THE ISLAMIST CHALLENGE IN WEST ASIA

Doctrinal and Political Competitions After the Arab Spring

TALMIZ AHMAD

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INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES & ANALYSES
NEW DELHI

PENTAGON PRESS

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First Published in 2013

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Preface

Over the last two years of the Arab Spring, the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) region has been witnessing an inter-play between the various strands of Islamism and national and regional political scenarios in an environment of robust competition and even conflict. While the various conflicts between the Islamists and secular/liberal elements in different countries have received considerable international attention, the principal competition at present is between the different streams of political Islam.

Over the last century, Islamism has manifested itself in three broad strands: the quietist Salafism of the Wahhabiya in Saudi Arabia; the activist tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood that has evolved over the last 20 years in Egypt, with influence in other countries as well, and the radical strand mainly represented by Al-Qaeda and its affiliate organisations. None of these strands of Islamism are monolithic, nor are any of their organisational structures or even belief-systems cast in stone.

At present, all of them are witnessing considerable internal debate and dissent as Islamists seek, for the first time in recent history, to take responsibility for democratic governance after their long experience of oppositional politics. Since this is an entirely novel situation, both for the countries concerned and the parties competing for political advantage, the scenario in each of the countries is one of considerable domestic discord as the principal protagonists seek to re-define (or re-affirm!) their vision, agenda and institutions so that they resonate with the requirements of governance and the aspirations of their citizens

for a modern and successful political and economic order that respects their strong religious moorings. Obviously, governance is not made any easier by pressures on the mainstream parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Nahda, from the more hardline Salafi groups (and their external patrons) and, beyond them, the radicals linked to a resurgent Al-Qaeda.

In Saudi Arabia, the Al-Saud-Wahhabiya order is under pressure both from the aspirations of its nationals who are seeking political and economic reform and its own activist Salafists, the *Sahwa*, who, in alliance with liberal elements, Islamist and non-Islamist, are advocating radical changes, possibly even a constitutional monarchy. In response to these domestic aspirations, the Kingdom has embarked on a massive programme of national reconstruction and welfare in the hope that this will dilute, if not nullify, agitations for political reform.

The Kingdom has rejected the possibility of radical political change not only at home but in every other member-country of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as well. Thus, the popular agitation for reform in Bahrain has been stigmatised as a product of Iran's "interference" and a part of its larger design for Persian/Shia hegemony across West Asia. Saudi Arabia is therefore confronting Iran in different theatres in the region, but particularly in Syria in the hope that regime change there will deliver a body-blow to Iran's strategic outreach to the Mediterranean by severing its links with its staunch Alawite ally and the Hezbollah, its powerful militant arm in Lebanon. This Saudi-Iranian confrontation has now also acquired a sharp sectarian character, with efforts across West Asia to mobilise a "Sunni axis" to confront the "Shia crescent" led by the Islamic Republic.

Separate from these competitions, within or between organised state entities, we are also witnessing the proliferation of Al-Qaeda-affiliated entities that are taking advantage of the absence of an effective central authority and security apparatus in failed or failing states to mobilise local support and embark on a campaign of violence against "strategic" targets that include government entities and Western individuals and institutions. These entities now have a strong presence in Yemen, Somalia, Libya and Northwest Africa, while their militias play a lead role in the Syrian conflict. Al-Qaeda, following the removal of Arab tyrants and the electoral successes of Islamist groups in the wake of the Arab Spring, senses an opportunity for the

furtherance of its own agenda, over the long-term, to realise the "caliphate" based on the Sharia, commencing with small liberated enclaves in former state entities and finally by capturing the entire state and even the global *ummah*.

Thus, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, almost every country in WANA is under pressure to reform, with domestic and regional politics being marked by contentions between the various strands of Islamism and the sectarian divide that dates back to the early days of Islam. At the same time, the recent emergence of the National Salvation Front in Egypt and the Nida Tunis in Tunisia, both of which seek to unite diverse non-Islamist elements in a formidable electoral alliance, suggests that in coming years Islamists may have to compete not only with their ideological cousins but also with entities outside the Islamist discourse.

While staking their claims to influence and power in the public sphere, all Islamists base their assertions on certain aspects of pristine Islam, particularly the Quran and the Sunna, as also Islamic law as practised over the centuries in Islamic domains. This harking back to the past has yielded a variety of modern-day expressions due to the different texts and scholars that had been selected for study and emulation, and the meanings relevant to contemporary times that have been drawn from these works by modern scholars who see them as inspirational sources. This effort is further complicated by the fact that much of the present-day discourse evolved when the Islamists were in opposition and were involved in a life-and-death struggle with tyrannical regimes which had been ruthless in responding to their challenge. Obviously, now that Islamist parties have got the unprecedented responsibility of governing, they will necessarily have to review their earlier discourse and imbue it with fresh ideas.

In order to place the present-day ideological and political debate in context, Chapter 1 provides a textual and historical overview of Islamic law—the Sharia, as it evolved from early Islam and, over the last two hundred years experienced the painful impact of the Western colonial system and its multifaceted influences that overturned Islamic traditional law, society and politics. Chapters 2 and 3 survey the thinking and history of two principal Islamist streams in contemporary times—the Wahhabiya in Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, while Chapter 4 examines their engagement and later estrangement over the past 50 years or so.

This sets the stage for the Arab Spring: the ongoing competitive Islamist discourse and politics are analysed in Chapter 5, along with brief overviews of the situation prevailing in the principal countries affected by it. Chapter 6 is devoted to radical Islamism as represented by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and their deep penetrations into the Arab peninsula, West Asia and, more recently, in North and Northwest Africa. The latter in fact gives every indication of emerging as a major theatre of conflict between the Al-Qaeda groups and the regional states, with periodic military interventions by European states and even the USA.

Chapter 7 provides an overview of Islamist politics in domestic and regional scenarios and offers a prognosis for the next few years. Chapter 8 examines the implications of the regional and global levels of the turbulence across WANA. Just as this work was being completed, the military in Egypt ousted the Brotherhood government of President Morsi, thus abruptly ending the first experiment of Islamists in democratic politics in the Arab world. This is analysed in Chapter 9. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses some of the larger challenges that the Arab Spring poses for Islamist discourse, particularly with regard to accommodating both the Sharia and a democratic order in a reformed Arab polity.

Though well over two years have passed since the first tyrants were overthrown in Tunisia and Egypt, the Arab Spring itself remains work-in-progress as attested by the fierce ongoing competitions across West Asia. The vagaries of unexpected developments, of transient alliances and short-lived achievements, and of the shifting influences of outside players, all of these mean that assertions in this monograph have to be necessarily seen as tentative and the prognosis speculative. Still, given that Islamist discourse in general and the various competitions and conflicts between the protagonists of its various strands will define politics in West Asia in the coming decades, it is hoped that this work will survive the uncertainties of the regional scenario and offer a longer term value. The Arab Spring itself, whatever its shape and course, remains the most dramatic and exciting development in WANA over the last 100 years and will call for further study and review.

Dubai   **Talmiz Ahmad**
15 August, 2013

Acknowledgements

This book has its origins in the paper, 'Islamist politics after the Arab Spring' that I presented at the Asian Security Conference organised by the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi in February 2013. While researching this paper, I became increasingly interested in the history and content of the discourse that informs the vision and belief-systems (and drives the competitions) of the various Islamist groups that are now contending for influence and power across West Asia. I acknowledge my deep gratitude to Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, IDSA, and Dr. Meena Singh Roy, Coordinator for the Eurasia and West Asia Centre, for kindly approving my proposal to research this subject, and to Vivek Kaushik, Assistant Editor, for agreeing to edit the book on behalf of IDSA and supervise its publication.

The first draft of the book was seen by three close friends, Swashpawan Singh, Atul Aneja and N. Janardhan, who made trenchant criticisms and valuable suggestions for improvement—with considerable restraint and courtesy—I may add! I also benefitted from the comments of two unnamed referees arranged by IDSA. This work has greatly improved because of their suggestions, though, of course, I remain responsible for any remaining shortcomings.

I am very grateful to my colleague, Ms. Anu Verma, who supported me in giving shape to this complex text, revising it several times and at all stages working against tight deadlines with extraordinary patience, cheerfulness and attention to detail. This work would just not have been possible without her diligence and commitment.

As in the case of my earlier academic efforts, my wife Sunita Mainee endured my distractions with her usual patience and fortitude and, at all the right moments, provided the required nudge to move the project forward.

The bulk of this work was written in the winter of 2012-13 when my mother-in-law was staying with us in Dubai. All too frequently she had to listen to my expositions of the various competitions and conflicts that are examined in this work. She invariably exhibited a deep interest in the issues at stake and imbued me with the will to continue with the task at hand whenever my enthusiasm faltered. Her response to the first draft of the text was one of pride and affection. She played a central role in the development of this narrative and, hence, it is to Mrs. Kusumlata Mainee that I dedicate this work.

Talmiz Ahmad

1

Islamism: A Textual and Historical Overview

The Sharia

Political Islam or Islamism as defined by the International Crisis Group is "the active assertion and promotion of beliefs, prescriptions, laws, or policies that are held to be Islamic in character."[1] From their perspective the political activists are seeking "the restoration of authentic, original Islam", an Islamic order that is cleansed of all innovations, deviations and influences that have crept into it over the years.[2] The removal of these interpolations will yield an Islamic society that is pristine and is closest to the order of the holy Prophet himself when he lived in Madinah and the era of the first four caliphs.

Though its roots lie in the intellectual activity that flourished mainly in Egypt in the 19th century, Islamism is primarily a 20th century development that emerged from the defeat and attendant loss of dignity at the hands of Western imperialism, which over time led to a consensus across the Muslim world about the need for reform and modernity. While one strand of this response did advocate a total rejection of the Arabs' Islamic heritage, the overwhelming majority of the intellectuals and later activists were of the opinion that Muslim salvation lay in Islam—as a religion, a culture and a belief-system. This perception of "Islam" was not conceived merely in terms of religious

rituals and practices; these were in any case personal and under no imminent threat. The perception of "Islam" was much broader and had religious, moral, social, cultural, economic and political implications for the reformed order that would equip the Muslims to face contemporary challenges of internal decay and defeat, Western political interventions, and, above all, "modernisation" as represented by Western values, technologies and institutions. These had already made considerable inroads into Muslim colonies and had overturned much that was traditional in terms of their authentic indigenous culture. Thus, a tension between the demands of "Islam" and modernity was set up, which challenged the intellectuals (and the activists inspired by them) to seek a balance that would harmonise them.

"Islam" in the sense that concerned 19th and 20th century intellectuals was essentially the Sharia, the Islamic laws and rules that from the time of the Prophet determined every aspect of the Muslim's conduct and institutions of which he was a part. These legal rules were not at any time rigid and immutable; they were, as Knut Vikor has described them, those that "we actually see applied in our human existence."[3]

The first sources of Sharia were the revelations of Allah to his Prophet, Mohammed, as enshrined in the Quran, and the sayings and conduct of the Prophet, based on the testimony of his contemporaries, collectively referred to as the Sunna. In terms of Islamic law, the Quran and the Sunna are part of the "Revelation" and have equal status.[4]

The Sharia evolved over several centuries: in the early period, the text of the Quran was finalised as were the Prophet's traditions (Hadith) by the efforts of the scholars (ulema) labouring on their own or in schools across the expanding Muslim empire. An effort was then made to standardise the understanding of these texts in the Muslim realm by "traditionalisation" of the Revelation, i.e., by tracing all legal principles and rules back to the revealed texts.[5]

These processes involved not just a reading of the basic text: the textual material was in itself neither sufficient nor lucid enough to permit plain readings that could be applied to the different situations in which jurists had to adjudicate. Hence, the instrument of *ijtihad*, i.e., the development of new rules of law through a re-interpretation of the basic sources came into being. This consisted of two systems,

(i) *Qiyas*, analogies drawn from one case and applied to similar cases in accordance with prescribed methods, and, (ii) *Ijma*, consensus, i.e. what is acceptable within a group (of Muslims).[6]

From the earliest times of Islam, commentators made a basic distinction in the content of the revealed sources -*ibadat*, man's relation to God, and *muamalat*, man in relation with other men.[7] The former were seen as eternal principles for the sole purpose of worship, which could not be changed. The latter were, of course, for the good of man and society and could change with the times. Scholars developed the concept of *maslahah*, translated variously as public welfare, public interest or common good, as a guiding principle for the application of law in specific cases.[8] Another concept developed by the early scholars was that of the *siyasa shariiya*, which means "to rule according to the Sharia." This effectively meant that, in a given set of circumstances, the Muslim ruler or judge could accord priority to notions of public interest in the "spirit" of the Sharia without adhering to the letter of the Sharia.[9]

As scholars in different parts of the Muslim world attempted to understand and explain the meaning of the revealed texts, known as *fiqh* (law or the science of law), and apply them in different situations, four schools (*madhhabs*) of Sunni Islam began to emerge. Each of these schools took a few decades to acquire concrete shape, primarily on the basis of the writings of their founders and their students. They were fully formed by the early 11th century, with each school having its own adherents in specific geographical areas.[10] The four schools (*Hanafi, Shafei, Maliki* and *Hanbali*) had much in common in terms of the application of legal precepts, though they differed in regard to methodology and the emphasis they placed on certain concepts over others. The authoritative or established views of a school are collectively referred to as *taqlid*.

The law and rules set out in the texts of the first sources and later in the writings of the scholars of the four schools were constantly tested in law courts in various Muslim states and empires. Till the 16th century, the religious scholar, the *mufti*, had the authority to issue fatwas, legal opinions that would elucidate a point of law in a given matter on the basis of his understanding of the relevant Islamic law or rule. These muftis functioned independently of the political order and were not subordinate to the sultan. However, at different periods

in early Islamic history, rulers would seek to assert their authority over muftis, which frequently led to tension between them. However, in most cases the muftis succeeded in retaining their autonomy.

At the end of the 12th or 13th century, some ulema asserted that since the schools of jurisprudence were fully formed and scholars of the standing of the original founders were not likely to emerge in future, the "gate to *ijtihad* is closed". What this meant was that, while the texts of the four schools could not be changed and developed any further since the required level of scholarship was no longer available, it did not mean that the entire legal system was now to be mired in a rigid and outdated set of rules that could not evolve in response to changed circumstances. There was nothing to prevent the mufti from issuing fatwas based on his own *ijtihad*, as long as they were in accordance with the principles of his school. There was thus no blind and mindless adherence to *taqlid* (established views), and a flexibility in the application of old laws in new circumstances continued.[11]

Vikor has clarified that *taqlid* and *ijtihad* are not the opposites that some have seen them to be in that *ijtihad* is seen to be flexible and positive, while *taqlid* is viewed as "ossified orthodoxy" or "blind imitation", when, in fact they are a "dialectical unity" in the development of the law.[12] In legal practice, the jurist would restrict himself to those areas in which he had knowledge and competence i.e., use *ijtihad*, beyond which he would resort to *taqlid*. Prominent muftis would, in fact, publish their fatwas in collections, which would then be used as references or as texts in local schools.[13] Another legal literature that appeared in the 13th and 14th centuries was the *qawaid*, i.e., general principles in support of the law. These were abstracts of the rules of each school that could be conveniently memorised by students.[14]

In the early centuries of Islam, the ulema were "people of knowledge" who advised the Muslim community and its rulers on various aspects of their public and private conduct on the basis of Sharia law.[15] They were thus the "collective voice of the conscience" of society.[16] In this period, they were not part of official government structures, but functioned autonomously as "controllers, interpreters, and articulators of Islamic law and the definition of the Islamic community."[17] In this role, they examined traditional sources through the eyes of reason and moderation, thus ensuring that the divinely

ordained law remained relevant for contemporary times and for the objective challenges facing the polity. The scholars' ability to review and critique the actions of the autocratic ruler ensured a balance of power in the political order and upheld the rule of law based on the Sharia. However, later developments in Islamic polities gradually ended the autonomy of the ulema and made them increasingly subservient to the ruler.

This was largely on account of turbulence caused by wars of succession, the break-up of empires and rival claimants to the throne and even to the title of caliph. In this situation, the ulema felt they had no choice but to judge a ruler not by his capacity to dispense justice but by his ability to maintain security.[18] This led some sections of the ulema to justify even tyranny in the name of religion, when they granted doctrinal legitimacy to the exercise of force. Though compromised to some extent, the ulema continued to hold positions of dignity even as the state became more complex, since they provided legitimacy to the new institutions that emerged in the body politic.

Separate from such mainstream ulema, there were from time to time Muslim intellectuals who continued the earlier tradition of objective and innovative reasoning, i.e., upholding the tradition of *ijtihad*. Among them was the 14th century reformer, Ibn Taymiyya, who reasserted the traditional role of the ulema as critics of society and the ruler.[19] While he agreed that obedience to the ruler was necessary to avoid anarchy, he also insisted that the obligations of the faith must be adhered to both by the ruler and the ruled. He upheld the right to *ijtihad* and thus established the alternative tradition of reformist activism that to some extent counter-balanced the larger community of ulema who had become part of the state establishment. A pattern was thus set for the coming centuries when, in the midst of deep political crises, certain ulema would emerge and demand that the community seek renewal (*tajdid*) by a return to pristine Islam as represented by the Quran and the Sunna.[20]

The Ottoman Period

In terms of the organisation and practice of the Islamic legal system, the Ottoman Empire constituted a major break from the past. As the Ottoman state expanded in territory and the diversity of its subjects, state institutions that incorporated the ulema and the judicial system

within the state order began to emerge. The Ottoman legal system created the post of "grand mufti" who in time came to be supported by a large bureaucracy. Thus, legal opinion now became an integral part of the governmental set-up. The most serious consequence of this was that it deprived the state of the balance of power that was earlier provided by the independent ulema.

The increasing Ottoman engagement with (and later subordination to) Western powers created pressures for modernising the legal system through the codification of the law (kanun) and its interpretation and implementation by a new class of judges trained in modern law and who were familiar with Western legal traditions and practices.[21] The status of traditional ulema was diminished and their role increasingly confined to family law. The legal system, both in terms of law and institution, became increasingly westernised. New civil and criminal codes, that were largely independent of the Sharia, were promulgated. The civil law covered economic and commercial matters, such as contracts and agency arrangements, as also procedural matters pertaining to evidence and testimony.[22] With the accession to power of Kamal Ataturk, the Sharia was abolished in Turkey in 1924 and secular laws were promulgated from 1926.

Response to Colonialism

The colonial experience was most traumatic for the worldwide Muslim community since, for the first time in their history, Muslims now found themselves facing comprehensive defeat at the hands of a civilisation that had superior weaponry and had mastered science and technology. As Pankaj Mishra puts it, "the long-established cosmic order of Islam" had been overturned.[23] Muslims delved deep into their souls to understand why they were "no longer the chosen people" and why "their history was no longer congruent with God's plan".[24] Over 50 years ago, the British scholar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, lucidly analysed the crisis experienced by the Muslims:

> The fundamental malaise of modern Islam is a sense that something has gone wrong with Islamic history. The fundamental problem of modern Muslims is how to rehabilitate that history, to get it going again in full vigour, so that Islamic society may once again flourish as a divinely guided society should and must. The fundamental spiritual crisis of Islam in the

twentieth century stems from an awareness that something is awry between the religion which God has appointed and the historical development of the world which He controls.[25]

The Muslims' response to the colonial challenge ranged from a total rejection of Islamic tradition to the insistence on a return to pristine Islam, though most people placed themselves somewhere between these two extremes. At this stage in their history, neither the traditional Islam of the Sharia nor the superficial modernism of the Ottoman order were of any particular help to Muslims to challenge Western domination. This was because European subordination of Asia, as Pankaj Mishra has pointed out, "was not merely economic and political and military. It was also intellectual and moral and spiritual."[26] The first impact of colonialism was therefore the emergence of secular intellectuals who, from the mid-19th century, would dominate the Arab world for over a century. Thus, after the First World War, a contemporary observer noted: "The intellectual and social orientation shifted toward an irreversible westernising and secularist direction...Islam, among the educated strata, was absorbed into secular ideology"; and, in the interwar period, the group that "gained undisputed political ascendancy in both Egypt and the Fertile Crescent was the Muslim secularists."[27]

The emergence and domination of these secular intellectuals was in part also due to the failure of the traditional ulema to play a role in helping the traumatised Muslim community cope with the challenge of imperialist conquest. As a result of the ulema's subservience to rulers in the centuries before colonialism and their total marginalisation during the colonial era, they were at this stage entirely mired in intellectual rigidity. Most of them withdrew into a "defensive conservatism" and, hence, could provide no leadership or guidance for dealing with the challenge of modernity posed by the Western encounter.[28]

At the same time, the biggest problem for the secular intellectuals was that they were an exclusive elite, more comfortable with Western languages, clothing and culture, and having little appeal amongst the masses within their country. Thus, as Mishra notes, ordinary people were left "stranded, materially and spiritually" by westernisation.[29] They needed a new kind of intellectual who, while modern in outlook, was also rooted in the culture of Islam.

Such intellectuals emerged from the of *tajdid*-oriented scholars of earlier times and who were led in the 19th century by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Mohammed Abduh and Rashid Rida. They, as Mishra has noted, were convinced of "the necessity of reform to offset internal decline and decay and the need to renew their traditions with outside learning."[30] The dilemma of Muslims at that time was how to reconcile modernity with their Islamic faith. As Albert Hourani has explained:

> For Muslims, … the problem was inescapable. Islam was what was deepest in them. If to live in the modern world demanded changes in their ways of organising society, they must try to make them while remaining true to themselves; and this would be possible only if Islam was interpreted to make it compatible with survival, strength and progress in the world.[31]

The three scholars responded to this challenge in diverse ways. Al-Afghani (1838-97) was seen by a contemporary religious scholar in Egypt's Al-Azhar University as a 'wild man of genius' whose "intimate acquaintance with the Koran and the traditions enabled him to show that, if rightly interpreted and checked the one by the other, the law of Islam was capable of the most liberal developments and that hardly any beneficial change was in reality opposed to it."[32] Anti-imperialism was central to Al-Afghani's thinking, though he was convinced that "a strong Islamic centre … could beat back the encroaching West."[33]

Mohammed Abduh (1850-1905) was Al-Afghani's pupil and disciple. He believed that early Muslim life at the time of Prophet Mohammed was the 'golden age', but rejected a blind imitation of all aspects of the past and insisted that all traditional texts be reviewed in the light of the Quran. He called for the re-interpretation of Islam for the 20th century by a new kind of religious leadership, "one tied neither to slavish imitation of the past nor to the godless interpretations of the West, one able to understand the benefit of modern sciences and the reality of living in the modern world."[34] He set out his views most cogently:

> Liberate thought from the shackles of imitation [taqlid] and understand religion as it was understood by the community before dissension appeared; to return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources, and to weigh them in the scale of human reason, which God has created in order to

prevent excess or adulteration in religion, so that God's wisdom may be fulfilled and the order of the human world preserved; and to prove that, seen in this light, religion must be accounted a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence, summoning him to respect established truths and to depend on them in his moral life and conduct.[35]

Rashid Rida (1865-1935), a student of Abduh, focused on legal matters. He highlighted the distinction between *ibadat* and *muamalah*, in that, while the former was absolute and unchangeable, the latter could change with the times. He was somewhat conservative in this regard, and made a further distinction in *muamalah* rules between those that pertained to morality and, hence, could not be changed, those that dealt with issues of daily life. In order to ensure that Sharia was in line with contemporary times, he stressed the importance of *ijtihad* and advocated *qiyas*, analogical reasoning. With regard to the formulation of law, Rida accepted the idea of "an assembly elected by majority vote among the believers" along with the scholars (ulema). Central to this approach was the idea that public good (*maslaha*) was much more important thana "slavish" imitation of the Prophet.[36] In the latter part of his life, Rida moved away from Abduh's liberal and rationalist thinking and veered toward Wahhabiya.[37]

These three intellectuals differed from their secular counterparts in that they associated Western culture with imperial domination and, hence, saw Islam as the authentic basis of their cultural identity. They represented the intellectual trend of Islamic modernism. In their attempt to influence the state order on Islamic lines, they gave currency to the concept of political Islam or Islamism, promoting the active role of Islamic groups and movements in the political arena while calling for the application of Islamic values and laws (Sharia) in the private and public spheres. Their legacy is encompassed in the philosophy, doctrines and worldview of Salafism, derived from *Al-Salaf al-Salih*, which may be translated as "virtuous forefathers". Salafism required a "return to the pristine, pure, unadulterated form of Islam" as practiced by the Prophet and his Companions. Salafism is not a homogenous movement, but includes elements that are "ambiguous and fragmented" and even have "contradictory tendencies".[38]

The return to *Salaf al-Salih* was a harking back to authenticity and legitimacy. The great Islamic scholar, Abu Hanifa (d 767), is believed

to have said: "Follow the traditions and the way of the Salaf and be on your guard against new-fangled matters (bid'a), for all of that constitutes a departure from the norm."[39] He emphasised the importance of preserving the integrity of the customs followed by the Prophet and his closest associates, and protecting this legacy from undesirable interpolations.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the desire to reform contemporary Islam, inspired by Al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida, awakened a new interest in the original sources of Islam, the Quran and the Sunna. This effort resulted in two distinct and mutually exclusive strands of Islamism. In line with Rida's later thinking, one strand is associated with the revivalist Salafi movement whose adherents, while expressing reverence for the pious ancestors, asserted that a faithful emulation of the Salaf and their practices was necessary for the salvation of the Muslim community. Their approach to the original texts was literalist.

As against this revivalist approach was the liberal reformist tendency, more in tune with Al-Afghani and Abduh. It also sought to adhere to the tenets followed by pious ancestors, but at the same time insisted on a careful study of non-Quranic sources such as the Hadith, religious biographies and exegeses. They believed that a knowledge of the lives and the customs of the pious ancestors would inspire Muslims to seek salvation by adopting and, where necessary, adapting the ideals and values represented by them.

Not surprisingly, the definitions of the Islamic state and its legal basis that emerged from these two approaches to the *Salaf al Salih* were quite different. For the revivalists, the Islamic state was characterised by divine sovereignty. Two scholars of the 20th century, Maulana Abul Aala Maududi and Sayyid Qutb, propounded this line of thinking. They rejected all forms of popular democracy, and insisted that all legitimate legislation had to emanate from the supreme sovereignty of God. The ideal Islamic state, the caliphate, would be headed by virtuous rulers who would govern an obedient citizenry in accordance with the provisions of the Quran and the Hadith. This Islamic state would have only one law, the Sharia, which would only have a single and uniform, often literal, interpretation, authoritatively established by the Prophet and upheld by his Companions, and thus valid for all times and places.[40]

For the revivalists, the implementation of the Sharia has invariably

meant the application of hudud penalties. These are the punishments prescribed for five crimes specified in the Quran: theft; armed robbery; fornication; false accusation of fornication and consumption of alcohol. This is of paramount importance for them since, in their view, it exemplifies the Islamic identity. It does not accommodate other approaches such as the historical contextualisation of legal rulings as they have developed overtime nor the invocation of public interest (maslaha) as grounds for legal flexibility which had actually been the practice in Muslim communities through their history.[41]

On the other hand, the liberal reformists believe that the Sharia is adaptable and can accommodate the complexities of modern life. On the basis of their understanding of the Salaf, they contend that Sharia should uphold ethical values such as justice and mercy, and no law can violate these fundamental values. They distinguish between Sharia and *fiqh*, pointing out that while the Sharia is of divine origin and therefore beyond human criticism, the *fiqh* is man-made and the product of human intervention. It is therefore both fallible and changeable and can be interpreted differently in different circumstances. They formulated three principles of governance on the basis of their understanding of the Salaf: (a) Shura ("consultation"); (b) bayat ('allegiance," "ratification"); and (c) ijma ("consensus").[42]

On the basis of these different approaches to the Salaf, Salafi groups can be divided into three categories in terms of political activity. The first group has a quietist character and a traditional outlook. It rejects participation in political organisations and activity, and enjoins loyalty and obedience to the ruler. This is often referred to as "Scholastic Salafism", and is principally concerned with ritual purity, which will bring the Muslims back to the true teachings of Islam after a long and difficult process of "purification and education".[43] It is best represented by Wahhabiya in Saudi Arabia.

The second group of Salafis supports political activism but of a non-violent character. Inspired by the thinking of Rashid Rida, it seeks political reform and even aspires to political power.[44] The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and other Arab countries follow this belief. In Saudi Arabia, this group is represented by the Sahwiya (the "Awakening Ones") movement.

The third group of Salafis are the Salafi-Jihadis. They support violent action (jihad) against the existing political order and the

establishment of an Islamic state in the form of a "caliphate" based on the strict application of the Sharia.[45] This group is principally influenced by the teachings of the 14th century scholar, Ibn Taymiyya, and the radical Islamic ideologues of the second half of the 20th century headed by Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb. The Al-Qaeda and its affiliates are adherents of this grouping.

It should be noted that the Islamist discourse in its various manifestations that evolved over the 20th century was, except in Saudi Arabia, an oppositional concept that functioned outside the prevailing state order. In the Arab world, the state continued to be dominated by the secular intellectuals who, particularly in the revolutionary regimes that overthrew traditional monarchies, defined and exalted a polity founded on the secular principles of nationalism and socialism.

In the second half of the last century, the secular political order in the Arab world gradually lost credibility and acceptability due to repeated failures in the various areas of governance, the most immediate and traumatic being the military and political arenas. The failure of these regimes to prevent the creation of Israel in 1948 and the humiliating defeat of the Arab armed forces in 1967 were seen as grave collective national humiliations, and affirmed to the Arab people that their leaders, and the polities headed by them, were not rooted in their tradition but were based on the Western models which, being alien, could not address their political and economic concerns or give them a sense of self-confidence and dignity.

This deep seated anti-Westernism became fertile ground for the emergence of a new voice that insisted that social justice, central to Islam, could only be achieved under a government based on Islam and its laws.[46] For instance, Pankaj Mishra, while examining the various influences that overtime came to define the thinking of the Islamist ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, said:

> Israel's victory and Egypt's military humiliation in 1948 were major milestones in Qutb's new thinking, as was his trip later that same year to the United States, then the embodiment of post-war modernity. This was where Qutb first began to develop his larger critique of Western civilisation as unhealthily obsessed with material and technological progress to the detriment of moral freedom and social justice.[47]

Qutb himself said: "We must nourish in our school-age children

sentiments that open their eyes to the tyranny of the white man, his civilisation, and his animal hunger."[48] Later, in his landmark work, *Milestones*, Qutb made the following pronouncement:

> Humanity is standing today at the brink of an abyss, not because of the threat of annihilation hanging over its head—for this is just a symptom of the disease and not the disease itself—but because humanity is bankrupt in the realm of 'values', those values which foster true human progress and development. This is abundantly clear to the Western World, for the West can no longer provide the values necessary for [the flourishing of] humanity.[49]

However, the post-war period was also the period of Nasser's ascendancy in Egypt and, hence, political discourse in the Arab world was dominated by socialism, Arab unity and Third World affiliation.[50] This discourse received a body blow with the defeat of 1967, which was seen not only as a military setback but as "a kind of moral judgment". Arab commentators of the time remarked that "the Egyptian and Arab peoples had lost confidence in themselves". They came to believe that political and economic life had to be based on moral values drawn from religion, and their identity had to be derived from "their own inherited beliefs and culture."[51]

As in the Arabs' response to colonialism, the crisis of the 1960s also saw a deep polarisation between the thinking of Sayyid Qutb and his associates who believed that the Islamic heritage alone should define contemporary life; and the liberal modernists who did not deny the value of the Islamic legacy but saw no merit in harking back to the past, and sought a thorough reform of the social and cultural order. The Syrian philosopher, Sadiq Jalal AlAzm (b. 1934), rejected religious thought, while the Tunisian thinker, Hisham Djait (b. 1935) called for a separation between religion and social institutions. The Sudanese scholar Sadiq Al-Mahdi (b. 1936) attempted to reconcile these divergent positions by calling upon academics to examine how the Quran and Hadith could be adapted to meet modern needs.[52]

In the 1980s, this ideational competition slowly tilted in favour of the radicals. This was the unintended consequence of the major social and economic changes effected in different Arab countries at state initiative. These regimes attempted to modernise their states by developing new infrastructure, encouraging urbanisation and

providing their populations access to modern education, markets and mass media. In the last two decades of the last century, many of these people also gained access to international travel, electronic communications and the Internet.

These developments encouraged a mass movement of people both within and outside their countries, which opened up new opportunities for employment as also associations beyond the traditional links of family, clan and tribe. These migrations effectively diluted the ties of the populace with their traditional moorings, familial, social and religious, and broadened their knowledge of the experiences of other societies in the West and East which were coping with the challenges of pluralism in multicultural environments. These changes also led to a "ruralisation" of urban centres as thousands of peasants migrated to cities seeking new opportunities for employment. Separated from the familial and social safety net of traditional rural life, they experienced a sense of alienation which they assuaged by affiliating with "the universal community of Islam" represented in Egypt by the Muslim Brotherhood.[53]

This provided the Brotherhood with an opportunity to mobilise a powerful popular support base which could be utilised to promote its Islamist agenda, that had both anti-government and anti-West elements. The latter was particularly resonant since, even after the end of the colonial era, interventions across the Islamic world by the United States in pursuit of its own political and economic interests and the interests of Israel (by carrying out or sanctioning military depredations and regime change where necessary), continued to inflame Muslim public opinion. As Fuller has explained:

> Even though direct forms of foreign rule have long since faded, modern mechanisms [for intervention and hegemony] include large US economic subsidies—particularly in the case of Egypt, use of loan mechanisms controlled by the United States from the World Bank, military sales, diplomatic support, the presence of military bases, regular political intervention, manipulation of regional policies as pressure points, military threats, and near silence on violations of civil liberties and human rights in these states.
>
> All of these policies are ultimately counterproductive in that they stir anger within the countries in question, weaken the prestige

of their rulers, and stimulate local radicalism and violence. This kind of long-term political and economic interventionism has taken on rawer form in the Middle East than in almost any other part of the world...[54]

The Islamist opposition viewed their national secular governments as "corrupt and ineffective, the instruments of private interests, or devoid of morality; and a society which seemed to have lost its unity with its moral principles and direction."[55]

As the 20th century drew to a close, the various forces that had defined Islamism through the previous decades stood poised for fresh competition: first, the Saudi Kingdom, emerging from the jihad in Afghanistan, was confronted with the consequences of its various initiatives to sustain royal and Wahhabi authority in a state convulsed by new challenges, domestic and regional. Second, the Muslim Brotherhood began to gear itself up to challenge an authoritarian order that was mired in corruption and political and economic failure. And, third, the radical and violent Al-Qaeda, strengthened by the allure of jihad for Muslim youth globally, and boosted by its strategic alliance with the Taliban, now prepared to strike at the "far enemy" and spread its tentacles across the Muslim world.

The ramifications of these competitions are examined in the following chapters.

NOTES

1. Quoted in John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, Hurst & Co. London, 2010, p. 293; Amel Boubekeur and Olivier Roy have discussed the contemporary meaning of Islamism (or political Islam) in the book edited by them: *Whatever Happened to the Islamists*, Hurst & Co., London, 2012, pp. 1-6.
2. Ibid.
3. Knut S. Vikor, *Between God and the Sultan—A History of Islamic Law*, Hurst & Co., London, p. 2.
4. Ibid, p. 38.
5. Ibid, p. 27.
6. Ibid, pp. 53-65.
7. Ibid, p. 68.
8. For a detailed history of the evolution of *masalahah* in early and medieval Islamic polities and its interpretation in the modern era, see: Asma Afsaruddin, "*Masalahah* as a Political Concept", in Mehrzad Boroujerdi (Ed), *Mirror for the Muslim Prince—Islam and the Theory of Statecraft*, Syracuse University Press, NY, 2013, pp. 16-44.
9. Vikor, page 69; for Ibn Taymiyya's thinking on the concept of *siyassa shariiya* see Afsaruddin, no. 8, pp. 36-38; she points out that his contribution is: "the strongest

and clearest articulation of *maslahah* as a political concept according to which pragmatic mundane considerations of public benefit and communal welfare take priority over idealised notions of moral leadership." (p. 38).

10. Ibid, pp. 103-04.
11. Ibid, pp. 153-55.
12. Ibid, p. 160.
13. Ibid, p. 163.
14. Ibid, p. 165.
15. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 8.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid, p. 9.
18. Ibid, p. 10.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid, pp. 10-11.
21. Vikor, no. 3, p. 207.
22. Ibid, p. 230.
23. Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire—The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia*, Allen Lane—an imprint of Penguin Books, London, 2012, p. 18.
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26. Mishra, no. 23, p. 45.
27. Esposito & Voll, no. 15, p. 13.
28. Ibid, p. 15.
29. Mishra, no. 23, p. 67.
30. Ibid, p. 52.
31. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA., 1991, p. 307.
32. Mishra, no. 23, p. 87.
33. Ibid, p. 89.
34. Talmiz Ahmad, *Children of Abraham at War—The Clash of Messianic Militarisms*, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2011, p. 212.
35. Hourani, no. 31, p. 308.
36. Vikor, no. 3, p. 235; for some details of Rashid Rida's thinking on *maslahah* see Afsaruddin, no. 8, pp. 38-39.
37. Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action", in Roel Meijer (Ed), *Global Salafism—Islam's New Religious Movement*, Hurst & Co., London, 2009, pp. 46-47.
38. Roel Meijer, "Introduction", in Roel Meijer (Ed), no. 37, p. 3.
39. Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims—History and Memory*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2009, p. 149.
40. Ahmad, no. 34, pp. 216-21.
41. Afsaruddin, no. 39, p. 158.
42. Ibid, p. 169.
43. Haykel, no. 37, p. 49.
44. Ibid, p. 48.

45.   Ibid.
46.   Hourani, no. 31, p. 398.
47.   Mishra, no. 23, p. 268.
48.   Ibid.
49.   Ibid, p. 270.
50.   Hourani, no. 31, p. 401.
51.   Ibid, pp. 442-43.
52.   Ibid, pp. 445-47.
53.   Ibid, p. 452.
54.   Graham E. Fuller, "The Future of Political Islam—its Dilemmas and Options", in Frederic Volpi (Ed), *Political Islam—A Critical Reader*, Routledge, Oxford, 2011, p. 253.
55.   Hourani, no. 31, p. 452.

2

Wahhabiya in Saudi Arabia

The ruling family of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia owes its legitimacy to the religio-political affiliation established by Mohammed ibn Saud with his contemporaneous Najdi religious reformer, Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahab, in the mid-18th century (1744).[1] Ibn Abdul Wahab observed that several practices and innovations that deviated from the original Islam had crept into the Islam of his region. He concluded that Muslims had no knowledge of their true faith and were living in a state of jahiliyya (ignorance), which had resulted in their spiritual decline and political defeat.[2]

Ibn Abdul Wahab's doctrines were inspired by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855) and Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328). He called for a return to the basic Islamic doctrines as set out in the Quran and the Hadith, because deviating from these had caused the prevailing Muslim malaise. The core of his doctrine was *tawhid* (unity) according to which there could be no association with God, no "intercession" (i.e., appealing to God through an intermediary) and no "innovation", i.e., no belief or practice beyond what had been prescribed by Islam's two basic sources. This was, in short, a return to the pristine purity of Islam, i.e., the Islam of the first three generations, the "Salaf' or "pious ancestors". This doctrine, loosely termed as Wahhabiya, rejected veneration of saints, prayers at their graves or any action that would divert attention from the worship of the one God. Persons who did not follow these

doctrines could be declared unbelievers or apostates, could be excommunicated, and jihad could be waged against them.[3]

The affiliation of Ibn Abdul Wahab and Mohammed Al-Saud—provided political clout to this reformist religious doctrine and enabled it to evolve from being a minor movement in an obscure corner of the Arabian desert to becoming the central doctrine of the Saudi state in its various incarnations through the 19th century, culminating in the setting up of the modern Saudi Kingdom under King Abdulaziz in 1932.

In the early part of this effort, the success of King Abdulaziz was based on the military support he obtained from the *Ikhwan*, the fierce Wahhabi zealots, who, with their faith and ferocity, facilitated Abdulaziz's conquests. However, as the Kingdom took shape, Abdulaziz rejected their demand that all state matters should be guided by and be subordinate to religious doctrine, and went on to physically and politically destroy their power. Thus, he affirmed that the new Saudi state, while heavily influenced by its doctrinal commitments to Wahhabiya, would ultimately be defined by royal and national interest rather than doctrinal purity.

This gave rise to an inherent tension at the heart of the Saudi state. The royal family attempted to manage this tension by allocating responsibility in terms of which the political order would be responsible for economic and foreign policy (with little or no reference to the Sharia), while the religious establishment would have the principal say in social, cultural and educational matters, enforcing the strict Wahhabi belief system and morality, while extending political support to the Saudi leadership.

The order of the Saudi state has been described by scholars as "Quietist Salafism" since it subscribes to the central importance of doctrine and eschews political activism. Its principal attributes are as follows:[4]

   (i) Commencing with the central doctrine of *tawhid* (unity), the Saudi ulema assert that knowledge and truth are available only with them, and all those who disagree with them are *munharifoon* (deviants).

   (ii) Following from this (i), the pursuit of competitive politics is rejected as *bida* (innovation) since it is based on borrowed alien

concepts; and as *shirk* (association with God) since it recognises political leaders. It is also unacceptable because it encourages *fitna* (dissension) and *ghuluw* (extremism).

(iii)   While Saudi ulema do not practice *takfir* (ex-communication), they do severely condemn their opponents and even suggest that they could be *kuffar* (unbelievers).

(iv)   The Saudi order advocates unconditional obedience to the ruler, thus upholding the political status quo; in return, the ulema benefit considerably from state patronage.

Anti–Shia discourse in Wahhabiyya

Hostility towards the Shia is central to all Salafi groups. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, on the basis of his study of the Hadith, developed a strong anti-Shiite bias. This permeated the teachings of Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahab who also "developed a profound hatred of the Shias".[5] He saw the Shias as heretics on account of their denial of the legitimacy of the first three caliphs and their criticism of some of the Prophet's companions. This, according to Ibn Abdul Wahab, undermined the very foundations of true Islam since the caliphs and their companions were "the most important guarantors of the authenticity of Hadith material". Accordingly, Ibn Abdul Wahab saw the Shias as *kuffar* (unbelievers).[6]

These views came to be adopted in the various Saudi states that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, and led to disputes between the Saudis in the Najd and the Shia populations on the Gulf coast and in the Hejaz. In the early 20th century, during the period of acute differences between Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan, while the ulema supported King Abdulaziz against the Ikhwan, they also, supported the Ikhwan's demands for a more radical anti-Shia policy by issuing a fatwa:

> As to the Shi'i renegades (*al-rafida*), we have told the imam [King Abdulaziz] that our religious ruling is that they must be obliged to become true Muslims, and should not be allowed to perform the rites of their misguided religion publicly…. they should swear to follow the religion of God and his Prophet, to cease all prayers to the saintly members of the Prophet's house, to cease their heretical innovations (*bid'a*) such as the commemoration rites performed on the anniversaries of members of the house of the

Prophet, and all other such rites of their misguided creed, and they should cease to visit their so-called sacred cities Karbala and Najaf.... Any Shi'is who refuse to keep with these rules must be exiled from Muslim territory.[7]

This extreme anti-Shia position continued to be articulated by the Wahhabi establishment ulema throughout the century. Thus, in 1991, a leading Wahhabi scholar characterised the Shias as "polytheists" who can be lawfully killed by Muslims.[8] Saudi rulers, however, do not allow the extremist assertions of the Wahhabi ulema to be implemented, though the Shias are discriminated against in the political, economic, social and religious domains.

NOTES

1. David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, IB Tauris, London, 2009, p. 19.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p. 15.
4. Details of Wahhabi doctrine may be obtained from: Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam—From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, Oxford University Press, London, 2004; Commins, no. 1, p. 10-21; and Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State—Islamic voices from a New Generation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 22-24.
5. Guido Steinberg, "Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is- Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of Anti-Shi'ism", in Roel Meijer (Ed.), *Global Salafism—Islam's New Religious Movement*, Hurst & Co., London, 2009, p. 112.
6. Ibid, p. 113.
7. Ibid, pp. 114-15.
8. Ibid, p. 115.

3

Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 in Egypt, by Hasan Al-Banna (1906-49), was at its inception committed to *Daawa*, i.e., an organised doctrinal effort to create a better Muslim, without participating in the country's political process. Though rooted in Salafiyya, the Brotherhood had a broad based educational, social and welfare programme that included: setting up schools for boys and girls; a scout movement; clinics and hospitals; sanitation; health education and even trade unions. Within two decades, as Karen Armstrong has noted, the Brotherhood had succeeded in establishing a "massively successful counter-culture" to the government.[1] It functioned outside the framework of the state and sought a Muslim society rather than a Muslim state. In 1928, it had a membership of about 20,000, which expanded to about half a million active members in 1948.[2] It also set up branches in other Arab countries such as Syria, Jordan and Palestine, though each branch functioned differently from the "mother" grouping in Egypt, in some cases even actively participating in local politics and elections.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt remained largely focussed on religion and society. It eschewed politics for fear of fanning internal strife, and, hence, in those early years, did not develop an elaborate or sophisticated political theory and political strategy. In line with traditional Islamic injunctions, its members were enjoined "obedience"

and "listening", and its senior officials were nominated by the Supreme Guide.[3] However, even this limited activity brought the Brotherhood into frequent conflict with state leaderships, both, monarchical and revolutionary, because its large following inevitably made it a political force, though on some rare occasions it also attempted to work with the governments of the day.

The Brotherhood initially collaborated with the July 1952 revolution in Egypt, when half of the revolutionary council was made up of prominent Muslim Brothers. Two of the revolutionary leaders, Nasser and Sadat, had ties with Hasan Al-Banna because they shared a common anti-regime and anti-colonial platform. However, after the rupture between the Free Officers, i.e., Nasser and Mohammed Najib, the Brothers supported the latter. This estrangement culminated in an assassination attempt on Nasser by a member of the Brotherhood in October 1954. Nasser then dissolved the Brotherhood, arrested some prominent members and executed some others.[4]

Political Theory and Practice

In his pioneering study of the Muslim Brotherhood, first published in 1969, the American scholar, Richard P. Mitchell, analysed the various writings and pronouncements of the principal Brotherhood leaders, including Hasan Al-Banna, and elucidated the organisation's philosophy, ideology and its thinking on various aspects of state order and system. These are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Philosophical Moorings

The Brotherhood's philosophical framework is based on the beliefs of the pioneers of Islamic modernism, Al-Afghani, Mohammed Abduh and Rashid Rida. Al-Afghani was the "caller", the one who proclaimed the Muslim renaissance. He was the "spiritual father" of the movement because he introduced the concept of activism.[5] Abduh was venerated because he: (i) simplified Islam to prevent internecine conflict; (ii) attached the highest importance to educational reform; and, (iii) while seeking a place for Islam in the modern world, advocated going back to the roots of Islam.[6]

However, as the Brotherhood evolved, it appeared to be following the line taken by Abduh's student, Rashid Rida. Al-Banna took the idea of "rigidity and puritanism", from Rida, which continued to

inform the thinking of Al-Banna's immediate successors as well.[7] Thus, Al-Banna, unlike Abduh, accorded the highest importance to the traditional jurists of Sunni Islam, gravitating, in the words of Prof. H.A.R. Gibb, "towards the exclusivism and rigidity of the Hanbelite outlook."[8]

Brotherhood Ideology

In line with the earlier modernist intellectuals, the Brotherhood too believed that the period of the first four caliphs was the ideal period, after which a decline set in due to the establishment of monarchies and the emergence of "schools" (madhhabs) and the perennial disputes amongst them. The open, innovative and creative spirit of Islam then stagnated into mindless ritual, fanaticism and neglect of "practical sciences".[9] This provided the enemies of Islam—the West and the Zionists—with the opportunity to destroy the Muslim states. The ulema, and particularly Al-Azhar, failed to deal with this challenge since the teachings of the latter were "dry, dead, ritualistic, irrelevant" and medieval.[10]

The Western political and economic domination of Muslim lands also meant that Western codes of law reigned supreme and replaced the traditional values and principles of Sharia. This "corrupted and perverted the nation's thought, mind and logic."[11] Western imperialism, in short, led to "slow annihilation and profound and complete corruption" in Egypt.[12] A "return to Islam" was the solution. As Al-Banna asserted:

> We believe the provisions of Islam and its teachings are all-inclusive, encompassing the affairs of the people in this world and the hereafter. And those who think that these teachings are concerned only with the Spiritual or ritualistic aspects are mistaken in this belief because Islam is a faith and a ritual, a nation (watan) and a nationality, a religion and a state, spirit and deed, holy text and sword....The Glorious Qur'an...considers [these things] to be the core of Islam and its essence....[13]

In fact, Islam encompassed the best features of all Western ideologies:

> If the French Revolution decreed the rights of man and declared for freedom, equality, and brotherhood, and if the Russian revolution brought closer the classes and social justice for people, the great Islamic revolution decreed all that 1,300 years before.

> It did not confine itself to the philosophical theories but rather spread these principles through daily life, and added to them [the notions of the] divinity of mankind, and the perfectibility of his virtues and [the fulfillment of] his spiritual tendencies.[14]

Therefore, it was essential to return to the principles and way of life of the first Muslims. This was not a call for a return to the seventh century. What was advocated was a return to *al-nizam al-islami* (an Islamic order) based on the legal principles of pristine Islam drawn from the Sharia.[15]

While the Sharia would be central to any Islamic order, a distinction had to be made between the principles of Sharia and the four schools of jurisprudence. The latter were just "words of scholars" which, while important as guides, still allowed Muslims to study the original texts for themselves. In fact, the Hadith traditions themselves needed to be revised to remove later interpolations and falsities, and new books needed to be written. The body of Sunna, in the view of one early Brotherhood member, was "a spiritual inspiration and guide", and perhaps a "fallible man's experience in society guiding fallible men."[16]

The Brotherhood position therefore was that the doors of ijtihad should be opened and traditional texts re-examined on the basis of other equally valid sources of law, *qiyas* (analogy) and *ijma* (consensus). In fact, the Brotherhood went beyond this to uphold the right of a Muslim ruler to legislate for the "general welfare" on issues on which there were no clear pronouncements or which, in the view of the ruler, needed to be reviewed in the modern context, (particularly with regard to the clearly sanctioned hudud punishments).[17]

The Islamic State

The Brotherhood recognised that Islam did not provide an elaborate political theory but only a set of "principles" on which the Islamic state was to be founded. These principles were:[18]

   (i) The Quran is the basic constitution;
  (ii) Government had to function on the basis of consultation (shura); and,
 (iii) The ruler was bound by the preachings of Islam and the will of the people.

The executive head could be variously termed caliph, imam, king or governor. His authority would be derived from the "will of the people", who would have a "social contract" with the ruler. The ruler was to be selected by an electoral process. He would establish and maintain Islam and implement its laws. The Islamic state also guaranteed its citizens, equality and freedom of thought, worship and expression. To these were added the right to education and "possession" i.e. property in reasonable quantity.[19]

Political Practice

The political philosophy, principles and organisation of an Islamic state, as envisaged by the top leaders and ideologues of the Brotherhood, clearly reflected both the modernist tradition of Al-Afghani and Abduh as well as the core tenets of Western democracy. These concepts were set out by the Brotherhood while in opposition, with no prospect of actually implementing them. It is also important to note that the Brotherhood had to frequently function underground as a secret society and was almost always at odds, first, with the royal rule and later with the three military regimes that ruled Egypt till the Arab Spring. Throughout this period, the Brotherhood could not internally arrive at a consensus on political philosophy and principles, and serious differences among the top leaders continued throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries.

Above all, the Brotherhood, regardless of the ruminations of its intellectuals, was rigidly hierarchical. During the Al-Banna period itself, there was evidence that he was intolerant of dissent, severely critical of "free thinkers" who sought to interpret Islamic texts independently. In fact, the Brotherhood's position would suggest that, while it advocated *ijtihad*, it perhaps wanted to retain this authority for itself.[20]

The Brotherhood, in its early decades, developed a deep sense of victimhood as its leaders and members suffered state-sponsored repression and exile. Throughout this period, it had a "secret apparatus", effectively its militant wing, which was a parallel centre of power, and represented the aggressive element in the organisation which continued upto the 1970s. Its membership was secret, and its cadres were organised in armed formations and trained in espionage and combat. This was the group that acquired a "terrorist orientation"

in 1954 and sought to assassinate Nasser, with serious consequences for the Brotherhood as a whole.[21]

Al-Banna firmly believed that "jihad is an obligation of every Muslim", and indeed, a pillar of Islam. Jihad for him meant *qital* (fighting) and martyrdom. These views permeated the training of Brotherhood cadres and extolled militancy and martyrdom. Al-Banna told his members that they were "the army of liberation, carrying on your shoulders the message of liberation; you are the battalions of salvation for this nation, afflicted by calamity."[22]

Thus, in its formative years, the Brotherhood articulated a reformist agenda, interpreting Islamic traditions within the framework of the broadest possible liberal values. At the same time, in its functioning, it manifested exclusiveness, intolerance of dissent, a conspiracy-oriented mindset, an inclination toward authoritarian diktat and a propensity to violence, all of which assumed significance when, after 80 years in opposition, it took up the reins and responsibilities of governance in Egypt.

Towards Political Participation

The bitter confrontation between the Brotherhood and the Nasser regime and the experience of imprisonment in the 1960s fostered a more radical orientation within the Brotherhood. It was led by the academic, philosopher and activist, Sayyid Qutb (1906-66). Even as Qutb projected "Islam" as an ideological force, his polity was totalitarian and supported the concept of "total war" with the West and with the home-based enemies of Islam. He recognised that contemporary society was in a state of *jahilliyya* (ignorance), and the irreligious and corrupt system needed to be reformed by a specially trained *talia* (vanguard):

> How is it possible to start the task of reviving Islam?... there should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of Jahiliyyah which has encompassed the entire world….[23]

Jihad for Qutb would be the principal weapon in the hands of Muslims against their unIslamic governments and Western imperialism.

Qutb spawned the next generation of Islamic radicals who became members of various extremist groups that emerged in Egypt. However, the moderate leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood rejected both of

Qutb's concepts—*jahilliyya* and jihad, and, instead, continued to pursue its agenda of realising an ideal Muslim society based on compassion and the rejection of violence.[24]

Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, at the outset attempted to change many aspects of Nasser's political order. He released the Brothers from prison and encouraged them to cooperate with his government. However, the Brothers got estranged from Sadat due to his peace agreement with Israel and what they saw as his acceptance of American influence over Egypt at the expense of Egypt's ties with the Arab countries. This estrangement gave a fillip to the radical Islamic groups in Egypt, under the influence of leaders such as Shukri Mustafa and Mohammed Abdul Salam Faraj. These diverse radical elements united under Gamaa Islamiyya, which embarked on an extensive programme of violent activities through most of the 1990s.

After pursuing relatively peaceful policies in Egypt for several decades, the Muslim Brotherhood slowly began to evolve its political theory and practice from the 1980s because it now had members from a new generation, many of whom were from the professional middle classes. Thus, it became a de facto political party, and its members contested elections in 1984 and 1987 as also in 2005, as independents. It however boycotted the elections of 1990, 2000 and 2009. Its members also fought elections to the various professional syndicates in Egypt, and won the medical syndicate elections in 1984; the engineers' syndicate in 1986, and the pharmacists' syndicate in 1988, and successfully contested the bar elections of 1992. It also expanded its presence on the university campuses and its members were elected to the students' unions at Cairo, Alexandria and at Al-Azhar. Through the 1990s, the Brotherhood, by virtue of its control over professional associations and its own network of charitable associations, was most effective in delivering social services, usually far more efficiently than the government.[25]

After Sadat's assassination, the Mubarak regime's central strategy was to use force against the Islamic movements, the radical and violent Gamaa Islamiya and the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood. The latter was condemned for presenting itself as the "acceptable face of violence" while being the fountainhead of Islamic terror.[26]

During this period, a divide emerged between the two generations of Brotherhood members, the top leadership that belonged to the pre-

Nasser and Nasser periods and the younger members who advocated a more active political role. The supreme guide, Mustafa Mashur, firmly rejected a political role and, instead, asserted that the Brotherhood would maintain its "presence" outside mainstream politics, in charitable, professional and banking and financial associations, which would provide it with a platform for *daawa* (preaching), and would in time enable it to achieve the "Islamic solution".[27] The Mubarak regime responded by outlawing the Brotherhood and arresting those who promoted active political participation.

In spite of this repression, the second half of the 20th century saw the emergence of a new generation of Islamic thinkers who sought to harmonise the precepts of Islam with the challenge of modern governance. They were: Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), Tariq al-Bishri (b. 1933), Kamal Abdul Majd (b. 1930) and Mohammed Salem al-Awwa (b. 1942). Bruce Rutherford terms their collective work as "Islamic constitutionalism".[28] The main point of their discourse was that "renewal of Sharia is essential for reviving the dignity and strength of the Islamic world."[29] While man-made laws could not be passed where there were clear Quranic and Hadith pronouncements, such laws could be promulgated on other matters, the guiding principle being *maslahah*, public good. Other avenues for undertaking *ijtihad* were: consensus (ijma), analogy (qiyas) and by synthesising ideas of different schools (talqid). They stressed the importance of the accountability of the ruler and consultation (Shura). The ruler was bound by contract to the ruled, and was to exercise his authority in accordance with the law and the will of the community. The new constitutionalists also advocated the setting up of an independent judiciary and creation of civil society organisations. With regard to the political system, they called for: elections, political parties, parliament, and full protection of the rights of the citizens, including those of women and non-Muslims.[30] Mohammed Salim Al-Awwa, an intellectual in the tradition of Abduh and Al-Banna, asserted "the absolute necessity of both pluralism and democracy", and echoed the liberal and inclusive political thinking of Al-Banna.[31] His pluralist state emerged from the Islamic principles of Shura, religious freedom, equality and accountability of the ruler. According to him, multi-partyism was also permitted in Islam as it is in the public interest.[32]

Pluralism, according to him, was compatible both with *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and the unity of the Muslim community, since unity offers scope for diversity.[33]

Inspired by the writings of these constitutionalists, the Brotherhood took the first tentative steps towards defining its political agenda. This culminated in the "Reform Initiative" of March 2004 and its campaign platform of October 2005. In these documents, the Brotherhood called for a republican form of government that would be democratic, constitutional and parliamentary, and would function in accordance with Islamic principles.[34] It also stressed the centrality of law, the protection of the people's rights, the autonomy of the judiciary, an elected parliament, strong political parties, and the protection of the rights of women and non-Muslims.[35] It should be noted that this political agenda was set when the Brotherhood was still outlawed and had no expectation of a political change that would give it the opportunity to actually implement this agenda.

Having briefly discussed the two principal Salafi movements—Wahhabiya and the Muslim Brotherhood, we can now examine in the next chapter some aspects of their engagement in the last century and their estrangement over the last decade.

NOTES

1.   Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God-Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Harper Collins Publishers, London 2001, p. 222.
2.   Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, Reprinted 1993, p. 328.
3.   Ibid, p. 300.
4.   Karen Armstrong no. 1, pp. 225-26; for details of the Brotherhood-Nasser relations see Richard P. Mitchell, no. 2, pp. 128-151.
5.   Mitchell, no. 2, pp. 321-22.
6.   Ibid, pp. 322-23.
7.   Ibid, p. 325.
8.   Ibid.
9.   Ibid, p. 210.
10.   Ibid, p. 213.
11.   Ibid, p. 223.
12.   Ibid.
13.   Ibid, pp. 232-33.
14.   Ibid, p. 233.
15.   Ibid, p. 234.
16.   Ibid, p. 238.
17.   Ibid, p. 239; for further details of Al-Banna's political thought, see: Ahmad

Moussalli "The Views of Islam's Movements on Democracy, and Political Pluralism, in *Islamic Movements—Impact on Political Stability in the Arab world*, The Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR), Abu Dhabi, 2003, pp. 129-34.

18. Mitchell, no. 2, p. 246.
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20. Ibid, p. 326.
21. Ibid, p. 206.
22. Ibid, p. 207.
23. John L. Esposito, *Unholy War—Terror in the Name of Islam*, International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh, Reprinted 2010, p. 59.
24. Radwan Al-Sayyid, "The Future of Islamic Movements in the Context of Changing Regimes and International Conditions", in *Islamic Movements*, no. 17, pp. 182-83.
25. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad—The Trail of Political Islam*, IB Tauris, London, Reprinted 2004, p. 293.
26. Ibid, p. 295.
27. Ibid, p. 296.
28. Bruce K. Rutherford, "What Do Egypt's Islamists Want?", in Mehrzad Boroujerdi (Ed), *Mirror for the Muslim Prince—Islam and the Theory of Statecraft*, Syracuse University Press, NY, p. 241.
29. Ibid, p. 245.
30. Ibid, pp. 246-50.
31. Mousalli, no. 17, pp. 137-38.
32. Ibid.
33. Larbi Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy—Discourse and Counter-Discourses*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004, pp. 244-45.
34. Rutherford, no. 28, p. 259.
35. Ibid, pp. 259-65.

4

Wahhabiya—Brotherhood Engagement and Estrangement

The most potent challenge to the Saudi royal authority was posed in 1979, by a messianic leader, Juhayman Al-Otaibi, who took over the Haram Sharif in Mecca and proclaimed the arrival of the Messiah in the shape of his brother-in-law, Mohammed Al-Qahtani. This insurrection was put down fairly quickly by military action. The Haram Sharif was retaken, the rebels were apprehended and later executed.[1] However, the Kingdom's state order was to face another challenge which, though less dramatic, was much more significant since it emerged from the heart of the Wahhabi religious establishment.

The Sahwa Movement
The quietest Salafi tradition of the Kingdom came under the direct influence of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood who were welcomed into Saudi Arabia from Egypt after 1954 when Nasser first cracked down on them, and, after 1970, when there was a steady stream of the Brothers from Egypt and other Arab countries, initially on account of the employment opportunities available to them and, in 1982, due to the harsh action taken against them in Syria by Hafez Al-Assad.

The Muslim Brothers' role in the political domain was first

encouraged by King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal when Saudi Arabia was in ideological and political competition with Nasser. The Kingdom then used Islam as a "counter-ideology" to Nasser's Arab Socialism, and utilised the services of the Brotherhood in this regard.[2] As Lacroix has pointed out, the members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia:

> were increasingly brought into the anti-Nasser propaganda apparatus and became its core by 1962. No one but these experienced Islamists, sometimes themselves Nasser's victims, was in a better position to denounce the "ungodliness" of his secular government and to use Islam as a weapon against it.[3]

Separately, the Brothers were given an active role in the setting up and strengthening of the Kingdom's nascent Islamic institutions of higher education, such as the Islamic University of Medina established in 1961, and later the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah and the Umm Al-Qura University in Mecca. Stalwarts from the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Mohammad Qutb, Sayyid Qutb's brother, came to occupy senior positions in these institutions. Some of the Brothers also taught in religious secondary schools known as Scientific Institutes.

Thus an entire generation of Saudi students came under their influence and this led to the establishment of a "counter-culture" in the Kingdom, which penetrated different arenas of the country through the education system. This new social movement became known as *Al-Sahwa Al-Islamia* (Islamic Awakening) or just Sahwa. The Sahwa was influenced by two different traditions—the Wahhabi tradition of Islamic ritual purity and the Brotherhood tradition of political and cultural activism. The Sahwis were organised in Saudi Arabia in *jamaats* (groups) formed around prominent leaders. In due course, four such jamaats came to be located in Riyadh and Jeddah.[4]

In the 1980s, Saudi students, as they came into the workplace fresh from university, encountered a generation of countrymen who were highly westernised and whom (because of the Brotherhood's influence) they came to see as "the generation of defeat, secularism and westernisation". These Sahwis believed that their country was the victim of a "secular-masonic plot" to eradicate Islam from the country.[5]

This sense of deep alienation led the Sahwis to question the establishment ulema and, in due course, challenge their monopoly

over Islamic interpretation. They argued that, in order to understand current situations and ideas that undermine faith, and to pursue "the legitimate means of protecting the ummah and making it advance now and in the future, the ulema needed not just mastery over the religious sciences but also vast knowledge of social sciences such as history, contemporary political science and the media."[6] The clear implication was that, since most of the establishment ulema in the Kingdom only had knowledge of religion and little else, they could not be effective in the fight against westernisation and secularism.

This criticism of the ulema was slowly extended to the royal family since the Wahhabi religious establishment was seen as its appendage. The Gulf war of 1990-91 acted as a catalyst for this critique of the royal family. In order to obtain religious sanction for allowing US troops into the Kingdom, the Saudi ruler, King Fahd, obtained a fatwa from the Council of the Committee of Senior Ulema in which it "support [ed] the actions decided on by the leader—may God grant him success— to call upon qualified forces possessing equipment provoking fear and terror in those who would like to commit aggression against this country." Later, the President of the Supreme Council of Justice, followed by the judges of the Final Court of Appeal, gave a similar opinion. Thus, establishment ulema and their institutions extended full support to the royal family in the hour of a grave national, spiritual and political crisis.[7]

Amidst these serious challenges, the Sahwi also witnessed a certain aggressiveness on the part of liberal intellectuals and activists whose writings dominated the Saudi and royal family-owned pan-Arab media. These provocations culminated in the attempt by 49 Saudi women to drive in 15 cars in Riyadh and posing a direct challenge to religious restrictions in this regard.[8]

Sahwi Critique of the Saudi Order

The first organised Sahwi action in Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the Gulf war was the presentation of a "Letter of Demands" to the King in May 1991, which was signed by 52 religious scholars.[9] The petition called for the establishment of a Consultative Council independent of any governmental influence; the repeal of all laws and regulations not conforming to the Sharia, as decided by competent committees; and insisted that all government officials be moral and

not corrupt. Justice, said the petitioners, must be applied fairly to all sections of the population without favouritism. Public wealth must be distributed equally, with fees reduced and monopolies eliminated. Banks must be cleansed of usury. For national defence, a strong army was necessary, tasked with protecting the country and the holy sites and supplied with arms from different sources; the development of a local arms industry should be given priority.

The new media, the petition stated, must serve Islam and strengthen the moral fabric of society by adhering to the Sharia and spread knowledge by constructive criticism and truthful reporting. Foreign policy must be based on the national interest without relying on alliances not sanctioned by the Sharia, and it must support Islamic causes. Saudi embassies must be revamped to reflect the Islamic character of the country. Islamic religious institutions, particularly those furthering Islam, must be strengthened. Judicial institutions must be allowed to operate independently. The rights of individuals must be guaranteed, in accordance with accepted religious safeguards.

Instead of addressing the issues raised in the letter, the Saudi authorities separately interrogated all the signatories, some of whom were imprisoned but released shortly thereafter.

After this, the Islamic dissidents issued the "Memorandum of Advice".[10] This document echoed the *ijma* (the basic document of consensus) of the Saudi Sahwa and critiqued several aspects of the Saudi system. These included: the role of the ulema; law and the judicial system; human rights; public administration; the economy; the armed forces; the information system and foreign policy. The Memorandum was signed by 109 persons, many of whom were from the Saudi heartland of Najd.

In September 1992, the Council of Senior Ulema headed by Sheikh Bin Baz condemned the memorandum. It accused the petitioners of fomenting dissent, exaggerating the Kingdom's shortcomings, and ignoring the good work done by the state. The Council stated that the signatories had "deviationist ideological links" and were encouraging discord. The royal family reacted to the Sahwi petitions by arresting the leaders and releasing them only after they had signed an undertaking not to participate in political activity. The government also made major changes in the education and religious spheres to restrict the participation of Sahwi scholars.[11]

The Sahwa-Liberal Combine after 9/11

The events of 9/11 had the salutary effect of prompting serious introspection on the part of the Saudi leadership on certain aspects of their order, particularly the place of religion in it. From December 1997, presumably in the wake of bombings in Saudi Arabia in November 1995 and April 1996, as also the emergence of the Taliban, Saudi leaders had already begun to articulate a moderate and accommodative Islamic approach that condemned extremism and violence and called for a dialogue to bridge the sectarian divide. Now, in the face of grave domestic and international concerns that saw the Saudi order as a breeding ground for extremism and violence, Crown Prince Abdullah intervened to advocate moderation both in the Islamic discourse prevailing in the country as also in the pronouncements of clergymen, along with sweeping educational reform.

Abdullah also entered the sensitive area of politics with a reform programme that was published in Arabic and English in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* and *Arab News*, respectively, on 13 January, 2003. The "Charter to reform the Arab condition," consisted of a strongly–worded critique of the Arab situation and included a commitment on the part of Arab leaders to reform the Arab nation.[12] The Charter took note of "weakness and powerlessness" of the Arab nation that had made it an easy target for its enemies. It asserted that the time has come to "reinvigorate the national soul and rekindle its determination to prove that the Arabs are able to establish themselves as a living nation capable of facing the challenges and threats posed by the ongoing developments and their accelerated ramifications." The most significant aspects of the Charter were the following:

> *Self-reform and the promotion of political participation in Arab countries represent two basic tools for building Arab capabilities.* They provide the conditions needed to realize comprehensive and sustainable development, meet the requirements of positive engagement in international affairs, encourage creative thinking and deal objectively with international changes, notably globalisation and the rise of mega economic blocks, as well as catch up with the rapid development in such areas as technology, communication and information (emphasis added).

On 19 January 2003, soon after the publication of the Crown Prince's "Charter" for reform, a Memorandum entitled: "A Strategic Vision for the Present and Future of this Country", was sent to Crown Prince Abdullah,[13] the signatories of which said that their vision for the country envisaged five pivots. Of these, the most basic was that steps had to be taken to set up constitutional bodies with provisions for separation of powers, the basic rights of citizens, and for a representational assembly through popular participation. This was an "Islamo-liberal" petition, an interesting aspect of which was that it provided an opportunity to the Shias in Saudi Arabia to publicly express their point of view. On 30 April 2003, a group of prominent Shias in Saudi Arabia submitted a 12-page petition to Crown Prince Abdullah, which called for an end to sectarian discrimination and advocated Shiite representation in the council of ministers, government departments, diplomatic assignments, military and security systems, and in the Shoura Council. Later in the year, more petitions were submitted to the Crown Prince, culminating in the second Islamo-liberal petition of 20 December 2003, which called for sweeping constitutional reform, including an "Islamic Constitutional Monarchy."[14]

This period, which lasted for about a year, with its plethora of liberal petitions and royal initiatives, was prematurely dubbed the "Riyadh Spring". It gave way to the "disappointment and demoralisation" of 2004.

The Wahhabi–Brotherhood Estrangement

Following the events of 9/11, just as Crown Prince Abdullah represented the "liberal" part of the royal family, the interior minister, Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz, represented the "conservative" strand. Both these approaches complemented each other and were aimed at protecting the interests of the Al-Saud and the Kingdom at a time of a grave national crisis.[16] Prince Naif's approach was manifested in November 2002, when he publicly distanced the Kingdom from the Muslim Brotherhood which it had accommodated for several decades but who it now blamed for the radicalisation of its youth. Following a wide-ranging interview with the Prince, (published in the *Riyadh Daily* on 28 November 2002), the Kuwaiti newspaper, *Al-Siyasah*, reported:

Asked whether he [Prince Naif] could remember any incident during his 30 years at Ministry of Interior where Saudi security men had oppressed people, Prince Naif said that he had not come across a single case of oppression but added that they exercised firmness in order to put off things before they took place. He added that the worst thing that took place while [he was] shouldering the responsibility of the Ministry was the attack on Al-Haram Mosque in Makkah, which ended within two weeks. He noted that some of those behind the attack were influenced by the Muslim Brothers, others by Al-Tableegh group.

He stressed that all the problems in the Arab and Islamic world came from the Muslim Brothers. "I said it due to my responsibility that when Muslim Brothers were cornered in their home countries and the gallows were prepared for them, they took refuge in the Kingdom." He added that the Kingdom had saved their lives and provided them with jobs, but they did not forget their previous links and started to gather people around them and they also turned against the Kingdom.

He pointed out that when Kuwait was invaded by Iraq, a number of Ulema like Abdulrahman Al-Khalifa, Ghanoushi, Turabi and Zendani came to the Kingdom and met with the King and the Crown Prince. "We asked them: do you accept a country to invade another country? They said they had come here to listen and exchange views, but when they arrived in Iraq, we were surprised that they issued a statement in support of Iraq," Prince Naif indicated. [17]

These remarks of Prince Naif were notable for a number of reasons: first, this was the first public attack by a senior Saudi leader on the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been welcomed in the Kingdom for nearly 50 years. Naif specifically linked it to the attack on the Haram Sharif in 1979, perhaps on the ground that Juhayman Al-Otaibi had a marginal link with the Sahwa. Clearly, the broader suggestion implicit in Naif's remarks was that the Muslim Brothers were directly responsible for the entire Islamic dissident movement in the Kingdom.

Secondly, he specifically named certain Islamist leaders who held sway during the early 1990s, and who he characterised as apologists for Saddam Hussein. The reference to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was important because much of contemporary anti-Saudi Islamic dissent

took place after this episode. The jihadi assault on the Kingdom had taken place after the Gulf war, which had exposed the Saudi leadership's dependence on the USA and the West in general for its own security and the security of the Holy Cities in the Kingdom.

Thirdly, the reference to the Muslim Brotherhood constituted an attempt to extend the geographical range of anti-establishment Islam and to provide it with a deeper historical context. The intent was to take Islamist discourse back to the early years of the Brotherhood and, in so doing, shift the focus away from Saudi-supported Islamic activism within the Kingdom and/or sponsored by the Kingdom in other countries.[18] The criticism of the Muslim Brothers for their ingratitude was an attempt to delink them from the Saudi leadership and to deny the symbiotic relationship that had existed between the two for several decades.

These remarks effectively marked the end of the mutually beneficial engagement between the Wahhabiya and the Brotherhood and that divide persists to this day.

NOTES

1. For a detailed account of this episode see: Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca—The Forgotten Uprising,* Allen Lane—an imprint of Penguin Books, London, 2007.
2. Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam—The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, Hurst & Co., London, p. 41.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, pp. 122-29.
5. Ibid, p. 131.
6. Ibid, p. 145.
7. Ibid, p. 159.
8. Ibid, pp. 163-64; David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, IB Tauris, London, 2009, p. 178.
9. Commins, no. 8, pp. 178-79; Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia—Power, Legitimacy, and Survival*, Routledge, Oxford, 2006, p. 95; Lacroix, no. 2, pp. 179-83.
10. Lacroix, no. 2, p. 185-86; Niblock, no. 9, p. 96; Commins, no. 8, pp. 180-81.
11. Lacroix, pp. 207-09.
12. *Arab News*, Jeddah, 13 January, 2003.
13. Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State—Islamic Voices from a New Generation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 232.
14. Ibid, pp. 247-48.
15. Ibid, p. 231.
16. This dual approach at the highest level of the Saudi royal family has been noted both by Al-Rasheed, no. 13, pp. 235-36, and Lacroix, no. 2, p. 240. However, as subsequent events in 2004 would reveal, the two postures complemented each

other, in keeping with the consensual approach of the senior royals in matters of royal and national interest.

17.   *Riyadh Daily*, Riyadh, 28 November, 2002.

18.   For details of Saudi Arabia's outreach programmes based on "religious expansion" see: Madawi Al-Rasheed (Ed.) *Kingdom Without Borders, Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, Hurst & Co., London, 2008; also Gilles Kepel, *Jihad—The Trail of Political Islam*, IB Tauris, London, Reprinted 2004, pp. 69-80.

5

The Arab Spring and its Aftermath

While there is an ongoing debate on the various factors that led to the first popular agitation in Tunisia from mid-December 2010 onwards and its quick spread across different parts of the Arab world, it is clear that the main source of discontent was the economic failure of the state which engendered deep frustration among young people about rising unemployment, under-employment, and the exclusion and humiliation endured by them. The widespread poverty and economic mismanagement were also accompanied by rampant corruption and the vulgar wealth and gross self-indulgence of their leadership. This led the youth to demand an economic order based on transparency and accountability and a reformed political system based on popular participation.[1]

The present scenario across the Arab world following the Arab Spring is as follows: first, in three countries, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, despots who had ruled for 30 years or more, have been evicted from their positions by an indigenous popular upsurge. In Tunisia and Egypt they were replaced by elected governments formed by mainstream Islamist parties. However, the Islamist government in Egypt was ousted in a military coup in July 2013 after only one year in power. In Libya and Syria, the incumbent leaders confronted the uprisings militarily. In Libya, this led to a civil war situation, with Western countries (along with some Arab allies) overtly supporting

the opposition and covertly providing military assistance to the insurgents. This culminated in the death of the leader, Muammar Gaddafi, which has since been followed by widespread murder and mayhem. The elected government in Tripoli has been unable to establish its authority across the country and warlords hold sway in different areas. In Syria, there is an ongoing bloody civil conflict, with Arab and Western countries providing military and financial to insurgents. Given the powerful forces ranged against it, the Assad government is under intense pressure and faces an uncertain future.

The third aspect of the scenario is the attempt being made by GCC countries to address domestic discontent by giving to the populace financial benefits, expanded welfare facilities and greater employment opportunities. In March 2011, Saudi forces, with UAE military support, helped the government of Bahrain to disperse dissidents and arrest their leaders. However, sporadic public demonstrations continue and the outlook for the country's stability remains uncertain.

In Oman, the Sultan defused public anger by acting quickly to provide financial benefits to young people, particularly the unemployed, thoroughly revamping the council of ministers and setting up a commission to look at political reform. In Saudi Arabia, the leadership has made huge financial outlays, estimated at $140 billion, to provide immediate financial support to certain disadvantaged categories, including the young and unemployed, and loans on easy terms to those in immediate need, particularly in the shape of housing loans. However, while public dissent is generally muted, occasional Shia protests in the Eastern Province continue.

Saudi Arabia, alarmed by Mubarak's ouster, drew a firm line against political change in Bahrain. By characterising the unrest in Bahrain as a conspiracy engineered by Iran, it went on to use some strong rhetoric against Iran's "hegemonic aspirations" across the Arab world, and affirmed that it would counter Iranian influence in the region—specifically Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine.

Turkey as a "model" for the Arab Spring Countries

In the early months of the Spring, there was considerable speculation in the media and academic and political circles as to whether Turkey's experience of the emergence and electoral success of an "Islamist" party could influence the course of the Arab Spring. And, further,

whether the Turkish scenario could determine the nature and direction of the Islamist role in the Arab world.

At first glance, the Turkish model did appear to offer an acceptable frame of reference for the Arab situation. Prime Minister Erdogan undertook an "Arab Spring" tour of Libya, Tunisia and Egypt in September 2011, where he projected Turkey as a model for the region in the throes of change.

The comparison of the Arab Spring with the Turkish model was most alluring. In Turkey, an avowedly Islam-oriented party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), had come to power through a democratic process and had constructed "a civil, democratic and non-sectarian political order."[2] It had thus affirmed that Islamism was compatible with the democratic process. In terms of its ideological orientation, the AKP stood for economic liberalism and social conservatism, which again resonated positively with the mainstream Islamist parties in WANA, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Nahda in Tunisia.

The historical experience of the AKP was again not very different from that of the mainstream Arab parties. Both had survived in a hostile political environment—a determined secular order in Turkey upheld zealously by the armed forces and repressive authoritarian regimes in the Arab world. In fact, in the face of the burgeoning sectarian divide and Iran's "hegemonic" intentions, an Islamist Turkey also came to be seen in some quarters of the Arab world as a valued ally on the Sunni side in the ongoing regional competition, particularly since Turkey had, over the previous two years, distanced itself to some extent from the USA and Israel and was exhibiting an increasingly constructive interest in West Asian affairs.

In keeping with the Turkish constitution, the AKP on its part consistently denied that it was an Islamic party, and stressed its "secular" political and economic credentials. But, this was seen as "the adaptability of the AKP in adverse conditions and its ability to survive and sustain its position of power in the context of hostile state structures and political culture."[3]

Later, however, commentators began to draw attention to the differences between the Turkish and Arab situations, and now Turkey is hardly ever cited as a model for Arab states in the throes of political change. The main point highlighted now is that Turkey has a vigorous

secular tradition that is strictly upheld by its armed forces. On the other hand, the cultural ethos in the Arab world, in spite of the long years of secular domination, is still largely religious. As Hassan Mneimneh noted: "Secularism as a whole lost its appeal for many [in the Arab world] who were trapped under the…dismal rule of increasingly autocratic and kleptocratic Arab governments."[4]

To the question whether the experience of AKP can serve as a guide for the future conduct of Islamist parties in power in the Arab world, there is no unambiguous answer. At least two observers have raised concerns. The distinguished commentator on West Asian politics and culture, Sami Zubaida, has noted that AKP's repeated electoral successes have begun to encroach "on the plurality of power centres" in Turkey which had enabled the democratic process to flourish so far, but now the polity is witnessing a distinct move toward "majoritarian authoritarianism."[5] The Turkish writer, Soner Cagatay, echoes this view, citing the increasing intolerance of criticism and dissent on the part of AKP's leaders. He says: "The AKP's recent history shows that majority or near-majority popular support leads Islamist parties and liberal political movements to re-embrace their authoritarian antecedents."[6] These could be pessimistic perceptions and, just as the Turkish and Arab situations are quite different in terms of recent history, so also the prognosis with regard to their situations can be expected to be different. In any case, the recent widespread expressions of popular dissatisfaction with the Erdogan government and the ouster of Morsi have diluted AKP's position as a role model for the Arab Spring.

The scenarios in countries that are in the throes of replacing the old order are examined in the following paragraphs.

Tunisia

After the electoral triumph of Al-Nahda, concerns have been expressed about the increasing influence of radical Islamic groups in Tunisia and the apparent reluctance of the government to confront them. Such concerns commenced after the attack on the US embassy in Tunis on 14 September 2011, following protests in different parts of the Muslim world against an anti-Islamic film made in the USA. At that time, it was reported that an extremist cleric, Abu Iyad, who had earlier been associated with the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and the assassination of

Ahmad Shah Masoud, had established a radical group, Ansar Al-Sharia, which had some connection with the Libyan group of the same name. According to one observer, Al-Nahda's response to such extremist acts was "marked by confusion" and a "reluctance" to attack the Salafi jihadis.[7] Another observer felt that Al-Nahda's caution stemmed from its desire to win over its various opponents through dialogue and "gradualism" in order to maintain its grip on power and not cede space to other more extremist groups.[8]

Other commentators present a more balanced picture, suggesting that, even in these early days of democracy, Tunisia has a government that is working in coalition with liberal parties; a functioning Constitutional Assembly; a vibrant opposition, and a powerful civil society that includes a trade union movement and political parties that are not in the assembly. In the social and cultural arena too, a liberal ethos prevails in the country.[9] The political scenario has been strengthened by the emergence of the Nida Tunis, a liberal grouping of non-Islamist leftist and nationalist parties, that advocates moderation in politics and appeals to the liberal middle-class.

However, on the second anniversary of the revolution, the mood in Tunisia was sombre and there was an all-pervasive dissatisfaction with the slow pace of economic change. This dissatisfaction found widespread and robust expression following the assassination on 6 February, 2013, of Shokri Belaid, the leader of the Popular Front bloc, a coalition of left wing and progressive parties. Before the Arab Spring, Belaid had been an active and vocal opposition leader, coordinating the secularist and leftist Democratic Patriots Movement, which later became the Popular Front. Belaid's assassination triggered nationwide protests, uniting all sections of the Tunisian polity who were unhappy with the government. Though there is no evidence of the involvement of the ruling Al-Nahda in the murder, the event led the Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, who is also the Secretary-General of Al-Nahda, to suggest that the present government led by his party be replaced by a government of technocrats. This caused a public split between the prime minister and the founder of the ruling party, Rashid Ghannouchi, who was against a change in the government setup, leading to Jebali's resignation. Overall, in Tunisia, as an observer has noted, this is "a time of exceptional partisanship and ideological polarisation."[10]

Ghannouchi on his part has robustly denied that his party is pursuing a radical Islamist agenda, asserting that: "Tunisia has proved the Arab Spring hasn't turned into a fundamentalist winter."[11] He has also denied that his party is accommodating Salafis, by distinguishing between "scientific Salafists" who are strict in religious matters and the radicals who veer toward violence. He has denied any polarisation between Islamists and secularists, saying that the government would be moderate in its approach and accommodate liberal values. He illustrated this by pointing out that the government had not insisted on including any reference to the Sharia in the constitution because the Tunisian people had already agreed that the nation's identity should be Arab and Muslim.[12] At the same time, there is intense competition between Al-Nahda and the Salafi groups to broaden their support base in the country, particularly among the youth.[13]

Egypt

Rapid political developments have taken place in Egypt since the ouster of President Mubarak in February 2011. These include:

- elections to Parliament and the Presidency;
- the ruling military council giving itself sweeping powers in June 2012 on the eve of the swearing in of President Morsi;
- the dissolution of the elected parliament by the Supreme Court;
- the President's annulment of the dissolution of the Parliament, a decree that was frozen by the Supreme Court and then withdrawn by the President;
- the scrapping of the sweeping powers of the military by the President;
- the president giving himself new powers, igniting protests across the country;
- the adoption of a draft constitution by the Constituent Assembly;
- the approval of the Constitution by a 64 per cent popular vote—in December 2012;
- postponing of parliamentary elections following court intervention in March 2013; and
- widespread anti-government demonstrations across Egypt at

the end of June 2013, which culminated in the ouster of the
Morsi government by the army on 3 July, 2013.

Party-based free elections in Egypt, the affirmation of civilian
domination over the armed forces and the preparation of a new
constitution, all of these were features that were novel in the Egyptian
political scene; hence, not surprisingly, they evoked considerable
domestic contention and concerns in the regional and Western media
regarding specific developments. Obviously, the political process was
complicated by the fact that political parties involved in the fray
represented specific segments of the population, with no single
grouping enjoying clear majority support. The sharpest divide was
between the Islamic groups and those with a liberal/secular
orientation. Women and religious minorities were especially concerned
about their status and rights in the emerging Islamist political order.

The Muslim Brotherhood has existed in Egypt for over 80 years.
Throughout this period, it has generally been in opposition to the
government of the day, and its leaders and members have suffered
prolonged incarceration and abuse. However, while in opposition, the
Brotherhood developed grassroots structures through its educational
and welfare programmes, and befriended the lower strata of Egyptian
society whose interests had been marginalised by the authoritarian
administrations. The Brotherhood also maintained an Islamic
orientation in its philosophy, politics and institutions, and thus was
in harmony with the cultural moorings of the bulk of the Egyptian
population.

Though, between the 1960s-1980s, some of its leaders and members
had affiliated themselves with the radical strand in political Islam, over
the previous two decades the Brotherhood carefully moderated its
platform in order to accommodate a wider range of opinion. All these
factors facilitated its electoral success. But, the success was not
overwhelming. In spite of very limited time available for setting up
of party structures and organising themselves for elections, non-
Islamist groups did achieve a fair modicum of electoral success. More
seriously, the Brotherhood has also had to share the Islamist space with
its more radical cousin, the Salafist Al-Nour Party, which has now
donned the mantle of the opposition, and has occupied the radical
space vacated by the Brotherhood as it sought to moderate its policies.

The nascent Egyptian political order enjoyed no "honeymoon" period either domestically or externally. The President from time to time revealed his lack of experience by issuing peremptory orders and then withdrawing them under pressure. His decree for granting himself sweeping powers earned him particular odium and he was criticised as the "new pharaoh". He sought an extension of two months for the Constituent Assembly and then, fearing that it might not be granted, rushed through the Constitution in a few hours and held a national referendum to obtain popular approval.

From time to time, commentators came forward to defend Morsi's actions, saying that he had assumed sweeping powers (exempting his decisions and those of the elected Constituent Assembly from challenges by courts and other government institutions) to protect the Constitution from the vestiges of the earlier political order that still controlled the judiciary, the security forces and the media, in short the "deep government" of the Mubarak era. Nathan Brown writing in *Foreign Affairs* said that "there is much to like in the document (constitution)", especially compared to the one it is replacing.[14] He pointed out that the draft contained a long list of freedoms that could not be suspended by government. At the same time, he admitted that the process by which the Constituent Assembly was set up and the haste with which it did its work had caused "extensive institutional wreckage and political damage."

In a later more detailed study of the provisions of the constitution, Nathan Brown (with Clark Lombardi) noted that Article 2 of the new draft repeated the Article of the 1971 and 1980 constitutions and stated that "the principles of Islamic Sharia" shall be "the main source of legislation".[15] Beyond this, Article 4 and Article 219, of the constitution reflected the debate that took place among non-Brotherhood parties in the Constituent Assembly in which the Brotherhood itself perhaps did not play an active role. Article 3 states that the "opinion" of Egypt's most prominent religious institution, Al-Azhar, is to be considered in matters related to Islamic law. The wording of Article 219 has the imprint of the Al-Nour party. The article reads: "The principles of the Islamic Sharia include its *adilla kulliya, qawa 'id usuli* and *qawa 'id fiqhiyya* and the sources considered by the Sunni *madhhabs*." The italicised words, Brown and Lombardi point out, are technical terms from Islamic law and are rarely used outside scholarly circles.[16]

Omar Ashoor has pointed out that Al-Nour put in this clause to provide a degree of specificity to the terms "principles" of Islamic law and "opinion" contained in Articles 2 and 4 of the draft.[17] The term *"adilla kulliyya"* refers to all the scriptural sources of Sunni divine law, including the Quran and the Sunna and the four principal schools of Sunni Islam (*madhhabs*). The other terms pertain to *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and refer to the procedure by which specific law was derived by scholars (*usul al-fiqh*) and the underlying principles informing the rulings of earlier scholars (*qawaid fiqhiyya*). In insisting on this article, the Al-Nour members were anxious to pre-empt any attempt to interpret the Sharia with flexibility as preferred by the Islamist liberal modernists, which is anathema for the doctrinaire Salafis.

Almost every political development in Egypt over the last two years, but particularly the finalisation and approval of the constitution, was marked by a shrill criticism of the Brotherhood and President Mohammed Morsi, whom the opposition considered incompetent and bumbling, or, more seriously, as pursuing an extremist Islamic agenda that would give Egypt a political order that was similar to that of Iran. Above all, he was indicted for abandoning all attempts at building a consensus so that the constitution and government functioning could reflect Egyptian culture and its varied composition, along with the aspirations of Egyptian society. Observers noted that the constitutional process, particularly the haste with which it was completed and put to vote, had thoroughly polarised Egypt, perhaps irretrievably. H.A. Hellyer was particularly harsh in his assessment: "In process, the draft is abysmal. In context, it revises history. In content, it is silent, vague and problematic. In consequence, it is bloody."[18]

Yasmine El Rashidi also wrote a strongly worded critique of the constitution-making process and the text itself. She noted the unseemly haste with which the document was completed and the intimidation of the Supreme Constitutional Court by Brotherhood activists, as also the fact that only 33 percent of registered voters endorsed the constitution in the referendum. She concluded by bemoaning the "larger political divide" that had opened up in the country, and the "very clear beginnings of sectarian and civil strife" that pitted the Brotherhood "against an opposition of many different stripes".[19]

Zaid Al-Ali offered a more balanced analysis of the constitution and highlighted the following positive features:[20]

- the drafting process was the first undertaken by an elected body in the country;
- the parliament has been given significant authority in government formation and dismissal;
- it restricts the power of the President to invoke a state of emergency;
- it protects judicial independence;
- it grants the full range of rights of a democratic society

The negative features, according to him, were:

- the Constituent Assembly strictly adhered to the arbitrary six-month deadline set by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces;
- it took the 1971 Constitution as its basis instead of making a fresh start, as in Tunisia;
- it gives the President the right to appoint one-tenth of the members of the Upper House;
- it "imposes a conservative vision of society on the country", while enumerating the rights of citizens;
- the document is quite confusing since provisions pertaining to a single issue are scattered across the document; and,
- in the area of civil-military relations, the text is heavily tilted in favour of the armed forces: the defence minister has to be from the armed forces; civilians can be tried by military courts for crimes that "harm the armed forces"; the National Defence Council is dominated by the armed forces; the military budget is to remain secret and outside parliamentary review.

The Constitution was criticised by the liberals on the ground that it could result in an Iran-style theocratic state in Egypt. Al-Ali rejected this, saying that "the constitution builds on the notion that Egypt is a religiously inspired state, but does not actually establish a 'religious' state per se."[21] He noted that Article 219 provides that "the entire body of Islamic Jurisprudence" will now be the "source of inspiration" for legislation. Moreover, he stated that even this was "sufficiently broad" to allow a variety of opinions on different issues and the courts would continue to have room for manoeuvre. He also pointed out that the Article pertaining to obtaining the opinion of Al-Azhar was

ambiguous: it was not clear how much weight would be accorded to its opinion; whether the courts could take a view that contradicted Al-Azhar, or whether the courts could consult others as well. However, he conceded that this provision would certainly exacerbate the struggle for control over Al-Azhar and its Council of Senior Scholars.[22]

Commentators from the GCC were particularly harsh on the Egyptian president and critical of the political developments in the country. The distinguished Saudi journalist, Abdul Rehman Al-Rashed, said of the President:

> The constitution is not going to feed the Egyptian people, nor will it secure work or shelter for them. Those who voted "yes" today [on the referendum] will never forgive Morsi when the prices rise tomorrow and when hundreds of thousands of youths find themselves jobless. Because of his intransigence and incompetent political performance, Morsi will end up on his own after alienating all other political functions and turning them, through the constitution fiasco, into enemies. He will have no-one to support him in the hard times to come.[23]

In an unexpected development in early January 2013, the Salafist Al-Nour party split when its leader, Imad Abdul Ghafour, announced that he and some other members were leaving the party to launch a new party, Al-Watan. The members of the new party said that they were more moderate than Al-Nour which, they said, was against entering into alliances with others. A spokesman of Al-Watan said they were trying to create a party that would be "more inclusive of different ideologies, not just Salafi movements."[24] Mohammed Hisham Abeih believes that the split occurred because Abdul Ghafour was keen to ally with the Brotherhood "based on a political and doctrinal vision", and that the split was encouraged by Khairat Al-Shater, the first deputy of the supreme guide of the Brotherhood, who thus diluted the strength of his party's principal Islamist rival.[25]

At the end of January 2013, on the eve of the second anniversary of Mubarak's ouster, riots erupted in Egypt and several lives were lost in police firing. The trigger was the court verdict that handed out death sentences to those responsible for the killings in the football stadium riots in February 2012. But soon thereafter, they became an expression of widespread dissatisfaction with Morsi's administration. The president declared a 30-day emergency and dusk-to-dawn curfew

in certain towns. It appears that the Salafis were not involved in the agitations which were said to be led by the so-called "Black Bloc", groups of masked young men who were also involved in some of the violence. The political polarisation in the country and widespread dissatisfaction with the Morsi government led to an army takeover in early July 2013. These developments and their implications are examined in Chapter 9.

Libya

The presence of powerful jihadi-Salafi groups in Libya became dramatically apparent with the attack on the American official compound at Benghazi in September 2012, in which the US ambassador and a number of US officials and security personnel were killed. A new group, Ansar Al-Sharia, has been identified as the perpetrator of this pre-planned assault. This group, which perhaps combines a number of radical Islamic groups in Libya, had played an active role in the anti-Gaddafi uprising. It has in its ranks fighters who have been involved in the jihad in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last decade. In early 2012, these fighters were reorganised into the Libya Shield Brigade, with security responsibilities in Benghazi. Such units made up of radical groups and street security commands have also been set up in other towns like Tripoli and Mistrata. These Libyan radicals have attacked Sufi monasteries and tombs of saints, without any intervention by local authorities.[26]

All through 2013, the security situation in Libya continued to deteriorate with regular attacks by armed milita on Western embassies. The French scholar Luc Debieuvre, writing in May, doubted whether Libya was still a country, and observed that: "There is no state apparatus, no authority other than that of some tribal leaders. Added to that, there is no security."[27] He and other observers have pointed out that the breakdown of state order has proved to be a bonanza for jihadis, and that southern Libya, eastern Algeria and northern Niger constitute a triangle, with the city of Sebbah as a hub for jihadis proceeding to Syria and Iraq. Abdullah al-Maizi echoes this assessment, adding that the jihadis also threaten the whole of the Sahel, with the support of jihadis based in Egypt.[28]

An important development which could have significant implications for the future of Libyan politics is the attempt of the

Brotherhood-oriented Islamist party, the Justice and Reconstruction Party (JRP), to reinvent itself to achieve electoral success in future. Unsuccessful in the March 2012 elections, the JRP is now focusing on setting up a new party machinery at the grassroots level and attracting a new cadre of professionals by concentrating on economic and reconstruction issues rather than religion.[29]

Syria

The ongoing conflict in Syria, which has already claimed nearly a hundred thousand lives and displaced at least three million people, is marked by a deep sectarian divide and the rising presence of Al-Qaeda-affiliated elements in the struggle against Bashar Al-Assad's government. Initially, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was playing a dominant role in the civil conflict, and had gained considerable local and international credibility by playing down its Islamist character by proposing a future democratic state and seeking Western support. The Brotherhood also benefitted from its widespread presence across the country and getting weapons and funds from Qatar.

However, towards the end of 2012, there were reports that radical Islamic groups had assumed a larger role in the conflict and were articulating a more strident agenda. The most extremist grouping is the Jabhat Al-Nusra, headed by a shadowy leader, Abu Mohammed Al-Julani.[30] These extremists are more disciplined and better equipped than other fighters. Al-Nusra, which has members from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon, Turkmenistan, France and even the UK, has introduced suicide bombings into the conflict. Many in its ranks are veterans of the jihad in Iraq and Afghanistan. Al-Nusra has announced its plans to set up a "caliphate" under Sharia law across the entire Arab world. Since the beginning of the civil conflict, Al-Nusra is said to have carried out 600 operations and 30 bombings against government targets.[31]

According to reports, Al-Nusra is perhaps not one monolithic group but an umbrella organisation, which has units operating in different parts of Syria without necessarily coordinating with each other. Its principal base is Idlib, and it also has a presence in Aleppo and Damascus. On 11 December 2012, the United States, even as it recognised the Syrian opposition National Coalition, declared Al-Nusra a terrorist organisation. This contradiction in US approach could

complicate matters for the opposition since a large number of Islamic groups in Syria have extended their support to Al-Nusra. It is also likely that Al-Nusra will continue to find support from non-US sources such as Turkey and Jordan.[32]

At a meeting of the "Friends of Syria" in Doha, in November 2012, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, made up of the various opposition groups in the country, was recognised as "the legitimate representative of the Syrian people". Though it has a strong international profile, the coalition continues to depend largely on the former Syrian National Council (SNC) which is dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. However, this does not seem to have created greater cohesion among the militants. In mid-January 2013, there were reports of internecine conflict between Al-Nusra and the elements represented by the Free Syrian Army (FSA).[33]

The month of May 2013 began with Israeli air strikes on Syria, purportedly to destroy weaponry bound for the Hezbollah. Assad did not retaliate, though it was now obvious that the Syrian conflict, already over two years old, was becoming a dangerous quagmire that would suck in several regional players. At the same time, developments in May pertaining to the Jabhat al-Nusra suggested that cracks were appearing in the organisation. On 19 May, it was reported that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, had some weeks earlier called on the Nusra leader al-Julani to merge his organisation with the Iraqi entity—a proposition that was rejected by Al-Nusra. Instead, al-Julani declared his direct affiliation with al-Zawahiri, in a clear attempt to maintain Al-Nusra's separate identity as an Al-Qaeda offshoot.[34] Later, there were unconfirmed reports that al-Julani had either been killed or seriously injured, and, separately, that Baghdadi had entered Aleppo along with several hundred fighters. Leaders of some rebel groups were quoted as expressing concern about the entry of Al-Qaeda veterans into Syria, fearing that they would dilute popular support for the uprising with their brutal executions and religious courts.[35] The Saudi commentator, Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed has regretted the ascendancy of Al-Qaeda in the Syrian conflict, and urged greater support for the Free Syrian Army, which enjoys Saudi patronage and has led the Syrian uprising from the outset.[36]

Besides the Al-Qaeda-related developments, three other competitions have been seen in the Syrian uprising:

(i) an intra-GCC competition between Saudi Arabia and Qatar for the leadership of the uprising;

(ii) the sharpening of the sectarian divide in the conflict with the entry of Hezbollah fighters on the side of forces loyal to Assad; and

(iii) an expanding Western participation in the conflict following the decision of the USA to play a more active role in supporting the rebels, even as Russia continues its military and diplomatic support to the Assad regime.

From March 2013 onwards, the regional and international media were reporting on the Saudi-Qatari rivalry in the context of the Syrian conflict. In March, Qatar, in an adroit manoeuvre, secured the appointment of Ghassan Hitto, a US national of Syrian origin, as the interim prime minister, in the teeth of opposition from several National Coalition members. Hitto was known to be close to the Brotherhood and (unlike the president, Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib) totally opposed to any dialogue with the Assad regime. Following this, there was criticism in some sections of the GCC media about the Muslim Brotherhood domination over the Syrian uprising and the "hegemony" of unnamed regional governments over the National Coalition. A commentator pointed out that "the Qatari-Turkish axis backs the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Saudi axis is in harmony with the United States."[37]

Following this, there were conflicting reports regarding the level of support extended to the Syrian rebels by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. A *Financial Times* headline of 17 May blared: "Qatar channels billions of dollars to Syria's rebellion",[38] while a headline in *The National* of Abu Dhabi of 15 May asserted: "Saudis overtaking Qatar in sponsoring Syria rebels".[39] The issue seems to have been settled in Saudi Arabia's favour: after the battle of Qusayr, where Hezbollah fought successfully alongside the Syrian loyalist army, the headline of an article dated 6 June stated: "Syria is now Saudi Arabia's problem".[40] Supporting this, the author Hasan Hasan pointed out:

Qusayr is arguably the first battle in Syria to be completely sponsored by Saudi Arabia, marking the kingdom's first foray

outside its sphere of influence along the Jordanian border. Riyadh
has now taken over Qatar's role as the rebel's primary patron:
In one sense, the Saudis can also claim a victory in Qusayr, as
they have successfully put various rebel forces under the
command of their ally in the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Chief of
Staff Gen. Salim Idriss… Under increased pressure from the
United States, Qatar has recently handed over the "Syrian
dossier" to Saudi Arabia.[41]

The situation as it prevails now is that the Kingdom's protégé, General
Salim Idriss, who is the head of the Free Syrian Army, has extended
his political and military authority over the various rebel groups at
the expense of the Brotherhood. According to Hasan, "the Kingdom
supports moderate groups to counter the influence of the Brotherhood
and its Qatari patrons." He further says that Saudi Arabia also
supports Salafi groups to counter Al-Nusra which further complicates
matters.[42]

Though there had been reports in March 2013 of fighting between
Hezbollah and Al-Nusra,[43] the role of Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict
came to be dramatically highlighted with the victory of the Syrian
army at Qusayr. This led to a cacophony of criticism of the Hezbollah's
role in Syria, particularly for the sectarian dimension it had now firmly
injected into the uprising. The GCC in a statement condemned the
Hezbollah by describing it as a "partner in crimes" in the killing of
Syrians.[44]

Following the overt entry of Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict, the
US administration declared its readiness to provide weapons to the
rebel forces. In order to consolidate the rebel movement under the FSA,
General Idriss appealed to the Islamist groups to join him, expressing
his willingness to share the US weapons with them as an incentive.[45]
This emerged from a meeting held in Ankara in late June, that was
attended by a number of Islamic groups (many of them Salafi-oriented
and backed by Saudi Arabia), from which Jabhat al-Nusra was
excluded. GCC-supplied weapons are said to have strengthened the
rebels in their battle against the government forces in the battle for
Aleppo. Still, Islamic forces continue to be both effective and respected.
Various groups, such as Ahrar al-Sham, Liwa al-Tawhid and Jabhat
al-Nusra, have earned a reputation for being principled in their
relations with the local population (e.g., they do not steal) and

distributing day-to-day necessities in liberated areas. They also provide some modicum of governance and even justice through legal institutions.[46]

Morsi's ouster in Egypt has already had an impact in Syria: Hitto, sponsored by Qatar as acting prime minister, has resigned and in his place a Saudi-supported candidate has been appointed.

Jordan

In early 2011, Jordan witnessed its own Arab Spring demonstration led by a nascent homegrown youth movement that was agitating amidst serious economic difficulties. Taking advantage of this popular dissatisfaction, and in the wake of the success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, known locally as Islamic Action Front (IAF), began to adopt a more aggressive posture vis-à-vis the Jordanian government and even the monarch.[47] Ironically, in Jordan, unlike other Arab countries, the IAF has been operating as a licensed political party with a long affinity with the monarchy. Its members have been cabinet members in the past and held senior positions. In August 2012, the IAF reversed an earlier call to its members to not register for elections. However, it called for the boycott of the elections scheduled for January 2013 to protest against the flawed election law that favours tribal districts over urban voters.[48]

Jordan has an electorate of 3.1 million of which a sizeable number, 2.3 million, are registered to vote. In the election held on 23 January 2013, 1.28 million people voted, which was 57 per cent of those registered and 40 per cent of the total electorate. As expected, the national assembly that emerged was quite similar to the previous one, being dominated by tribes and pro-government figures. A large number of seats (17) were won by the Muslim Centre Party, which was made up of pro-government defectors from the Brotherhood.[49] Riots erupted across the country calling for a change in the electoral law, though the king himself asserted that the elections would usher in a "new phase" in strengthening parliamentary governments.[50] On the other hand, the distinguished commentator, Marwan Muasher, has said that the Jordanians were seeking "real change", and called for a new electoral law and sweeping economic reforms.[51]

King Abdullah of Jordan appears to share these sentiments. In a wide-ranging interview to *The Atlantic* in April 2013, he affirmed his

commitment to "representative democracy", the building of political parties and the need to establish "a mature political culture" in his country.[52] These are daunting aspirations given the dichotomy in Jordan between the majority who are of Palestinian origin from the West Bank, and the tribe-based, indigenous community in the East Bank, whose leaders constitute the backbone of the support for the royal dynasty. The king showed his interest in giving the Palestinians proportional representation in the elected parliament but blamed his secret police for blocking his efforts at political reform. He said he wished to protect his people from the Muslim Brotherhood (referring to it as a 'Masonic cult') so that it would not hijack democracy in the name of reform.

Lebanon

Lebanon has been deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Syria—where the conflict has acquired a sectarian character and now includes even an Al-Qaeda-affiliated militia. Taking advantage of the presence of several thousand Syrian refugees in north Lebanon, local jihadi-Salafi leaders have begun to assume extremist anti-Shia positions with a view to expanding their power base. The growing "anti-West, anti-Hezbollah, anti-Iran Salafist movement" is flourishing in some mosques and in towns in northern Lebanon. Hezbollah, the party that has dominated the Lebanese government over the past year, is a particular target because of its continuing support of Bashar Al-Assad. As Geneive Abdo has pointed out, the Salafist opposition in Lebanon, which is directly targeted at the Iran-Hezbollah-Assad axis, has discovered that characterising the turbulence as a sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shiite Muslims "resonates not only with its followers, but with many outside Lebanon as well. And they are using the Syrian civil war as the *cause celebre* to fight the case for what they see as discrimination against all Sunni Muslims."[53] Clearly, the increasingly sectarian character of the conflict in Syria has had a deleterious impact in Lebanon, where sectarian conflicts have already erupted, with Salafi preachers playing a major role in fanning the flames of mutual animosity.[54]

Sinai

The fall of President Mubarak in February 2011, created a power

vacuum in the Sinai, which encouraged militiamen to attack and capture the local capital, El Arish. According to reports, the Sinai is flush with foreign jihadis from Yemen and Somalia who have aligned themselves with local extremists.[55] The population in Sinai has long-standing grievances relating to discrimination in jobs, under-development and persecution, which have led them into the embrace of Egyptian and foreign jihadis. It appears that these Sinai fighters have also obtained considerable weaponry from Libya, Gaza and Iran.[56] In August 2012, the militia, made up of homegrown and foreign jihadis, perpetrated a series of attacks on Egyptian troops near Taba. This included an attack on an Egyptian border post with Israel in which 16 soldiers were killed and the Israeli border breached. The Egyptian army retaliated with force.[57]

In 2013, the situation in Sinai has further deteriorated after a rocket attack on Israel in April, which was followed by the kidnapping of seven Egyptian security personnel in May. Earlier, with regard to the August 2012 attacks, there had been suggestions that the jihadi elements had been trained by Hamas in Gaza. Now, however the Hamas has quickly distanced itself from the recent attacks, declaring the border between Gaza and Sinai a "closed military zone".[58] This situation has prompted an Israeli commentator, Shlomi Eldar, to point out that "the Sinai has become a triangle where the interests of Egypt, Hamas and Israel converge", and that it would be in Egypt's interest to cooperate with Israel to combat this nascent jihadi threat.[59] This seems to have been implemented after Morsi's ouster, with the Egyptian army establishing firm control over the Sinai, though sporadic acts of violence continue.

Kuwait

Following the merger of the posts of crown prince and prime minister in 2003, the opposition, consisting of Islamists and tribals, has gained in strength. The demands for political change have intensified ever since, as has the influence of Islamists, with some indications of friction within the royal family as well. Over the last few years, the Kuwaiti political system has witnessed "a cycle of stalemates and crises" which have led to the royal family and opposition parliamentarians being in a state of continuing contention.[60] Kuwait has had five elections in

the last seven years and five parliaments, all of which were dissolved before the end of their term.

The distinguished Arab commentator, Abdel Wahab Al-Effendi, believes that "the tsunami of Arab revolutions has finally reached the Arabian Gulf." He points out that Kuwait's history has been different from that of the rest of the GCC countries in that it has enjoyed a modicum of democracy for several decades: although its parliament has been dissolved several times, the Constitution of 1961 itself has never been suspended. The natural progress of Kuwaiti politics should have culminated in the setting up of a genuinely constitutional monarchy but this could not be achieved due to the opposition of the royal family.[61] As a result, Kuwait is now trapped in a vicious circle in which free elections bring the people's representatives to Parliament but the government always thwarts their efforts to respond to the aspirations of their voters.

Other observers have been less than enthusiastic about political change in the country. A correspondent of the Saudi-owned *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* believes that the biggest problem in Kuwait is "the over-powering influence of the Muslim Brotherhood" and the support the Brotherhood has come to enjoy from the West.[62] According to the writer, the Muslim Brotherhood is encouraged by the success of Islamist groups in other Arab countries and is attempting to establish itself in Kuwait, because it deems it to be the Gulf's "soft underbelly".

Shafiq Nazem al Ghabra, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the political agitations in the country since 2006 have now evolved into "a popular political and national movement that has specific demands [for political and administrative reform] that could maintain the essence of the political monarchy system."[63] These demands cover every aspect of the political order, including the relationship between the national constitution and application of law; ties between leaders and citizens; issues of corruption in administration; the separation of powers and public accountability, and ties between the various communities that make up the Kuwaiti state.

The December 2012 opposition-boycotted elections resulted in a national assembly dominated by pro-government parties. The government also cracked down on dissent particularly on Twitter—with tough laws and long prison sentences. In response, the opposition parties led demonstrations demanding a change in electoral law and

fresh elections. In June 2013, the constitutional court dissolved the assembly elected in December 2012, but upheld the electoral law on the basis of which it had been constituted. The stage is thus set for continued crisis in Kuwait.[64]

Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom's leaders responded to the Arab Spring with a high degree of caution and nervousness. On 29 January 2011, King Abdullah raised his voice in support of his beleaguered friend, Hosni Mubarak, referred to the agitation against him as a *fitna* (chaos), and invoked the hadith that rejects insurrection against a legitimate ruler, regardless of his conduct. At the same time, amidst the ongoing disturbances across WANA, the Kingdom had to cope with a revived domestic dissident movement that, like its counterparts in other Arab countries, sought to mobilise supporters by using modern technological aids such as satellite television, the internet and mobile phones.

With the onset of the Arab Spring, the Sahwa, which had been quiescent for several years emerged once again to demand political reform. In February 2011, a petition signed by about 2000 Sunni and Shia intellectuals, including large numbers of young people, was submitted to the King.[65] Many of the signatories belonged to the Sahwa, though others from a non-Islamist liberal background also supported it. The issue that brought the Sahwa and the liberals together on a common platform were shared concerns relating to human rights and political prisoners, many of whom have been accused of involvement with jihadi groups. The petition called for extensive reforms in the country, while preserving the monarchy. The proposed reform programme included:

  (i) An elected Shura Council,
  (ii) An independent prime minister enjoying the confidence of the Shoura Council,
 (iii) Judicial reform,
 (iv) End to corruption,
  (v) Employment for youth,
 (vi) Freedom of speech and expression,
 (vii) Support for civil society and professional groups, and
(viii) Release of political prisoners.

The Sahwa leader of the 1990s, Salman Al-Awdah, emerged in public to strongly welcome the Arab Spring. In his book, *Questions on Revolution,* without naming Saudi Arabia, he said that domestic unrest could be prevented by fundamental reforms rather than by what he termed as "bribes" to people in the form of salary increases, loans, grants and lower food prices. He went on to say: "The urgent and important task before Arab regimes to emerge from the current crisis is to move forward..reconfiguring the relationship between ruler and ruled…on the basis of people's consent which comes from freedom and a living in dignity....Those who will not pay the price of reform will pay the price of the lack of reform."[66]

Besides the non-sectarian activity detailed above, the Shia in the Eastern Province have also held their own demonstrations. These have been led by the prominent cleric, Sheikh Tawfiq Al-Amer, who has called for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, three separate branches of government and political parties. In March 2012, the various Shia activist groups came together to form a group called "Coalition for Freedom and Justice", which has a decentralised structure and no known leadership. To neutralise these radicals and to insulate them from the influence of the Iranian and Iraqi Shia clergy, the Saudi government is said to be contemplating the setting up of a new Saudi *marja*, a high-ranking Shiite religious authority, so that the Saudi Shia do not look elsewhere for guidance.[67]

However, some observers, both Saudi and Western, have attempted to play down the sectarian character of dissent in the Eastern Province and to link it with the need for reform on a national scale. In February 2013, the Saudi liberal dissident, Mohammed al-Mahfouz, emphasised the nationalist character of the demonstrators' demands and categorically asserted: "When a people take action by expressing nationalist slogans and social and political demands, we cannot brand their movement as sectarian even if its organisers belong to a single confession." He added that, "based on my observations, no sectarian slogans have so far been raised [in the Eastern Province demonstrations]."[68] Later, in an interview in May 2013, Frederic Wehrey pointed out that the protestors in the Eastern Province "have more in common with the crowds in Egypt's Tahrir Square or Tunis than with Iranian-backed groups. They have in many ways moved beyond religious ideology to talk about bread and butter issues."[69]

Wehrey has noted that the "social media has facilitated increased contact between Shia and Sunni reformists," and that issues of common concern were bringing together liberals, both Sunni and Shia, on a shared platform, chief among them being the continued incarceration of political dissidents. An important, bridging role is perhaps being played by the Sahwa leader, Salman al-Awdah, who has 2.6 million Twitter followers. He has played down sectarian references and places greater emphasis on democracy.[70]

Stephan Lacroix, the author of a seminal work on the Sahwa movement, has pointed out that, since 2003, a pro-democracy current has emerged in the Kingdom, uniting Sunni and Shia intellectuals with Islamic and liberal backgrounds, who have been agitating for a constitutional monarchy in the country.[71] The Sahwa remains the largest and best organised non-state group in the country and has hundreds of thousands of members. He concludes that it is unlikely that any popular movement would take hold in the country without the Sahwa's support because, in his words:

> Generating a sustained political challenge to the state requires organised and committed activists, solid mobilising structures, and networks—things that can't simply be obtained through Facebook and that only the Sahwa can provide. Again, Sahwis are like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: They may not start the protest, but it won't succeed without them.

UAE

In a strongly worded public statement, in July 2012, the police chief of Dubai, Lt. Gen. Dahi Khalfan Al-Tamim, launched a fierce attack on the Muslim Brotherhood, saying that the Brotherhood is "a small group that has strayed from the true path." He said that the revolution in Egypt "would not have been possible without Iran's support and is the prelude to a new Sykes-Picot agreement", and that Mohammed Morsi's election in Egypt was "an unfortunate choice." He concluded by saying that: "If the Muslim Brotherhood threatens the Gulf's security, the blood that flows will drown it."[72] Throughout the summer of 2012, Al-Tamim criticised the Brotherhood on Twitter, terming it "a sinful gang whose demise is drawing near", and called for its assets and bank accounts to be frozen.

These outbursts were followed by the more measured but equally

trenchant remarks made by the UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, who said: "The Muslim Brotherhood does not believe in the nation state. It does not believe in the sovereignty of the state," and there were individuals within the Muslim Brotherhood who would use their "prestige and capabilities to violate the sovereignty, laws and rules of other states... We need to communicate to see if there were individuals or organisations who were using these countries", though he did not name the countries he was referring to.[73]

A group of around 60 Emiratis belonging to the Islamist group, Al-Islah, which is said to espouse Brotherhood views, was arrested in the UAE in July 2012. Local media reported that some of those detained had confessed that their organisation was running an "armed wing" and had been plotting to seize power and establish an Islamist state.[74] The reports said that the group was coordinating with Brotherhood organisations in three other Gulf Arab countries, and that they had received up to 10 million dirhams ($3.67 million) from a counterpart in another Gulf Arab country. Al-Islah in its defence says that, although it has an ideology similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, it has no direct links with it and is only pushing for peaceful reforms.

On 26 December 2012, the UAE news agency announced that, in a joint UAE-Saudi security operation, the authorities had destroyed "an organised cell from the deviant group" that had planned to carry out attacks on the two countries along with other brother countries.[75] This was an apparent reference to the Al-Qaeda, and confirmed that the group had penetrated into different areas of the Arabian peninsula. In fact, this development led the Saudi commentator, Tariq Al-Homaid, to ask who was funding such cells, given the total commitment of the GCC countries to uproot them.[76] However, Dr. Saleem Humaid, the head of a UAE thinktank, said the cell had been linked to the "hardline Muslim Brotherhood Organisation" whose efforts to consolidate its influence across WANA were thwarted by the cohesiveness of the GCC.[77] The Kuwaiti columnist, Shamlan Yussef Al-Issi, said: "Undoubtedly, Gulf nations today have to face up to long-ignored "political Islam groups" that the so-called Arab Spring has now rendered mainstream. But they [the GCC] don't know how to effectively deal with this 'ghoul', to whom they once entrusted their

school curricula and ministries of Islamic affairs."[78] This is an obvious reference to the dominant role played by the Brotherhood in educational and religious institutions in several Gulf states.

In early January 2013, the UAE authorities announced that they had uncovered a Brotherhood cell that was active in local recruitment and collecting "sensitive military information". The cell, that had eleven members, all Egyptians, was said to have "a defined organisational structure" and links with Emirati secret organisations, including Al-Islah, for whom the Brotherhood unit had also conducted training sessions on "holding elections and overthrowing regimes in the Arab states."[79] The Brotherhood, in an official statement from Cairo, described these claims as "devoid of truth".[80]

After this, the Dubai police chief, in an interview to *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (excerpts from which were published in the English language *Khaleej Times*), said that, well before the Arab Spring, the Brotherhood had set up "a solid organisational structure" in every emirate of the UAE.[81] It also had set up cells in many GCC countries "to indoctrinate their students to turn renegade and rise against the rulers and the people who had welcomed them."

Throughout 2013, the anti-Brotherhood rhetoric continued unabated in the UAE media, highlighting the group's objective of setting up "caliphate", its secretive approach and its preparedness to use violence to promote its agenda.[82] It was alleged that sleeper cells, which camouflaged their nefarious designs by social welfare activity, had been set up across the GCC. In fact, the Brotherhood had played on the "emotionalism of the Emiratis" by enticing them to participate in these benevolent projects in the name of Islamic brotherhood.

While Egyptian officials and media continued to express concerns over the incarceration and trial of their nationals, both governments generally attempted to play down their differences in public. This ended with the harsh remarks of Dr. Essam El Erian, Deputy Chairman of the ruling Freedom and Justice Party, who said: "Egypt's patience with the UAE will not last much longer and UAE's attitude is disgraceful." For good measure, he went on to say: "A nuclear Iran is coming and the Emiratis will become slaves of the Persians." These gratuitously offensive remarks led the UAE commentator Mishaal Al-Gergawi to state presciently that the Brotherhood in Egypt seemed "insecure and unable to function as a democratically elected

representative of the Egyptian people and was in fact endangering Egypt's very fragile democratic transition."[83]

Yemen

After the fall of Hosni Mubarak, street protests erupted in Yemen, calling for the removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh who had been in power since 1978. These peaceful protests later turned into violent confrontations between the president's supporters and various heavily armed tribal groups opposed to him. These included an attack on a mosque in the presidential palace that left Saleh badly wounded. Finally, in November 2011, he handed over power to his deputy, Vice-President Abdul Rabbo Mansur Hadi, with the rest of the political order staying largely intact. However, a year later, the new president removed a number of Saleh's associates from office, including his son who headed the Republican Guard and his nephew who headed the Central Security forces.

Yemen is today facing challenges that include: demands for a new more responsive political order; a separatist movement in the South; a tribal rebellion of the Houthis in the North, and continued depredations by US drone attacks that have caused numerous civilian casualties. This has encouraged the Al-Qaeda-affiliated militants in different parts of the country to consolidate.[84]

Yemen, as Bernand Haykel has pointed out, is a "highly fragmented and divided country, with no national leadership that can unite a majority of the population around a vision or programme for the future".[85] While the GCC was successful in managing the transition from Saleh to Abdul Rabbo, it has not yet succeeded in addressing the deeper political and economic malaise. The "Southern question" is at the forefront of national concerns, since the failure to address the grievances of the people in the south has encouraged the proliferation of jihadi elements (and the drone attacks!) and has threatened national unity, with the principal southern movement, Hirak al-Janoubi, even calling for secession.[86] Yemeni affairs are further complicated by the fact that it provides another platform for the proxy competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While the Kingdom is backing Abdul Rabbo, Iran is said to be supporting the Southern insurrection and the Houthi rebellion in the north. At the same time, Qatar is believed to be funding the Al-Islah party, which combines tribal leadership with

Islamist ideology, and is now the dominant force in the divided country.[87]

Two years after the Arab Spring, a review of the situation in most Arab countries presents scenarios of competition and conflict, as Islamist groups in some instances attempt to cope with the challenge of governance, or in others are embroiled in confrontations with established authorities whom they seek to displace politically or militarily. They in turn are opposed by liberal-secular elements anxious to obtain the freedom, democracy and dignity promised by the Arab Spring, and, in Egypt, by the armed forces who are alarmed by the Islamist takeover of their polity. Amidst these ongoing disputes—in conference halls, in the media, and on the streets, radical Islam has sensed new opportunities for itself. These are examined in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. The Arab Spring remains work-in-progress, with new developments taking place almost every day. Hence, our narrative and understanding is only as up-to-date as the day on which our story is written. Still, some books on the Arab Spring are useful to understand its origins and impulses and possible future trends. These include: Farhad Khosrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that Shook the World,* Paradigm Publications, Boulder, CO, 2012; Tariq Ramadan, *The Arab Awakening—Islam and the New Middle East*, Allen Lane—an imprint of Penguin Books, London, 2012; Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History—Times of Riots and Uprisings,* Verso, London, 2012; and Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring—Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2012; a succinct account may be seen at: Talmiz Ahmad, "The Arab Spring and its Implications for India", *Strategic Analysis*, New Delhi, Vol. 37, Issue 1, Jan-Feb 2013, pp. 119-127.
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13.   For details see: Anne Wolf, "Salafists challenge ruling party for allegiance of youth", *The National*, May 12, 2013, p.14; Mischa Benoik Lavelle, "Salafists, state move closer to open conflict in Tunisia", *Al-Monitor*, May 20, 2013, at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/tunisia-salafists-suppression.html (May 22, 2013). Commentators have also expressed concern over the increasing radicalisation of Tunisian youth: Nesrine Hamedi has noted: "Tunisia estimates that around 40 percent of foreign jihadis in Syria hold Tunisian nationality. More than two-thirds of them are fighting in the ranks of Jabhat al Nusra." ("Tunisian Jihadis Fighting in Syria, *Al-Safir*, March 18, 2013, English translation at: http:/www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/Tunisian-jihadists-syria.html, March 23, 2013).

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6

Proliferation of Radical Islam

The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and the subsequent Saudi invitation to the Americans to defend the Kingdom and end the Iraqi aggression gave a fillip to a radical Islamist movement in the Kingdom that initially operated on the margins of the Sahwa but did not actively participate in it. Thus, Osama bin Laden, who had just returned to the Kingdom after the successful jihad in Afghanistan, did not sign the Sahwi "Letter of Demands" since he was at that time financing Yemeni jihadis fighting in the then communist South Yemen.[1] At this stage, Bin Laden, like other Afghan veterans, was more interested in other jihadi theatres rather than in Saudi Arabia. In mid-1991, Bin Laden left the Kingdom for Sudan when his plea to the Saudi royal family to permit him to conduct a jihad against the Iraqi occupation was rebuffed. In Sudan, he mobilised jihadi veterans, which led to the cancelling of his Saudi citizenship in March 1994. Bin Laden issued a communiqué attacking the royal decision.

Later, in a second communiqué, in April 1994, he announced his association with the Sahwi protest movement which began with a "Letter of Demands", and expressed full support for the demands contained in the "Memorandum of Advice".[2] In that month, he also announced the setting up of the Advice and Reform Committee headed by him, which opened an office in London in July. After this, up to late 1995, Bin Laden issued several communiqués criticising

Saudi Arabia for: the Committee of Senior Ulema's lack of independence, the insignificance of the political reforms implemented by the royal family, and the deteriorating Saudi economy.

Separate from the activities of Bin Laden in Sudan and later in Afghanistan, a radical movement emerged within Saudi Arabia itself. It attacked a National Guard training facility in Riyadh in November 1995. Of the four perpetrators arrested, three were Afghan veterans while the fourth was associated with the Sahwa.

Outside of Saudi Arabia, on 23 August 1996, Osama bin Laden published his "Declaration of Jihad against the Americans who are occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places."[3] In this statement, Bin Laden committed himself to a "Global Jihad". He declared himself the heir of the Sahwa and saw in his declaration of war on the Saudi state the logical end of the protest movement begun in 1991. Thus, Bin Laden's global jihad can be traced to the Sahwa insurrection.

Al-Qaeda Ideology

In 1996, the Pakistani intelligence agency, ISI, introduced Osama bin Laden to Mullah Omar, thus setting the stage for a symbiotic relationship that would have far-reaching regional and global implications. The Taliban provided Bin Laden with security and protection, while the latter reinforced the Taliban forces with a few thousand Al-Qaeda fighters, and imbued the Taliban leader with jihadi zeal and deep animosity for the West.[4]

Bin Laden's anti-West agenda found powerful expression in the "World Islamic Front's Declaration of Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," issued on 23 February 1998.[5] It recalled Western assaults and depredations on the Muslim lands and declared that jihad is an individual's duty (*fard ayn*), given that the enemy was destroying Muslim territory. Al-Qaeda's jihad on the West culminated in assaults on the USA on 11 September 2001.

Natana Delong-Bas, a scholar of Wahhabiya, has traced Bin Laden's ideological roots not to Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahhab but to Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb.[6] In his public pronouncements after 9/11, Bin Laden revealed his thinking on jihad. The principal point that Bin Laden emphasised was the centrality of faith in Allah, adherence to the doctrine of 'loyalty' and 'enmity' and defensive jihad in the path of Allah. He said there could be no compromise on these

principles and that 'Muslims and especially the learned among them should spread Sharia law to the world, that and nothing else'. A moderate approach that compromises Islam's basic principles, particularly in respect of jihad, is not acceptable, especially with regard to 'Defensive Jihad' which is one of the basic principles of Islam.[7]

Al-Qaeda's radical discourse was expanded and fine tuned by Ayman Al-Zawahiri (b. 1951), the last surviving jihadi ideologue in the tradition of Qutb and Mohammed Abdul Salam Faraj (1952-82). Al-Zawahiri called for jihad not just against the infidels who raid the Abode of Islam, [i.e. Saudi Arabia], but, more stridently against the apostate rulers who reign over Islamic lands and govern without Sharia—the friends of Jews and Christians.[8] In line with radical Islamist thinking, Al-Zawahiri believed there was a fundamental unbridgeable gap between the Muslim believer and the kafir, and thus there was no scope for compromise.

He expounded his ideas on jihad and martyrdom in terms that were without precedent in Islamic literature and went well beyond what any of the 20th century ideologues had advocated. He pronounced that all those who served infidel or apostate regimes were complicit in the crimes committed by the regime and, hence, were legitimate targets for jihad; such persons could not even be regarded as Muslims. If jihad was the highest duty of the Muslim, martyrdom was his highest reward. In fact, in this jihad, even the incidental killing of women and children was legitimate since jihad could not be abandoned in any set of circumstances since it was a "defensive jihad".[9] He said:

> Defensive warfare is the most critical form of warfare [since we are] warding off an invader from [our] sanctities and religion. It is a unanimously accepted duty. After belief, there is no greater duty than to repulse the invading enemy who corrupts faith and the world. There are no rules or conditions for this; he must be expelled by all possible means.[10]

The narrative of the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, its affiliation with the Taliban and its role in the events of 9/11 have been documented in detail in several books.[11] Suffice it to note here that, after the US-led assault in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks, Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders and a large number of their followers obtained sanctuary in Pakistan, particularly along the Pak-Afghan border.

From late 2002, the Taliban began to move arms and food supplies to Afghanistan and augmented their strength with jihadis of Arab and Central Asian origin. They began their assaults on Western and Afghan targets from early 2003, and gradually expanded their presence in the country. Taliban-occupied territory became a regional hub for jihadi activity, with fighters operating across the region between Afghanistan and Iraq, North Africa and Europe. The Taliban's strength was buttressed by fresh recruits from Central Asia, Western China, Turkey and several Arab countries, so that by 2009, Taliban had occupied 70 percent of Afghanistan.[12] At the same time, the Al-Qaeda maintained a strong armed presence in Pakistan, particularly in the border tribal areas. The local affiliate of Al-Qaeda was the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which carried out suicide bombings and possibly the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto in 2007. It also withstood a number of assaults by the Pakistani armed forces in 2009.

After the Arab Spring

In his latest book titled, *After Bin Laden: Al-Qaida, The Next Generation*, the distinguished Arab journalist and commentator, Abdel Bari Atwan, has pointed out that, after Bin Laden's death, the Al-Qaeda is "stronger and more widespread than ever", with a presence that encompasses most of West Asia, Central and South-East Asia, and, above all, Africa. He believes that, well before his assassination, Bin Laden had "already become a figurehead rather than an active commander"; and now, after his "martyrdom", his iconic stature in jihadi circles across the world has been significantly enhanced.[13]

A summary of Al-Qaeda's presence and successes in different parts of WANA after the Arab Spring is given in the following paragraphs.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

In the early part of the last decade, Al-Qaeda had a substantial following in Saudi Arabia where it carried out a series of high-profile terrorist attacks, including: assaults on three residential compounds in Riyadh in May 2003; a massacre in Al-Khobar in May 2004; and the attack on the US Consulate in Jeddah in December 2004. These attacks culminated in the assassination attempt on the then assistant interior minister, Prince Mohammed bin Naif (now interior minister), in August 2009. Saudi security authorities responded by killing and

arresting many jihadis, though there are concerns that some 'sleeper' jihadis may still remain in the country.[14]

These attacks by the security forces encouraged many of the Saudi jihadis to relocate to Yemen. Yemen has been very conducive for jihadi activity since its central political authority is fragile and large areas of the country are dominated by local tribal chiefs. In fact, according to Atwan, before his ouster, President Ali Abdullah Saleh had lost control over 60 per cent of his country.[15] All through the last decade, Yemen was an important staging area for the movement of jihadis, particularly to Iraq and Afghanistan and now increasingly to Somalia.

Yemenis have played a significant role in the Al-Qaeda-led jihad, commencing with the attack on *USS Cole* in October 2000, and forming a large part of the contingents that fought in Afghanistan in the last decade. In January 2009, the Saudi and Yemeni national jihadi groups, along with several small groups, came together to set up the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Fifty percent of the AQAP is made up of Saudis, and has leaders from both countries.

Jihadi strength in Yemen has increased following the political chaos in the country after the ouster of President Saleh, with AQAP personnel carrying out several attacks on the Yemeni armed forces and security personnel. They have also expanded their support base among local communities by providing teachers and marrying among local tribes. As Robert Worth has noted: "The threats of jihad in Yemen are likely to last a long time."[16] Atwan believes that AQAP's increasing influence will not only encourage the movement of jihadis between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, it will also facilitate links with the jihadi groups in Somalia.[17]

Iraq

Following the withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq at the end of December 2011, the Al-Qaeda's jihadi entity in the country, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISOI), declared victory. Since then, a number of terrorist attacks have taken place both in the form of suicide bombings and IEDs, and the number of civilians killed doubled from 6.6 per day in 2011 to 12 per day in 2012. While the principal targets have been security forces and government officials, sectarian violence has also escalated, exacerbating the Shia-Sunni divide. Observers have already

reported the existence of close ties between Jabhat Al-Nusra and the ISOI, so that Al-Nusra "gets its funding, fighters and training" from the Al-Qaeda militants at the Iraq-Syria border. This has also led to clashes between these militants and Iraqi security forces, who are obviously concerned about the nexus between these militants and the deeply disgruntled Sunnis who have been demonstrating against the Nouri Al-Maliki government through December 2012 and January 2013.[18]

Al Shabaab in Somalia

With the near-total breakdown of state authority in Somalia and its being deemed a "failed state", from 1991 onwards, the country has been split along clan and sub-clan lines. At one time, there were over 30 groups warring for power. The situation was thus propitious for the emergence and consolidation of jihadi groups into a coalition, termed the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which seized power in 2006. Even as Somalia faced military attacks from neighbouring Ethiopia, jihadis from several countries came into Somalia to support the ICU. After the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, a joint African Union Mission was set up in Somalia, with troops drawn mainly from Uganda and Burundi.

Al Shabaab is the youth wing of the ICU and is today at the vanguard of the jihadi attempt to assume full power in that broken country. From 2009, Al Shabaab expressed an interest in formally affiliating itself with Al-Qaeda, which it finally did in February 2012. As part of its attempts to burnish its jihadi credentials, Al Shabaab carried out a number of terrorist attacks, that were both spectacular and low-key in "haemorrhage-style".[19] According to recent reports, Al Shabaab has also established links with Somali pirates and the pirates now contribute about 20-25 per cent of the ransom money to jihadi coffers in return for a freehand to carry out their activities in the region.[20] Given the large presence of Somali-origin persons in Western countries, the Al Shabaab have also established links with their diaspora, particularly in the UK and USA. Thus, a powerful two-way connectivity has been established, with West-based Somalis supporting the struggle in their home country while Somali jihadis fan out into other theatres in the region.[21]

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM)

The consolidation of an Al-Qaeda affiliate in Somalia marks the "Africanisation of Al-Qaeda" in terms of its spread to different parts of North and Northwest Africa. The Al-Qaeda movement in this region is referred to as "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib" (AQIM). The Al-Qaeda's entry into Algeria occurred towards the end of 1990s, when the radical Islamic group, GIA, discredited itself both in the popular view and in the eyes of Al-Qaeda itself, on account of its random and mindless acts of violence against ordinary Algerians. (Between 1992-98, the GIA-led violence and retaliation by the Algeria security forces left at least 200,000 civilians dead.) At that stage, the GIA came to be replaced by a less extreme organisation, the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), under the leadership of a GIA breakaway commander Hassan Hattab.[22]

GSPC is continuing the violent tradition of the GIA, but it principally targets security forces and Western nationals. GSPC members have also become active in jihad in other theatres, such as Afghanistan, Chechnya, Lebanon, Somalia and Sudan. In September 2006, Al-Zawahiri announced the merger of GSPC with Al-Qaeda.[23] The AQIM came into being with this merger. It has not only carried out lethal suicide attacks on political and security targets, it has also gone beyond Algeria into Niger and Mali and has incorporated into its ranks jihadis from the Tuareg and Berber tribes.

AQIM activities appear to have accelerated after the Arab Spring, and include a suicide bombing attack on Algeria's prestigious military academy because of the Algerian government's support for Gaddafi.[24] In January 2013, Algeria faced its gravest threat from Islamists in several decades when elements of AQIM took several hundred workers hostage, including several dozen Westerners and other nationalities, at the Ain Amenas gas facility, near the border with Mali. In the encounter between Algerian security forces and the kidnappers, several hostages and Islamists were killed.[25]

Moroccans have been particularly active as suicide bombers in Iraq over the last decade. In Morocco itself, the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM), the local jihadi group, is also a part of AQIM. GICM has carried out sporadic acts of violence, including suicide attacks, in different parts of Morocco, but as of now its appeal appears to be limited, perhaps on account of the efforts of King

Mohammed VI to undertake political reform in the country. Given the slow progress of the reforms and widespread dissatisfaction, it is feared that the AQIM could increase its violent activities.[26] In Tunisia, too, the initiation of a democratic political process after the fall of Zine Al-Abidine in January 2011 has diluted the appeal of jihadi elements, though Tunisian nationals continue to form a substantial proportion of AQIM activists.

Libyans have traditionally figured prominently in the central leadership of Al-Qaeda, with Abu Yahya Al Libi being the best known amongst them. In Libya, the Al-Qaeda associate is the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). LIFG elements, along with Al-Qaeda members, played an active role in toppling Gaddafi.

Following Gaddafi's fall, Libyans have begun to assert their tribal and clan identities; there are at least 140 tribal networks and several hundred clans in the country.[27] Large parts of Libya are now controlled or dominated by tribe-based militia groups formed around warlords, with the government in Tripoli generally unable to control their activities or to disarm them. Libyan jihadis are also active in other theatres, particularly in Iraq. AQIM has also spread across the broad Sahel region of North Africa where it has announced the setting up of the "Islamic Emirate of the Sahara." Its area of operations has been expanded further to include Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Mauritania and Chad.

Since 2009, Nigeria has witnessed various acts of violence perpetrated by a shadowy Islamic group generally referred to as "Boko Haram" (literally, Western Education is a Sin). This organisation is based in Northern Nigeria and is the descendant of an earlier entity set up in 2003 called "Nigerian Taliban", which had members from Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Its present leader is Abu Bakar Shekau who identifies himself with Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Besides security forces, this group attacks Christian targets as well. Amongst its aims is the restoration of the Sokoto Islamic Caliphate that had controlled parts of Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger upto 1903. In the last three years, the Boko Haram has killed over 1700 people, with 250 of them having been killed in January 2012 itself.[28]

However, events in an unlikely theatre, Mali, have overshadowed the Nigerian problem. Mali is today at the epicentre of a grave confrontation between African and Western interests on one side and

radical Islamists on the other, which has serious long-term implications both for Africa and Europe.

Mali's problems began in the mid-1990s, when various Islamic groups from neighbouring countries established themselves in the north and the west of the country. Separately, periodic coups and the absence of an effective government in Bamako meant that there was little evidence of a central authority to maintain order in the countryside. In March 2012, the sitting President, Amandou Toumani Toure, was ousted by Captain Amandou Sanogo, who continues to exercise effective power in the capital. Radical Islamists took advantage of the political chaos to expand their influence by capturing towns in the North, with one Islamist groups capturing Timbuktu in June 2012.

The Islamist movement in Mali is made up of three groups—the Ansar Al Dine, the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and a breakaway group, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa. From their base in the North, these Islamic militants moved to the centre and southwest of the country. At their peak, they controlled about 620,000 sq. km. of territory, the size of France, and were reported to have enforced hudud punishments in these areas and to have attacked mausoleums of Sufi saints.[29]

In mid-January 2013, after the capture of Konna by the Islamists, France decided to intervene militarily to stem their forward march. French aircraft carried out numerous attacks on rebel camps and command centres, with some success. Neighbouring countries— Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria, announced they were putting together a force to support the Mali armed forces' ground action. At the end of January 2013, French ground troops and African soldiers, supported by the French air force, liberated a number of Islamist-held towns, including Timbuktu, and the Islamist militia disappeared into the desert.

France's publicly stated reasons for the armed intervention were to prevent the establishment of a "terrorist state" in its neighbourhood that would threaten France and Europe, besides, of course, protecting the 6000-odd French nationals who reside in Bamako. France has also said it will stay on in Mali until it is secure. The Islamists on their part have said that "France has attacked Islam" and that France has now "opened the gates of hell for all the French".[30]

The escalation of the situation in Mali is a matter of deep concern for the North African states of Tunisia, Libya and Algeria, who see a nexus between their own jihadis and those in the Sahel and are aware that the flow of arms across their national borders could foment widespread regional unrest.[31] At least two of them—Tunisia and Libya—already grappling with their own domestic issues engendered by the Arab Spring, would it find quite difficult to cope with these fresh external challenges.

The African Islamists have also taken the opportunity to remind France that: "She has fallen into a trap which is much more dangerous than Iraq, Afghanistan or Somalia."[32] The reference to Somalia is a painful reminder of the abortive French military attempt to rescue its intelligence agent, Denis Allex, who was in Al Shabaab captivity since 2009. The rescue operation was undertaken in mid-January 2013, exactly when the bombings in Mali were taking place, leaving one French soldier dead and the subsequent killing of the agent himself.[33] While French commentators have defended their country's military intervention, the British journalist, Simon Tisdall, described France's "lonely intervention" as a "disjointed, uncoordinated and dangerously unfocused interventional response" to the long-running problems of the region.[34]

France's military intervention was initially welcomed by its Western allies and several states in Northwest Africa, but doubts soon surfaced once they understood its full implications. While French leaders have asserted that their interventions are entirely altruistic and short-term, there have been suggestions that France is seeking to upstage China in its traditional sphere of influence and it might have a long-term interest in the region's mineral resources as well.[35]

More importantly, the fact that one more theatre is being opened up for Al-Qaeda activity and for a confrontation between radical Islam and the West is raising significant concerns. Observers have recalled that, after 9/11, the USA had seen Mali as being sufficiently fragile as to attract the extremist elements. It had then "militarised" its countermeasures by providing counter-insurgency training to armed forces across the region. Unfortunately, these US-trained soldiers later engineered most of the major coups in the region, including in Mauritania, Nigeria and Chad (which was not successful). US-trained soldiers carried out the coup in Mali in March 2012, opening the way

for the massive penetration of Malian territory by disgruntled Tuaregs and the Al-Qaeda-oriented Islamists.[36]

Besides US military training, the pattern of Western military interventions in the region has also contributed to the worsening of the situation. The West-led assault on the Gaddafi regime had the unintended consequence of creating thousands of disgruntled elements, flush with weaponry and jihadi zeal, who spread across the Sahel and emerged as a potent threat to the fragile regimes in the region. This had been anticipated by the International Crisis Group (ICG) which, in June 2011, had observed that the attack on Libya "would have grave political and security implications for its neighbours."[37] With regard to the Mali imbroglio, Hugh Roberts has pointed out:

> The Sahel's terrorism problem dates back no further than 2003, the West's global war on terror gave birth to it; the West's part in the destruction of Muammar Gaddafi's Libya aggravated it; and France's decision to pursue another war in Mali is expanding it.[38]

Abdel Bari Atwan echoes this view. He says that the West's "misreading of political factors" prevailing in the Muslim world led to a series of deadly invasions and other interventions which evoked a lethal response from extremist elements. Thus, US intervention in Iraq "breathed new life" into Al-Qaeda. On the same lines, the French military engagement in Mali will give the radicals a chance to fight a Western power on their own turf.[39] Atwan concludes:

> Every time NATO forces intervene in an Arab or Muslim state, leaving chaos behind and turning stable nations into failed states, Al-Qaeda thrives and branches out into new areas, under new names. A failed state is an open invitation for Al-Qaeda.[40]

Having analysed the steady inroads being made by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates across WANA and Africa in the wake of the Arab Spring, the following chapter offers an overview of the Islamist rivalries across West Asia and attempts a prognosis of Islamist politics as it is likely to play out in the region over the next few years.

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7

Islamist Politics: Competition, Conflict and Prognosis

The aftermath of the Arab Spring is witnessing an inter-play of Islamist discourse and domestic and regional politics in an environment that is fraught with the promise (or threat) of change. This inter-play consists of the three principal expressions of contemporary Islamism—the Wahhabiya of Saudi Arabia; the activist tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its affiliates in other parts of WANA, and the radical worldview and agenda of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. The ramifications of this scenario, in terms of competition for space, influence and power at present, and over the next few years, is examined in the following paragraphs.

The Domestic Situation

The euphoria of two years ago was missing at the second anniversary of the Arab Spring, which lacked even the quiet self-confidence and sense of achievement that was apparent in the previous year. In Tunisia, where it all started, there is dissatisfaction regarding the political and economic situation. The economy has been particularly badly hit by the recession in Europe, the country's main economic partner, and the government is seen as pursuing populist policies. But, the deeper divide is between the liberal and Islamic sections of the

population. The former, the products of several decades of a secular order and significant Western influence, are disconcerted by the efforts of the Al-Nahda-led government to Islamise the nation, a major concern being the politicisation of the civil service by the induction of Islamists. This has led to anxieties relating to personal rights and liberalism in an Islamist order.[1]

On the positive side, the Tunisian economy is in far better shape than that of several of its neighbours and could see further improvement in the near future. Again, Al-Nahda has been careful to include non-Islamist partners in the government set-up, along with a liberal president. Its constitution–making process, though tardy, is reasonably accommodative of non-Islamist views and the final document is not likely to be stridently Islamic. The best aspect of the scenario is that the people who, though impatient for change, realise that the process of reform will necessarily be slow and painful but will ultimately be successful.[2]

The picture in Egypt is more gloomy. Not only was there no euphoria on the second anniversary, there were in fact largescale demonstrations, police firings and, finally, on 27 January 2013, a declaration of emergency in selected towns. The president sought a "national dialogue" but was rebuffed since the opposition leaders saw no reason to bail out the person they held responsible for the acute mess in the country and his failure to build a consensus. Morsi's critics in the GCC media had a field day. Dr Hamad Al Majid said:

> During the "era of President Morsi", prices have risen, Egypt's currency has fallen to record lows, the tourism industry has sunk to new depths, capital has fled abroad, the fragile security situation prevails, and the president is suffering from a lack of genuine prestige.[3]

Tariq Al-Homaid criticised the Brotherhood as a whole:

> The Brotherhood's problem, not only in Egypt but in all countries of the Arab Spring, is that they offended everyone with their greed for power and their overwhelming desire to seize everything, from the trade unions to the presidency, the People's assembly, the Shoura Council, and the government.[4]

The Egyptian politician and commentator, Hassan Nafia, had been critical of the government even before the riots because: "the Egyptians

are shocked by the scale and grave nature of the Brotherhood's mistakes."[5] Later, when the rioting was at its peak, he said: "Dr. Morsi has become part of the problem and not the solution."[6] Elias Harfouche made a sober but severe indictment of the rule of the Brotherhood in Egypt:

> The Egyptian Revolution was supposed to mend the rifts in society between the former president and those benefiting from his rule on the one hand, and the remaining sectors of society. The hope was that the Revolution would unify most Egyptians behind the same aims and aspirations, regardless of their political affiliations, religious creeds, and where they come from.

> What happened, however, was a monopoly over power despite the tiny majority by means of which power was gained. The road to dialogue was blocked and religion was used as a political cover with the aim of declaring those who disagreed with the regime as 'apostates'.[7]

On 28 June, a few days before Morsi's ouster, Heba Saleh wrote a page-long article in the *Financial Times* under the heading, "A revolution betrayed".[8] In this she highlighted the government's inexperience and authoritarianism and the widespread perception that Morsi was incapable of leading the nation facing a serious economic crisis. Young people were in the process of organising themselves for a "second revolution" under the banner of *"Tamarod"* (Rebellion) and seeking fresh presidential elections.[9] This public anger was expressed through massive demonstrations across the country on 30 June, 2013, which led the armed forces to intervene and oust the Morsi government and replace it with an interim government made up of non-political figures, but with the army in effective control.

Islamist Parties

A Gallup poll conducted in 2007 revealed that religion was of paramount importance for 98 per cent Egyptians, while 87 per cent maintained that rites and traditions were central to their faith. Only 9 per cent of those polled indicated a preference for a secular order in which there would be an absolute separation between the state and religious institutions. At the same time, 88 per cent wanted a democratic system in their country. Thus, as Ibrahim Houdaiby has

noted, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was quite in accord with the broad beliefs of Egyptian society.[10]

Within its Islamist discourse, the Brotherhood in Egypt has accommodated, at various times, all the principal trends of political Islam. In its early years, it reflected the Islamic modernism of the Abduh school, but later became increasingly traditionalist. The latter's influence declined in the 1960s when Qutbism became dominant and inspired large numbers of young members with its revolutionary vision and zeal. In the face of harsh state action, this trend faded away and the top leadership sought refuge in quietist Salafism.

However, with the emergence of a new generation of young members, the Brotherhood agenda through the 1990s and the first decade of this century became increasingly democratic and accommodative, with the active participation of its members in debates on national political and economic issues as also on matters of regional concern, such as the situation in Palestine.[11]

However, the dissatisfaction of younger members with the functioning of the Brotherhood was apparent even in 2003. In his interviews with Brotherhood activists, Mohammed Mosaad Abdel Aziz found them to be resentful of the adherence of the Brotherhood to "an old fashioned, dated, rigid, shallow and monotonous ideology." What they wanted instead was a "pluralistic discourse" that would accommodate a variety of views.[12]

However, in 2009, at the time of the first major leadership change in many years, the Brotherhood failed to respond to these new aspirations by including reformist elements in the executive council. Thus it came to be dominated by Salafi-oriented leaders rather than modernist reformers. This exclusionary approach was adopted to avoid rifts in decision-making but it had the effect of rendering the group relatively ill-equipped to cope with the challenges of governance after Mubarak's ouster. The Brotherhood's tradition of secrecy, conspiracy and an all-pervasive sense of victimhood obviously did not help in this situation.

Houdaiby believes that the Brotherhood in government showed "an inadequate understanding of the magnitude of change brought about by the revolution".[13] It focused more on identity issues and victimhood rather than on the country's social, economic and political challenges, pursuing "status quo policies whilst adopting a populist

rhetoric promising change."[14] More seriously, it seemed to be more comfortable with Salafi groups than with the liberal/secular parties.

The Brotherhood faced several challenges in adapting itself to the political environment—both internal and external. Internally, the Brotherhood needed to disconnect itself from its political arm, i.e., the Freedom and Justice party, so that the latter could build its own cadres and develop a party programme that would have an appeal beyond the committed members of the Brotherhood itself. Externally, the Brotherhood and its ruling party had to cope with political, economic and social policy-making, as also the core issue of the role of religion in state administration. Though without any previous experience of government, Nathan Brown noted how the Brotherhood was already being changed by its participation in politics over the previous two years.[15] These changes included: abandoning its quietist approach; setting up a political party and participating in elections; undertaking, though slowly, the separation of the party from the Brotherhood; increasing involvement in the functioning of public institutions that required patience and compromise; a heightened sensitivity to polarisations in the body politic and the need to accommodate different views outside the narrow ideological perspectives of the Brotherhood. Above all, it was beginning to realise that the mobilisation of party cadres was also necessary for reaching out to different sections of the populace and to focus on local interests and formulate policies to address these to garner popular support at the local, provincial and national levels. Obviously, all these initiatives were at a very nascent stage and could not keep pace with the impatience of the people wanting real evidence of change in their life.

Brown noted that the Salafi groups had also taken enthusiastically to democratic politics. In contrast to their previous quietist and detached attitude to public life, they participated actively in constitutional debates and displayed a spirit of compromise on matters important to them, such as the provisions pertaining to Islam where they went along with Brotherhood rather than stick to their own ideological rigidities.[16]

Despite the hostility of the armed forces and of the liberal/secular elements in the polity, the scenario over the next two-three years is likely to reveal that mainstream Islamic parties, principally the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates, will continue to be important role-

players in the politics of states such as Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco and Kuwait. In fact, the resilience of these political processes will ensure the integrity of the states concerned and prevent them from disintegrating on tribal or clan lines as in Libya and Yemen or on sectarian/ethnic lines as in Iraq. However, maintaining the political order and facilitating the transition of these polities from authoritarian structures to moderate Islamic entities in a democratic system will pose a serious challenge. At the same time, the armed forces, which had facilitated the ouster of tyrants, can be expected to see themselves as the guardians of the nationhood of their state and will prevent the implementation of a substantial Islamist agenda which could prove divisive and encourage domestic conflict.

Radical Islam

Abdul Bari Atwan, writing in the *Al Quds Al-Arabi*, of which he was the editor till recently, has pointed out that Al-Qaeda's "Strategy to the year 2020", published in March 2005, seems to have achieved considerable success.[17] This strategic vision included: widespread confrontations between Western and jihadi forces; the debilitating impact of this conflict on Western economies, and the overthrow of the hated Arab dictators, followed by the establishment of an Islamic caliphate across the West Asia. This struggle was to culminate in an apocalyptic struggle between the "crusaders" and the believers, ending in the final defeat of the former and the establishment of the "Global Islamic Caliphate".

Given this vision, it is not surprising that, after some initial hesitation, Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri both welcomed the Arab Spring. In April 2011, Bin Laden celebrated the "unprecedented opportunities" offered by the Arab Spring and the success of the Islamist parties. He urged the jihadis to be patient and deliberate and not enter into confrontations with Islamic groups by saying: "A sizeable element within the Muslim Brotherhood and those like them hold the Salafi Doctrine…so their return to true Islam is only a matter of time, Allah willing." Al-Zawahiri saw the uprisings as "the Blessed Revolutions". The Al-Qaeda mouthpiece, *Inspire*, characterised the Spring as the "Tsunami of Change", and said: the Arab Spring "has proved that Al-Qaeda's rage is shared by the millions of Muslims across the world." Anwar Al-Awlaki, the spokesman of AQAP in

Yemen (assassinated in a drone attack in Yemen on 30 September, 2011), described the uprisings as an "avalanche" which would open "great doors of opportunity for the mujahideen all over the world."[18]

Atwan believes that the spring offers valuable opportunities to Al-Qaeda:[19]

- Al-Qaeda welcomes the emerging confrontation between the liberals and mainstream Islamist groups, as it is convinced that this would lead to weak governments and pave the way for itself and its affiliates.

- Similarly, the failure of mainstream Islamist groups to provide effective governance and reform would also discredit them, thus preparing the ground for an extremist upsurge.

- On the other hand, if the Islamist groups were denied full access to power through elections, there would again be an extremist upsurge as had occurred in Algeria in the early 1990s.

- Finally, the burgeoning sectarian divide between Shia and Sunni, which is in accord with Al-Qaeda's own views, would also benefit the radical groups.

So far, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates have been most successful in failed or failing states where the central authority is either non-functional or is extremely vulnerable, and their security apparatus and normal political and economic life have collapsed or are very fragile. Thus, these movements have been most effective in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Mali. In Pakistan, too, the central authority has been non-effective, in that, major players in state structures, particularly in the security apparatus, have actively supported the proliferation of radical groups and/or have failed to suppress them when called upon to do so. In the face of this governmental pusillanimity, large areas of Pakistan, particularly the tribal areas on the Pak-Afghan border, have become important sanctuaries for radical forces. These sanctuaries have connections of mutual support with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The symbiotic Al-Qaeda-Taliban relationship had been cemented by Bin Laden and Mullah Omar when, sometime in 1998, Bin Laden announced he had sworn *bayat* (allegiance) to Mullah Omar, the Amir of the Faithful. Later, all the other principal

leaders of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates similarly swore *bayat* to Mullah Omar.[20]

At the heart of global jihadi activity is the alliance between the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The Haqqani network, which operates on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border, maintains close ties with the Afghan Taliban and has encouraged the expansion of the TTP in Pakistan. "Al-Qaeda Central" remains in Pakistan, with a strong presence in Yemen. It keeps itself well-informed about the activities of various Al-Qaeda-oriented groups in different parts of the world, though it maintains varying degrees of association with them. As Atwan has noted, "there is the congratulatory nod, the wholehearted support, the expression of commonality, an alliance and, for some groups, the full-scale merger."[21]

It appears that for a group to move up the scale in terms of its affiliation with "Al-Qaeda Central", it should manifest the ability to carry out effective and lethal assaults on "strategic" targets. Both Osama Bin Laden and Al Zawahiri had been deeply unhappy with the mindless violence unleashed by Al Zarqawi in Iraq as also his wanton assaults on Shias.[22] Earlier, they had similar reservations about GIA's extensive violence in Algeria. A top Al-Qaeda leader had then said: "[In] Algeria, between 1994 and 1995, when [the GIA] was …on the verge of taking over the government they destroyed themselves with their own hands with their lack of reason, delusions, ignoring the people, their alienation of them through oppression, deviance and severity, coupled with a lack of kindness, sympathy and friendliness."[23]

Arab states such as Libya and Syria, whose political structures have broken down after the Arab Spring, have attracted a large number of Al-Qaeda militia, whose interventions could mean either that Al-Qaeda will play a larger role in the emerging political order, or, failing that, it will continue to foment turbulence and chaos in the country. A pattern has emerged that, when an authoritarian regime collapses under the influence of the Arab Spring, the state splinters on tribal and clan lines, with specific areas being dominated by well-armed warlords who carve up the country and assert local autonomies. There are legitimate concerns that, at least in the short-term, in Yemen, Libya and post-Assad Syria, a viable democratic process that would reconcile the various warring factions with incompatible agendas is

unlikely to emerge, and the countries would only be united and sharp animosities blunted under the authority of a radical grouping. In fact, Atwan believes that, after the Arab Spring, Al Zawahiri seems to be moderating his position to avoid alienating popular opinion, and suggests that Al-Qaeda could in time even develop a political wing to become a more effective player in the current regional scenario.[24]

Two prominent Arab observers, Mohammed Abu Rumman and Hasan Abu Haniya, believe that Al-Qaeda has already commenced the process of "ideological adaptation" in terms of which some of Al-Qaeda's public positions have changed to reflect the new realties of the Arab world, without of course compromising on its fundamental beliefs.[25] According to them, the Ansar Al Sharia is the new more moderate face of Al-Qaeda. The setting up of Ansar Al-Sharia was announced in Yemen in April 2011 and is part of AQAP. It has since spread to Tunisia and Libya, where it has carried out the demolitions of Sufi tombs and shrines. Its "theorist" is the Mauritanian preacher, Abu Mundher Shanqeeti, who sees the Ansar as an instrument for imposing the Sharia and for competing with the mainstream and Salafist parties for popular support, while not participating in democratic politics. Without giving up Al-Qaeda's core demand for an Islamic caliphate and its rejection of democracy, this new body could pressurise mainstream Islamist parties in power to enforce Sharia in their polities.

Arab Monarchies

In Jordan and Morocco, the monarchs are likely to promote a reform agenda in order to "manage" the political process so that their regimes are not toppled by the agitations led by mainstream Islamists. Both regimes are under considerable stress and the outcome of their attempts to manage political matters cannot be safely predicted.

The leaders of the GCC believe their political order is resilient because it is in harmony with popular aspirations, while the leaderships themselves have sufficient resources to prevent or contain agitations for significant reform. However, this scenario could change. Thus, according to a UAE-based political commentator, Mishaal Al Gergawi, some of the GCC regimes "evoke specific ethnic and pre-state alliances" to stress the legitimacy of their rule, while others use a specific interpretation of Islam for legitimising their states.[26] He

believes that all these bases for legitimacy have serious shortcomings in that they tend to privilege small groups in the national order and exclude others, both in terms of familial or ethnic groups or exclusivist religious groupings. Al Gergawi concludes:

> The notion of constitutional legitimacy served Kuwait well in its hour of need. And while it is unlikely that other Gulf states could suffer its fate [i.e. the ongoing political crises], the Gulf Co-operation Council as a whole faces daunting political, economic and social challenges in this decade. It will need all the unity it can get, and *only the singular upholding of constitutions can recognize all citizens as individuals—regardless of sect, race or any other divisible factor—and unite them as such.* (emphasis added)

The fact that Kuwait has a very different history of political participation compared to the rest of the GCC means that it can be expected to break ranks in the near future. The confrontation between the Amir and parliamentary members, with the leitmotif of elections and parliamentary dissolution, is not sustainable, particularly when parliamentarians have begun to mobilise street support. Thus, it would appear that a movement for greater political reform in Kuwait in the next two or three years cannot be ruled out.

The public agitations in the Sultanate of Oman in early 2011, the heightened political consciousness of the people and the accommodative approach of the ruler, all suggest that there is a possibility that participatory politics could take root here in the near future.

The situation in Bahrain continues to be grave and uncertain, and there are indications that at least some sections of the royal family are interested in entering into a dialogue with the Shia-majority opposition and would also countenance a degree of political change. Hence, it would appear that some reform could take place within a two-three year time frame.

Saudi Arabia has shown remarkable flexibility and dexterity in handling the challenges it has faced over the last 50 years or so. Thus, in the 1960s, its rulers used the Muslim Brotherhood to counter the secular allure of Nasser. Later, when faced with the challenge posed by the Islamic revolution in Iran, it gave its full support to the "global jihad" in Afghanistan, shedding its quietist character by supporting Islamic activism on the regional and global stage. After 9/11,

domestically, its leaders turned against the ulema and the education system shaped by them, and appeared to support a liberal Islamic agenda that included political participation and wide-ranging social and cultural reform, and even made some overtures to the marginalised Shia. The King initially seemed to concur with the "Awakening Sheikhs" when they criticised the Wahhabi order, but came down heavily upon them and their Brotherhood mentors when their demands began to include political reform, along with a constitutional monarchy. In short, the Kingdom has repeatedly exhibited the ability to course-correct swiftly and make dramatic U-turns whenever the interests of the royal family and the state so demand.

As of now, Saudi Arabia seems to be confident regarding its ability to weather the implications of the Arab Spring. During this challenging period, the royal family has turned to the Wahhabi establishment, its traditional bastion of support, and is extending it political and financial patronage for the augmentation of its authority in the country's social, cultural and educational domains. This obviously contradicts the King's avowed desire to accommodate the modernist aspirations of his people, particularly the young, and to project the country as a moderate, accommodative and attractive partner for regional and international engagement. The Kingdom has so far managed this contradiction by robustly challenging Iran and its "hegemonic" intentions and, as expected, has obtained the swift political and military support of the West, led by the USA.

But, beyond this façade of bravado and self-confidence, certain fragilities are apparent: the leadership has to manage the twin challenges of maintaining the unity of the royal family and the strident demands of the ulema, while accommodating the expectations of the people, many of whom are anxious for change. But, can their dissatisfaction translate into dissent and anger that would pull people onto the streets and make a collective popular demand for reform? There is no evidence to support this. Alternatively, could some modicum of change trickle down from the top, as the next monarch, with the consensual support of his brothers and nephews, initiates a programme of systematic political reform? This seems to be the most likely scenario, but it would have to contend with elements in the Wahhabi establishment, both quietist and Sahwi, who would actively

challenge any attempt to circumscribe the unique Islamic character of their state order.[27]

Sectarianism

With the entry of the Hezbollah on the side of the Assad regime in Syria and Hamas aligning itself with the Sunni axis, the sectarian divide in West Asia seems complete. The Hezbollah was till now a heroic Arab entity, an ally of Hamas, and supported by the Gulf sheikhdoms. By entering the Syrian conflict on a sectarian basis, it appears to have violated its own history. The influential Qatar-based cleric, Yusuf Qaradawi, who had earlier applauded it fulsomely when it had stood up to Israel in 2006, has now termed it the "party of Satan". He has also called on all Sunni Muslims with military training to march against Assad. Qaradawi was responding to the Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrullah's pledge to support Assad till his final victory. [28]

A Shia identity, separate from the broader Muslim and Arab persona, has been taking shape since the US liberation of Iraq in 2003 and the installation of a Shia government in a country with a Shia majority which ended the centuries-old Sunni domination of that land. Some observers go further back and suggest that Shia consciousness had first emerged in Lebanon in the 1960s, when demands were made for equality and full rights for the community that had been marginalised in that country's morass of diverse and competing denominational groups.

While Islam has been made up of two principal sects from its very beginning, the sectarian divide has hardly ever been a matter of a political contention in modern times, and generally the two communities have lived peacefully side-by-side. In fact, during the ascendancy of "secular" rulers through most of the 20th century, sectarian identities were quite blurred as there was a sense of nationhood under authoritarian rule. Authority in revolutionary Iraq, although exercised by so-called Sunni rulers, was hardly "Sunni" in a sectarian sense: it was a secular Baathist regime, with core support for the ruler Saddam Hussein coming from fellow-denizens from his hometown of Tikrit. It was party membership, loyalty and family connections that facilitated promotions in the party and government hierarchy rather than sectarian identity.

Syria too has been ruled for over 40 years by a secular Baathist party, the core support for the rulers coming from the narrow Alawi sect to which the Assads (father and son) belong. This was hardly a sectarian affiliation: it did not embrace the broad Shia community, nor did the regimes pursue any uniquely Shia projects or work against other groups on sectarian basis. Again, none of the other countries in West Asia, who are avowedly Sunni, interact with Syria as a Shia country. It was invariably seen as a revolutionary Arab country, founded on a secular ideology that had been developed almost entirely in an Arab context. In fact, Saudi Arabia, which is now at the forefront of the anti-Assad campaign, had the closest possible ties with Bashar al Assad, a relationship that even survived Saudi displeasure following the murder of its Lebanese protégé, Rafiq Hariri. What, then, explains the deep sectarian divide that seems to be driving present-day West Asian politics? Peter Beaumont has answered it thus:

> The reality is that the present rising tensions in the Middle East are far more complex than simple religious hatred. Rather, they reflect a growing friction rooted in more recent competitions over power, rights and identity which have been exacerbated both by the war in Iraq and by the reconfigurations of the Arab Spring.
>
> At the very heart of the debate is how much sectarian tensions themselves are driving the new conflicts or whether Sunni-Shia tensions have been co-opted into local and regional competitions whose nature is as much about power, politics and the distribution of resources as it is religious.[29]

This assessment is shared by the Iraqi scholar, Harith al-Qarawee, who believes that:

> Sectarian identities are used by political entrepreneurs to achieve political goals. Although cultural symbolism and collective narratives are a part of this process, the real objectives are political—and largely calculated.[30]

The current wave of sectarianism in West Asia may be explained thus: the strategic balance in West Asia was over-turned with the regime change effected by the USA in Iraq. On the debris of the Saddam regime emerged a political order that asserted its Shia identity and opened the doors for a possible political and even strategic partnership with Iran. The substance of this partnership was of course severely limited by the visceral US hostility to Iran and its political, military

and economic domination over Iraqi affairs, which continues even after the departure of its troops. Again, the new Iraqi order did not itself have a monolithic Shia character: it consisted of a large number of Shia groups vying for power and influence, some homegrown, others Iran-oriented, who were just not able to work with each other. And then, of course, there were various Sunni groups, some mainstream others radical, who sought their own share of the political space either through strategic alliances with Shia groups or by unleashing sectarian violence against the Shia.

Regardless of the complexity of the Iraqi political scenario, the fact remains that Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC did believe themselves to be insecure and vulnerable in the face of a possible Iran-Iraq alliance. But, this in itself would not have led to the present-day divide, which was primarily the result of the impact of the Arab Spring in Bahrain.

Bahrain is unique in the GCC in having a majority Shia population which, by most accounts, faces discrimination in political, economic, social and religious areas. However, the agitation in Bahrain for equality, freedom, dignity and democracy in early 2011 was not sectarian in character, nor does it appear that Iran, deeply divided at home and a pariah abroad, had any role in encouraging the public agitation.[31] Still, given the perceived threat from Iran, it was in the interest of the GCC to enforce the political status quo in member countries that constituted the Sunni axis (in alliance with the USA) against the "Shia crescent".

A similar story was repeated in Syria. The early agitations in the country were non-sectarian and sought individual dignity and democracy. It was Bashar Assad who injected the sectarian element to defend his regime, by supporting himself with Alawite loyalists and positing that the "Alawite" hold on power was under threat.[32] This encouraged his enemies to mobilise themselves on sectarian lines as well, with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, annihilated by Assad Sr. in 1982, forming the vanguard of the insurgency, and enjoying the full support of the "Sunni axis".

The genie of sectarianism, now out of the bottle, has come to engulf all of West Asia. The GCC conflict with Iran and the battle with Assad are now seen as "Sunni" battles, and have mobilised Sunnis across the region into this conflict that is believed to be existential by both sides.

The influential Sunni cleric, Qaradawi, warned that 100 million Shia could defeat the 1.7 billion Sunni because the latter are "weak",[33] a challenge which has fired Sunnis with fanatical zeal. Lebanon and Egypt are the latest playgrounds for Salafi clerics inciting sectarian violence. The Shia on their part fear annihilation, and have resorted to a "Shia jihadism" to protect themselves. According to Vali Nasr:

> For Shias, Syria is not the Spanish civil war or Afghanistan. Many of those Shia who are going to fight are going from places like Lebanon and Iraq because they believe they are fighting for themselves. It is seen as a forward deployment by those who fear that, if Assad loses, Sunnis will come after them. They see it as a pre-emptive defence. [34]

It is important to note that, in this fraught environment, Shia fears have been exacerbated by what they see as "Sunni" resurgence (in sectarian terms) across WANA after the Arab Spring. From their perspective, the first movement for freedom and dignity, that was all-embracing and non-religious, has mutated into Sunni triumphalism and is being led by Islamist groups that have substantial anti-Shia discourse in their historic baggage, however muted it might be today. All of this is of course impacting the region's geopolitical scenario which is discussed in the next chapter.

NOTES

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8. Heba Saleh, "A Revolution Betrayed", *Financial Times*, June 28, 2013, p. 7.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibrahim El Houdaiby, "From Prison to Palace: the Muslim Brotherhood's Challenges and responses in post-revolution Egypt", *Fride/Hivos*, 2013, p. 4.

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12. Mohammed Mosaad Abdel Aziz, "The New Trend of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt", in Olivier Roy and Amel Boubekeur (Ed.), *Whatever Happened to the Islamists?* Hurst & Co, London, 2012, pp. 86-87.
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14. Ibid, p. 12.
15. Nathan J. Brown, "Islam and Politics in the New Egypt", *The Carnegie Papers, Middle East*, April 2013, p. 3.
16. Ibid, pp. 10-11.
17. Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden—Al-Qaeda, the Next Generation*, Saqi Books, London, 2012, pp. 12-13; for a summary of Al-Qaeda's vision and strategic thinking see Talmiz Ahmad, *Children of Abraham at War—The Clash of Messianic Militarisms*, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 270-74.
18. Atwan, no. 17, pp. 37, 58-60.
19. Ibid, pp. 37-38.
20. Ibid, p. 134.
21. Ibid, p. 177.
22. Ibid, p. 210.
23. Ibid, p. 172.
24. Ibid, pp. 264-65.
25. Mohammed Abu Rumman and Hasan Abu Haniya, "Ansar al-Sharia: Al-Qaeda's Response to Arab Spring", *Al-Monitor*, January 9, 2013, at: http://www.lebanonwire.com/130IMLN/13010910AM.asp (Accessed on January 13, 2013).
26. Mishaal Al-Gergawi, "Gulf rulers should rely only on constitutional power", *Financial Times*, February 2, 2012, p. 11; another UAE scholar, Sultan Al-Qassemi, has pointed out: "For the Arab States of the Gulf there are two kinds of reforms, those that are acceptable and those that are off limits. Off limit calls for reform include calling for a constitutional monarchy, however inevitable; the policy of the Gulf States in that regard is to kick the ball forward into the future for as long as possible. Acceptable calls for reform on the other hand include advocating for women's rights and for the election of municipal councils." [Sultan Al Qassemi, "Institutionalising the Arab Gulf Governments", February 2, 2013, at: http://www.opendemocracy.net/sultan-soud-al-qassemi/institutionalising-arab-gulf-governments (Accessed on February 4, 2013).]
27. The former Saudi government official-turned-academic, Fahad Nazer, has explained why Saudis, at present, do not manifest any desire for radical change. He points out that, in view of the difficulties being experienced by the people of Syria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, "they've (the Saudis) gained greater appreciation for the relative stability, prosperity and, as they see it, civility of their state." He goes on to say: "Saudis do not see the regime as their enemy, nor do they consider their monarch to be a tyrant. They also do not view their state as inherently unjust. Recent polls conducted in the region show that Saudis are optimistic about their economic well-being and are generally 'happy'."
     A young Saudi Professor of religion said in an interview that, "Unlike in the past, youth today are not mainly concerned with what Islam prescribes about how to dress, how to wear their hair or how to deal with the opposite gender. Rather, "their main concern now is citizenship, freedom, human rights... We want

to have these ideas connected to Islamic thinking." [See: Fahad Nazer, "'Saudi Code' Prevents Arab Spring in Kingdom", *Al-Monitor*, February 13, 2013, at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/saudi-arabia-arab-spring-king-abdullah-saudi-code.html (Accessed on February 18, 2013), and Caryle Murphy, "Saudi Youth Question Traditional Approach to Islam", *Al-Monitor*, February 4, 2013, at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/saudi-youth-question- (Accessed on February 5, 2013).]

28.   Peter Beaumont, "Conflict in the Middle East is about more than just religion", *The Observer*, June 9, 2013, at: http://www.lebanonwire.com/1306MLN/13060902GDN.asp (June 9, 2013).

29.   Ibid.

30.   Ibid.

31.   See Geneive Abdo, "The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shia-Sunni divide", *Analysis Paper, No. 29*, The Saban Centre for Middle east Policy at Brookings, April 2013, pp. 12-14; Farhad Khosrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that Shook the World,* Paradigm Publishers, Boulder, Co, 2012, p. 128.

32.   Khosrokhavar, no. 31, p. 130.

33.   Beaumont, no. 28.

34.   Beaumont, no. 28.

8
Regional Islamist Confrontations

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the scenario in the WANA region before Morsi's ouster consisted of the following:

(i) a deepening sectarian divide, created by Saudi Arabia's attempts to counter Iran's influence in the region, which has domestic implications for each GCC country and a broader regional geopolitical impact;

(ii) the increasing hostility of Saudi Arabia and the UAE towards the Muslim Brotherhood and President Morsi's government, while Qatar seemed to be supportive of Brotherhood interests; and,

(iii) a burgeoning warmth between Egypt and Iran parallel with the Saudi-Iran estrangement and Saudi-Egyptian uneasiness.

The Saudi-Iran Competition

The ongoing turmoil in most countries of the Arab world has been complicated by the larger geopolitical competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran that has religious, ideological, political and military dimensions as well as regional and global implications.

Faced with the demands for reform in Bahrain, which has a majority Shia population, Saudi Arabia moved quickly to play the sectarian card. The uprising in Bahrain was attributed to Iranian "interference", after which Saudi Arabia geared itself to confront the

Iranian presence and influence in different theatres in West Asia. This confrontation with Iran was given an ethnic and sectarian hue that was reflected in the Saudi and sections of the Gulf media. Thus, in response to the Iranian Shoura Council's National Security Committee's demand for the withdrawal of Saudi troops from Bahrain, *Al-Watan* in its editorial said:

> Iran has ignored the realities of its intervention into the affairs of the region, its attempts to ignite sedition and its hostile policies, brushing aside international laws and good neighbourly principles. Since this state came into existence, Saudi leaders have been keen on non-intervention into affairs of others. Similarly, they have never allowed others to intervene into their affairs.[1]

Al-Madinah, in an editorial, applauded the united stance taken by the GCC at the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Riyadh, in April 2011, which, it said, had thwarted Tehran's attempts to vitiate the atmosphere in the region, while contributing to the restoration of peace and stability in Bahrain.[2] The *Okaz* said that Iran had been continuously pursuing a policy of expansionism, i.e., by occupying the islands belonging to the UAE; by encouraging sectarianism in Bahrain, and, more recently, using spy cells in Kuwait to undermine the leadership there.[3]

This strident tone of the Saudi media was echoed by other sections of the Gulf media as well. Thus, the distinguished Kuwaiti editor, Ahmad Al-Jarallah writing in the *Arab Times*, said that the Iranian regime "has become a viral disease attacking all countries except those supporting its ideologies or (those) in its bondage".[4] Recalling the pernicious role played by Iran in encouraging sectarianism in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, Jarallah said:

> Iran's relationship with GCC nations is on the brink of collapse, because the regime has been pushing the region towards an armed offensive, thinking it is the region's power bloc in control of the situation.

This strident tone continued all through 2012. In May 2012, an editorial in the Saudi *Al-Watan* said:

> Quite simply, the Iranian nuclear program is proceeding as the leadership in Tehran wishes. It is based on the dream of reviving the Persian Empire and reinstating its control over the region,

subjecting its nations by force to an agenda that is no longer secret to anyone. This agenda is based on territorial/confessional [Shiite] expansionism, digging up the past from its grave in the service of this expansionist policy.

The Iranian project in the region is no longer a secret. Even if it assumes different forms and adopts various guises, such as 'backing the resistance against Israel', it ultimately aims at ensuring Tehran's control over the so-called 'Shiite Crescent'. This is the prelude to taking over the rest of the region— something that the region's states and nations should be wary of.[5]

The Arab Spring has thus set the stage for a fundamental transformation in existing postures and alliances, sharpening the edge of intra-regional competition and the restructuring of the old West Asian order, primarily on sectarian lines. Saudi Arabia's intervention in Bahrain elicited a cacophony of protest in Iraq, with almost all prominent leaders expressing outrage at the suppression of democratic rights in Shia-majority Bahrain. The Hezbollah in Lebanon echoed this outcry, and there were strong reactions and even sabre-rattling by different sections in Iran.

But, the principal arena for the competition is Syria. In the early days of the Syrian uprising, the Saudi agenda was modest: the Kingdom saw in the ferment an opportunity for far-reaching reforms in the Syrian political order or, failing that, regime change, either of which could serve to break the long standing strategic ties between Damascus and Tehran. Thus, Tariq Al-Homaid wrote in *Ashraq Al Awsat* that, "the time for reform has come"[6] and that "repression may buy the regime—any regime—more time; but it will not rescue it". He concluded by saying that:

The time has come for Damascus to pay greater attention to its domestic affairs and work seriously on providing decisive solutions on the issues of political parties and the peaceful transfer of power. A republic remains a republic. There is no magical solution for this predicament.

Again, the position taken by the government of Nouri Al Maliki on developments in Syria evoked serious criticism in Saudi Arabia, which saw in this posture another evidence of sectarian affiliation. Tariq Al-Homaid said that the present regime was "worse and more dangerous

than Saddam Hussain's Iraq" since it is based on a "detestable sectarianism and its export", and that "the events in Syria (and in Bahrain before that) have proven that the Iraqi regime has less to do with democracy and more to do with sectarianism and the establishment of Shiite rule."[7]

The election of Hassan Rouhani as the new president of Iran has raised hopes of better ties between Iran and the West as also the GCC countries. Soon after his election, warm messages were exchanged between him and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. Later, at a press conference, Rouhani stressed the importance of good ties with the GCC, particularly Saudi Arabia, in these words:

> The Persian Gulf region and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf have their special features because of the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf from the political and economic points of view. We are not only neighbours with southern states of the Persian Gulf, but also brothers. We are not only neighbours and brothers with Saudi Arabia but all Muslims' *Kiblah* [the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca toward which Muslims turn when they pray] is there. It is a country that we have very close cultural, historic, and regional relations with. Hundreds of thousands of Iranians travel to Saudi Arabia for hajj ceremonies. Many Saudi Arabian citizens travel to our country. The basis of dialogue and cooperation in economic, cultural, and political fields is fully ready between the two countries. I am happy that the first security agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia was signed by me on behalf of the Iranian side in 1377 [1998-1999]. God willing, I hope that we will have very good relations with neighbours, particularly with Saudi Arabia during the next government.[8]

This is the first silver lining after the bitterness and acrimony of over two years.

The Saudi/UAE—Brotherhood Estrangement

Saudi estrangement from the Brotherhood, that became public with Prince Naif's remarks in 2002, has not been bridged. In fact, in the wake of the Arab Spring, even as the Brotherhood in Egypt and its affiliates in other countries came to power or were seeking political power, the distance between the Brotherhood and the Kingdom grew even greater. This was clearly apparent in the hostility with which

commentators wrote about the Brotherhood and the Morsi government in the Saudi and some sections of the GCC media and the two pan-Arab Saudi-owned papers, *Al-Hayat* and *Ashraq Al-Awsat*. In fact, the non-Saudi pan-Arab paper, the liberal *Al Quds Al-Arabi*, in an editorial said that Saudi Arabia has given "a green light to some of its commentators to publish a series of articles attacking the Muslim Brotherhood harshly, accusing them of ingratitude and trying to topple certain regimes."[9]

The Saudi-Brotherhood divide has deep ideological and political moorings: while both occupy the common space of Salaf, the (selectively) "quietist" attitude of Wahabbiya is entirely at odds with the robust activism of the Brotherhood in the political domain. Again, the Al-Saud see Wahabbiya as a source of *their* legitimacy, both as rulers and as the "guardians of the two holy mosques", while the Brotherhood has a political agenda that is much broader in content and geographical space. As the Saudi experience of the Sahwa movement has shown, the Brotherhood has the capacity to engender a movement at the heart of the Wahhabi establishment which can pose a real challenge to the monopoly of power of the Al-Saud on their own home turf. The recent activism of the Sahwa in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in the Kingdom, the ascendancy of its liberal elements who are espousing constitutional monarchy and democratic rights, and their active association with Shia activists on a common platform of reform, are developments that have convinced the Al-Saud that the Brotherhood poses a threat to its domestic order and its regional influence.

Abdul Bari Atwan, former editor of *Al Quds Al-Arabi*, pointed out that the GCC nations had every reason to feel insecure in the face of the Brotherhood because:

   (i) the Brotherhood is now a global organisation;
  (ii) it has considerable influence among the GCC youth whom it had mentored earlier in local educational institutions;
 (iii) it is well-funded, and,
 (iv) its links with Islam gave it a strong base of support among the local population.[10]

But, there was a major crack in the usually solid phalanx of the GCC —Qatar. Both Arab and Western observers watched with some

bemusement as Qatar strode robustly on the regional stage, "bankrolling a new generation of Islamists across the Middle East", while expressing its "eagerness to retain influence in the West."[11] Commentators were unable to figure out the motive behind Qatar's activism. In Libya, it was seen supporting Islamist factions over the liberal transitional government; it had links with the radical Al Shabaab in Somalia, and, above all, it was most active in backing the Brotherhood elements in the Syrian uprising, though there were suggestions that some of its military aid could even be going to more extremist groups.[12] Qatar was particularly active in bolstering its ties with Morsi's Egypt. It was pumping much-needed funds into the Egyptian economy, announcing investments of $18 billion in 2012 and a further aid of $8 billion this year. This led to speculations that Qatar was claiming bonds of "ideological and political kinship" with the Islamist entity and is "determined not to let [it] fail."[13]

One explanation for the Qatari role has come from a Nigerian diplomat who said: "They want to be seen as a big player, an important player that is respected and willing to bring peace to distant lands."[14] James Dorsey made the interesting point that Qatar, a Wahhabi State, in fact "offers young Saudis a vision of a conservative Wahhabi society that is less constrained and permits individuals, irrespective of gender, greater control over their lives".[15] Qatar's support for the Brotherhood could also be a deliberate effort to compete with Saudi Arabia, which was the strategy behind its mediation efforts in the region during the last decade. Whatever the explanation, Qatar was certainly causing some exasperation in the Kingdom. The Saudi columnist, Tariq Al-Homaid, analysing Qatar's cosy ties with the Brotherhood in Egypt, categorically asserted: "Backing a particular current in Egypt at the expense of another is tantamount to sabotage."[16] Al-Homaid was truly puzzled:

> For one thing, Qatari society is salafi and follows the school of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdelwahab, and more so than many people believe. And this renders Qatar's backing for the Brotherhood in the media and in political terms genuinely surprising and strange. Moreover, this is taking place not only in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, but also in Syria, Jordan, and as mentioned earlier, in certain Gulf states—in fact, in states where no Brotherhood presence was known before.

In a paper on Qatar's foreign policy initiatives, Lina Khatib analysed Qatar's active role in regional affairs and was of the view that Qatar's foreign policy "does not appear to be based on a coherent political strategy and is largely reactive in character." In terms of the core interests propelling its foreign endeavours, besides national security and keeping Iran at bay (without entirely alienating it), Khatib suggested that it is to expand its regional influence (often in competition with Saudi Arabia) and mark its presence in the international community, while remaining an unswerving ally of the West, particularly the USA.[17]

After the Arab Spring, Qatar played a high profile role in pursuing regime change in Libya in alliance with the West, an intervention that in itself proved to be a game-changer in Arab politics. It firmly allied the GCC with the West by shifting the focus of the Arab agitations from freedom, democracy and dignity to confrontation with Iran, the sectarian divide and, towards this end, regime-change in line with GCC and Western interests, an approach that is seeing its full expression in the conflict in Syria.

However, Qatar went well beyond the simplistic paradigm of aligning with Western interests; it in fact firmly affiliated itself with the Muslim Brotherhood, cementing ties with Egypt and extending full support to Brotherhood entities in Syria, Yemen and North Africa. In these initiatives, Qatar was well ahead of its Western allies and even appeared at odds with them and its GCC partners, particularly in respect of its ties with Morsi's Egypt.

Given that Qatar's affiliation with the USA lay at the heart of its national interest, we can safely conclude that Qatar's role in promoting ties with the Brotherhood could not and did not contradict its US connection. It would appear that Qatar saw itself as being at the vanguard of the process of "softening" up the Brotherhood as the latter grappled with the myriad political and economic challenges of governance for which it had neither the vision nor the experience, nor even resources, both human and financial. In short, with adroit diplomacy and the strategic extension of financial support to Egypt's (and Libya's) beleaguered economy, Qatar thought it could, over the long term, steer these hardboiled Islamist ideologues toward moderation and, in time, even an accommodation with Western interests. In this light, Qatar's affiliation with the Islamism of the

Brotherhood could be seen as strategic rather than ideological. With the ouster of the Morsi government and Saudi Arabia's strong ties with Egypt's military rulers, Qatar's role in Egypt and beyond in support of Brotherhood interests has received a body-blow.

Egypt-Iran Ties

The ideological divide between the Brotherhood and the GCC and its increasing political distance from Egypt set the stage for Egypt and Iran to come closer to each other. These ties were given a boost by the visit of the Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, to Cairo, in January 2013. Saleh is known for "his well-measured statements and composed demeanour" besides being a fluent Arabic speaker.[18] This visit was followed by that of President Ahmedinejad in early February 2013 for the OIC summit—the first visit by an Iranian President to Egypt since 1979. As expected, these visits and the general warming of Egypt-Iran ties caused considerable concern in the GCC.

Some GCC commentators suggested that Iran could be assisting Egypt in setting up a cadre of the Brotherhood on the lines of its own Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). This was derived from a report in a British paper according to which the head of the IRGC, Major General Kassem Suleimani, had paid a secret visit to Cairo at the end of December 2012, though several sources on both sides asserted later that the visit did not take place and there was no such plan.[19]

GCC commentators were highly critical of the Iranian foreign minister's visit as well. *Ashraq Al-Awsat's* Ahmad Othman wrote, albeit somewhat confusingly, that the Egypt-Iran rapprochement was bringing together one party that sought "to re-establish the Persian Empire's hegemony over the Arab countries, and a group [the Brotherhood] that aims to recreate the Caliphate in order to bring there some countries under its control."[20] Ahmad Youssef Ahmad, writing in the Abu Dhabi-based *Al-Ittihad,* said that the Iranians were offering "generous economic aid to Egypt with the secret aim of sabotaging relations between Egypt and the UAE."[21]

Relations between Iran and the Brotherhood go back to the 1950s when Iranian religious figures, who later became prominent in the Islamic revolution, had first met Brotherhood leaders in Cairo in 1954. These links continued in later years. Sayyid Qutb's writings were

translated into Persian and were very popular. There is considerable overlap between the Brotherhood and the Iranian religious establishment in that both accept the leadership of a "supreme guide" and the practice of *taqiyya* (religious dissimulation) to avoid persecution; and they both believe in elections and the rule of the Sharia, with oversight by the clergy. As pointed out by Hassan Hassan, we should draw a distinction between the ideology and the organisation of the Brotherhood, in that, while its members reflect a wide variety of views on religious matters, from extreme Salafi to moderate, as an *organisation* the Brotherhood takes a very cautious position on sectarian matters, which facilitates its ties with Iran.[22]

The distinguished Iranian commentator, Kayhan Barzegar, is of the opinion that Egypt-Iran ties during Morsi's rule blunted the hostility with which Mubarak's Egypt had viewed Iran. He believes the new relationship could "create a new power equation in the region that can potentially redefine the role of global players in the greater Middle East."[23] Besides the comfort generated by the Islamist orientation of the two countries and the fact that Egyptian foreign policy was now likely to be both nationalist and independent, the ties between the two, says Barzegar, reflect a "mutual strategic need", because Iran was the dominant power east of the Middle East while Egypt dominated the West of this region. Thus, they had common strategic interests with regard to regional issues, particularly in limiting the role of the great powers.

While Barzegar may have overstated the mutuality of interests, there is no doubt that the Arab Spring, which has aggravated the sectarian divide due to the Saudi-Iranian competition, seemed to bridge this divide, to some extent, by bringing together Iran and Egypt, the leader of the Arab world that had a traditional Sunni Islamist party at the helm. Morsi's rejection of the sectarian approach was itself a breath of fresh air in the fraught West Asian scenario and presaged Egypt's "post-sectarian foreign policy"[24] which would directly challenge the sectarian wedge created by Saudi Arabia. Morsi's ouster, however has changed the entire scenario, leaving in its wake an environment of considerable uncertainty.

Prognosis

The two-year old conflict in Syria, where the sectarian divide is

becoming sharper by the day, has now involved all the major players in West Asian affairs who also have come to believe that the outcome of this conflict will profoundly affect their long-term interests. Today, Hezbollah fighters and cadres from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard are fighting alongside Assad. Ranged against him is the Free Syrian Army (FSA), bolstered with weaponry from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and some Western countries. The training and logistical support for the FSA is being provided by Jordan and Turkey, with the latter also being the venue for regular "Friends of Syria" meetings. The Syrian Kurds are also asserting themselves and are working closely with their Iraqi brethren to maintain the border posts in north Syria. Turkey of course is concerned about Kurdish intentions, even as it seeks to define a new role for itself in West Asia. Salafi and Al-Qaeda-affiliated cadres are coming into Syria from Iraq, North Africa and other parts of the Arab world. Israel has already conducted air operations against Syria in May 2013, and has fortified its borders with Syria. And, finally, the West, led by the USA, is extending full political and military support to the uprising, while engaging diplomatically with Russia to promote a settlement. Steven Heydemann has described the Syrian scenario succinctly, thus:

> Syria has become the epicenter of regional conflicts and competition in the Middle East. Regional balance of power politics, ideological clashes, and unrequited nationalist aspirations have fused, transforming what began as a peaceful uprising for dignity and democracy into an ethno-sectarian conflict that is increasingly difficult to contain within the boundaries of the Syrian state.[25]

For the external participants, the Syrian conflict has a significance well beyond regime change:[26] for the GCC, Israel and the West, it is a proxy war against Iran which, on the basis of its alliance with Syria, has a strategic presence at the Mediterranean; for Israel, there is the additional consideration that regime change in Syria would cut the lifeline of the Hezbollah, its formidable enemy across the border in Lebanon. From the GCC perspective, a Syria with a more amenable Sunni government would restore some balance in its strategic equation *vis-à-vis* Iran. (Obviously, the GCC is so far not a monolith entity with regard to Syria, since Qatar has been backing the Syrian Brotherhood groups, while Saudi Arabia (for whom any Brotherhood

group is anathema) is supporting the more moderate (i.e., non-religious) FSA.

With Russia and China ranged against the US (and its Western and Arab allies), the Syrian conflict has acquired a global dimension as well, by becoming the arena for a new strategic divide and competition. Russia has important interests at stake in Syria: the Assad regime is its traditional ally, hence its overthrow would bolster the West and possibly diminish Russian standing in West Asia and even beyond in Central Asia, its traditional sphere of influence. Hence, Russia has provided Assad with weaponry, energy supplies and finance, as also diplomatic support at the UN.[27] But, Russia takes a much larger view of the situation.

Russia's concerns emerge from the fact that it sees the US role in Syria as mirroring the case of Libya, where it used a vaguely worded UNSC resolution to unleash massive airpower and missiles in Libya which not only overthrew the Gaddafi regime but also destroyed the integrity of that country. The Russians believe that the US is incrementally enhancing its intervention in Syria, thus paving the way for the destruction of the regime and the unity of the state, which will have serious implications for the stability of the country and the region.

The Sino-Russian partnership is marked by their rejection of unilateral resort to war on the part of the West and their principled rejection of a "military solution" for complex issues. In the words of a Russian foreign affairs commentator:

> We experience [on the global stage] a new quality of Russian-Chinese strategic partnership. The Chinese are against interventionism. They do not think that those interventions are humanitarian. They don't think those interventions have to do anything with democracy. They think it's about geopolitics…

> As far as I can judge, they see the Syrian case as a test case for the introduction of the new international model—one that will be based on the concept of multipolarity rather than the unipolarity. What happens in Syria is considered in China as matter of principle—a matter of political philosophy. They will not support a world in which a group of countries will dictate to others how to behave, and will bring down governments, finance "orange revolutions" and organize interventions like the one in Iraq.[28]

Given the ferocity of the conflict, the multiplicity of participants and their competing interests, and the sense that this is a zero-sum situation, the outcome of this confrontation is not likely to be clear or neat, nor will it fully satisfy any of the participants. If the Assad regime were to dramatically collapse (as in the case of Gaddafi) or if he were to leave the scene (like Ben Ali of Tunisia), there is every likelihood of fighting breaking out between the principal players, as all of them are flush with weapons and funds, and none of them are willing to give ground. The division of the country into various enclaves dominated by different groups appears inevitable. (There could even be an Assad-ruled Alawite enclave on the Mediterranean coast.)

Heydemann envisages two possible scenarios: a failed or failing Syria or a Balkanised state.[29] While a failed or failing state, in which the institutions of governance have collapsed, cannot be ruled out, the more likely outcome is a Balkanized state, i.e., a unitary state divided into new political parts, with functioning institutions of governance. Would this presage a region-wide collapse of the existing state order and widespread violence leading to the creation of new political entities? Again, while this cannot be ruled out, most changes are likely to take place *within* the existing state boundaries determined by the terms of the Versailles agreements after the First World War. These mutations, which will most probably be along ethnic and sectarian lines, are likely to be accompanied by considerable blood-letting.

Such a grim outcome could perhaps be avoided by a strong dose of accommodative politics and bipartisan statesmanship, which is currently not being displayed by any of the principal players.

The competitions within Islamism and between Islamist and non-Islamist elements (i.e., liberal, secular, the military) have thrown up some rather unlikely coalitions: in Syria, the so-called Shiite Alawi regime is facing a coalition made up of a mainstream religious group, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which is backed by GCC member Qatar, and the new regional player Turkey; a non-religious group of Syrian army officers who have defected to form the FSA, which is backed by Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, and an extremist Islamic group (with some divisions within it) that has an affiliation with Al-Qaeda. These groups are not just against the Assad regime; they are also in competition with each other, and the influence of each rises and falls in accordance with the clout of its external patron. With the rising

Saudi influence in Syria and now Egypt, the Brotherhood, supported by the Qatari-Turkish group, could be on a downward spiral.

In Egypt, the competition has not so far (and may not) achieved the scale of a civil war, but the domestic alliances are equally bewildering. The liberal/secular forces, at present amorphous and unorganised, in association with sections of the Salaf, had coalesced around the army (now the champion of the nation and the underdog) to oust the democratically elected Brotherhood from power. However, shortly after the ouster, the Salafist Al-Nour saw the light; it refused to accept the secular-liberal El Baradei as prime minister and expressed deep sorrow at the killing of Brotherhood activists on 5 July. As street violence has increased and political polarisation has deepened, the liberal groups have also begun to question their affiliation with the armed forces and their ties could reach breaking point in the near future. The Brotherhood on its part has fallen back on its core members to confront the alliance ranged against it.

Meanwhile, the army is busy re-inventing itself, falling back on the legacy of Nasser and Sadat to project itself not as a coup-maker but as "the legitimate successor of the finest and most idealistic that the Egyptian military has produced".[30] No mention here of the debacle of 1967 or of the tyranny and economic mismanagement of the earlier despots; in fact, no reference to Hosni Mubarak who was himself the legitimate successor of Nasser and Sadat; but, then he was ousted at Tahir Square by Egypt's present military guardians and therefore cannot be remembered, though his release from prison affirms the political link between Al-Sisi and his predecessor. And then, of course, Egypt's new rulers enjoy the full backing of Saudi Arabia, whose dislike for the Brotherhood is as intense as its distrust of the Arab Spring. Thus, the world's most rigidly doctrinaire Islamic entity finds itself backing non-religious elements in Syria and Egypt—the principal theatres of present-day Islamist contentions.

All of these alignments in the political firmament of West Asia are tactical and temporary and serve the interests of some for keeping Arab Spring at bay, while others seek to leverage them to their advantage, however, transient and opportunistic their coalitions might be.

NOTES

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2. *Al-Madinah*, April 4, 2011.
3. *Okaz*, Riyadh, April 5, 2011.
4. Ahmad Al-Jaralla, *Arab Times*, Kuwait, April 4, 2011.
5. *Al-Watan*, May 29, 2012.
6. Tariq Al-Homaid, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, March 28, 2011.
7. Ibid, April 27, 2011.
8. Rouhani interview, June 21, 2013, at: http://www.lobelog.com/rouhani-on/ (June 25, 2013).
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17. Lina Khatib, "Qatar's foreign policy: the limits of pragmatism", *International Affairs*, 89:2 (2013), pp. 417-31.
18. Richard Javad Heydarian, "Iran tries charm-offensive in Cairo", January 18, 2013, at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/printN.html (Accessed on January 20, 2013).
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20. Ahmad Othman, "Common ground between Cairo and Tehran", *Asharq al-Awsat*, Translation in *Mideast Mirror*, January 14, 2013.
21. Ahmad Youssef Ahmad, no. 19.
22. Hassan Hassan, "Iran-Brotherhood Ties: rooted in history, with eye on future" *The National*, Abu Dhabi, January 15, 2013, p. 14.
23. Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran and Egypt Chart New Course in Relationship", *Al-Monitor*, March 13, 2013, at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/iran-egypt-alliance-mutual-ties-regional-stability.html (March 14, 2013).
24. Heyderian, no. 18; Bessma Momani however believes that the strategic interests of Iran and Egypt "are still worlds apart" and that "the icy relationship between these two historic powers in the Middle East remains." She contends that Egypt's

political and economic interests will ensure that its substantial ties with the GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar, will continue. [see: Bessma Momani, "Egypt and Iran: A Rapprochement Is Unlikely", February 7, 2013, at: http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/02/07-egypt-iran-momani (Accessed on February 18, 2013).]

25. Steven Heydemann, 'Syria's Uprising: Sectarianism, regionalisation, and the state order in the Levant", *Hivos/Fride*, 2013, p. 1.

26. "Sayyida Zainab—a shrine which was accorded the status of a site of Shia religious pilgrimage largely in the 1980s and 1990s—lies at the heart of the strategic relationship between the Assad regime, Iran, and Arab Shia groups. This relationship…is driven far more by geo-strategic interests than faith. The various groups that profit from a further 'sectarianisation' of the conflict, this time on the Shia side, are to blame. These include Iran, which is trying to re-establish its influence over all Shia political movements and groups, whether in the Gulf, in Iraq or elsewhere. This is not a fight purely or even primarily about Islam; it is a war about the future of the Middle East."
     [Toby Mattiesen, "Syria: Inventing a Religious War, June 12, 2013, at: http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2013/jun/12/syria-inventing-religious-war/?utm_medium=email&utm_... (June 19, 2013).]

27. A Russian commentator has suggested that the Syrian conflict is "a proxy war between Russia and the West". Russia not only has geopolitical interests in opposing Western success in Syria, its policy of backing an old ally and opposing the West also emerges from the leadership's 'sense of national pride'. (Andrei Nekrasov, "Russian Motives in Syria are not all geopolitical", *Financial Times*, June 19, 2013, p. 9.)

28. "Behind Russia's Syria Stance", Interview with Alexey Pushkov, Chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the Russian State Duma, June 19, 2013, at: http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/behind-russias-syria-stance-8623?page=show(June 25, 2013).

29. Heydemann, no. 25, pp. 5-7.

30. Atul Aneja, "Efforts on at Tahrir to paint El-Sissi as face of second revolution", *The Hindu*, July 7, 2013.

9

Military Takeover in Egypt

The deep polarisation in Egypt throughout President Morsi's one-year rule culminated in the ouster of his government by the country's armed forces on July 3, 2013, the suspension of the constitution and the arrest of the Brotherhood's top leaders. Islamic television stations were closed down, and the business dealings of the Brotherhood and its senior members were under investigation. These dramatic developments climaxed in large-scale public demonstration across the country, with people coming out into the streets in their millions, supporting the demands for Morsi's ouster with signatures, again going into the millions. The demonstrations on 30 June in Cairo attracted about ten million participants and had the support of the heads of Al-Azhar and the Coptic church. The people were protesting against deteriorating living conditions and limits imposed on their freedoms, particularly freedom of expression, while Morsi on his part claimed "legitimacy" as the basis for his continuance in government. The demonstrations were organised by Tamorad, an organisation that represents Egyptian youth. It is headed by 27-year old Mahmoud Badr and four associates, and articulates a liberal/secular agenda while asserting that "people and police are one hand".[1]

In this fraught atmosphere, the head of the Army General Command and Defence Minister, General Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi, issued a 48-hour ultimatum, calling on the government "to bow to the will

of the people". Morsi responded with an aggressive speech. However, there are reports that he attempted a bargain with Al-Sissi, and agree to: set up a national unity government; a neutral committee to review the constitution; expedite the finalisation of laws on parliamentary elections and even hold a referendum on his presidency. In the event; none of these late concessions were acceptable to Al-Sissi, who took over the government at the expiry of the ultimatum on 3 July.[2]

In order to give the military takeover a civilian face, Al-Sissi appointed Adli Mansour, president of the constitutional court, as the interim president to head a government of national unity and focus on the economy. In justifying the armed forces' intervention, Al-Sissi highlighted the national security threats arising from the government's divisive policies. In a show of national unity, while announcing the military intervention, Al-Sissi was flanked by the heads of Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church, representatives of the Salafi Al-Nour Party (believed to be backed by Saudi Arabia), and the National Salvation Front (NSF) representative, Mohammed El Baradei. Abdel Bari Atwan has described the scenario thus: "this is a military coup with a civilian face, a religious cover, and a democratic promise".[3]

The military takeover was welcomed by Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar, as also Syria, and criticised by the Turkish government. King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz in a statement praised the Egyptian armed forces for managing "to save Egypt at this critical point from a dark tunnel" and applauded that "wisdom and moderation that came out to those men [the armed forces] to preserve the rights of all people in the political process."[4] Both USA and the UK were cautious in their reaction, refusing to label the takeover as a "coup" which would have automatically deprived Egypt of all US assistance. There were reports of conversations between US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel and Al-Sissi a week before the takeover, leading to suggestions that the US had supported a "soft" coup in Egypt.[5] However, the anti-US mood in Egypt; the linking of the Brotherhood leadership with the US, and the general air of neo-Nasserite triumphalism in Cairo, all of these suggest that even the US might have been surprised by the turn of events,[6] though some observers still assert full US complicity in the coup.

A week after Morsi's ouster, Hazem el-Bablawi, an economist, was appointed prime minister, and Mohammed El Baradei was named vice

president for foreign affairs. The armed forces also announced a transition plan which provides for: amendments to the draft constitution and its ratification by a referendum, which will be followed by parliamentary elections. All of these actions are to be completed within 210 days, so that elections can take place by February 2014, while elections to the presidency will take place after that.[7] In first reactions, almost all the groups in Egypt's divided politics, including the NSF, Tamarod, and Al-Nour, criticised the transition plan on the grounds that they were not consulted and will propose amendments to it. El-Bablawi has promised to include Brotherhood members in his cabinet, an offer that has been spurned by the official leadership.[8]

Early comments on the fall of the Brotherhood government have been on two lines. Predictably, the takeover has been criticised on the grounds that Morsi's government had been legitimately elected by a free democratic process ; that one year was too short a period to judge the performance of a first democratically elected government in Egypt's history; that such a government cannot be removed only because one side did not like the results of free elections; and, finally, that the country's economic and social problems were so deep-rooted and widespread that no government could address them effectively in just one year. Noting that the government needed to build democratic institutions, overcome chaos, strengthen the economy and provide employment, the Israeli commentator, Shlomi Eldar said that "the (Egyptian) people's demands were excessive and impossible to fulfil".[9]

The critics of the Brotherhood's rule are of course most vociferous. They point out that Morsi signally failed to fulfil his pre-election promise of leading a government that was representative of different sections of the population; instead, he limited his appointments and public policies to the narrow Brotherhood agenda, and made no attempts to address the country's economic malaise. In short, he moved away from national consensus, so that there was "a continued and gradual erosion of faith" in him and his government.[10] The protests against the government were against its administrative failure, its attempts to limit people's freedoms and its failures with regard to public policies and international relations. The military takeover was

thus a "second revolution", a continuation of the popular uprising that had overthrown Hosni Mubarak.

Shlomi Eldar has noted that Morsi's leadership was characterised in turn by "reconciliation, indecision and confrontation". When faced with critical policy dilemmas, he fell back on appeasing the Brotherhood leadership, ignoring the role and power of the army, which had after all ensured Mubarak's fall by not intervening on his behalf.[11] The army saw itself, and was seen by millions of Egyptians, as the true and ultimate guardian of Egypt's nationhood. In fact, within the first few days of the military takeover, a major effort was mounted to project the armed forces as the "social unifer" of the country, with pictures of General Al-Sissi flanked by the Grand Mufti of Al-Azhar and the Coptic Pope Tawadros II. According to an Indian journalist, Atul Aneja: "There is a conscious attempt at Tahrir [Square] to elevate the Egyptian military to iconic status, as an unimpeachable guardian of political stability, social justice and patriotism."[12] Posters of Gen. Al-Sissi in full military regalia were put up along with pictures of Nasser and Anwar Sadat, linking his political intervention to that of his illustrious predecessors, even as Mubarak is condemned by the Tamarod for his dictatorship and corruption.

In August, there has been continuous street violence following confrontations between Morsi supporters and the security forces in which hundreds of people have been killed and thousands injured. As of now, the Brotherhood position is uncompromising in its demand for Morsi's return to power, with Al-Sissi becoming increasingly strident in his warnings. The political polarisation witnessed during Morsi's rule is now deeper than ever. With Mubarak's release from prison, the clock of the Arab Spring in Egypt has turned full circle.

Implications: Domestic

The ouster of the Morsi government has raised grave uncertainties about Egypt's political future. Here again commentators are divided into two groups. One group foresees violence and prolonged political turmoil as the Brotherhood mobilises its cadres for street protests. An observer has noted that, as of now, the Brotherhood members are "defensive and a little paranoid...(feeling) hunted and persecuted".[13] The Brotherhood is convinced that its legitimate government was ousted by the armed forces, acting in cooperation with hostile Arab

regimes and Western governments. Egypt could thus repeat the Algeria experience of a long period of violence and terror in the 1990s, which culminated in the establishment of authoritarian rule that continues to this day. Observers have noted that the present sense of injustice among the Brotherhood cadres is similar to that of its confrontation with Nasser in 1954, when Nasser had cracked down hard on the movement, executing and imprisoning many of its leaders and members. This had paved the way for Sayyid Qutb's radical thinking and the nurturing of a new generation of violent Islamists in Egypt and other parts of the Muslim world.[14] The ongoing violence suggests that Egypt could be in for a prolonged period of confrontation between Brotherhood activists and the security forces.

Other observers suggest (though not with much conviction) that the Brotherhood should handle this crisis with moderation and maturity: it should eschew violence and use this period for introspection, so that it is better prepared to participate in governance in more propitious times. This, in short, is the Turkish option, and recalls the evolution of the Turkish Islamist movement from the confrontations of the 1960s to Erbekan (ousted by the country's armed forces who were upholding secularism) and then to Erdogan's 'secular' AKP which has now been in power for ten years.[15]

According to commentators, the first option of violence has been tried out in the Arab world earlier and had failed to achieve anything positive. They note that the Brotherhood's top leadership is divided: it has a hawkish wing consisting of Morsi and Mohammed al Baltagi, and a more moderate wing made up of Khairat al Shater and party leader Saad al Katatni. The latter could mobilise the younger members of the movement and guide them towards moderation and accommodation on Turkish lines, however daunting a challenge this might be.

The political outlook remains uncertain as there are several important imponderables at play. It is not known how long military rule will last or how successful (and popular) the interim government will be, though there are promises of substantial economic support from GCC and Western sources. Again, with the Brotherhood under severe pressure, the Al-Nour's stance is not known: will it turn more aggressively Islamic or will it be moderated by its Saudi patrons? The ability of the "liberal" National Salvation Front (NSF) to maintain

unity, develop a coherent programme and broaden its support base will also be severely tested. Above all, the actions of the Brotherhood will largely impact on the flow of events: if the violence continues, the army will be hard-pressed to contain it on the streets, reprising the earlier scenarios of political intimidation, incarceration, terror and subversion, and firmly established and long-term authoritarian rule. A more moderate approach, with an accommodative agenda, could of course be the wished for option, but nothing in Brotherhood's history indicates that this is likely, at least in the short term.

Implications: Regional

The response to the military takeover presages important shifts in Egypt's ties with its neighbours. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have welcomed the change and, with aid and investment, are likely to support the interim regime dominated by the armed forces. Qatar has given a proforma welcome to the change, though, with the closure of *Al-Jazeera* and the arrest of its journalists, its role in the country will certainly be much diminished. With the major change in Qatar's own leadership having taken place just before Morsi's ouster, it is possible that the new Amir would seize the opportunity to make a change from the approach of his father and the former prime minister and distance his country from the Brotherhood across the region and move closer to the position of its GCC partners.

Just before his ouster, Morsi had attempted to distance himself from Iran and to take a more aggressive position in favour of political change in Syria. While the new government in Egypt may not be very pro-active in Syria, Iran will face the same coolness, if not hostility, that had characterised the Mubarak regime.[16]

Important changes are already being felt in Syria. Here, the Saudi-backed FSA, headed by General Idriss, is asserting itself against the Qatar-supported National Coalition, while Saudi control over the National Coalition itself has been affirmed with the election of Ahmad Assi al-Jarba as its head in place of Qatar-based backed Ghassan Hitto. Jarba is said to be a secular moderate, with close ties, tribal and political, to Saudi Arabia. However, none of these changes is likely to make the end game in Syria more smooth or predictable.

Some commentators have rung warning bells for the Islamist governments in Tunisia and Turkey, suggesting that strong moves in

the Islamist direction could encourage calls for government change. Morsi's removal has dealt a blow to Erdogan, not only in terms of his standing at home but also with regard to his ties with Egypt, which were central to the "new order" being shaped by him in the region. An observer close to the Turkish prime minister has seen a parallel in the situations in Turkey and Egypt, asserting that "what had been attempted in Turkey [i.e. the "international plot" against the AKP government in the shape of the Gezi Park demonstrations] has succeeded in Egypt."[17] In Tunisia, a movement calling itself Tamarod, after its Egyptian predecessor, has started collecting signatures for the dissolution of parliament and fresh elections. It also enjoys the support of the liberal Nida Tunis. Ghannouchi on his part has called on Egypt's Brotherhood activists to remain on the streets till Morsi is reinstated.[18]

The USA and Israel can be expected to be quite satisfied with the change, particularly with Egypt's move away from Iran and its reduced influence on Hamas, which, under Saudi influence, could become more accommodative. This of course will give a free hand to Israel to keep the peace process on the burner and continue to expand its settlements in occupied territories.

The domestic and regional scenarios appear to be indicating the restoration of the Mubarak era, though back with a new protagonist.

The Future of Islamist Politics

Islamist parties were the first winners of the Arab Spring. Though slow to participate in the youth uprisings, they moved swiftly to associate themselves with the demands for political change. Later, with their grassroots support bases, the organisational skill of their leaders, the discipline of their rank and file, and, above all, with promises of moderation and accommodation, they swept to power through the ballot box in Tunisia and Egypt, a first instance in modern history when Islamist parties came to power through the democratic process. Both the Brotherhood and Al-Nahda have had a difficult time in government, since nothing in their previous experience had prepared them for the challenges of governance. They had neither the human resources, nor the vision, nor the leaders, nor the agenda for the national development their polities craved and demanded with strident urgency. While it is true that one year is too short a period to judge a government, particularly one with no previous experience of

democratic politics in its 80-year history, the Brotherhood in Egypt daily manifested its ineptitude (mainly due to inexperience) and daily moved further away from those who had reposed so much faith in it and were impatient for results.

While Morsi had been voted to office only by a thin majority of about 51 per cent, he had promised reconciliation and had based his campaign on a "Renaissance Project" that would cover education, health, science and technology.[19] His failure in both these areas cannot be denied. In office, he showed little interest in reconciliation, in broadening his support base or projecting "modernity", particularly as regards women and minorities, that many in his country aspired for. They would have forgiven his inexperience if he had shown the ability to rise above his past and tread beyond the immediate, to be a leader of his divided, confused and demanding people.

But, Morsi could not re-invent himself; he could not be the Mandela his people wanted. He just could not divest himself of the most stringent aspects of his own heritage, the vision, belief-system and agenda of the Brotherhood, developed and fine-tuned in opposition and adversity. Morsi's heritage did not include the breadth of vision and liberal mindset of Al-Afghani and Abduh, or the eclectric thinking of Al-Awwa.

In that sense, Morsi was just the product of and limited by his own circumstances, for, in 2009, when the Brotherhood had the opportunity to thoroughly re-invent itself, it fell back on its traditional Salafi leaders and purged from its senior ranks all those who were modern and moderate. Morsi thus headed the traditionalists at a time when there was no prospect of coming to power. But for the Arab Spring and Mubarak's fall, Morsi would have remained obscure and faceless, instead of being catapulted into leadership at a historic moment in his nation's life, a role for which he was unqualified and which he could not grow into. Failing to grasp the Mandela-like opportunity thrown at him, he could only become a victim of his circumstances, looking quite pathetic as he pledged to shed his blood for the people, many of whom have turned against him and have only contempt for him, though of course his core supporters continue to demand his return and are willing to take bullets in this endeavour.

Al Nahda has fared marginally better in Tunisia: the country is more homogenous than Egypt and in better shape economically. Al

Nahda has also avoided the doctrinaire approach in crucial areas, which Morsi could not avoid.

As the Brotherhood and Al-Nahda assumed power after the Arab Spring, students of West Asian affairs watched with keen interest if Islamism could prove successful in democratic politics. Morsi's ouster would suggest that Islamism is not yet ready for participatory politics. There is so much going against it. Historically, its vision and belief-system have been stridently Islamic, drawn mainly from the tradition of Salafiyya and rejects most modern influence and Western experience, which shaped to some extent the thinking of early leaders of political Islam, like Al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida. Though Islamist movements have spoken of democracy, parliament, parties and elections, few details are available in the public domain, not least on the issue of how democracy will accommodate their commitment to Sharia. Again, though the Brotherhood in Egypt applauded democratic politics, the literature on which its members are nurtured is by the most conservative of Muslim thinkers, including Sayyid Qutb. A critic has pointed out that they have no literature that "consolidates democratic values" or encourages pluralism.[20]

In this background, is Islamism now dead or irrelevant in the political discourse of West Asia? The answer has to be an emphatic no. Given that the core identity of the people is derived from Islam, an Islamist discourse is the only one that is likely to succeed in democratic politics in the region. But, the contours and content of this discourse will be multifaceted and ever-changing. While extremist Islamism will seek to expand its reach and influence, particularly in polities that are failing, mainstream Islamist parties will continue to compete with their more radical cousins on the right and the more "liberal" groups on the left. Morsi's experience has shown that it will not be enough to be Islamist: governance will demand accommodation across the political spectrum and considerable competence in the "secular" areas of governance—the economy, law and order, development of the infrastructure, poverty alleviation, and military and foreign affairs. In Islamic history, these areas were traditionally the prerogative of the Sultan, and he was judged by his success in handling these matters. Democracy has not changed the responsibility of the ruler; it has only made his challenges more difficult.

In spite of the ouster of the Morsi government, the prognosis for

Islamism over the longer term should be positive. Olivier Roy has correctly observed that, after the Arab Spring, Islamism and democracy have become interdependent and "neither can now survive without the other."[21] This is because Islamists can maintain their legitimacy in the political process only through elections, even as the democratic process in the Arab world cannot be consolidated without the participation of the mainstream Islamic groups. Roy is confident that participation in the democratic political process will give the Islamists experience of governance and will in due course blunt some of their slogan-based posturing. In fact, two decades before the Arab Spring, Islamist groups, frequently in exile, had already attempted to move towards an increased focus on democracy and human rights, recognising that "democracy was a better tool to fight dictatorship than the call for either jihad or Sharia." It is this understanding that will constitute the basis of their participation in national politics in the coming years.

NOTES

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11.   Shlomi Eldar, no. 9.

12. Atul Aneja, no. 6.
13. Ashraf Khalil, *Time*, July 3, 2013.
14. Mohammed Aburumman, *Al-Ghad*, (Amman), translation in *Mideast Mirror*, July 5, 2013.
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16. Kaveh Afrasiabi, "After Morsi, the geopolitical fallout", July 3, 2003, at www.atimes.com/atimes/MiddleEast/MID-05-030713.html (July 8, 2013).
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18. Mischa Benoit-Lavelle, "Tunisian Ruling Party Feels Heat After Egyptian Coup", *Al-Monitor*, July 8, 2013; Mounir Ben Mahmoud, "How will Egyptian Developments Affect Tunisia?", Al-Monitor, July 8, 2013.
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10

Institutionalising Sharia and Democracy

Historically, the Islamist discourse has been extraordinarily varied and multichromatic. Regardless of the exhortations of the ulema, large areas of the Muslim state were outside religious determination even as the theological order, made up of religious law and Islamic scholars, remained largely autonomous in the state system. Thus, effectively, there was a separation of mosque and state, with the ulema dominant with regard to the interpretation of Islamic sources and *fiqh*, while the Sultan's writ ran in diverse secular areas of *Siyassa* (state order), such as commercial and economic policy, foreign and military affairs and criminal law.[1] In this situation, there was a persistent tension between the attempts of the ruler to obtain legitimacy from the ulema for his political endeavours and, periodically, attempts by the ulema to sanction rebellion against rulers who failed to rule in accordance with God's law. Thus, an effective system of checks and balances was an integral part of the traditional Islamic state system.[2]

While some aspects of the traditional order faded away because of: the growth in size and complexity of the Muslim states, internecine conflicts, and, finally, the penetration and occupation of the Islamic domain by Europe, the principles did not die and could be recalled into service in periods of grave crisis through the process of *tajdid*

(renewal). This seeking of "renewal" invariably meant a recourse to pristine Islam, to the first sources, the Quran and the Sunna, that defined the earliest and most idealised order, which would provide salvation to the beleaguered community. However, this going back to the past for solace and ideas did not mean replicating in literal terms the structures, practices and polities of the seventh and eighth centuries; it was a reiteration of the principles and values, that continue to influence modern-day Islamist discourse.[3]

Esposito and Voll, writing in 1996, had pointed out that "the dual aspirations of Islamisation and democratisation set the framework for most of the critical issues in the contemporary Muslim world."[4] A few years later, but before the Arab Spring, Larbi Sadiki, on the basis of interviews with some leading Islamic intellectuals and activists, had reinforced this observation thus:

> While Islamists generally are enmeshed in the discourse of and struggle for democracy, the type of democracy they have in mind revises and challenges Western foundations such as individualism and secularism. In other words, Islamists see no route to democracy without Islam.[5]

Sadiki had then argued that Islamisation and democracy were in fact a "mutually reinforcing process" in that the Islamists were anxious to retrieve their "revered institutions" through the democratic process which could provide the reformed order with justice, probity and accountability founded on the principle of consultation (Shura).[6]

The 'realisation' of Islam in a democratic polity requires the enforcement of Sharia. According to Vikor, all Islamist groups:

> focus on the Sharia as a political programme and use it as a definition of 'Islamisation'. It holds, they believe, the key to the solution of the various social, political and economic problems that the Muslim world is facing. Thus it must be 'reintroduced' or 'applied' as the law of the land, and for many as the only law of the land.[7]

A number of modern Islamic scholars have supported the setting up of a democratic order in the Islamic realm on the basis of two traditional concepts—Shura and *masalahah*. Recalling the two Quranic verses that refer to Shura (consultation), scholars have concluded that "Shura as mutual consultation in various spheres is the preferred and

desirable method of resolving matters because it reflects the public will and results in greater public benefits [i.e., *masalahah*]."[8]

Noah Feldman explains how a modern democratic state can be achieved on the basis of Islamic principles. Given that the core value of Islam, as seen by the Islamists, is "justice"—social, political and legal, it follows that the enforcement of Sharia effectively means the enforcement of justice. This poses two challenges for the modern Islamic polity: (a) how would the laws enshrining "justice" be codified? (b) how would they be interpreted and enforced?

These can be responded to thus: since Islam only accepts "God's sovereignty" (rather than popular sovereignty), the laws would have to be in accord with God's Law, the Sharia. The constitution of the state would then provide that Islam or Islamic law would be either "the source of law" or "a source of law". Where Islamic law does not provide clear answers, the democratically chosen Islamic legislature would use its discretion and adopt laws that are infused with Islamic values.[9] A process of "judicial review" would ensure that the laws accorded with Islamic values. This would be the prerogative of the highest judicial body in the state, which would function outside the legislature and the executive. These judges would not be traditional Islamic scholars but would be selected through the normal constitutionally determined processes.[10]

It should be noted that the emerging state order in the post-Spring Arab world is already "civil" since there is no institutionalised rule of the clergy, as in Iran. Again, the Islamist movement is not, and has never been, a monolith, in that no single party or grouping in the state order can:

   (i)   claim, to have a monopoly over "Islam" in terms of its principles, values and institutions;
  (ii)   decide what aspects of Islam's historic texts should continue to be influential in contemporary affairs and who should decide and pronounce on this; and, above all,
 (iii)   determine what aspects of the Muslim's encounter with the West should find a place in the new order.

These and other issues remain debatable within the broad and multi-faceted Islamist family while national constitutions are formulated and democratic institutions given concrete shape. These intra-Islamist

debates will also have to be sensitive to the view of "liberals", both within and outside the Islamic order, as part of the national consensus.

It is unlikely that this consensus will countenance or accommodate any aspects of "hard" Islam. There are several reasons for this. First, the Islamist parties have so far been successful in elections not just because they were Islamic but also because they had the best party machinery and grassroots support bases. They were familiar to the mass of the electorate, and their historic and strident opposition to the authoritarian order was widely known and appreciated. Again, these parties, over the last two decades, had carefully jettisoned some of their own extreme positions, particularly with regard to jihad and violence, and could offer a more broadbased platform before the elections.[11]

Secondly, as Olivier Roy has noted, Arab society itself has now changed: modern education and communications and exposure to the values of the outside world, both Asian and Western, have engendered a consciousness regarding human rights and personal dignity and sensitivity with regard to gender and minority issues, in short, a mindset of pluralistic accommodativeness.[12] The Arab Spring's demand for freedom, rights and dignity has truly globalised the Arab and made him (and her) a part of the universal value system. This position cannot and does not accommodate blind adherence to an extremist doctrine or a charismatic leader.

Thirdly, the Islamist parties resonate with the traditional cultural ethos of large sections of the electorate.[13] For instance, the social agenda of the Muslim parties pertaining to women reflects the views of large parts of the electorate. But, this situation is also evolving, and the Brotherhood and Al-Nahda (and their affiliates) could in time both lead and reflect the changing mores of their nations. In any case, in a democratic order, every one of these parties, be they mainstream Islamist, Salafi or liberal-secular, will have to compete regularly with each other for popular support, so they will have to remain sensitive to their nationals' views and aspirations rather than seeking to impose views and values from above.

Commentators, Arab and Western, who see the ongoing domestic political competitions in terms of liberal *versus* traditional, or, more specifically, secular *versus* Islamic, seem to be on the wrong track. As Tariq Ramadan has pointed out, the historical experience of Western

and Arab societies in regard to secularism has been quite different. While in Western political evolution, secularism meant democracy and religious pluralism, in the Arab world, on the other hand, secularisation "became identified with the threefold experience of repression, colonialism and assault on Islam."[14] Thus, while the Arab authoritarian regimes projected themselves as separating state and religion and upholding women's rights, they were:

> in reality...dictatorial regimes. There was no alliance of democracy and pluralism in the name of separation of religion and state; religion was subjected to the state, with no democracy and no pluralism...models...that have been imported from the West.[15]

Beyond the fact that even in the West "no public sphere is entirely culturally and religiously neutral",[16] the Islamic *versus* secular debate in the West Asian context is quite unnecessary, since, as pointed out in Chapter 1, Islamic law has consistently distinguished between *ibadat* (worship) and *muamalat* (public or social matters): rules in respect of the former are eternal and immutable, while the latter is always subject to review on the basis of the well-established Islamic principle of *ijtihad* and the process of Shura and thus covers a very broad secular space. Numerous scholars with different political orientations, both medieval and modern, have upheld this important aspect of Islam. Thus, the recourse to Islam in this period of political transition, as Ramadan asserts, could prove to be the way "to liberate minds through the acquisition of knowledge, autonomous rationality, critical thinking and freedom of thought: the very definition of pluralism, responsible citizenship and of civil society...."[17]

Two years is too short a period to judge the content, direction and resilience of revolutions. Almost all revolutions and revolutionary efforts are painful, both those that effect change and those where popular aspirations are thwarted. The new order that emerges rarely represents the totality of those forces that brought about the change and is usually unable to build a consensus in the short-term. It also has little experience of governance or even the deal-making that constitutes the stuff of politics. And, of course all its mistakes, and they are many, are magnified, not least by the vestiges of the old order that seeks restoration, however misguided their aspirations might be, Two

years ago, the French intellectual, Jean-pierre Filiu, had already warned that:

> This Arab revolution...will suffer backlashes, defeats and vicious repression. Once the initial enthusiasm fades away, this uprising and its actors will be slandered, vilified and caricatured. Even if its most radical demands are to be fulfilled in the political arena, the rehabilitation of governance will be only part of a daunting challenge to cope with the deficits in the labour market, in the housing sector or in the public infrastructure.[18]

But, the principal point to be noted is that, following the Spring, the Arabs' "wall of fear" has been pulled down, and, though there may be occasional setbacks due to inexperience, short-sightedness or ineptitude, or the inducement or the armed force of its opponents, this tide will not be stemmed. The Arab revolution, as Filiu has said, is an Arab renaissance.[19]

NOTES

1. Robert W. Hefner, "Public Islam and the Problem of Democratization", in Frederic Volpi (Ed), *Political Islam—A Critical Reader*, Routledge, London, 2011, p. 163.
2. Ibid.
3. Knut S. Vikor, *Between God and the Sultan—A History of Islamic Law*, Hurst & Co., London, 2005, p. 227, 257; Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2008, pp. 106-07.
4. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 6.
5. Larbi Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy—Discourse and Counter-Discourses*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004, p. 321.
6. Ibid, p. 322.
7. Vikor, no. 3, p. 257.
8. For details see: Asma Afsaruddin, "*Maslahah* as a Political Concept", in Mehrzad Boroujerdi (Ed.), *Mirror for the Muslim Prince—Islam and the Theory of Statecraft*, Syracuse University Press, NY, 2013, pp. 39-42.
9. Feldman, 108-13.
10. Ibid, pp. 119-21.
11. A.E. Kadoussi, "Islamist Resurgence and Arab Spring", *Islam and Politics*, July 16, 2012, at http://newageislam.com/Print.aspx?ID=7938 (Accessed on October 22, 2012). This provides an excellent summary of the reasons for the success of Islamist parties in the elections. In a recent analysis of voting in Tunisia and Egypt after the Arab Spring, Amel Boubekeur and Olivier Roy observed that:
On the part of Tunisian and Egyptian civil societies, voting for Islamist parties was, in a post-authoritarian context, motivated more by a hope to see the fulfilment of promises of moral politics, the fighting of corruption, economic redistribution, reconciliation and social justice, rather than by an adhesion to

discourses on Shari'a and the need for creating new Islamic institutions. ["Whatever happened to the Islamists or…Political Islam Itself?", in: Olivier Roy and Amel Boubekeur (Ed), *Whatever happened to the Islamists?* Hurst & Co., London, 2012, p.2.]

12. Olivier Roy, "The New Islamists", *Foreign Policy*, April 16, 2012, at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/04/16/the_new_islamists?page=full (Accessed on December 13, 2012); also Olivier Roy, "Democracy and Political Islam after the Arab revolution", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, December 14, 2012, at: http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary_democracy_and_political_islam_after_the_arab_revolutions (Accessed on January 8, 2013).

13. Ibid; also AE Kadoussi, no. 11.

14. Tariq Ramadan, *The Arab Awakening—Islam and the New Middle East,* Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, London, 2012, pp. 82-83.

15. Ibid, p. 85.

16. Ibid, p. 89.

17. Ibid, p. 91.

18. Jean-Pierre Filiu, *The Arab Revolution—Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising*, Hurst and Co., London, 2011, p. 147-48.

19. Ibid, p. 135.

Glossary

adilla kulliya	The totality of scriptural sources of Sunni divine law.
al-rafida	renegades; pejorative reference to Shia
ansar	(Arabic: The Helpers) the name given to Prophet Mohammed's followers in Madinah.
al-maslaha al amm:	Matters of public welfare.
bayat	Oath of allegiance; ratification
bid'ah (*bida*)	Reprehensible innovation in Islam; heresy
Caliph (*Arabic: Khalifa*)	(Arabic: successor, deputy) The caliph was the successor and deputy of Prophet Mohammed and was recognised as the supreme authority of the Muslims by the Sunni until the Mongol invasions in the late 13th century. According to the Sharia, the caliph exercised full authority in both spiritual and political matters. After the rise of the sultans and amirs throughout the Muslim world, the caliph was reduced to a figurehead.
daawa (*daawat*)	(Arabic: The Call): invitation to non-believers to convert to Islam.
faqih	A Muslim jurisprudent who is deemed capable and sufficiently knowledgeable to issue a *fatwa*.
fard	duty; compulsory for the believer.
fard' ayn	A legal obligation incumbent on individual Muslims.

fard kifaya	A legal obligation incumbent on Muslims as a whole.
fatwa	An opinion or a ruling given by an appropriate Islamic authority *[faqih]*, who interprets a point of holy law in a way that is binding on those Muslims who accept him as their guide.
fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence; the study and application of the body of sacred Muslim law.
fitna	dissension
ghuluw	extremism
Hadith	An oral tradition handed through a reliable train of sources consisting of a saying or deed of Prophet Mohammed for the guidance of Muslims; these were compiled during the ninth century. The whole corpus of the Hadith is one of the major sources of Islamic law.
hudud	The five rules of law that are specified in the Revelation.
ibadat	rules pertaining to man's relations with God.
ijma	The 'consensus' of the Muslim community that imparts legitimacy to a legal decision; the third source of Shariah law after the Quran and the Hadith.
ijtihad	The 'independent reasoning' used by a jurist to apply the *Sharia* to contemporary circumstances. One who was expert enough to advance the Islamic tradition by means of individual reasoning was called a *mujtahid* (one who exercises *ijitihad*).
Imam	(Arabic: leader) Generally, the word is used to describe any leader of the Muslim community or a Muslim who leads the prayers in the mosque. In the Shia tradition, the word is applied to Prophet Mohammed's descendants through his daughter Fatima and his son-in-law, Hazrat Ali.

Islam	The religion of Muslims. It means submission to God, and a 'Muslim' is 'one who submits'.
Islah	(Arabic: to repair) generally translated as 'reform'
Jahiliyyah	Traditionally translated as 'Age of Ignorance', and is applied to the pre-Islamic period in Arabia. Today, radical Muslims often apply it to any society, even a nominally Muslim society, which in their view has turned its back upon God and refuses to submit to God's sovereignty.
jahili	(Arabic: ignorant) those who do not follow the tenets of Islam.
Jihad	(Arabic: striving, struggle) struggle undertaken for God. In normal usage, the military struggle of the Muslims against a non-Muslim enemy. Greater *jihad* speaks of internal struggle for righteousness; lesser *jihad* is the defence of the Muslim community.
jizya	a tax levied upon non-Muslims in a Muslim state in return for the freedom to practice their faith and obtain state protection from external aggression as also exemption from military service and payment of *Zakat* (obligatory alms).
kafir	Traditionally translated as 'unbeliever'. More accurately, it refers to somebody who ungratefully and aggressively rejects Allah and refuses to acknowledge his dependence on the Creator.
maslahah	'the common good'; also, welfare, public interest.
maslaha mursala	to make a law for the common good without basing it on a text of Revelation
mu'amalat	transactions; rules concerning human/social relations (opposite of those between man and God, *'ibadat'*)
Mufti	An expert in Islamic law; it is a title bestowed

	on a Muslim who is renowned for his scholarship and personal reputation.
Mujtahid	An Islamic scholar qualified to exercise *ijtihad* or independent judgment in all matters pertaining to Islamic practice.
munharifoon	deviants
Qadi	A judge who officially administers the Sharia
qawa'id	fundamental principle; the basic principles of the Sharia; (hence, *qawaid fiqhiyya*, the basic principles from which the rulings of earlier scholars were derived.)
qiyas	(Arabic: precedent) In Sunni jurisprudence, it is the process of analogical reasoning for deriving a new injunction from precedents set out in the Quran or Hadith. This is the fourth source of Sharia law after the Quran, Hadith and ijmah.
Quran	(Arabic: recitation) The name given to the holy book of Islam, which Muslims believe was dictated to Mohammed by God Himself. Mohammed, who could not write, was told to recite the words spoken by the divine voice. As the revelations came to Mohammed, these utterances were written down by those of his disciples who were literate, and were collated by his disciples by the middle of the seventh century.
Sahwiya	(Arabic: the "Awakening One's"), an activist movement of religious scholars in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s within Wahhabiyya; influenced initially by teachers from the Muslim Brotherhood.
Salaf (or al-Salaf al-Salih)	pious forefathers; the early followers of Islam (variously, either just the Prophet's generation or the first three generations)
Salafiyya	Sunni Islamic movement that takes the pious ancestors, the *Salaf* of early Islam, as models. Salafism seeks to revive the practice of Islam

	that is closest to that practiced during the time of Prophet Mohammed.
Sharia	The word literally means the road or way to a watering hole, which must always be followed; it refers to Islamic holy law which was compiled and codified by the great Muslim jurists of the eighth and ninth centuries, who applied the principles of the Quran and the Hadith to the smallest details of everyday life.
Shia/Shiite	(Arabic, *Shiah al-Ali:* the partisans of Ali.) Originally, this was a political movement of a minority of Muslims in the community, who believed that the Prophet Mohammed had wanted Ali ibn Abi Talib, his cousin and son-in-law, to succeed him instead of Abu Bakr, the first Caliph. Over the years, Shiites developed beliefs and religious practices that were different from those of the Sunni Muslims, but the essentials of the faith remain the same in the two traditions.
shura	consultation or council (e.g. council of scholars or other Muslims, council of judges, *muftis*, etc.)
siyasa shariya	(1) state rule on the basis of the principles of Sharia; (2) to judge according to the 'spirit' of the Sharia, unrestricted by its rules of procedure.
shirk	association of others (deities, saints) with God
Sunna, Sunni	(Arabic, *Sunna*: the way) The Sunna is the way of the Prophet Mohammed and includes everything he said, did or prescribed. A Sunni is a Muslim who follows this way.
Tajdid	Renewal
Takfir	(Arabic, from the root *kafir*, non-believer) Any action or pronouncement by an apparent Muslim that indicates his abandonment of his faith, exposes him to extreme punishment, including execution.

taqlid	to accept as authoritative the views of a scholar, or school of thought
Tawhid	Unity and authority of God and religion.
Ulema/Ulama	The learned men who devote their lives to the study of the holy law of Islam. As guardians and interpreters of the *Sharia*, the *ulema* have traditionally held a prominent place in Muslim society. The consensus (*ijma*) of the *umma*—which in reality translates into the consensus of the *ulema*—is second only to the Quran and Sunna in authority and is generally seen as binding on the entire *umma*.
Umma	the (world) community of Muslims.
usul al-fiqh	the procedure or methodology by which a specific law is derived by scholars.
Wahhabiyya	Sunni reform movement that emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in the mid-eighteenth century under Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-92). His followers reject the term 'Wahhabi' and call themselves the *Muwahideen*, i.e., 'those who believe in God's unity'.

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