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The Connective Power of Islamist Parties: How does the Internet shape the Activities of Islamists in Egypt?

By Billur Aslan

The Internet is usually considered as the major element of success in Hosni Mubarak’s resignation but “what is the role of this new media on the rising political power of the Muslim Brotherhood?” is still a question to be analysed. To understand the role of new media in the political fortunes of the Muslim Brotherhood, we must examine how the party and its members use the Internet and social media both for internal organisation and mobilisation and to engage Egyptians outside the party. Such an examination shows how the MB has achieved success through connective power. This power is risky, it brings to divisions within the party, but already we can begin to see how the party has begun to turn connective power to its advantage.

Connective power emerges via personalized communication of people in communication technologies. Contrary to communicative power of Castell (2009, 429) which belongs to programmer of single networks and switcher of different networks, connective power is made up of interactive process. It does not belong to one social actor that influence others. As Bennett and Segelberg (2011:12) argue, thanks to personal action in the Internet, people show each other how they can appropriate, shape and share themes. Muslim Brotherhood is one of the organisations in Egypt that use this connective power effectively.

For years, The Muslim Brotherhood’s status in Egypt as an illegal organisation obstructed its capacity to issue media (Ajemian, 2008:3). Armed with handled technology, the new generation of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) changed this situation and connected with their public via the Internet. Thanks to blogging and social networks, they got media capabilities that they did not have before, they reported on issues of corruption, torture, military tribunals and the arrest of organisation leaders (Ajemian, 2008:7). Moreover, during the Egypt protests in 2011, it was seen that the Internet expanded the political opportunity structure of Islamist organisations by offering them various capabilities such as mobilising the movement. Indeed, since 2004, the Internet had been an effective medium for mobilising the movements, internationalising the ideologies and eroding support against Mubarak’s government. However, two growing impacts of the Internet made young Egyptians more powerful and coordinated at the time of revolution and these aspects of the Internet have been still shaping the politics in Egypt. The first one is the ability of the Internet to create solidarity among young Egyptians. Although social movement theorists mostly criticise the Internet for creating weak-tied social relationships, the success of young Egyptians on the Internet and on Egypt politics shows that the Internet can indeed create a collective identity among groups (Bennett and Segerberg 2011:9). The second impact is mostly seen in the structure of the organisation. The online blogs of Young Brothers illustrate the fragmenting ideologies among the Muslim Brotherhood members. These new platforms show that young Brothers are indeed just like other Egyptians. They fight for their rights and freedom and they are open to different views. Today, thanks to the blogs and social media, young Brothers’ voices are heard by other young Egyptians, and most importantly, by the organisation itself. Although these young voices get popularity among different groups and gather support for the organisation, they cause problems in the internal structure of the party.
**Mobilisation Attempts**

The first apparent Internet activities of the Muslim Brotherhood began with the establishment of two websites in 1998. The first one was an English-only site, it included only two pages of information and remained untouched since 1998. Along with this website, there was also an Arabic-only website launched in 1998. The goals and activities of these websites were entirely about religion and there was not any information about political activities of the organisation (McLaughlin, 2003). These Internet activities of the organisation shows that MB were acting like a sort of semi-accepted opposition, it did not try to break the censorship and political limitations of Mubarak’s regime.

Although in 1997, Islam Online appeared as a website which offered news, commentary and live dialogues, it could be said that the MB’s political activities in the Internet heat up only after Kifaya movement’s emergence in 2004 (Lynch, 2007a). Egyptian Movement for Change, known as Kifaya, was the first organisation that showed the power of the Internet and blogging to other Egyptian organisations. Focusing on civic freedoms and the possibility that Mubarak might pass the presidency onto his son, Kifaya coordinated colourful demonstrations and grew in popularity during 2005 (Lynch, 2007a). At the same year, the Muslim Brotherhood also launched its first official website Ikhwanweb. Ikhwanweb was founded by Khairat el Shater, Deputy Chairman of the Muslim Brotherhood and it targeted to present the Muslim Brotherhood’s vision right from the source and rebut misconceptions about the movement in western societies (Ikhwanweb, 2005). The emergence of Ikhwan showed the willingness of the young reformists inside the organisation such as Khaled Hamza to promote MB’s vision. However, the political mobilisation of the organisation was spread particularly by its blogging activities (Isherwood, 2008:4).

Despite its long standing online presence, the Muslim Brotherhood did not quickly familiarise with blogging (Isherwood, 2008:5). In 2007, only a few MB blogs appeared. According to one blogger, Abd al-Rahman, this was because the style of education given to the Brothers runs counter to the idea of blogs; because blogs rely on openness and independence (Lynch, 2007b:7). However, as Mubarek’s regime increased tightening restrictions on the organisation, young Brothers looked for new political spaces. Over the year 2006-07 particularly, MB members were prevented from standing for student government positions and this absence of political space leaded young Brothers to use blogs as mean of expression. Meanwhile, many leaders from the organisation were arrested. These arrests led the families and students to create blogs to challenge the government’s detainments and to raise awareness of the imprisonment and mistreatment of their brethren. They also organised campaigns for their family members’ release via blogs (Isherwood, 2008: 5; Lynch, 2007b). According to Lynch, these blogs were also used as source to activate young Egyptians who seemed ‘in a coma’ and unwilling to act politically (Lynch, 2007b:10). Hence, the blogging campaign began with a small core group of activists over time and has expanded and diversified.

**Internationalisation Attempts**

The mobilisation attempts of the Brotherhood bloggers did not only target the release of activists but it also aimed to inform Egyptians and international society about the Muslim Brotherhood. For instance, after the Mubarek regime had subsequently arrested Brotherhood leaders including some icons of reformist youth, such as Shatir and Iryan, the Internet activism of MB increased
To get the support of the others, family members organised the campaign blogs that presented the human side of the organisation. These blogs contained family pictures, home videos and touching anecdotes that all aimed to soften the stern image of the Muslim Brotherhood among Egyptians and abroad (Lynch, 2007b:8). Hence, MB members organised coordinated political campaigns in order to have the assistance of the society for its political movement. Besides presenting the human side of the organisation, young bloggers also tried to reassure sceptical audiences. For instance, one blogger who wrote in English in his blog tried to allay the concerns that international society might have that the MB will return to the radical ideology. He argued, “to be clear, I'm not fearing a violent Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Brotherhood will not accept violence, and will not accept the violent ideologies” (Ayyash, 2010).

The organisation has been engaged with international society particularly via social networks. For years, the Twitter account of the organisation had only been a means that helped people link to the Ikhwanweb’s posts. However, in 2011, thanks to a young Egyptian student named Miriam, users were also encouraged to adopt or engage with the MB identity. Miriam explained their goal was “to spread the truth and engage with an English-speaking audience and liberals who would not otherwise interact with them” (Bohn, 2011: 79). It can be said that the interaction of young MBs with other groups is the most important aspect of their internet activities because they form a connective power with other young Egyptians. As El Sherif mentions through Egyptian Revolution the movement has managed to cooperate with other opposition blocs despite well established ideological differences (Sherif, 2012).

**Solidarity Attempts: A human face**

One thing had never changed for young Muslim Brothers; they constantly expressed their solidarity with other Egyptians in their individual blogs, and later, in social networks. Although the first wave of Arab blogging that was identified with Kifaya was constituted mostly by westernized and liberal voices, young Muslim Brothers did not have difficulties connecting with these different communities. It could be said that the young Brothers represented the new face of the organisation who were young, politically oriented, pragmatic and independent-minded (Lynch, 2007b:7). They stated their solidarity with the liberals and they also showed that they were comfortable with non-Islamists. For instance, one of the young Muslim Brothers, Abd al-Mun‘im Mahmoud, surprised many by expressing his solidarity with anti-Islamist Suleyman in his blog Ana- Ikhwan (I'm Muslim Brotherhood). Suleyman was in fact jailed for posting comments that insulted Islam, however this ideology of Suleyman did not prevent young Brothers to support him (Lynch 2007b:7). At every opportunity, young brothers showed that they were a part of network of identity communities linked in a virtual place by virtue of their Egyptianness (Radsch: 2008:9) This attitude of the MBs helped them to have the support of other communities and unified with others for the same collective aims namely to bring freedom of expression to Egypt. For instance Khaled Hamza the consultant of Ikhwanweb had very strong relation with human right activists from all over the world. When he was arrested in 2008 he got the support of people of different ideologies (Houdaiby, 2008). The union of young brothers with other groups had also been seen during the Egyptian protest. In the beginning of January 25th, although the MB’s leaders and other obedient followers did not participate the protests and only joined the events after January 28th, young Brothers were ready in Tahrir Square to protest with their peers (Hassan, 2011)
For young Brothers, the Internet is also the only place where they can connect with non-Brothers and change the negative image of the organisation. Muslim Brothers are often seen as robots incapable of independent thought and slavishly devoted to religion by other Egyptians. Young Brothers’ activities in the Internet aimed to destroy this stereotype and show their peers they have indeed a similar desire for, for example, a democratic government (Lynch, 2007b:10; Aljazeera, 2011) For these aims, they explain to others that they are, first of all, human, they go to movies, demonstrate and just like others they blog for freedom. Thus, they use the Internet to generate solidarity, support and attention enjoyed by bloggers from different sectors in Egypt (Ajemian, 2008:5). All of these efforts of young Brothers helped them to create a collective identity with other Egyptians. It can be said that this solidarity of young Egyptians had had a huge influence on the triumph of Egyptian protests in 2011.

Reforming the Muslim Brotherhood

After the revolution, the MB became active in every aspect of the Internet. First, the MB’s official website Ikhwan Online launched its Facebook page where it has explained who they have been and what they have wanted. More importantly, Ikhwanweb launched its own Facebook called IkhwanBook. Ikhwanbook hosted on a server which has also contained 18 other Brotherhood domains such as Ikhwangoogole.com or Ikhwanophobia.com. As a reason for launching their own domain, Ikhwanweb editors claimed the necessity to protect their users’ independence. They also mentioned that its news is not formed by top down decision from the MB but by internal administrative decisions made by Ikhwanweb’s editorial team (Bohn, 2011:80). Some articles issued on the Ikhwanweb website confirmed their claim. For instance, one of their news was titled “Freedom and Justice Party Strongly Condemns Attacks Targeting Journalists and Media Figures”. The news was about Khaled Salah, the editor of Al-Youm Al-Sabea newspaper, who accused leaders of MB for inciting violence against him (Ikhwanweb, 2012). This kind of news shows us that even MB’s own members can criticize their parties on/through the Internet. Hence after a period of struggle against the opposition media, young Brothers finally got a chance to spread/diffuse their ideologies with a greater independence through the Internet.

However, the greatest impact of the Internet is internal to the Brotherhood. Today, blogs help us to understand the different point of views and ideologies in the organisation. As Lynch claims, while the Internet is used to change the domination of the MB by an older generation accustomed to patriarchical ways of doing business, blogs and social media empower the voices of more moderate, tech-savvy members (Lynch, 2007b:10) and this threatens the authority of more conservative leaders (Ajemian, 2008:6). The new outlets provide a space to the youth of the MB where they can challenge entrenched dogma and empower reformist and independent voices (Lynch, 2007a). For instance, in 2011, when groups asked for a second revolution against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that has been running the country since Mubarak stepped down in February 2011, the MB was opposed to this revolution and they claimed they would not participate in the protests. Meanwhile, the young leaders who wanted to join the protests claimed their disappointment about this statement on the Internet. Despite the organization’s vehement opposition, a group of MB youth had affirmed that they would participate in Friday’s protests (Hennawy, 2011). Thus, once again, it was seen that while older members were opposed to
political clashes with the authorities, young Muslim Brothers joined forces with other constituencies in Egypt in an effort to overcome divisions and complete the revolution.

Today, the disagreement between the youth and their leaders shows a new episode of internal clashes that have made headlines in recent months. However, these internal discussions do not always weaken the political party. On the contrary, they may fortify participatory politics and lead to a democratic regime since the messages of young Brothers may have an impact on the views and speeches of older leaders. For example, in 2007, the Muslim Brothers were involved in a public struggle with the regime over the slogan “Islam is the solution”. While MB’s leaders insisted on the slogan, several Brotherhood bloggers were demanding why the organisation was wasting its time on a ‘sideshow’. Instead they proposed a slogan they thought would unify people: “Egypt for all Egyptians” (Lynch, 2007b:11). Although they did not win this battle at that time, today their messages are used by prominent leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in order to convince Egyptians about the new parliament. For instance, the outgoing water resources minister Mr Qandil, speaking in a conference in Cairo, called people to unify again and to support the current government. He said; "We have to stop asking who is a Copt, a Muslim or a Salafi. I don't see that. All I see is that we are all Egyptians and this should be the main principle" (BBC, 2012). Hence today, instead of emphasising religion as a slogan, the members of parliament use the unifying message of youth bloggers in order to create once more solidarity in Egypt and to appease the concern of sceptical Egyptians.

Although the leaders of the MB use the messages of young Brothers, they have refused to internationalized any of the criticism that reformist youth articulate (El Sherif, 2012). One of the reasons for their failure may be the fragmenting cracking ideologies among young Muslim Brothers. There is anecdotal evidence that while much of the youth adopt salafi ways of thinking, reform-minded Brothers constitute only 15 percent of the new generation (Lynch, 2007b:14). It should not be forgotten that the Internet is a political opportunity for different groups. Young brothers who adapt Salafi beliefs are equally free to use the Internet to spread their opposing views. Today, the lack of policing and control over religious media permits Salafi beliefs to extend much faster and more efficiently than during Mubarak’s regime (Prinsloo, 2011). It can be said that the competition of these two opposite views may shape the future Internet activities of Brothers.

On the other hand, although bloggers prove to the world and their leaders the importance of solidarity, currently there are divisions even inside of the organisation. Many reform-minded Brothers are pushed to search for alternative political forums, while some have resigned from the Muslim Brotherhood, many others have been fired (El Sherif,2012). However, we can still see their influence in the Internet activities of the MB. Contrary to the negative expectation, the MB continues to show greater reliance on the Internet. For instance, through the election night, the MB informed people on Twitter about updated election results coming from the Brothers in polling station. Hence, the political party controlled the narrative and forced a level of transparency in elections, thanks to these efforts, the Egyptian state could not rig the election for Shafik (Tufekci, 2012). On the other hand, Ikhwanweb continue to be critical about the MB’s activities.

However, it should not be forgotten that the online activities of Brothers depend also upon who they’re interacting with and competing with. The rising Egyptian protests against the decree granting new powers to President Mohamed Morsi, the internal clashes among Muslim Brothers
or the reaction of international society to the Freedom and Justice party may all affect the Internet activities of the political party. Moreover, the complex and overlapping national, regional and transnational media ecologies also shape the news in the Internet. As Chadwick observes, we are currently witnessing the hybridization of the traditional and new media. This hybridization shapes power relations among actors and has an impact on the flows and meanings of news (Chadwick, 2011:12). Although reform-minded Muslim Brothers are powerful in forming news on the Internet, it is also important to know who forms the news in traditional media. For instance, the Freedom and Justice Party did not change the old media system of Mubarek. The appointments of chief editors are still in the hands of the Shura Council. People in Egypt have concerns that the Brotherhood may try to turn their newspapers into reliable house organs (El Zein, 2012). If this will be the case, such constraints upon the newspapers will affect information on the Internet as well. Thereby, in order to understand the rising ideologies of the MB on the Internet, today it is necessary that we consider different external and internal factors as well.

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A Myriad of Gaps doesn’t make a Canyon: EU vs. Bilateral Engagement in Tunisia

By Katrin Buchholz

The Arab spring is widely seen as a seminal event in the recent history of international relations. The international community and particularly Europe is faced with serious risks of instability in its neighbourhood. But it is primarily the new political elites in the countries concerned, brought forth by the rise of political Islam, which are faced with a myriad of challenges. Confronted with rampant unemployment, creating jobs is of major concern to the entire Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). It is evident that the countries in question are not able to overcome these problems alone, international help is needed.

In the immediate aftermath of the Tunisian revolution, Germany rechanneled existing funds and a few months later the German Parliament allocated 100 million euros for the years 2012 / 2013 in order to further support the countries of the so called “Arab Spring”. These funds as additional to the German engagement in the field of economic and development cooperation, were to be used to support democratisation on an institutional level, decentralisation, media and civil society, employability and academic cooperation. A task force to steer the various projects that were selected for funding was set up and a special representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs was appointed.

The EU engagement was even more impressive. The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) has allocated 18 billion euros in total for the period 2014-2020 to the eastern and southern neighbouring countries. In addition, the mandate of the European Reconstruction and Development Bank (EBRD) was extended to the MENA region and the European Investment Bank (EIB) saw a significant rise in its budget. But money has never been the sole remedy. The European Commission published two communications right after the revolutions sparked in Tunisia and Egypt promoting a new approach to its Southern Neighbourhood, incorporating lessons learned from the pre-revolutionary period.

However, the EU continues to be criticized for various gaps and flaws in its neighbourhood policy. Since the EU itself can only compensate some of its shortages and since bilateral engagement is not a good substitute for EU action, both of them are prone to criticism. Using the example of Tunisia, this article argues that though there are limits to German support in the MENA region, bilateral action has comparative advantages to EU engagement.

I.

The EU’s policy towards the MENA region is widely said to have many gaps. From the start of European relations with the region in the middle of the 90s (Mediterranean Partnership) up until the revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011, the EU’s policy has continually been criticized for being interest driven, based on double standards and for being institutionally poorly organized. In a nutshell, even today, three points can be raised:

1. **Shortages on an organisational and human resources level are visible even with the new institutional framework.** Since the Lisbon treaty established new structures such as the European External Action Service,
they are – according to some academics - used without any vision. In times of crisis, national sovereignty claims prevent the further use of foreign and security policy instruments, such as for instance engaging in permanent structured cooperation. According to other academics, the lack of coordination with the work of the European Commission is an obstacle to effective policy. The nomination of a Special Representative for the region (Mr. Bernadino Leon) in June 2011 – though against this backdrop widely seen as a wise step – is of little help: The implementation of his more or less ambitious mandate is lacking man power.

This also hints at a lack on a policy level. While the bilateral European Neighbourhood Policy suffers from a co-ordinated approach of both the Commission and the Special Representative, the inter-regional approach of the European Union is also unable to keep up with its promises: The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was largely invisible when the Arab awakening started to unfold, and has remained so ever since. Though it is fair to argue that the UfM was never meant to be a political forum, but was rather aimed at facilitating expert cooperation, it is not considered a success story.

2. The gap between the EU’s normative rhetoric on democracy and its “realpolitik” is still a dilemma. The Commission was forced to revise its bilateral approach to the European Neighbourhood (ENP) even before the Arab spring had started since results did not materialize as expected. In May 2011, the reform of the ENP resulted in a stronger focus on the cooperation with civil society, on the opening of markets, on facilitating mobility and on conditionality. The so called “more for more” principle was set forth in order to break with the past – a past in which the EU had more or less unconditionally dealt with autocratic regimes. Though there is a strong commitment by all actors on the European side to its implementation, the EU is still and again being criticized for its double standard policies towards autocratic regimes such as in Algeria or Jordan.

3. The EU is underestimating the “insularity gap”. The fact that Europe is not the only power active in the region makes coordination and measuring impact difficult. Besides the EU and its Member States, Turkey is the rising star in the region, offering support ranging from political backing of the main Islamic parties, to free trade agreements and development aid. Furthermore Qatar, like other Gulf countries, is supporting the Arab brother states, especially with infrastructure projects and, allegedly, party financing. Also China and the US are expanding their activities in the region. Organizing an EU task force in Tunisia (September 2011) or Egypt (November 2012), the European Action Service tried to include third parties; none of the mentioned actors participated.

II.

In the end, the “myriad of gaps” that was only indicated at in bold terms does not form a “canyon” separating EU aspirations from effective engagement in the region. At least three arguments favour the newly defined European action based on 3Ms (market, money, and mobility) compared with national engagement.

1. The topics that are the most pressing for the partner countries fall within the competence of the EU: trade can have the most positive impact on growth and job creation. In the Tunisian case, trade with the European Member State countries makes up 70% of GDP. Though it is true that trade relations depend primarily on the economic situation in the European partner countries and their outlook has not been very positive in 2012, EU competence in the area of trade is having an impact. It would allow a deepening of the partnership with Tunisia, initiated in 1995, in the domains of
services and agriculture (tariffs and barriers for industrial goods were already lifted in 2004). In order to boost these areas the EU’s current efforts to adopt a Deep and Comprehensive Trade Agreement with Tunisia are of major importance, even if the social costs for post-revolutionary Tunisia are high.

Mobility is another case in point. As mobility serves the exchange of ideas, goods, services and workforces, it is another, in part complementary, precondition for prosperity in the countries of the southern Mediterranean. Though migration management is still under the control of EU Member States, they alone cannot change the parameters of mobility. The European Schengen framework is the common point of reference for managing legal and irregular migration. The EU therefore at a very early stage offered Tunisia a so-called partnership on mobility, migration and security including the offer of visa facilitation coupled with Tunisian commitment to reduce irregular migration.

2. National budgets – especially in times of crisis - are “peanuts” compared to the EU funds. Important structural reforms or ample budget support to the MENA countries can only be supported by a major investment. Though in sum 18 billion euros, i.e. 40% more European funds than before the Arab Spring, seem less impressive when taking into account that they are set forth for 16 neighbouring countries, the sum seems more than enough to make a difference in Tunisia: Tunisia is profiting from 400 Mio. Euros of European support in the period 2011-2013 whereas the German support in the framework of the transition partnership equals about 41 Mio. euros and 60 Mio. euros set free by a debt swap (2012-2013).

3. The European Union serves as a model for regional integration in the MENA region. In order to support efforts towards a similar success story of regional peace, prosperity and common values, the EU has set forth frameworks that – even though discussed controversially as in the case of the Union of the Mediterranean (2008) – push common understanding on institution building in the Mediterranean. More specifically, the coeval 5 + 5 dialogue including only Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania on the one side and the countries of the northern Mediterranean (France, Italy, Spain, Malta, Portugal) on the other reflects even as an informal setting the European spirit of regional integration. Hopes are high that with the democratic aspirations of Tunisia and Libya, the 23 year-old but essentially dead Maghreb Union will see a revival. As the lack of intra-regional trade amounts to losses of up to 4% of national GDP, the new dynamics initiated amongst others by the Tunisian President Marzouki are of no surprise.

III.

In summary, European engagement is a natural consequence of a specific set of factors (competency, financial necessities, and regional dynamics). It is evident that national engagement seen against this background cannot keep up with European engagement. Indeed, as seen in the example of Tunisia in at least three ways it is a burden to European engagement:

1. The overburdened bureaucracy in Tunisia, hardly capable of managing the demands of cooperation with the EU, is faced with a multitude of actors who need not only answers but also progress in their respective work in order to report back to their national parliaments and – eventually - taxpayers (“responsiveness gap”).
2. Given that extra national funds are only approved for a short period of time, the sustainability of any engagement is at stake. Sustainability of bilateral engagement is also a challenge if the risk of fickle national interest is considered. Tunisia – ranked at the top of the agenda until recently - was quickly sidelined by the rising interest in the political developments in Egypt and, later on, Syria.

3. In addition, any engagement runs the risk of doubling already existing or planned engagement. European coordination efforts in Tunisia try to overcome this problem but the involvement of a diverse set of actors – embassies' representatives, EU delegation members, capital envoys, non-governmental experts – makes it difficult to steer coordination effectively.

This is even more so the case when national engagement is poorly coordinated in the first place. In Germany for the different playing levels such as the federal and state level this is likely to happen. But despite all these difficulties and criticism German Tunisian cooperation is cited by all sides as a success story.

IV.

The German Foreign Ministers’ visit to Tunisia only one month after Ben Ali fled Tunisia gave a living face to what would later result in institutionalized cooperation. Germany offered Tunisia a bilateral cooperation called “transformation partnership” that was accepted and formally agreed upon through joint declarations signed later on in 2011 and in September 2012. There are at least three reasons why that timely if limited German engagement is no less important than European engagement.

1. The German Transformation Partnership creates an immediate impact due to its ability to tie its activities to actors and structures in the country. Traditionally Germany’s foreign policy is characterized by a wide range of decentralised actors that are active in the field in one way or another. In Tunisia four political foundations, the German Culture (Goethe Institut) Institute and the German development agency (GIZ) have been present for decades. Other actors such as the German Bank for Reconstruction (KfW), the Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) or the German Broadcasting Agent (Deutsche Welle) opened their branches in Tunis recently. Finding a local partner for projects selected for funding by the Foreign Ministry therefore is a relatively easy task. In the particular sector of job creation, German projects profit from 280 German firms present in Tunisia. With their help, the so called “employability pact” focusing on dual professional training, impact on the job market is secured.

2. Tunisia perceives Germany as a driving force within the European Union. Cooperation with Germany on a bilateral level will therefore positively affect Tunisian standing in Brussels. For example, Germany is encouraging Tunisia in its efforts to acquire a privileged status amongst the EU’s partner countries. German ministries offer support in order to enable the Tunisian government better handle negotiations in Brussels on highly difficult files such as the conclusion of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. Another case in point is the debt swap of 60 Mio. euros that Germany as the only country of the European Union agreed upon in favour of Tunisia in May 2011. In the bilateral consultations in September 2012 the German State Secretaries declared that they would promote the idea of converting Tunisian debts amongst its European counterparts.
3. Finally, the Tunisian-German partnership is a decisive element of public diplomacy in both countries. Tunisia’s interest in establishing strong relations with Germany is in part due to discussions over Tunisian identity. As a country where the French footprint is omnipresent as a result of the colonial ties between the two countries, Tunisia is keen to loosen these ties and open up to different partners. Public diplomacy is a case in point for Germany too. Faced with the widespread fear of Islam in its population Germany wants the new moderate Islamic elites in Tunisia to succeed in their ambition to link its Islamic religion and culture to democracy. In times of crisis, Germany needs moderate Islamic partners to calm tempers and promote intercultural dialogue. In the Tunisian case, in September 2012 when an anti-Mohammed video produced in the US led to violence in many places of the Muslim world German Foreign Minister Westerwelle and his Tunisian counterpart Foreign Minister Abdessalem published a common op-ed in Tunisia, Germany, Egypt, Lebanon and Great Britain.

Public diplomacy is certainly not the only German interest in Tunisia. Stability of the region is another concern that has different trans-national aspects such as migration, climate or energy. Thus Tunisia’s capability to promote regional integration is of high importance to Germany. But while German engagement, thanks to its foreign policy’s political leverage and effectiveness, might make a difference in Tunisia it will not be enough to stabilize a wide and highly complex region. Thus German and European levels of action should be complementary.
To the Right of Ghannouchi: The Salafi Challenge to Ennahdha

By Riccardo Fabiani

The electoral triumph that Tunisia's main Islamist party, Ennahdha, recorded in October 2011 was a moment that many religious supporters and activists at home and in exile had waited for for a very long time. Ennahdha's victory marked its rise to power, after years of repression under the Ben Ali regime, and highlighted well the party's wide support base in the country across geographical, social and even religious boundaries and thanks to its hard-earned reputation as the only real opposition to Tunisia's dictatorship. Despite the country's fame for its secularism, for the first time an Islamist party has risen to power and is in a position to implement a policy agenda potentially different from what Tunisia has experienced in the past. This is the outcome of a process of moderation that has led Ennahdha to the centre of the political spectrum and has made possible for the Islamist party to become the most important political force in Tunisia. That said, this unprecedented situation also means that for the first time in its history Ennahdha faces a series of existential challenges to its political and social hegemony within the Islamist/conservative camp, in the wake of the political opening that has followed the 2011 revolution.

Ennahdha before the 2011 revolution

During the Ben Ali era, Ennahdha (or Mouvement de Tendance Islamique, MTI, as it was known in the 1980s) was unanimously recognised as the main Islamist organisation in Tunisia. Ennahdha quickly gained a special status among the various opposition parties, earning a reputation as the country's most serious and committed anti-regime movement, thanks in particular to its strong showings in the elections held in the 1980s and later to the authorities' harsh repression against it. The MTI was born in 1981, at a time of relative political relaxation. In the last years of Habib Bourguiba's presidency, the Tunisian regime was experiencing a process of gradual deliquescence, as the ideological and political momentum of the post-colonial era quickly disappeared. The MTI positioned itself as a radical Islamist movement that aimed to topple the country's secular and despotic regime and replace it with a vaguely defined religious system. This situation was similar to other processes that were taking place at the same time in the rest of the region and, as in other countries, the Tunisian authorities responded to this challenge hesitantly, offering modest political openings as well as repressing any opposition. In this context, the 1987 coup staged by Ben Ali was seen by many Islamist sympathisers as a historic opportunity to rise to power through a democratic opening. However, in a few years it became clear that under Ben Ali that there was no political space for the MTI (later become Ennahdha).

As a result, in the 1990s and 2000s Ennahdha stepped up its opposition against the Tunisian regime, but met an even harsher response. These events boosted its reputation and placed the Islamist group above all other opposition parties in the country. As the Ben Ali regime tightened its grip on the political scene and banned most opposition parties, Ennahdha effectively remained the main opposition movement in the eyes of most Tunisians in the country and abroad.
The rise of Ennahdha

This situation meant that, with the fall of the Ben Ali regime in early 2011, Ennahdha was naturally placed to take advantage from this reputation. At the end of January, only a few days after Ben Ali's hasty departure from the country, Ennahdha's leader Rached Ghannouchi made a triumphal comeback to Tunisia, in what many secularists saw as an eerie parallel with Ruhollah Khomeini's return to Iran in 1979. However, unlike Khomeini, Ghannouchi made a conscious effort to appease the country's secular constituencies and Western partners by avoiding any confrontation with other opposition parties and referring to a moderate, democratic agenda that could do without the strict implementation of Islamic law (sharia). This discourse was meant to broaden the party's appeal to other groups and constituencies that are not traditionally sympathetic with Islamist ideas (the business sector as well as the middle class, for example) while avoiding any conflict with the country's variegated secular spectrum.

This meant that for months Ghannouchi was able to avoid tackling the most controversial issues (such as the role of Islamic law in the future constitution, women's rights, the role of religion in politics etc.) and defining more specifically the party's agenda. Thanks to this careful strategy, Ennahdha managed to speak to its core supporters and hardline Islamists as well as the less religious-minded voters. As a result, the Islamist party secured a plurality in the elections for the Constituent Assembly held in October 2011, distancing all other secular movements: Ennahdha obtained around 37% of the popular vote, followed by the secular Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol, with 9% and 7%, respectively. In the aftermath of this ballot, Ennahdha struck an alliance with the two secular groups, CPR and Ettakatol, and obtained the premiership (while leaving the presidency to the CPR's Moncef Marzouki and the role of assembly speaker to Ettakatol's Ben Jaafar).

This was the unsurprising outcome of Ennahdha's strategy: from his return from exile, the party's leader Rached Ghannouchi downplayed Ennahdha's ambitions, underlined its moderate agenda and made a conscious effort to avoid upsetting opposition parties and foreign partners. Although these reassurances were not enough to soothe the secular opposition's fears of an Islamist takeover, they were widely praised abroad as a sign of Ennahdha's moderation and commitment to democracy.

New challenges

However, the opening of the political space and the legalization of behaviours and movements that were banned under Ben Ali created a vacuum to the right of Ennahdha that has been quickly filled by a plurality of actors. Not only Ennahdha, but also other elements and groups have taken advantage of the new freedom and political climate to establish their organisations and claim a visibility that had been previously denied. This process has taken place both on the left and on the right of the political spectrum, creating a completely new set of challenges, questions and strategic obstacles for a party that had been shaped by years of confrontation against the regime and has never had to worry too much about its position within the opposition camp.

Indeed, in recent months Salafi and extremist activists have grabbed the headlines of most Tunisian and foreign newspapers through a series of highly visible and controversial initiatives, ranging from anti-Semitic demonstrations to violent clashes with the police and many more.
Salafists have suddenly become a source of concern for many Tunisians as well as external observers owing to their uncompromising stance and violent initiatives. In turn these episodes, albeit limited in time and space, have highlighted the existence of a previously underestimated political reality to the right of Ghannouchi’s mild brand of Islamism and have posed a considerable threat to Ennahdha’s so far unchallenged hegemonic role within the conservative camp. As Salafists have become increasingly vocal by demonstrating in favour of the application of Islamic law and criticising Ennahdha’s restraint, it has become evident that there is an ultra-conservative constituency that is ready to take action and get organised if the main Islamist organisation becomes too soft.

This has led Ennahdha to take an ambivalent attitude to the Salafi camp: on the one hand, the moderate Islamist leadership is aware that part of its success was due to the Salafists’ support and that this support will not be guaranteed in the future; on the other hand, Ennahdha cannot be seen too close politically to the Salafists, as the party’s moderate voters, secular allies and international partners would not tolerate it. This dilemma has become the most important strategic problem for Ennahdha, which has shown a lack of resolve and clarity on several controversial issues because of its inability to solve this problem.

In addition, this new situation to the right of Ennahdha has led to the demand for the legalisation of various Salafi parties. As Salafi activists have become more confident about their status and increasingly vocal, this has encouraged various preachers and militants to get organised and found their own movements. This has temporarily culminated with the approval of Tunisia’s first Salafi organisation, the Reform Front, followed a few weeks later by Hizb at-Tahrir. Both parties are credited with very limited followings at the moment. However, in future both groups are likely to pose a new challenge to Ennahdha’s previously undisputed hegemony. Moreover, other parties (such as the populist al-Aridha al-Chaabia and, to a lesser extent, the CPR and Ettakatol) have tried to exploit this situation as well by positioning themselves to the right of Ennahdha on specific issues or by establishing formal or informal contacts with Salafi exponents. Although their ability to appeal to this small but vocal constituency is probably limited, these episodes show clearly how even these parties have tried to tap this group of voters as well as to embarrass Ghannouchi’s party.

Fault lines and divergences within Ennahdha

A less obvious effect of the emergence of this new political space has been to highlight a plurality of opinions and fault lines within Ennahdha itself, as the party has come under pressure from all sides to take position on a variety of controversial issues. Challenges to the right, posed by Salafi groups, and pressure to the left, exerted by its allies and the country’s international partners, have put Ennahdha in an extremely uncomfortable position, where Ghannouchi’s imprecise discourse has been completely unable to address the questions and problems raised by the new political reality. Unsurprisingly, Ennahdha has wavered more than once when faced with difficult decisions and under pressure from the right and the left, with Ghannouchi struggling to come up with effective answers to the most controversial issues that have been raised in the political debate.

In this context, pressed from the right as well as the left to dissolve its ambiguity vis-a-vis the Salafists, Ghannouchi (and Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali) has tried to strike compromises between the party’s conservatives (such as Sadok Chorou) and moderates, while avoiding to stir
concerns among the country's secularists and foreign partners. This has meant giving up the inclusion of Islamic law in the constitution and maintaining the wording of the old constitution, for example. This course has been difficult and has disappointed many people on the right as well as the left, exposing Ennahdha to conflicting accusations of excessive moderation and extremism at the same time. Rather than concealing the party's internal fault lines, this strategy adopted by Ennahdha has only underlined the divisions within the party.

As tensions continue to build up, the risk of a break-up for Ennahdha could increase, posing fundamental questions to the party's leadership regarding the identity and role of an Islamist party in the post-Arab Spring context. Despite the constant references to Turkey's AKP experience as a model and inspiration, Ennahdha is charting its way in this new political reality and is positioning itself as a conservative movement where religion plays an important role but is far from being the only ideological frame for action. That said, the implementation of this strategy is not easy and exposes the party to tensions and attacks that are unprecedented. So far, Ghannouchi's strong leadership has contributed to minimising these tensions and defending the party from most of these attacks. Moreover, the party has shown more resilience and unity than many other movements, such as the CPR, Ettakatol or al-Aridha al-Chaabia. That said, in a future without Ghannouchi, it could become increasingly difficult for Ennahdha to reconcile the various contradictions inside and outside the party, opening the way to possible schisms and fractures within this once-monolithic movement.
Political Islam in Turkey has always been illustrated as a persistent competition between Secularism and Islamism in terms of defining the nature of the ruling system and State-Society relations. Unlike the literature emphasizing the binary division between Secularism and Islamism as an irreconcilable dichotomy in the elite’s cognitive system, the AKP manifests an attempt to harmonize between these two spheres of identification. Therefore, the reconsideration of the Kemalist definition of Secularism and the integration of Islamic values without violating the rational and modern mechanisms of the State’s institutions constitute the main challenge under the rule of the current regime.

In Turkey, the traditional elite endorsed the Kemalist foundations in running the internal and external affairs. The military and the bureaucracy are the main actors who maintained their practices compatible with the Kemalist ideology in their fields of action. On the other hand, the conservative elite defended a different vision of development and manifested an attachment to the Islamic civilization. Thus, it refused the secularization process as a constitutional order and an ideology that allowed the traditional elite to maintain their authorities and marginalize Islamic forces. However, the Kemalist regime has reached its limits by manifesting a governance crisis related to the institutionalization of authoritarianism as the sole means to protect the republican principles. Therefore, while it is important that Turkey remains secular, it is essential that it goes beyond the establishment’s oppressive practices.

Secularism in the AKP’s political discourse

The restructuring of the Turkish political system and its center on the practical and cognitive levels is visibly manifested under the rule of the AKP through its political discourse. Being supported by the conservative bourgeoisie, the party has reformulated the political center in accordance with the society’s interests as articulated by the newly emerging socioeconomic elite. Such a change incited the bureaucratic apparatus to be subordinated to the citizens’ demands instead of being an instrument of social domination. Thus, the AKP discourse is a form of relaxation of the State apparatus in terms of allowing the opening of the center and preventing its perpetuation as an exclusion mechanism.

By transcending the Kemalist rigid center, restructuring Turkey’s Islamic identity and abandoning the anti-Western rhetoric of the ultra-conservative movements, the party managed to align with the globalization exigencies and increased the masses’ freedom. Being the mayor of Istanbul in the 90s, Erdogan’s experience allowed him to formulate a pragmatic policy geared towards solving everyday’s problems and ensuring the society well-being without resorting to religion as a political tool. Accordingly, he transposed this local practice to the political center without confronting the State or highlighting the ideological antagonism between Islamism and Secularism.

The arrival of the AKP manifests the Kemalist system’s success in controlling the role of Islam in the public sphere. In this sense, the AKP represents a paradox in the Turkish political system in light
of its conservative basis that in spite of being marginalized by the Kemalists managed to consolidate its position. The implementation of the European Union reforms and the IMF, the management of the Iraqi crisis and the Cypriot issue allowed the AKP to increase its legitimacy and diversify its external relations. In light of its balancing strategy between the Kemalists and the Islamic trends, the AKP illustrates a turning point in the Turkish political history.

The AKP historically associated with the Islamic political tradition adopts a speech that manifests a disruption with the religious dogma whose elements were discarded in favor of pragmatic orientations. Islamic groups, following the postmodern coup, have agreed to develop a more flexible approach towards the West. The resistance faced by the conservative elite throughout the Turkish history led to the reformulation of its Islamic identity through their orientation towards the European Union in order to ensure democratization and openness for the marginalized masses. The party’s political identity reflects the universal values and the traditional Kemalist principles in a liberal conservative synthesis inspired by the Islamic civilization. Thus, the party initiated an identity transformation process oriented towards globalization that, despite its rejection of the Islamic State option, emphasizes values and concepts related to Islam.

Therefore, the AKP, being devoted to the promotion of human rights, modified the balance of power on the national scene in favor of the civilians as a result of the weakening of the military and the adoption of the legal reforms imposed by the European Union. A series of reform packages were introduced by the parliament, since January 2003, enforcing the right of association, the prohibition of torture, the closure of political parties, the cancellation of the Act of terrorism and the limitation of the National Security Council authorities. In April 2004, further constitutional amendments were related to the release of the Higher Education Council from the military domination and the ban of the death penalty and the State Security Courts. In this regard, the bureaucratic elite has no longer the monopoly on the policy formulation in the name of the protection of the Republic and the defense of its secular principles. Thus, a new concept of security and national interest emerged and reversed the political lexicon of the traditional elite and interrupted arbitrary interventions. The Turkish national security became multidimensional by including economic factors, educational and cultural demands, the pursuit of democratization and securing natural resources in addition to military concerns.

Beyond Secularism vs. Islamism antagonism

Although the AKP is devoid of an ideological motivation in its political activity, the Ottoman legacy plays the ideology role in the formulation of the political ethics of the party and the definition of national interest beyond territorial integrity and State survival. The AKP perception of globalization has introduced a new conception of national interest based on a pragmatic and conciliatory speech internalizing Western liberal values which succeeded to relegate the confrontation with Kemalism beyond the national sphere.

The AKP’s style reconsiders the modernization path in order to allow the urbanized masses to coexist on an equal footing with the Kemalists at the center on the economic, political and social levels. By borrowing of a modernization discourse, once adopted by the Kemalists, while relating it
to the adopted reforms, the AKP will be able to transform the internal politics and eliminate the roots of the September 12th regime. Hence, the party started with questions related to the State’s political identity such as the Kurdish problem, the headscarf issue and the dominance of the military on the decision making process as a requirement of the legal harmonization package.

On the other hand, the AKP’s adaptation to the national exigencies manifests its inability to cope with the system, as an Islamic party which, for fear of having the same fate of his predecessors, denies its religious roots. Thus, by concealing its Islamic character and refraining from formulating political arguments based on religion, the AKP is a post-Islamic party that engages in the political process to serve its electorate. In this sense, the nature of the party is inspired by the exigencies of the political and economic liberalism in terms of producing allegiance ties based on improving services for the people.

Accordingly, the party embodies a transition from Political Islam in its speech where the national policy is formulated in the name of the “ethic of service”. Being identified as a social democratic party of the third way inspired by the European model, it adopts a pragmatic program that promises Turkey’s integration to the economic globalization in terms of participation and competition while ensuring justice and social freedom. Accordingly, the AKP was forced to change the premises of the Kemalist ideology and its social hegemony by turning the State into a subject to the nation and the society that were previously subordinated to the traditional elite’s exigencies.

Turkey’s integration into globalization created spheres of opportunity for Islamic groups and civil society, changed their traditional configuration and turned them into the main economic and sociopolitical actors. This bourgeoisie has emerged as a counterweight to the secular economic elite that had symbiotic relations with the State. The economy deregulation and liberalization allowed the emerging elite to transcend the State network and develop its own model of transnational economic and financial transactions. Having undergone a process of urbanization and socialization marked by a high educational level and a religious revival, this elite manifested a remarkable social mobility and created a middle size business beyond the State’s control. Its Islamic identity allowed it to reposition itself vis-à-vis the secular elite while making their own networks based on Islamic capitalism that justifies their share in the market.

**Secularism reconsidered through the State-Society relations**

The Anatolian elite’s strategy defies the binary division of society between the center and the periphery while presenting an alternative based on a communitarian model that is more liberal and less constrained by the ideological limits of Kemalism. The emergence of this elite on the economic, social and political level is a revolution that reverses the traditional up-down development model through the integration of new forces in a bottom-up dynamic opposed to the Kemalist socialization process. Besides, it advocated for the integration of traditional values to the center as an attempt to moralize the State institutions and structures.

In this sense, the notion of freedom, designed by Erdogan, eliminates all kinds of barriers and interventions into the majority’s lifestyle aligned to a moral identification opposed to that advocated by the State. It is a new political discourse that reformulates Kemalism in accordance with the
requirements of liberalization and universal standards. Therefore, the AKP emphasizes freedom, human rights, supremacy of law and transparency while denouncing the secular idioms that consolidate the opposition between modernity/religion and progressivism/conservatism.

The AKP manifests a reconsideration of the Islamic/conservative groups’ position vis-à-vis the West. The reconsideration of the linear rationality of modernization by the Islamic elite, including Milli Gorus, has reflected a fundamental and radical interpretation of the sacred text in response to "the distortions" inflicted by the westernization process to the Muslims’ identity. The refusal of the Westernization process by Erbakan presented a different formulation for national identity and history narrative based on a religious reference in opposition to cosmopolitanism. It consists of the resurrection of authenticity and Islamic civilization in search for autonomy from the West.

As for the AKP, the process of identity reconstruction is based on the distinction between modernization and westernization as well as the refusal of the subordination of the former to the latter. Its leaders reconsidered the political identity of the Islamic movements and rejected Milli Gorus’s ideological dogma. By adopting a program affiliated to the center right "Program for Development and Democracy", the AKP expresses a reconciled position whose scope expands internally in terms of democratization and externally through integration to the world order. As a conservative democrat, the AKP presents a new identity for the Islamic parties that are not opposed to the secular system of the State while promising to achieve internal stability.

It is a process of adjustment to global changes without losing the essence of traditional values which underlines the hybrid and vague nature of its ideology that allows it to adopt a flexible and conciliatory policy. It is a synthesis between rationality and morality, the universal and local values and traditions. Conservative Democracy conceives a political participation based on the reconciliation of differences, people’s sovereignty and law supremacy. It is a conciliatory and inclusive notion aiming for the normalization of the national scene in terms of the relationship between State and society where the first meets the expectations of the second. Although this concept is challenged in different literature because of its intellectual and theoretical deficiencies, by using it, the AKP deemphasized opposition between Secularism and Islamism and accepted the former as the foundation of the State politics while offering alternative interpretations for its application.\footnote{Conservative classes support a passive secularism where the State is neutral vis-à-vis religion while refuting its adoption of a political doctrine that determines the individual’s identity and his worldview. The AKP believes that secularism must be tolerant vis-à-vis the different religions instead of being a tool of repression. According to Arinc, secularism in Turkey must consider the socio-cultural duality in Turkey that belongs to the West while being predominantly Muslim.}

The priority is to reconcile the interests of the periphery in the constitutional provisions with the ideological lexicon of the center and to eliminate the affiliation to the center as the only legitimate channel to participate in politics. The majority wasn’t satisfied with the State policy that marginalized the mass by its patronage and secular urban classes in the implementation of economic projects within the modernization process and the import substitution policy. To transform the political culture of the center where Islam can be accepted as a political identity, the AKP passed a less stringent definition of secularism while denouncing it as an individual ideology. By becoming a body
that serves the society in developing and shaping the center, the AKP created a new social contract between the people and the State that is no longer based on the Kemalist ideology nor the authoritarian socialization process but rather on the promotion of liberal democratic principles of freedom and well-being protection.

**Foreign policy: a manifestation of a new understanding for the State secular bases**

Against the positivist view of the social and political model based on the Kemalist motto "Order and Progress", the social ethic advanced by the AKP is an alternative developed by intellectuals and professionals who embrace social Islam as a group identity. This syncretism of values and norms from tradition and modernity allows the reformulation of the internal order and the adoption of a balanced and multidimensional diplomacy.

The slogan "Peace Homeland, Peace Abroad" is respected by the AKP leaders who adopt an assertive and autonomous diplomacy. As a result, the traditional elite, including the military and the judiciary, have become increasingly skeptical about the liberalization process adopted by the AKP since it is perceived as a threat to the secular foundations of the Republic that may lead to a possible Islamization of the Turkish society.

Accordingly, Foreign policy has contributed to the conciliation between Islam and modernism as well as progressivism and conservatism internally. It compensates for the party’s inability to reach a consensus with the Kemalist elite in the formulation of the political culture. The party has transposed its conciliatory nature and political ideology to the external level by the development of multidimensional and simultaneous relations with Western and Arab/Muslim countries to assert an existing harmony between Muslims and the West.

The reformulation of the relation with the West while considering the Arab-Muslim neighborhood consists of creating a transnational and an inclusive vision that underlines the maturity of the Kemalist principles. The AKP manifests continuity with the secular line of the Turkish diplomacy by according importance to the modernization process and strengthening ties with the West while maintaining common interests with its neighborhood. The Kemalist adage is thus pursued in accordance with national and international exigencies within a clear policy based on multidimensionality, multilateralism and pro-activism in achieving a stable and peaceful region. Turkey considers foreign policy orientations as a means to achieve its broad national interests rather than some limited elitist goals and Western exigencies. The reformulation of the party’s identity led to the reconsideration of the State’s relations with the West in terms of autonomy and independence. The economic liberalization, the increasing trade and financial relations with neighbors and other non-Western States empowers Turkey’s position towards the West.

The accumulation of economic agreements, free trade and elimination of double taxation treaties and the expansion of the Turkish market in the neighborhood fall within the reconsideration of the Turkish identity as a central State and a regional power where Islam is an essential articulator of its diplomacy as a global player. Thus, the notions of power center and leader of the Islamic world reflect the economic reforms undertaken by the AKP as well as its desire to strengthen the Islamic character of the Turkish identity and its presence in the region.
Deterioration in the Sinai and its Implications for Egyptian-Israeli Relations

By Cindy May

Since the Egyptian revolution and the fall of long time President Hosni Mubarak, the Sinai Peninsula has become an area of ever increasing lawlessness and instability. The region has turned into a base for Bedouin drug smuggling, weapons smuggling, human trafficking, and a wide array of militant activity. The Sinai’s border with Israel and its proximity to the Suez Canal make it an area of vital strategic importance. The deteriorating status of the Sinai has the potential to threaten regional stability, the Egyptian-Israeli peace accords, and the new Egyptian government’s consolidation of power and relations with outside powers, including the United States.

The dynamics of the Sinai are complicated. The region’s Bedouins oppose Egyptian security forces due to the way the Cairo government has treated them. They are angry about the lack of public services and economic development in the area. Added to this already volatile situation is the presence of numerous individuals and groups that support Palestinian, jihadist, and Al Qaeda causes, as well as the Takfiri people who left Egyptian society in the quest to build a perfect Islamic society in the Sinai. This has turned the Sinai into a base for discontented groups that has led to a rise in militant and terrorist activity. Following the Egyptian revolution hundreds of Islamists that had been detained under Mubarak reportedly returned to the Sinai after being released from, or breaking out of, prison. According to one Egyptian estimate, the area is now home to approximately 1,600 Salafi Jihadist militants. Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian factions have been moving their safe houses, armories, and explosive workshops into the peninsula to put them beyond Israel’s reach. There are even reports that Al Qaeda affiliated groups are becoming active in the peninsula.

In August 2011 Al Qaeda’s official website proclaimed the establishment of an Al Qaeda “Emirate of the Sinai Peninsula.” Then, on December 20, 2011 a statement by Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri declared a new Al Qaeda affiliate group had been established in the Sinai, called Ansar al-Jihad, which was “dedicated to struggling against the ‘Jews’.” In July, Islamists released a video and leaflets that promised to turn the Sinai into an Islamic emirate and demanded that Egyptian security forces impose sharia law or quit. In addition, these militants are well armed. The Sinai is a base for weapons smuggling into Gaza, which has only increased since the revolutions in the Middle East took place. Some of these armaments are coming from weapons stockpiles in Libya that became unsecured after the fall of Colonel Qadhafi, which contributes to the destabilization of the entire region.

In the past year there have been several terrorist attacks launched from the Sinai, mostly against Israel. In August 2011 eight Israelis were killed near Eilat, Israel in a cross-border attack that was planned by a Palestinian Islamist Group in Gaza and carried out by Bedouin. Also, in late April 2012 two American tourists were temporarily abducted from Nuweiba, Egypt by Bedouin demanding the release of one of their tribesman. Most recently there has been a spat of deadly attacks in the Sinai in August 2012. On August 5, militants armed with semiautomatic weapons and hand grenades attacked Egyptian border guards, killing sixteen and wounding seven. The militants then stole Egyptian armored vehicles and broke through the Israeli-Egyptian border before being killed by
Israeli Defense Forces. This attack was followed just days later on August 8, by a series of simultaneous attacks against five Egyptian security checkpoints and a military cement factory in North Sinai that wounded five security officers and a civilian. The attacks prompted the Egyptian government to launch aerial strikes on militants in the region. This in turn caused regional militants to post a statement online claiming they were not behind the attacks and warning the Egyptian military not to crack down on regional militants. The warning was posted on a website that regularly features Al Qaeda and other jihadist group statements.

Israel has requested several times that Egypt’s ruling generals do more to stabilize the region, even offering to permit modification of the peace treaty’s established Egyptian troop levels in Sinai. However, for the most part Egyptian leaders have proved either unable or unwilling to address the problem. The Israelis permitted an amendment to the peace accords last summer that would allow the Egyptians to deploy seven battalions into the Sinai; however, only two materialized. Moreover, there are reports that the security forces that are in the area are woefully underequipped with reports that Israeli forces have had to provide food and other provisions to the counterparts. The Egyptian government also launched Operation Eagle in the summer of 2011, but it ultimately failed and did little to secure the region. The inhospitable terrain in the Sinai, which includes mountains, limited roads, and little government control, provide ample locations for militants to hide and further complicates the ability of Egyptian officials to secure the area.

The United States has also expressed concern over the deterioration in the region. U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton warned during her July visit to Egypt that the Sinai could become an “operational base for jihadists” if security is not improved. The fear is that Salafists in Gaza and Sinai are joining forces and thus creating an environment that is ripe for Al Qaeda to establish a base of operations for targeting Israel. There have been reports that Egyptian Al Qaeda members have started to move back to the region from Pakistan in order to take advantage of the Sinai’s changing political dynamics. Additionally, the United States is concerned about the safety of its military personnel that are part of the multinational observer force in the Sinai. American troops represent the largest national contingent in the observer force. Coinciding with the increased instability in the area, there has also been an increase in violence against the observers. Bedouin have recently held up convoys of observer troops, refusing to let them pass until Egyptian authorities release members of their tribe. In March Bedouin held one of the multinational bases under siege for a week, refusing to allow troops out or provisions in, and in May ten Fijian soldiers were held hostage for two days.

Additionally, on August 1 a militant group calling itself Soldiers of Islamic Law called for the expulsion of U.S. troops from the Sinai. If violence against the multinational force continues or if casualties started to ensue, there will be pressure for the United States to either take action in its own right to secure the area or to reduce and/or end its involvement with the multinational force, a prospect that could have devastating consequences for the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

It remains to be seen how the new president, Mohamed Morsi, will respond to the problem over the long term. Though he has officially resigned from the Muslim Brotherhood and has promised to uphold Egypt’s international treaties, there is still cause for concern as to what his relations with Israel will be like. The Muslim Brotherhood is traditionally strongly anti-Israel and has not supported the peace process. In the past it has promised to hold a referendum on the peace accords if it came
to power. In addition, the Brotherhood has made it clear that the organization intends to support the “resistance in Gaza,” which could translate into greater support for Hamas. Although it is unlikely that even a Muslim Brotherhood sponsored government would break the peace treaty with Israel, there is the very real possibility that the Egyptian government could turn a blind eye to the activities in the Sinai as a means of subtly supporting the Palestinian groups, while at the same time officially taking a more mainstream and moderate foreign policy approach. This would be very similar to the approach that Pakistan took with the Taliban during the War on Terror: while it was officially working with the United States to combat terrorism, behind the scenes it was still permitting and supporting Taliban activities. Another such example would be the way Fatah used to operate along the Jordan Valley in the 1960s. Allowing Islamist groups to work out of the Sinai could also be a way of pushing Israel to break the treaty through a cross-border raid, as a means of eliminating a treaty that the Brotherhood has never supported.

There are already some indications that Morsi could be adopting this approach. Although he publicly condemned the August 2012 attacks in Sinai and launched retaliatory airstrikes against the militants, it is unclear how effective the military response actually was. It seems his response to the violence was focused more on public relations than security. Morsi made a personal visit to Sinai to demonstrate his commitment to the issue and seized the opportunity presented by the outcry over the attacks to consolidate his power and limit the role of the military within the Egyptian government. Not long after the attacks Morsi announced the retirement of several of the country’s top military officials, including Field Marshal Tantawi, the longtime defense minister and the defacto ruler of Egypt following Mubarak’s fall. Many Egyptian moderates worry that the consolidation of power in the presidency and the removal of Tantawi are signs that the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi are preparing to adopt a more Islamist agenda in an effort to transform Egypt into an Islamic society modeled on Iran. Other troubling signs include the recent discussion of allowing Egyptian policemen to adopt a more Islamist appearance by growing beards, the prosecution of two journalists for insulting Morsi, and the announcement that Morsi will visit Iran for Non-Aligned Movement talks. Members of the old regime, Coptic Christians, and secular Egyptians are distrustful of President Morsi’s intentions and saw the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) under Tantawi as an insurance policy against Muslim Brotherhood control of Egyptian society. Despite this display of newfound commitment to the region’s problems and his assurances that he intends to honor the treaty with Israel, President Morsi permitted the Muslim Brotherhood to issue a statement blaming the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad for the attacks. Additionally, there were reports that Israel was only informed of Egypt’s intentions to increase its troop levels in the Sinai after the fact, which allegedly prompted Israel to request that the troops be removed. If these reports are true it could be a worrying indication of Morsi’s willingness to maintain the working relationship with Israel that was developed under Mubarak and has been the cornerstone of the peace treaty’s endurance over the last three decades.

The continued strikes against Israel that are originating in the Sinai and the region’s general instability threaten the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the new government’s relations with Israel and the United States. It presents the very real possibility that Israel will at some point feel compelled to conduct preemptive counterterrorism operations across the border, a violation of Egyptian sovereignty that could threaten the peace between the two countries. This becomes increasingly likely
as Israel begins to feel boxed in by the many threats on its borders including instability in Syria and the Iranian nuclear threat. Under these circumstances a cross-border raid on Sinai could present an attractive and potentially lower risk option for an Israeli government that may need to demonstrate military strength to its constituents in the face of rising insecurity on its borders. If the Sinai continues to devolve into a hotbed of terrorist activity, the U.S. may also feel compelled to act, especially if the area’s activities begin to have global consequences. At the very least the United States could condition its substantial Egyptian aid program on Cairo’s willingness to confront the Sinai’s problems. Any reduction in U.S. aid would have dramatic consequences on Egypt’s already fledgling economy and ultimately on the durability of the Morsi government. If President Morsi truly wants to develop a stable and prosperous Egypt, he will have to break with the Muslim Brotherhood and enter the mainstream. That will mean honoring the peace treaty with Israel in practice, not just rhetoric and taking a direct interest in the security and development of the Sinai region. While it was possible for Mohamed Morsi to espouse anti-Israeli rhetoric and Islamist views as an opposition party member, he does not have that luxury as president. Continuing to do so will only further destabilize Egyptian society and ultimately endanger his leadership. He will need to find a way to appeal to a large section of Egyptian society, not just the Islamist faction, if Egypt’s nascent democracy is to survive.
The Hopes and Expectations of the Religious Minorities and the Supporters of a Secular State for Egypt after the Revolution

By Radamis Zaky

Introduction

“Damn Egypt and damn the Egyptians, an Indonesian Muslim would be better for the rule of Egypt than a Coptic Egyptian”. These were the words of the former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mr. Mohamed Mahdy Akef, in an interview with Saeed Shoieb, a journalist from the Rosa El Youssef magazine on April 9th, 2006. I decided to choose this quote to start the paper as it summarizes how this religious political group perceives Egypt and the Egyptians. This paper’s main objective is to present the vision of the political groups that subscribe to the ideology of political Islam and also to present the Orthodox Church’s contributions in rebuilding Egypt constitutional framework after the January 25th, 2011 revolution. In order to satisfy the objective of this paper I conducted some interviews with some human rights activists and a priest from the Coptic Church.

Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood

I thought it might be a good idea to start this paper with some background information about Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood as an Islamist political group. I will also highlight some of the issues related to their parliamentary performance.

In the first post-revolution elected parliament, the Muslim Brotherhood obtained around 45% of the votes and the Salafis (another Islamist group) got 24%. In other words, the two major Islamists political parties controlled more than 2/3 of the seats.

Hassan El Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in a small city located in east Egypt (Ismailia). The Egyptian political researcher Amr El Shobaki (2011) mentions that since then—and till now—the Muslim Brotherhood are considered as the strongest, well established political group in all the Arab countries (p5). Shobaki stresses that because the Muslim Brotherhood espouses a flexible ideological and political frameworks, such flexibility allows them to have a general inclusive vision for Islam. Shobaki mentions that the members of the Muslim Brotherhood can easily be politicians if they want, or religious leaders (Imams in a mosque for example) calling on people to behave in a good manner, or members of parliament, or Sufis (men sitting all the time in the mosque praying), or they could even be revolutionists (p5). A good example for the ability of the Muslim Brotherhood to include different types of people as members is that they used to have a conservative judge like Hassan El Hodabi and a radical thinker such as Sayed Kotob. Other benefits for having a flexible organizational structure, is that the Brotherhood succeeded in dealing with different political regimes. When the Muslim Brotherhood was established, Egypt was under the ruling of the Mohamed Ali family, an era that could be considered as a semi liberal period. Then, they continued to operate under Nasser, even when they were put in prison. They were released at the beginning of the Sadat era then, back to prison at the end of his authority. During the ruling of Mubarak, the
relation was up and down but the regime was always giving them a margin of freedom to move within certain boundaries (Shobaki, 2011: 5).

On the other hand, S.T., a research fellow in George Town University; mentions in an interview conducted by email that he sees that the Islamist ideology followed by the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat for the following reasons:

The problem in the case of Islamism is history. It is true that one can point out to failures in Iran, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, or their future failures in Egypt and elsewhere; however, Islamists will always have one thing that other political ideologies never had; a previous success story (from the perspective of a big portion of Muslims): the success story of Islamic nation constructed at the early ages of Islam.

Why does this matter?

1. Because it makes Islamism unbeatable. Islamists -no matter how much they fail- will always have a successful model to point to, thus a claim that it was the implementation that was wrong and not the idea itself.

2. Islamism is transformative. The Islamist goal is not to play the political game by its present rules, but to change the very rules of the game by means of a wholesale transformation of society based on a desired religious model. Any attempt to compare Islamism to normal parties in democracies is wrong.

3. Islamism is entering a historical stage. Islamism is a work in progress. Like any ideology, it will be tested, contested and transformed by reality. But, and this is very important, the transformation will be in a more frightening direction.

Other reason for the success of the Muslim Brotherhood, at least during Mubarak regime, according to Father George Mikhail, the priest of one of Ottawa, Ontario, Canadian Coptic churches is:

“Mubarak decided not to provide Egyptians with high quality education believing that it is easy to rule illiterate people. But the Islamist groups took this as an advantage and brainwashed these poor illiterate people with fanatic ideas under the umbrella of religion. At the same time, they provided these poor people with food and little money so they can guarantee their votes in the elections.” (face to face interview for this paper)

Mikhail adds that despite all the negative aspects of the Mubarak regime, it is still better for Christians than the authority of any Islamic regime. He justifies his position by giving the example of the problem of obtaining a licence to build a church⁴, a problem that Christians have been facing since hundreds of years. Under Mubarak’s regime, granting a licence to build a new church was depending only on Mubarak’s mood and nothing more. It was difficult to have a licence, but at the end the Church got it when Mubarak’s mood got better. When Mubarak’s mood was not good towards the Christians, some licences took longer but -at least- it was possible. On the other hand, according to Mikhail, the Islamists political groups see the Christians as infidels, so how will they issue licences for building churches.
It is noteworthy to mention that Anba Morkos the director of the Coptic Orthodox Church media office says in an interview published in El- Sayassi magazineiv that one of the reasons that led the church to cancel the annual breakfast of Ramadan for this year is that the concern about getting embarrassed if one of the religious political leaders issues a Fatwa (Islamic religious opinion) that the food prepared by Christians is haram (non-kosher).

**The Islamic performance in the parliament and the Constitution Committee**

As a result of the fact that -till the time of writing this paper- there is no clear outcome for the Constitution Committee, it is very hard to evaluate the impact of the groups who follow the Islamism ideology, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis in particular.

It is worth noting that the parliament’s inaugural session opened with an acknowledgment letter to field Marshall Tantawy at a time when the army was accused of killing peaceful protesters in the street of El Kasr El Ainy (Salah, 2012)\(^\text{xv}\). Dr. Saad El Katatny, the parliament speaker, announced that the parliament confirmed what the minister of interior mentioned about not using real bullets against the protesters, although it wasn’t the case. Youssef Salah, in his paper mentions that the Islamic parliament members (members from the Muslim Brotherhood and other Salafis members) focused on proposing laws like legitimizing the banning of pornographic websites, banning the education of English language in the schools, changing the legal age for marriage so girls can get married at the age of 13 years instead 18 years. At the same time they didn’t act to issue a single law that provides the citizens with more dignity in their lives. Salah explains that their performance in parliament is a natural outcome of their Islamic vision. The Islamic parties perceive that they are in power as an outcome of a promise from God and not as a result of democratic elections. Consequently, they are trying to satisfy God by doing their best to impose the Islamic laws (El Sharia El Islamyia) and not to build a democratic, civil and civilized country (Salah, 2012).

**The Church and the Constitution Committee**

According to Salah, the Islamist parties believe that they should impose the Sharia’in order to satisfy God and further, that the idea of a civil state does not exist in their minds. So the question is what about the Church, the other counter power, in Egypt? The answer is that the Church also does not want a civil state. The Church wants to keep its influence and domination on the Christians. I will focus in this part on the Coptic Orthodox Church performance in the constitutional committee. Anba Pola who represents the Church in the Constitution Committee happens to be the president of the Church’s marriage legal committee that is responsible for the decisions related to Christians’ marriage and divorce. In the interview conducted with Father George Mikhail, he says that he sees that the reason for the Church’s choice for Anba Pola is that the most important issue for the Church is the personal status law. Mikhail says that we wish to have Egypt as a civil state where all the Egyptians are having the same rights and duties, but the Church will not ask for it. The Church does not want the State to have a say in its personal status law. Mikhail says “we don’t have problem if the government wants to apply the Islamic taxation system on the Christians (El Gazîah) or even if they want the
Christians to wear uniform, we will abide by all that. But if they impose any amendments to the personal status issues for Christians, we will sacrifice our blood in order for this not to happen.”

Although there are no official documents issued from the Constitution Committee, it is good to mention that Anba Pola, the Church’s representative, voted in favour of an article giving only monotheists (believers in Islam, Christianity and Judaism) the right to express their beliefs and practice their religion publicly. This article is a clear violation of the concept of a civil state from a human rights perspective. This article bans people with other religious beliefs (for example the Baha’i’s) from practicing their religion in public.

In conclusion, as it is clear from the interview with the Coptic priest and from the performance of Anba Pola in the Constitution Committee that the Church will not contribute in constructing a civil state. I would argue that the Church will always do deals with the regime in order to guarantee its control over the Christians under the disguise of protecting the Christian faith.

The solution:

The Muslim Brotherhood who are ruling Egypt now are concerned with constructing Egypt to be a religious state and they will not face any resistance from the Church as long as they guarantee that the church remains the main representative of the Christians. If Egypt becomes a religious state, the future of the country and the whole region will be very bad. The religious minorities will be affected badly as well as the freedom of speech. The rules of a religious state will affect many important industries such as tourism, the cinema, and theatre. The solution to solve this dilemma and to guarantee a bright future for Egypt is to create a strong civilian secular stream. Sherif Mansour, an international human rights activist explains in an interview for this paper “that the only solution to protect Egypt from the threats of the establishment of a religious state is to build a secular alternative stream with a specific characteristic. Mansour insisted that for this stream to succeed in its mission, it should have a strong connection with the people at a grass roots level. The importance of enjoying strong ties with the people at the grass roots level is that the stream will have a “negotiating power”. Mansour stresses the fact that during the transitional phase -between Mubarak’s resignation until Morsi got elected as president- the Muslim Brotherhood were the only force that was able to negotiate with the military. This was mainly because they have the power to mobilize thousands of people in the streets and at the same time, they have the power to make the streets empty.

It is worth mentioning that there are several good initiatives created by leftist and liberal parties and human rights activists. A good example for these initiatives is the campaign established by two university professors: May El Telmissany and Walid El Khachab, in cooperation with a group of intellectuals entitled “Egypt is a Secular State” (for more information about this initiative please visit http://www.dawlamaneya.com/ar/). Another good initiative is the online campaign created by Dr. Basma Moussa the Baha’i activist under the title “A world free from discrimination” (for more information http://basmagm.wordpress.com). An additional example is the initiative created by 13 liberal and leftist political parties called “The Third Path” although; there is no solid outcome to evaluate this up till now. I doubt that they can harmonize their efforts as their recent history proved a failure in coordination during parliamentary and presentational elections.
The motto of the 25th of January revolution “Bread, Freedom and Human dignity” will not be achieved if Egypt doesn’t become a secular state.

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The entire interview can was republished in book in 2010 by Dar Safsata. The book includes the entire interview in addition to documenting the reaction of different political groups on this reaction.


For Christians to build a church in Egypt they should licence from the president himself, there is no government body can issue this statement expect the president himself.

El- Sayassi magazine is one of El Masry El Youm newspaper publications; the referred interview was published in issue no 3 published on August 3rd, 2012.

Youseef Salah, The Transition phase and culture context (Religion and Democratic Transformation), 2012 can be retrieved from http://bit.ly/PtEFur