusiveness, and serving people. These concepts have been replaced with “jihad is our way,” struggle over control and not simply ruling, and politics as a way to implement Sharia instead of serving the people. He ended on a dramatic note. One day a man will come and ask the fourth founding leaders to step aside in order to declare the fifth founding: the Islamic Caliphate.⁷¹

Sooner or later one side will win or the group will disintegrate. On one side, the old guard enjoys historical prestige and remains in control of the Brotherhood’s

finances as well as its international arm. On the other side are the radicalized members paying the heaviest price in blood. These men are no longer committed to operating within the concept of the nation state. Their legitimacy stems from their sacrifices and they alone are in control of the Brotherhood Street. They also dominate the media.⁷² The Brotherhood pyramid is today inverted with the base dragging the leadership forward. The struggle is no longer as it was portrayed before the revolution between Qutbists and Reformers.⁷³ The Qutbists of old are the current doves.

This is not the first time the Brotherhood has faced a leadership struggle. From Shabab Mohamed's fight with Banna over his willingness to operate within a system governed by man-made laws in 1940, Ahmed al-Sokary's fight with Banna over leadership in 1947, and the special apparatus and its challenge to Hassan al-Hodeiby in the 1950s, to the Sayed Qutb prison challenge in 1965, the Wasat Party split in 1995, and Abdel Monem Aboul Fetouh in 2011, the Brotherhood had had its share of internal crisis.⁷⁴ Despite these splits, the optimists argue, the group has survived. In truth, the Brotherhood did not survive Nasser's crackdown. Had the Islamist revival not been taking place on university campuses when the Brotherhood's leaders emerged from twenty years of imprisonment in the 1970s, it is doubtful the Brotherhood would exist today.

The future has not been written yet, but one thing is certain. As journalist Abdel Rahman Youssef put it, "The question is not whether the Muslim Brotherhood will change, but how it will change and what is the extent of that change."⁷⁵

NOTES

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The Impact of ISIS on Global Salafism and South Asian Jihad

By Thomas F. Lynch III

THIS PAPER DEFINES THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND AL-SHAM (ISIS) Caliphate, including its distinctive features as a Salafi-jihadist group. It also highlights ISIS' challenge to al-Qaeda's longstanding leadership of the global jihad, and its impact on jihad in South Asia. It develops conclusions based on classic literature pertaining to the inception and sustainment of terrorist groups, as well as from media sources and outlets throughout the Middle East and South Asia.¹

The paper offers several conclusions about ISIS. First, ISIS' declaration of a caliphate has caused a significant rupture in the global Salafi jihadist constellation, directly challenging al-Qaeda's longstanding dominance. Second, ISIS will remain a dangerous security problem for the Middle East as long as it retains a critical mass of support from Sunni tribal leaders and the former Baathist military personnel in Iraq who have played a leading role in its ascent. Third, ISIS' support is fragile; the persistent brutalization of Iraqi and Syrian Sunnis by its many foreign fighters is certain to erode its viability. Fourth, ISIS' rapid rise has sparked a major backlash, both from the surrounding states and from within the Salafi jihadist community. Finally, ISIS' appeal has generated an uneven response: it has resonated more with individuals than with groups, more with newly evolving

Salafi jihadist outfits than with longstanding ones, and far more in Europe, North Africa and Central Asia than in South Asia. The reasons associated with ISIS' relative underperformance in South Asia tell us a lot about ISIS' innate weakness as a serious challenger to al-Qaeda.

ISIS as a Phenomenon of Salafi Jihadist Fragmentation

BEGINNING IN 2011, THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR BECAME A LAWLESS, UNGOVERNED incubator for radicals and revolutionaries. By late 2011, ISIS' self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was sending hundreds of Iraqi jihadists into Syria to advise and assist the many Sunni groups joining the fight against Syrian President Bashar Assad.² Many of these fighters were veterans of al-Qaeda in Iraq and had fought under the infamous Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. As a result, they knew the dynamics of insurgency and attracted foreign fighters who traveled to Syria to fight against Assad. This force grew alongside other Sunni jihadist anti-Assad revolutionary groups—including ones strongly aligned with al-Qaeda's core leadership in South Asia—while maintaining its independence.

As ISIS expanded in Syria, it began to dominate the scene; before long, scores of western Iraqi Sunni tribal leaders and former Iraqi Baathists who had grown disdainful of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's sectarianism took up with ISIS. The seeds were sown for a resurgence of Salafi jihadism in Iraq and Syria with aspirations that went beyond the al-Qaeda vision for global Salafi jihad.

Open competition soon broke out between Baghdadi's ISIS and al-Qaeda's groups in Syria. In particular, tensions between ISIS and the al-Qaeda endorsed al-Nusra Front turned into a full-blown feud.³ Although there are many important dimensions to the rupture between al-Qaeda and ISIS, they all hinge on four major disagreements.⁴ First, al-Qaeda contends that the West must first be driven from Muslim lands to enable a vanguard of expert jihadists to plot and plan catastrophic attacks in the West. ISIS does not share this view and instead focuses first on attacks against local foes and opposition groups.⁵ Second, ISIS believes in indiscriminate, unbridled, and graphic violence as an imperative for jihad and is unwilling to temper that violence in order to achieve other goals.⁶ By contrast, al-Qaeda believes in selective violence, since indiscriminate killings might cause the Sunni Muslim Umma to reject it.⁷ Third, and relatedly, al-Qaeda sees risk in

battling its many enemies simultaneously and so prefers instead to focus on driving off foreign infidels and then toppling apostate Sunni Muslim governments before moving on to other objectives. By contrast, ISIS indiscriminately challenges a multitude of enemies, taking on all adversaries at once, irrespective the risk.⁸ Fourth, al-Qaeda has talked of a wider Muslim caliphate stretching from Spain to the Philippines evolving over generations and built upon the fusion of al-Qaeda supported regional Salafi jihadist affiliates that have already fought and won Islamist emirates. ISIS explicitly rejects a bottom-up, lengthy process of caliphate formation. Instead, less than two months after it captured Mosul in Iraq, ISIS declared itself on June 29, 2014 to be the Islamic State Caliphate with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its caliph. The leadership then announced its aims to expand and extend the Caliphate through a wider network of *wayilats* (regions) across the Muslim world; and, declared that it would pursue a 5-year plan to topple standing governments and unify these locations under one, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi-led caliphate.⁹

So while ISIS poses a serious security and sovereignty challenge to Iraq and Syria, it also raises existential questions relating to global jihad and al-Qaeda. Baghdadi's June 2014 declaration of a Salafist caliphate elevated a dormant schism into an open rupture in the Salafi jihadist community.¹⁰ ISIS has established an alternate vision for the future of Salafi jihadism and introduced a formal competition into the jihadist space that is being played out across several important dimensions. ISIS formalized the competition with an appeal to all jihadist groups to declare loyalty to ISIS instead of al-Qaeda.¹¹ The question is whether the al-Qaeda vision of strategic violence tied to major operations will remain ascendant, or if the approach of ISIS will displace that of al-Qaeda.

ISIS' Caliphate and the Challenge of Durability

ISIS' PROSPECTS FOR BECOMING A DURABLE LEADER OF A GLOBAL SALAFI JIHADIST terrorist movement remain dubious. In fact, the very successes that have marked ISIS' rapid ascent also make it highly vulnerable to an equally rapid fall.

For one, ISIS has enemies on all of its borders. As of late November 2014, the U.S.-organized anti-ISIS coalition included 62 member countries, with the U.S. carrying the bulk of the military burden.¹² Additional states have joined the anti-

ISIS coalition since then, including Sweden in April 2015, pushing the coalition to an estimated 64 member countries.¹³ Although not a member of the coalition, Iran has also made substantial contributions of material and manpower toward defeating ISIS, reportedly including two brigades of volunteer Revolutionary Guards units and a large number of Guards officer leadership cadre. No major jihadist outfit has inspired such a comprehensive set of encircling adversaries in such a short period of time.

Coordinated anti-ISIS coalition military and political activities have taken a measurable physical toll on ISIS. Despite some limited turf gains in parts of Iraq and Syria in early 2015, independent assessments confirm that ISIS lost almost 10 percent of its territory in the first six months of 2015.¹⁴ Beginning in late 2014, ISIS was pushed out of the Syrian town of Kobane by Kurdish fighters and American airpower; run out of the Iraqi Sunni stronghold of Tikrit by a combination of Iraqi army units, Shia militias and Iranian military units and senior generals; and, put under the gun by rival Salafist units within Syria conducting guerilla attacks and assassinations against ISIS foreign fighters. Compared to its peak in the early fall of 2014, ISIS-held territory had shrunk by at least 25 percent.¹⁵ As Dan Byman and Jennifer Williams, two top terrorism experts, summarize:

The Islamic State's fate is tied to Iraq and Syria, and reversals on the battlefield—more likely now that the United States and its allies are more engaged—could erode its appeal. Like its predecessor organization in Iraq, the Islamic State may also find that its brutality repels more than it attracts, diminishing its luster among potential supporters and making it vulnerable when the people suddenly turn against it.¹⁶

Moreover, ISIS' feud with al-Qaeda has made it a pariah among global jihadists, sparking a number of direct clashes over manpower, financing and other resources, including overt confrontations pertaining to jihadist affiliates, individual recruits, jihadist financing, and jihadist multi-media and social media. Each of these areas of confrontation merits evaluation.

ISIS' appeals for other jihadist groups to pledge allegiance to it has received splashy media attention. The response from the jihadist groups, however, has been uneven. As of August 2015, ISIS claimed a relationship with forty-two separate jihadist groups. However, only thirty of these groups have pledged formal affiliation while twelve others have made a lesser pledge of support. With the recent exceptions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hezbi-e-Islami (HiG)—

the Afghan Taliban group led by the erratic Gulbiddin Hekmatyar—those Salafi jihadist outfits pledging mere “support” for ISIS tend to be far more established and with ongoing or past affiliations with al-Qaeda. Moreover, the jihadist outfits pledging affiliation are generally those with little to no pedigree and are experiencing severe organizational problems. Still others have been shunned by al-Qaeda for showing too little discipline to be included in the al-Qaeda network. In contrast, those pledging mere support for ISIS tend to be more established jihadist outfits with ongoing or past affiliations with al-Qaeda. These include Saudi Arabia’s Islamic State in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques, Libya’s Islamic Youth Shura, Pakistan’s Jundullah, and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines. In an apparent attempt to hedge their bets, these groups are unwilling to formally sever ties with the al-Qaeda network.

Within the Middle East and North Africa, ISIS has established loose links with multiple Salafi jihadist groups that ISIS’ leadership identifies as “governates” or “wilayats.”¹⁷ A majority of these declarations have been from relatively new jihadist groups without prior allegiance to al-Qaeda, and only those in North Africa can claim responsibility for a high level of violence to date. ISIS’ declared North African affiliates—from Algeria to Egypt to Sudan—number a dozen and include several very active groups, such as Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, the Okba Ibn Nafaa Battalion in Tunisia, and Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in the Egyptian Sinai.¹⁸ By affiliating with ISIS, these groups have received a certain amount of prestige. In return, they have facilitated the flow of jihadist fighters into Syria, revitalizing the lines of infiltration that plagued Iraq last decade.¹⁹ In a nod to these affiliates, ISIS has claimed responsibility for several terrorist strikes in the Maghreb, including the March 2015 armed assault on the Bardo Museum and the June 2015 attack against international tourists at the Imperial Marhaba beach hotel, both in Tunisia.²⁰ Tunisian officials, however, remain uncertain of the link between ISIS and either attack, noting that the Algerian who orchestrated the attack was with the Okba Ibn Nafaa Group, which had previously only declared support for, but not an affiliation with, ISIS.²¹

ISIS also has signaled its goal to cultivate groups in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.²² Two groups in Yemen and one in Saudi Arabia have pledged themselves to ISIS. However, there is little evidence that meaningful ISIS group formation has taken place in either country, let alone that such a group has overtaken al-Qaeda’s affiliates there. For example, the March 20, 2015 suicide attack that killed 137 worshipers at a Shi’ite mosque in Sanaa, Yemen was claimed by ISIS, but American and Western officials stated that there was no clear operational link between the bombers and ISIS’ leadership in Iraq and Syria.²³ Despite a vigorous counter-intelligence cam-

paign by authorities in Saudi Arabia, early 2015 witnessed claims of a growing ISIS presence capitalizing on wider Wahhabi sympathies for Salafists in Syria and Iraq.²⁴ ISIS claimed to be the inspiration for a May bombing at a Shiite mosque that killed 21 people and wounded another 120; and, to be behind suicide bombing plots against a large mosque in eastern Saudi Arabia thwarted by Interior Ministry troops in July.²⁵ ISIS also claimed responsibility for a June 2015 suicide bomber attack on a Shiite mosque in Kuwait that killed 27 bystanders, an attack that Kuwaiti authorities attributed to a single individual inspired by a small cell of ISIS adherents.²⁶ In each case of ISIS-claimed violence in the Gulf, Shiite groups were the targets and the sectarian focus of the attackers. Although worrisome, the low quality of these attacks, coupled with the stern government responses against them, stands in stark contrast to the other major Salafi jihadist outfits across the Gulf States and North Africa. When compared to the Salafi jihadist groups in the Middle East and the Gulf that remain affiliated with al-Qaeda, including al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula, al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb, and al-Shabaab, it is hard to argue that al-Qaeda has lost significant ground to ISIS in the region.

ISIS' year long quest for serious jihadist affiliates outside of North Africa and the Middle East has fared little better, and arguably even worse. In Yemen, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, ISIS has attracted a hodge-podge of minor splinter groups, including: Mujahideen of Yemen; Tehreek-e-Khilafat, consisting of ten disgruntled Teh-rik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) affiliates re-branded as Leaders of the Mujahid in Khorasan and Jundallah; and, the al-Tawheed Brigade in Khorasan and Heroes of Islam Brigade in Khorasan (ISK).²⁷

In July 2015, Hezb-e-Islami's mercurial leader, Gulbiddin Hekmatyar, called for his group to support ISIS in battles against the Afghan Taliban; however, Hekmatyar's history of allegiance reversals during the many wars in Afghanistan makes this pledge less than solid.²⁸ These groups have supported the flow of some fighters to Syria and Iraq, but relatively few compared to other Muslim regions. Small in number, with inspiration but no direct material support from ISIS in Iraq or Syria, and with grievances and agendas matching Pashtun sub-tribal interests that are consistent over decades, these self-proclaimed Afghanistan-Pakistan affiliates of ISIS have engaged in territorial battles with traditional Afghan Taliban outfits in Nangarhar, Kunar and Farah provinces without any clear pathway to victory.²⁹ To date, these re-made terrorist entities have not generated any viable counter-weight to dozens of Salafi jihadist outfits in the region with solid ties to al-Qaeda, including Harakat-al-Mujihadeen, the Pakistan Taliban, the Afghan Taliban, Jaish-e-Muhammed, and Jamaat-e-Mukharat. In fact, the top U.S. Army officer in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, recently testified before Congress

that the presence of ISIS in Afghanistan represented the rebranding of a few marginalized Taliban.³⁰

In Central Asia and Russia, ISIS began acquiring affiliates and support far earlier than in other regions. At least four minor jihadist groups and group fragments based in Dagestan, Russia and the Caucasus declared themselves supporters of, or in allegiance with, ISIS from late 2013 through March 2014, before even the declaration of the ISIS Caliphate. Then, in September 2014, ISIS garnered a major declaration of support that conveyed immediate operational impact. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), with leadership lodged in Afghanistan and Pakistan, declared itself in support of ISIS. After the July 2015 announcement of the death of Mullah Omar, IMU formally upgraded its affiliation to that of “allegiance” toward ISIS. These sequential declarations came after several years of increasing duress for this Central Asian jihadist movement in its longtime safe-haven along the Afghan-Pakistan border. A serious target of ongoing Pakistani counterterrorism operations as well as NATO-ISAF and Afghan military forces, IMU was eager to build new partnerships abroad. IMU’s pledge of support was followed by increased flows of skilled fighters into Syria and Iraq from IMU recruiting nodes in Central Asia and its training bases in South Asia. These IMU cadres added to a steady stream of fighters from a half-dozen other smaller jihadist groups already joining ISIS, thereby thickening the Central Asian ISIS contingent. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR) estimates that over 2,500 jihadist fighters from IMU and other jihadist outfits from Central Asia and Russia traveled to Syria during 2014 and early 2015.

In Southeast Asia, ISIS has attracted jihadist groups with little capability and waning relevance, including Abu Sayyaf, the Bangsamoro Islamic Movement, and the Mujahideen Indonesia Timor. By the time of their declaration in late 2014, these groups were basically shells of themselves after a decade of decline and fragmentation under relentless pressure from government intelligence and paramilitary units. They have brought little in the way of true support for ISIS, and critics suggest that they made their declarations in the hope that ISIS’ aura of success might somehow infuse them with relevance once more.

In Nigeria, the early 2015 pledge of affiliation by Boko Haram is the exception that confirms the rule of this pattern of less-than-substantive jihadist groups affiliating with ISIS.³¹ A large and resoundingly ruthless jihadist group with control of territory in northern Nigeria and Cameroon, Boko Haram is a notoriously autonomous and erratic outfit. Al-Qaeda leaders declined Boko Haram’s pledges of affiliation for several years before acquiescing to Boko Haram’s public claim in late 2011 that it had joined al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden feared that al-Qaeda

stood to gain little from Boko Haram, yet risked a great deal in formally associating with it.³²

Recently, Boko Haram has suffered a precipitous decline in its fortunes: a multinational military offensive has retaken 80 percent of Boko Haram's territory and cost the militant group almost 3,000 fighters.³³ In response, Boko Haram has begun conducting desperate and unpopular high-profile tactics, such as suicide bombings using young children, kidnappings to gain recruits, livestock as shields when fighting authorities, and brutal public executions.³⁴ The group lacks funding that could benefit ISIS, and its role in providing fighters to ISIS is unlikely to amount to much because the group's ethnic profile is a conspicuous mismatch for the Arab states its fighters must transit en route to Syria, Iraq or the Levant. Moreover, even if Nigerians did make it to Syria or Iraq, they would struggle to fit in with the dominant Arab, Central Asian and Middle Eastern makeup of ISIS' foreign fighters. Ultimately, therefore, Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to ISIS appears to be little more than symbolism, devoid of any meaningful exchange of fighters, funding or enhanced training. In fact, it may actually represent Boko Haram's desperation as it copes with a large-scale military setback.³⁵

Assessed closely, most of the international groups declaring support for, or outright affiliation with, ISIS have tended to be of low quality: either minor splinters from standing affiliates with al-Qaeda or downright problematic groups. These are jihadist outfits deemed by al-Qaeda to be too undisciplined or broken by counter-terrorism operations. With the exceptions of IMU, HiG and Boko Haram, none are really mainstream groups within the global Salafi jihadist movement. In contrast, al-Qaeda retains very tight affiliations with three dozen Salafi jihadist outfits possessing name brand cache and substantive capabilities in their regions of operation.

At the same time, ISIS has undertaken a broad, multi-media campaign to recruit and employ jihadist fighters from the Muslim diaspora of Western and non-Muslim states. These efforts have been substantive and produced measurable, worrisome results. ICSR estimates that ISIS' massive and broadly aimed recruiting campaign at this target audience has induced some 20,000 foreign fighters to join in jihad and jihad support activities over the past two years. These jihadists hail most prominently from North Africa, Western Europe, the Gulf, and Australasia.

For the most part, recruits gained through ISIS' individually-targeted social media messaging arrive as an undisciplined and largely untrained rabble that is addicted to multi-media activities.³⁶ They are mostly suited for support activities and martyrdom operations, including suicide bombings. As this fate is reported on social media, the allure of ISIS for naïve young adventure seekers is sure to

wane, and even more so as ISIS' image as an invincible force is punctured.³⁷ Confronted with reports that ISIS is losing, instead of gaining ground in Iraq and Syria, international recruits must now confront both personal dangers and a declining aura of invincibility as they contemplate joining the ISIS Caliphate.

In addition, the flow of foreign fighters has begun to produce antibodies in both Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, tensions between foreign fighters and local Iraqi Sunni militias began to show up in early 2015, with a growing incidence of guerilla attacks against foreign fighters.³⁸ In Syria, ISIS lost significant ground in the north to Kurdish forces backed by coalition air strikes, reportedly losing control of 215 villages and over 1,000 militants killed in hard fighting with Kurdish and other Syrian rebel forces during January alone. Civil rights groups working in Syria began reporting in February that ISIS' foreign fighters are being killed by rival groups and that ISIS had executed suspected defectors from their own ranks.³⁹

ISIS also has encouraged violence against non-believers in secular Western countries. As an example, in September 2014, Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the Islamic State's chief spokesman, called on Muslims in France and Canada to find an infidel and "smash his head with a rock," poison him, run him over with a car, or "destroy his crops."⁴⁰ This exhortation was proximate to a horrific attack on two members of the Canadian military and occurred during the planning stages of the Charlie Hebdo attack. These horrific and unscrupulous actions have mobilized Western governments, making it increasingly difficult for ISIS to sustain its messaging. In combination, these challenges point to a looming crisis for ISIS.

Another major issue is ISIS financing. ISIS constructed its financial position on regional and local sources of funding in Syria and, even more so, Iraq. Initially, ISIS' ability to ruthlessly poach funds and material from rival Syrian jihadist groups, from collapsing Syrian Army units, and from other participants in the Syrian civil war proved critical to its finances. Then, ISIS' collaboration with and subsequent cooption of Iraqi Sunni smuggling networks and the graft-riven activities of former Iraqi Baathists set up a short-term windfall. ISIS built-up its position by exploiting oil, ransoming foreign hostages, and toppling multiple financial institutions in western Iraq. Independent research establishes that ISIS built up some \$2 billion in fixed assets seized during 2014 conquests in Iraq (\$875 million in assets from the capture of Mosul, \$500 million from state-owned Iraq banks and \$600 million from extortion and taxation in western Iraq during late 2014).⁴¹

However, ISIS funding sources are not durable and will be insufficient to sustain the Caliphate in the future.⁴² Durable sources of funding from reliable smuggling networks, from diaspora contributions, and from other wide-ranging

money-making activities are necessary to sustain terrorist activities.⁴³ ISIS has not established itself in any of these areas, and is facing active resistance from al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda's supporters.

Surrounded by enemy governments, ISIS' hydrocarbon production facilities and smuggling operations are under serious duress. Anti-ISIS military operations by U.S. and coalition aircraft and on-the-ground actions in late 2014 and early 2015 have destroyed dozens of ISIS-held oil and gas production, refinery and transit facilities across western Iraq and northern Syria, severely constraining ISIS finances.⁴⁴ Adding to ISIS struggles, coalition participants, along with other national governments, have agreed to end ransom payments for hostages.⁴⁵ ISIS' brutal treatment of minorities and infidels, which it actively publicizes, has turned off many sympathizers and contributors. Virtually all surrounding countries and bordering sub-state actors have condemned the Caliphate and refuse to do business with it. One-time sympathetic government and religious leaders in wealthy donor countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE have banned all transactions with ISIS, including charitable contributions, severely constraining the group.⁴⁶

ISIS' feud with al-Qaeda has placed it in a spot where it cannot compete for traditional sources of Salafi charitable and covert funding.⁴⁷ Taken together, ISIS current finances will rapidly become a severe constraint on its abilities to govern or check counter-attacks. In March 2015, some analysts reported that ISIS may have already lost up to 75 percent of its revenues, causing it to begin an accelerated draw-down of its 2014 financial reserves and making it increasingly hard for the group to provide sufficient goods and services to the nearly eight million people living in the Caliphate.⁴⁸

ISIS' clash with its neighboring states and its schism with al-Qaeda has made it a pariah to a degree never before witnessed in jihadist circles. Al-Qaeda's affiliates in Syria, including the Nusra Front, have begun organizing military activities to target ISIS' leadership and its territorial strongholds.⁴⁹ In addition, appalled by ISIS' barbaric tactics and recklessness, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have quietly encouraged, to the point of direct sponsorship, long-time Salafi jihadists who are willing to denounce ISIS and organize fighting groups against it. In the summer of 2014, Jordan cut a deal with two longtime enemies of the Hashemite dynasty: Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi, Zarqawi's former spiritual mentor, and Mahamad Shalabi, the leader of Jordan's banned Salafi jihadist movement.⁵⁰ Maqdisi was freed from prison and Shalabi had his prosecution for terrorism stayed after each declared ISIS illegitimate. Later, they were reported to be organizing jihadist outfits to confront ISIS in Syria, doubtlessly under the watchful eye of Jordan's intelligence service, the GID.⁵¹

For its part, Saudi Arabia has steadily increased support to a Syrian Sunni Salafist group, Jaish al-Islam, to counter ISIS from within. Heavily tied to Saudi Wahabbist mosques through its founder Sheikh Zahran Abdullah Alloush—and certainly penetrated by Saudi Mukhabarat Intelligence to guard against any jihadist blowback in the Kingdom—the group was badly mauled by ISIS in early 2014.⁵² Since late 2014, the Saudis, with some assistance from the Kuwaitis, have been steadily increasing support to reconstitute Jaish al-Islam as an entity to strike ISIS inside Syria.⁵³

ISIS has also indiscriminately recruited and lacked discipline in its messaging on social media. This has allowed it to seem spectacularly successful in the short run, but also makes it susceptible to penetration by outside intelligence agencies and law enforcement. By carefully combing its social media, foreign governments have learned much about ISIS' organization, structure and aims, enabling more precise and effective targeting. Indeed, social media is a double-edged sword for ISIS, especially as it discovers the counterintelligence challenges associated with it.⁵⁴ Moreover, its reliance on radical violence in its messaging has left it with little empathy from the international diaspora, something which has proven vital to terrorist groups in the past.⁵⁵

Perhaps most importantly, by its own temporal declarations, the ISIS Caliphate must grow and grow robustly across the Middle East and the wider Islamic world to fulfill its five year plan promise. However, it has stopped growing in Iraq and Syria, and its claims of group affiliate attacks have yet to produce demonstrable territorial gains elsewhere. Its most enthusiastic supporters are congenitally impatient, demanding that ISIS could only legitimize itself by holding and growing territory and threatening to turn against ISIS should it fail to meet ambitious territorial growth timelines.⁵⁶

All of these factors indicate that the ISIS' Caliphate is Icarus of Greek legend: it is burning brightly because it has flown too close to the sun, which in turn assures it of its own dramatic fall. For all of the attention ISIS has garnered, U.S. military and American intelligence activity suggests that Washington views it as a serious regional menace but not as a group capable of carrying out large-scale international terrorism. As evidence, American airstrikes into Syria have been at least as heavily focused on the al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group, an organization known for its sophisticated bomb making.⁵⁷ The Caliphate poses no such comparable global catastrophic terrorism threat.

ISIS' Impact on South Asia

ISIS' IMPACT IN SOUTH ASIA HAS BEEN MOST INTERESTING AND HIGHLY ILLUSTRATIVE of the degree to which ISIS represents a rupture with al-Qaeda for leadership of the international jihadist space. Al-Qaeda's response to the ISIS challenge in South Asia has been both vigorous and important. The limited appeal of ISIS for long established South Asian jihadist outfits is also indicative of the inherent strengths of al-Qaeda and the weakness of ISIS in the broader struggle for Salafi jihadist supremacy.

Al-Qaeda's response to the ISIS challenge was most vigorous in South Asia. On September 4, 2014, al-Qaeda Emir Ayman al-Zawahiri formally announced the formation of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).⁵⁸ In his message, Zawahiri cleverly focused on the wide array of Salafi jihadist groups and radically-inclined Muslims on the subcontinent. Zawahiri reminded the jihadist faithful that al-Qaeda understood its issues in South Asia and was prioritizing jihad to resolve these issues. He appealed to the faithful to ignore distractions and focus their jihad against the infidels and apostates in Afghanistan, where they could exploit circumstances following the expected departure of Western military forces. He also criticized the civilian government of Pakistan as apostate and as a target for the mujahideen in the region. Finally, he emphasized al-Qaeda's dedication to jihadist causes in Bangladesh, Muslim India, and the Royhinga Muslims in Burma. In each of these messaging components, Zawahiri made it clear that South Asia was al-Qaeda's jihadist space, where ISIS was not welcome, and that al-Qaeda would vigorously pursue a hands off policy vis-à-vis ISIS in South Asia.

Just over nine months later, Zawahiri's message seems to have resonated, although not without some challenges in Afghanistan after the July 2015 announcement that longstanding Afghan Taliban leader and al-Qaeda supplicant, Mullah Omar, died in 2013 without any acknowledgement at the time. By reinforcing several other trends of Islamist exceptionalism in South Asia, the AQIS declaration seems to have blunted most of ISIS' appeal. Although present in a loose way due to the labeling choices by some fragmentary jihadist groups in Afghanistan, ISIS' impact in South Asia has been conspicuously less than in other regions in general and especially on a Muslim per-capita basis.

Even more than in other parts of the world, ISIS' appeal for affiliate groups to join it in establishing what it calls "Khorasan" has not generated a response from quality regional jihadist outfits. Three splinter groups in Afghanistan along with

the more established, yet very mercurial, Hekmatyar, and handfuls of disgruntled Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commanders and the Jundallah terrorist group in Pakistan have pledged allegiance, or in the case of Jundallah, support, to ISIS since mid-2014. Dozens of other longstanding jihadist outfits in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh remain firmly with al-Qaeda; in the case of Lashkar-e-Tayyiban in Pakistan, it remains tied to the nationalist-Islamist aims of the security and intelligence services. Disgruntled Pashtun tribal subgroups and affiliates on both sides of the border have loosely combined under the banner of ISIS-Khorasan (or ISIS-K) and engaged in battles against established Afghan Taliban elements in the northeast and south-central parts of Afghanistan.

Despite some noisy claims of territorial conquest, the rebranded Pashtun jihadists have yet to demonstrate staying power or broad appeal. As mentioned earlier, ISIS-K self-declared leaders were reportedly killed by Afghan and U.S.-led coalition forces in the summer of 2015, and ISIS-K sub-tribal elements were reportedly wiped out in Afghanistan's Farah province and pushed back in spring/summer 2015 battles in Nuristan and Nangarhar provinces.⁵⁹ These inauspicious results suggest that ISIS affiliated groups in Afghanistan are in for a tough go, just like they would be if they were still understood as merely Taliban splinters or aggravated jihadist sub-tribes.

ISIS' pull on individual fighters from South Asia has been equally lukewarm. The ICSR and the private Soufan Group estimate that no more than several dozen fighters from Afghanistan, 500 from Pakistan and at most a handful from India and Bangladesh have moved from South Asia to Syria in response to ISIS' appeal. Given these estimates, the entirety of South Asia jihadists reported going to the ISIS fight is actually less than those from the UK, Germany, and dramatically less than those recruited from North Africa or Central Asia. On a per capita basis, even Australasia has a greater participation rate than all of South Asia.

This conspicuously underwhelming South Asian response to ISIS' intense global appeal seems paradoxical. Precise reasons for this South Asian exceptionalism merit more detailed study. However, there are at least four important hypotheses that, when taken together, help explain why South Asia remains mostly unaffected by the ISIS appeal for leadership of the global jihad.

First, al-Qaeda's senior leadership remains in the region and has vigorously defended its space against encroachment. Zawahiri's September 2014 declaration of AQIS was keenly calibrated to brush back ISIS from an area al-Qaeda considers its own. The message spoke to the specific grievances of Muslims in South Asia, many of whom are frustrated by their local governments. The faithful were urged to join the fight in Afghanistan and told their regional grievances and issues

would be those of AQIS, isolating ISIS as an outsider with no real understanding of Muslim aims in South Asia. Although Zawahiri's credibility was challenged by the sudden July 2015 announcement that Mullah Omar had died in 2013, Zawahiri's August 1, 2015 message swearing an oath to Afghan Taliban successor leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour appears to have re-established al-Qaeda's bona fides and primacy in a fractious jihadist landscape where ISIS remains a distinct outsider.⁶⁰

Second, South Asia already features a robust array of options for those prepared for jihad—options tolerated by certain regional states and ineffectively countered by others. Unlike jihadists in North Africa, Australasia, Central Asia, and Western Europe who are often alienated from their home societies, jihadist groups in Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan offer places where radicalized Sunni Muslim groups or individuals can go to pursue jihad. Zawahiri's message to jihadists reinforced this by providing a superstructure in AQIS.

Third, India, with the region's largest Muslim population, uniquely benefits from a history of pluralism and tolerance toward its Muslim citizens. This is not to minimize the communal tensions and violence that have afflicted India over the years, including in the present. However, unlike Muslims in other settings who often feel ostracized, misunderstood or alienated by their own governments, Indian Muslims continue to be a group with a generally positive relationship with their government. India's liberal democracy has reinforced a culture of social and political inclusion for individual Muslims and Muslim families.⁶¹ As a result, only a handful of Indian Muslim youth have made the trek to the Middle East to join ISIS.⁶² Many of those who have gone often return disillusioned, even admitting to shame in having dishonored their Indian Muslim heritage by succumbing to ISIS' social media propaganda.⁶³ India may have the most to fear from Muslim youth retweeting and forwarding ISIS' propaganda as a form of coreligionist thrill seeking.⁶⁴ Addressing that problem may be tricky, but it is not on the same scale of difficulty as confronting a swarm of ISIS recruits preparing to leave the subcontinent.

Finally, there may be a significant impact from the fact that the Gulf Arab states have sworn to destroy ISIS and prevent any blowback into their own countries. As part of their anti-ISIS campaign, these Arab governments have signaled that Muslim immigrant workers from places across South and Southeast Asia will be carefully scrutinized and banned from economic opportunities if they, or any members of their families, are determined to be ISIS-aligned jihadists.⁶⁵ This threat could have a major impact, considering that over 20 million migrant workers and their families across South Asia send some \$12 billion in remittances home annually.

Combined, these four hypotheses appear to explain a lot about the uniqueness of South Asia when it comes to the pursuit of jihad. They emphasize that long-standing patterns of Muslim inclusivity in India coupled with three decades of established jihadists place unique barriers on ISIS' appeal within the region.

No state in South Asia should be comfortable that it may not suffer a greater penetration from ISIS in the coming few months—therefore mandating vigilance. Indeed, the convoluted July 2015 announcement of Mullah Omar's 2013 death will certainly reverberate in the South Asian jihadist landscape for months to come—impacting some allegiances and affiliations—and might make ISIS' largely alien brand of jihad more appealing for a time. Yet the most salient factors in play across South Asia suggest that this region will remain mostly dominated by al-Qaeda's version of global jihad. In turn, the priorities established by Zawahiri for jihad in his September 2014 message should remain the primary concern for South Asia policymakers. These remain the jihad on behalf of the Taliban in Afghanistan, support for the Tehrik-e-Taliban campaign in Pakistan, and support for persecuted Muslims in Bangladesh and Burma.

ISIS' use of social media for a broad array of purposes, from radicalization to recruiting to resourcing, is unique to South Asia over the past decade. ISIS has even promulgated a significant number of original messages in Hindi, a language seldom if ever used in al-Qaeda jihadist propaganda. Thus, it behooves regional governments to up their game in terms of social media monitoring of ISIS messages. It will also be especially important for India's Home Ministry to work closely with the Gulf Arab States. New Delhi can best slow radicalized Indian youth from transiting to the Gulf States en route to jihad in Syria or Iraq by sharing intelligence and cooperating.

Conclusion

SINCE EARLY 2014, THE FIGHT HAS BEEN ON IN THE SALAFI JIHADIST GLOBAL space. Like Icarus, ISIS has burned brightly in the early going by employing a brash and high risk strategy that has exposed it to existential dangers, including many new enemies.

It is still early, but the intra-jihadist struggle increasingly pits the long-established global entity of al-Qaeda with a clear and disciplined approach to terror against an incredibly active and seemingly reckless ISIS. Nowhere are ISIS' issues more visible than in South Asia, where ISIS has made minimal inroads against

al-Qaeda's ascendance despite the fact that countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh are hotbeds of Islamic radicalism ripe with recruits. A curious combination of pre-established pathways for those aspiring to jihad, a relatively unreceptive Muslim community in India, and cunning al-Qaeda messaging has combined to stifle ISIS.

Could this be a pattern that is repeated in other regions of the world as the novelty and the momentum of ISIS in Syria and Iraq slows? The struggle between ISIS and al-Qaeda will continue for a lot longer before the results become clear.

NOTES

1. Dr. Lynch thanks research assistant Graham Vickowski for his expert canvassing of hundreds of international and regional monographs and newspapers, cataloguing the impact of ISIS on Salafi jihadist outfits and individuals over a year-long period. The opinions expressed in this commentary represent Dr. Lynch's own views and are not those of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense or the United States Government.
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Kurdistan and the Challenge of Islamism

*A Conversation with Dr. Hadi Ali,
former Chairman of Kurdistan
Islamic Union's Political Bureau*

By Rebaz Ali

When and how did the Islamic movement in Kurdistan begin?

The Islamic movement in Kurdistan emerged in the 1950s, when Iraq was still under royal rule. At the time, Muslim Brotherhood ideology started to reach Iraq and parts of Kurdistan.

In the beginning, a number of Muslim clerics joined the Islamic movement, particularly in Kirkuk, Erbil and Halabja. After the fall of the royalty as a result of the July 14, 1958 revolution, the space for politics in Iraq widened considerably.

The Iraqi Communist Party stepped into the opening and grew considerably. In response, Muslim Brotherhood members started the Iraqi Islamic Party, which still exists today. The Islamic Party turned quite active in the Sunni populated areas of Iraq, including Kurdistan. So the Islamic movement in Kurdistan was part of Iraq's Muslim Brotherhood activities. The reason why the Brotherhood ideology proved so attractive was because the communists turned viscerally

against religion. The Brotherhood acted as a vehicle for religious people to stand against communism's attacks on religion and religious people.

The Muslim Brotherhood ideology never increased or decreased tensions between Arabs and Kurds because there were no tensions in the first place. Kurds and Arabs had no problems coexisting. The problem has always been between the political authority in Iraq and the Kurds.

Do you think that the Islamic movement in Kurdistan is particular to Kurdistan? Or is it part of the same movement in Iraq and the Arab world?

The Islamic movement in Iraq, like other groups across the region, traces to the Muslim Brotherhood's beginnings in Egypt. The Islamic movement in Kurdistan was part of that movement until the 1980s, albeit under Iraqi leadership. During the 1980s, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan had a major impact on the Islamists in Kurdistan. Part of the movement transformed into a jihadi wing under the umbrella of the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan (IMK). The leaders of IMK were religious clerics who started fighting against Saddam and his regime alongside other Kurdish secular and nationalist parties.

After the first Gulf war in 1991 and the creation of a safe haven in northern Iraq, which included the establishment of a Kurdish parliament, Islamists in Kurdistan joined the political process. The non-jihadi faction of the movement launched a moderate political party, the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU).

Ever since, Kurdish Islamists have been trying to function independently of the Islamist movement in Iraq and other Arab countries. However, their ideology has always remained under the influence of Arab Islamists.

Moreover, some Islamists in Kurdistan have fallen under the influence of Salafism in Saudi Arabia, known as Madkhali Salafism. This particular school of Salafism is growing in Kurdistan, in part because the major parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), hope its growth will sap the strength of their KIU and Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) political rivals.¹ Indeed, the main reason why both KDP and PUK have chosen to overlook this particular school of Salafism is because the Salafists strongly oppose the political Islam of the KIU and the KIG. The Salafists have shown no interest in politics whatsoever. Instead, they teach Muslims to show complete loyalty to the prevailing ruler, no matter who that ruler might be. This ostensibly serves the PUK and the KDP agenda. However, I strongly believe that this particular policy of the KDP and the PUK will have dangerous repercussions in the region, since the

roots of radical Islam go back to this particular school of Islam centuries ago. Madkhali was founded by Mohammad Bin Abdulawahab, who was influenced by Ibn Taymiya, who in turn was influenced by Ahmed Ibn Hanbal. These are the roots of radical Islam.

Among which subset of the population is the Islamic movement in Kurdistan most popular?

In general, Islamist ideology is spread among different segments of Kurdish society. The jihadi ideology is most popular among the lower educated Islamists who live in rural areas; currently, the ideology of ISIS is probably the favorite of radical Muslim Kurds. It is important to mention that the ideology of ISIS is very limited, and very few Kurds have joined the movement since they started last year. Since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, a few hundred young Kurds have joined up with radical militant groups in Syria. They generally stem from very religious families or have relatives who have in the past joined radical Islamists. For many of those youths, unemployment and poor economic conditions are big factors. Meanwhile, the majority of moderate Islamists or those favoring Brotherhood ideology come from the major cities and are well educated.

Do you believe that Islamists in Kurdistan are part of the Kurdish nationalist movement? How do they view Kurdish nationalism?

Secular and leftists parties started the Kurdish nationalist movement and they still lead it. Islamists were not part of the movement in the beginning and they never had a clear understanding of Kurdish national aspirations. During the 1960s, there used to be a sort of misunderstanding and mistrust between Islamists and nationalists. Both sides were new to one another and took a hesitant, cautious approach to each other. However, by the mid-1980s, both sides had grown closer to one other and started working together. The atrocities of Anfal and the chemical attacks of the Saddam Hussein regime acted as unifying tragedies that underscored the need for Kurdish unity. Islamists and nationalists alike perceived the dangers posed to the entire Kurdish nation by their common enemy.

Since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, both Islamists and nationalists have had a similar understanding of Kurdish nationalist aspirations. The Islamists in Kurdistan, just like the nationalists, have called for an independent Kurdistan. On a national level, Islamists can never call for anything less than an independent Kurdistan because it is the expectation of the entire Kurdish

people. The differences between Islamists and nationalists center on processes and procedures, and not on the overriding objective of an independent Kurdistan.

What are the main factors for the decline of Islamists in Kurdistan?

There are a few reasons for the decline of the Islamic movement in Kurdistan. For one, as I just mentioned, it failed to be a part of the Kurdish nationalist movement from its inception several decades ago. Although Islamists joined the movement during the 1980s, it was already too late.

Islamists have a religious policy aimed at a particular slice of society. The public views them as religious people, not as politicians or statesmen. They are still behind other secular parties when it comes to Kurdish nationalist aspirations and remain more focused on religion and religious issues. The dominant Kurdish issue is nationalism and not religion. Although Islamic parties have seventeen seats total in the current Kurdistan Parliament, they still come behind KDP, PUK, and Gorran (Change Movement).²

What political and ideological differences exist between different Islamic groups in Kurdistan today?

In the late 1990s, a few groups split from the IMK and formed Jund al-Islam, which later became Ansar al-Islam. Another group that split from the IMK was the KIG, which is still an active party in the region.

Until 2003, both the KIU and the KIG had very different political and religious ideologies. The main difference was that the KIG believed in jihad and fielded its own militia ready to fight. However, the KIU did not—and still does not—believe in jihad as a form of politics. The KIU never stood up a force.

In 2005, the KIG's emir, Ali Bapir, was jailed by the U.S. military. The real reason for his imprisonment is still unclear, but I suspect it was because the KIG used to be a jihadi group and had ties with Ansar al-Islam before the U.S. invasion. A year later, when he was released from prison, he announced that the KIG was no longer a militant group and had abandoned its militia and jihadi beliefs. One can easily surmise that at the moment there are few political and ideological differences between the KIU and the KIG. "

Are all Islamic groups in Kurdistan part of the Muslim Brotherhood?

In the beginning, all Islamists belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood. The group of

clerics who started IMK during the 1980s, however, abandoned their ties to the Brotherhood. Today, both IMK and KIG do not consider themselves part of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, KIU is still considered a representation of the Brotherhood in Kurdistan.

Islamists in general, and the KIU in particular, were very happy about the rise of the Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world, such as in Tunisia. They believed that after many years of political deprivation, the era of the Muslim Brotherhood had arrived. KIU was therefore extremely disappointed with the collapse of the Morsi government in Egypt. They organized public demonstrations in Erbil and elsewhere protesting the Egyptian military takeover. KIU faced criticism for organizing these protests in solidarity with the Brotherhood while neglecting to organize similar solidarity rallies for the Kurds suffering in Syria, among other places.

What is the impact of Jihadi Salafists on Islamists in Kurdistan?

Currently, the jihadi Salafist ideology has a lesser impact on Islamists in Kurdistan, mainly because of all the atrocities that have been committed in the region under the guise of Islam. This is especially true with the rise of ISIS. I believe that the Islamic groups in Kurdistan are seeking distance from that ideology.

However, one cannot deny that Madkhali Salafism from Saudi Arabia is having some impact on Islamists in Kurdistan. As I mentioned earlier, Madkhali Salafism is permitted by both the KDP and the PUK as a counter to Islamic parties such as the KIU and the KIG. This creates ideological tensions among the groups and could lead to the eventually radicalization of the Islamists. It is important to reiterate that Madkhali Salafism exists within neither the KIU nor the KIG, since it categorically rejects political Islam and Islamist parties.

Do you think that the Kurdistan Islamic Union has been able to overcome the Brotherhood framework? Or is it still within that framework?

Until this very moment, as I mentioned, the KIU has not been able to outgrow the Brotherhood, or as I call it, Ikhwanism. However, the voices that call for such a separation are growing louder and stronger. So such a separation will probably occur in the near future, particularly after the scheduled party convention in mid-2016.

Some people have presented proposals to the party leadership. I have also submitted a comprehensive project to the KIU leadership. The project is designed to transform the party into a non-religious political party, meaning the separation of

politics from religious activities. Islamists should understand that the time has come to separate religious activities from politics. If they want to work on educating people about religion and religious duties, then they should abandon politics. They can never be successful doing both together.

So far, I have received positive feedback and reactions from some members of the party, so hopefully it will make some changes in the future.

How have Islamic groups balanced their Islamist and Kurdish identities?

Unfortunately, Islamists in Kurdistan have not been able to strike a balance between their Islamist and Kurdish identities. They have been trying to overcome that gridlock but have been unsuccessful, mainly because they lack the ability to reform ideologically and religiously.

Recently, with the participation of several colleagues, I started a think-tank called the Kurdish Institute for Dialogue as the first practical step for encouraging greater discussion among Islamists. In the name of the Institute, we travel the country and hold seminars and public discussions.

Do Islamic groups hold similar views on women's issues, human rights, democracy, and citizenship? Or are they different?

Islamic groups have differing views on women's issues, human rights, and democracy. Some have proven more flexible and open than others.

Obviously, the KIU is more open-minded on such issues than the IMK and the KIG. And that's mainly due to the fact that the KIU, unlike KIG and IMK, emerged from a non-jihadi ideology. Since its inception in 1994, the KIU has declared that it believes in those principles and has worked on practical measures to improve the conditions of women and human rights. Women have always played a significant role within the ranks of the party, and have held top leadership positions.

However, both the IMK and the KIG are still behind, owing to their jihadi background. They have struggled to overcome the rigid religious principles of centuries past.

Overall, Islamic groups have conflicting views on issues of women, human rights and democracy. I would encourage these groups to show courage and bluntly express their views on those important issues.

What is the role of Islamists in the process of religious reform? Have they been able to play a significant role in that process?

I strongly believe that religious reform is a crucial necessity for the entire Muslim world, and particularly for Islamists. It's very important for Islamists to have newer and more critical interpretations of Islam. They should criticize many wrongdoings in the history of Islam with regard to the interpretation of Quran "Tafseer," the Hadith, jihad, caliphate, women, and human rights. Unfortunately, Islamists in Kurdistan have not taken many serious steps in that direction.

With the emergence of ISIS, and its atrocities (including against Yezidi women), the issue of religious reform has again risen in importance. Some individual Islamists have shown interest in having serious discussions on questions of religious reform.

Kurdish Islamists reformers, for example, are influenced by the writings of Iranian scholars, including Abdulkarim Srush and Shubastari. There is also a lot of interest in the writings of the Arab Islamist Muhammad Shahrur, who is originally from Syria but now resides in Lebanon. But I think it's not enough and they still need to do more.

Do all Islamic groups have the same view on issues of radicalism and terrorism? Do you think that Islamic groups in Kurdistan play a role in the fight against terrorism in general, and ISIS in particular?

Officially, all Islamists condemn terrorism; however, their views on the issue are not the same and there is some confusion and ambiguity in that.

The confusion and ambiguity is more with those Islamists who used to be part of the jihadi movement in the past. They still don't have a clear understanding of the issue. That's one of the main reasons why there are still young Kurds among ISIS and other jihadi groups.

The role of the Islamists in the fight against ISIS is limited to condemnation of the group's brutality. All agree that ISIS presents a serious threat to the safety and stability of Kurdistan, and all seem to believe that it is important to stand against ISIS. Many hope that Islamists will play a larger role in persuading young Kurds to stand against ISIS' radical ideology. For the KIU's anniversary last February, President Barzani issued a statement in which he officially asked the KIU and other Islamist groups to play a role in combating extremism among young Islamists. There haven't been any practical steps taken in this regard yet.

Kurdish parents, on the other hand, have been playing a large role in preventing their sons and daughters from succumbing to ISIS' false promises. For instance, just recently Kurdish security forces arrested an ISIS sleeper cell in Erbil. The parents of the leader of that cell were the ones who had informed on him and

alerted the authorities. This is a good example of local Kurds standing at the ready against extremism.

What are the ideological and political tensions between Islamism and Kurdish nationalism?

There have always been tensions between the Islamists and Kurdish nationalist parties. One major reason is that many Kurdish nationalists have communist or Marxist backgrounds. As I mentioned earlier, Islamism and communism have a sore history in Kurdistan.

Today, Kurdish nationalists claim that they are liberals, but as a matter of fact, their communist background still has a negative influence on their views towards Islamists. Many of these nationalists are quite aggressive and anti-religious, and many of them appear on public television attacking and criticizing Islam. Naturally, this provokes reactions from young Islamists. Moreover, one of the elements of Islamic extremism has always been discomfort with secularism.

Are there tensions between Islamists and the Kurdish tribes?

There are no real tensions between the Islamists and the Kurdish tribes. Tribes in Kurdistan have played a significant part in the social and political life of the country. Many people, particularly in rural areas, maintain deep loyalties to their tribes, even if tribal identity has receded over the past several decades. Tribes play an especially important role during elections; a tribal leader's endorsement is a coveted prize in Kurdish politics that could even swing an election.

Islamists and Kurdish tribes have good relations with one another. However, Kurdish tribes and their leaders tend to focus on personal interests when they establish relationships and contacts. They are less interested in religious commitments. Without access to the levers of power, Islamists cannot satisfy many of the tangible tribal requests while in opposition. The tribal leaders therefore have better connections and loyalties to the parties in power.

What do Kurdish Islamists think about Iranian Islamists and the Iranian regime?

Since Kurdish Islamists are Sunnis and the regime in Iran is Shia, there is always a baseline of mistrust and sensitivity in the relationship. Moreover, Iran's policies at home and abroad have always been sectarian and anti-Sunni. At the same time, the regime in Iran is pragmatic and open to relations with everybody. I can say

that there is a political relationship and cooperation between the regime in Iran and the Islamists in Kurdistan. The regime in Iran has similar and sometimes better relations with the secular and nationalist parties as well.

How do Kurdish Islamists see the rise of the AKP and the policies of the Erdogan government in Turkey?

Islamists in Kurdistan are happy to see Erdogan's party growing. They look at AKP as a successful political party with an Islamic background. There is also growing interest among Islamists to apply the lessons of the AKP to Kurdistan. Many Islamic leaders, particularly within the KIU, look upon the AKP experience as a successful model that Islamists around the world should learn from. Islamists are very proud of the fact that the Kurdish issue in Turkey has seen dramatic development within the last decade. They usually try to use that as an advantage especially during elections. But the issue is far more complicated even for Erdogan who is seen as somebody who is trying to resolve the issue. The Syrian conflict and what happened in Kobane are examples of that complication.

Some Islamists in Kurdistan criticized Erdogan and AKP for their policies against the Syrian Kurds especially after what happened in Kobane. Islamists, just like everyone else in Kurdistan, were frustrated when the Turkish government watched from the sidelines as ISIS besieged Kobane. However, they were relieved when Turkey allowed Peshmerga forces to pass through Turkey to help shore up Kobane's defenses. In general, Kurdish Islamic parties, particularly the KIU, have good relations with AKP.

Does the Kurdish Islamist movement operate throughout the Greater Kurdish homeland, or are there separate, nationally-based Islamist movements in Kurdistan?

Kurdish Islamic groups in Iraq don't operate throughout Greater Kurdistan. Other parts of Greater Kurdistan have their own Islamic movements that are separate from what we have here. In Turkey, for instance, Islamists operate under the umbrella of "Noor School" or the school of "Shaikh Saeed Noorsi." There are also some Muslim Brotherhood activists. These are not political groups and they don't have political activities. They mainly function as religious, educational, and charitable organizations.

In Iran, there is a big Islamic organization called "Islah and Dawa Group" that belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood. They are not registered as a political group

because political activities are not allowed in Iran. Obviously, the regime in Iran is a sectarian regime and will always try to limit the activities of local Sunnis. *Islah* and *Dawa* are not happy with the regime's sectarian policies, but I think there is very little they can do if they want to stay away from serious trouble. Because of their Muslim Brotherhood ties, they have good relations with the KIU.

What has the Kurdish Regional Government in northeastern Iraq done to lessen the appeal of radical Islamism among the youth?

What could they do better?

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been successful in controlling the security situation. However, they haven't been as successful in combating the ideology of radicalism among the youth. As I mentioned earlier, high unemployment is a big reason why many youth become radicalized, and the KRG hasn't been successful in providing more job opportunities for young college graduates.

It's important for the KRG to conduct serious political and governmental reforms to eradicate corruption and provide social justice for every citizen. Islamists were part of the opposition before the elections in 2013. Together with the Gorran Group, they presented a comprehensive reform project to the government, the Six Package project. After the elections, the opposition, including the Islamists, agreed to participate in a new government on the condition that it would implement their reform project. However, the government has done little toward that end, mostly because it has been too busy fighting a brutal war against ISIS, accommodating an influx of refugees, and negotiating several problems with Baghdad.

Islamist groups should be given more space for political participation. The popularity of Islamists is very limited; during past elections, they gained only 20 percent of the votes. By pressuring them, the government only isolates the Islamists, thereby forestalling their undertaking the necessary ideological and religious reforms.

Moreover, Kurdish nationalist groups should open themselves up to the principles of liberalism, moderate secularism and democracy, since Marxism and radical secularism only strengthen radical Islamism. Radical Islamism has always been a reaction against extreme secular rulings. When Islamists feel that the ruling authority offends the sacred elements of the religion, they react aggressively. Unfortunately, some Kurdish secular groups sometimes act as if they are opposed to religion, giving radical Islamists pretext to recruit and further radicalize.

Finally, Kurdish Islamists themselves have much to contribute. They should endorse moderate principles and stand against religious extremism. They should also conduct religious reforms in society. The KRG should be more open to the

idea of moderate Islamism in society. Foreign NGOs can help through training and education; after all, there are examples of foreign NGOs working with Islamists in this regard to great effect.

NOTES

1. The KIG was formed in 2000, after a group of top IMK leaders split and founded a new Islamic militant group.
2. Gorran, or the Movement for Change, is the main opposition group in Kurdistan that started after a group of PUK leaders led by Nawshirwan Mustafa split from PUK.

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