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INSIGHTS

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

A current affairs periodical of The Cordoba Foundation

VOLUME 1 | EDITION 1 | MAY 2014





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The Middle East and North Africa Insights (MENAI), is published periodically by The Cordoba Foundation. It provides unique insights and analysis of events and developments in the Middle East and North Africa. Seeking to provide impartial, accurate and authoritative content, we do this through the Foundation's unique access to rare and highly important primary sources in the Muddle and beyond.

ABOUT THE CORDOBA FOUNDATION

Founded in 2005, The Cordoba Foundation (TCF) is an independent Public Relations, Research and Training unit, which promotes dialogue and the culture of peaceful and positive coexistence among civilisations, ideas and people. We do this by working with decision-making circles, researchers, religious leaders, the media, and a host of other stakeholders of society for better understanding and clearer comprehension of inter-communal and inter-religious issues in Britain and beyond.

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WELCOME



WELCOME to the first edition of the *Middle East and North Africa Insights* (MENAI), the latest periodical of The Cordoba Foundation.

This new publication replaces *The MENA Report*. We will continue to monitor the fluid and dynamic events in the Middle East and North Africa from our vantage point of freedom of speech and above all, freedom from xenophobic nationalism, which has unfortunately engulfed the region.

Politics, as commonly defined, is all about power. It is about who should have a monopoly over its use in a society, and how a country's natural resources should be allocated and under what criteria. In the majority of autocratic regimes of the Middle East, corruption and the embezzlement of state resources form the bases for state repression coupled with incredulous efforts to pander to foreign powers as a substitute for local legitimacy and protection.

Conceited with their success in turning the tide of democracy in Egypt, the Gulf States, along with other Middle Eastern autocracies, are working hard to unfold the nascent democracies in Libya, Tunisia, and the rest of the Arab states, including Turkey. However, all these spurious attempts to starve the people of the region of their right to govern themselves would not have succeeded without the support of a sizable chunk of the population. For example, in Egypt and Syria, the minorities, including many Christians, lent their unwavering support to state repression against the majority of the population from the outset of the Arab Spring. Undoubtedly, they judged the foreseeable outcome of the democratic process in their countries on the

failed Iraqi experience when the Christian minority was decimated by immigration due to violence and instability.

We believe that these circumstances are totally different, and without going into detail, the future is made bleaker for the minorities in their current decision to side with autocracies. If it wasn't for the sake of justice and being righteous, siding with the oppressed majority or at-least keeping a distance from the autocratic regimes would save them from the continuous blackmail by the same institutions they try to seek help from. It was proven that just before the advent of the Arab Spring in Egypt the Mubarak regime intentionally bombed a number of churches to solicit foreign and local sympathies against local protagonists. However, the blame should not solely be placed upon the shoulders of the minorities. The Islamist opposition, which constitutes the majority and most organised in the MENA region should be clear and consistent in its rejection of fringe and extremist groups' ideologies of hate, segregation, and outdated political rhetoric and practices.

In the 1990s, the opposition Islamists came together with the proponents of Arab nationalism to reach a shared view and a model of democratic Arab statehood. Over the past two decades they reached a positive level of mutual understanding and agreement on a wide range of political issues. Similarly, the future of the modern nation-state in the MENA region is dependent on the pre-laying of confidence and cooperation measures and agreements between the mosaics of communities to avoid the appalling Iraq experience.

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If the people of the MENA region are serious about bettering their future and that of their children, their only way is to find ways to settle their fears and offer mutual assurances.

Certainly, such an enterprise will be vehemently opposed by the autocracies in the region placing immense pressure on the minorities. However, if the people of the MENA region are serious about bettering their future and that of their children, their only way is to find ways to settle their fears and offer mutual assurances through social and political contracts outside the present state of predation.

Thank you.

Dr Fareed Sabri

HEAD OF THE MIDDLE EAST
AND NORTH AFRICA PROGRAMME
THE CORDOBA FOUNDATION

Iraqi Parliament Speaker **Osama al-Nujaifi** visits United States amidst turbulence in the region

IRAQI politics today is as divisive and turbulent as it has always been since the establishment of modern Iraq. The country was carved out of what remained of the Ottoman Empire by the British and its allies after the First World War, and ever since, the politics of the “cradle of ancient civilisations” has been marred by deep schisms between the different communities, sects and political affiliations. The military coup in 1958 ushered a new dawn of ideologically centred divisive politics. Arab nationalism became fashionable in the 1960s but it was mere rhetoric, devoid of specific programmes and actual experience. This led the majority of the nascent Arab national governments to borrow Marxist economic strategies in a brusque and diligent manner.

Consequently, the structure of the ancient societies with their stable economies and social paradigms were shaken violently, forcing the mosaic of communities in the region to dig deeper into their histories to find answers to their present ailments. The Iranian Revolution came at a crucial stage in 1979 barely a few years after the collapse of the nationalist ideology, giving the young generation in the Arab world hope that religiosity was the answer.

It is important to note that after the collapse of the ideological disposition to persuade, organise and control, the Arab state was left with brute force as the only option. Iraq was one of these Arab states despite the semblance of democratic institutions.¹ Iraqi Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi’s visit to Washington was more of a protest at Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s autocratic and heavy-handed rule, especially against the Sunni

community. Furthermore, the visit came after an apparent turning point in American foreign policy towards Iran and the Middle East in general. Arab politicians were taken by surprise, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies in particular have the most to lose from this latest accord between Iran and the West. According to close aids of al-Nujaifi, the visit was warmly welcomed by the American Administration. Al-Nujaifi’s visit included meeting the President and his deputy, the Foreign Secretary Joe Biden, Foreign Secretary John Kerry, Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel and the Chief of Staff of the American Army General Raymond T. Odierno.

On February the 22nd, al-Nujaifi met President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. One of the Iraqi MPs who was present at the meeting described it as frank and fruitful, he continued to say that al-Nujaifi gave an overview of the present impasse in Iraqi politics and the difficulties facing the different communities, and the Sunnis in particular, amid the discriminatory politics of Prime Minister al-Maliki. The visit came amid simmering communal tensions, car bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, deep political divisions and infighting, even within the confines of the different communities in Iraq. Despite the growing economy at an impressive annual rate of 10% which is largely due to soaring oil prices, the country still languishes in unprecedented inequality, poverty, lack of basic services and corruption. Based on a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published in September 2012, Iraqi citizens are accustomed to paying bribes to civil servants in almost all government departments. Even more worrying are the bribes paid to members of the health service which indicates significant problems



in the equitable provision of health services in Iraq.² Deaths mainly from terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda affiliated groups and government backed militias were close to 1000 on January 2014 alone. This was the highest in five years since the civil infighting which followed the bombings of the two shrines in Samara in 2006.

The Kurdish province is the only region where there is relative calm. Unsurprisingly, it is where the Iraqi government and its military and security forces have no jurisdiction. The rest of the country is marred by a revival of insurgency roiled by a plethora of groups with divergent strategies and ideological backgrounds. However, all these groups are united by their enmity towards the present government, its discriminatory policies and human rights abuses, apart from a small group of al-Qaeda operatives which infiltrated the province after it was defeated by local tribal groups under the umbrella of the Awakening Councils (al-Sahwat). Since the general elections of 2010 and after a two-year subsidence of terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda and the sectarian militias which are mainly backed by Iran and the factions from within the Iraqi government, violence is on the increase at unprecedented levels. Many academic and political analysts portion the blame on the discriminatory policies of Prime Minister al-Maliki and his Islamic Da'wa Party (IDP).

The power struggle was not limited between the Prime Minister and the Sunni political leaders; in fact the acrimony and tensions extended to the Kurdish leadership and other Shi'i factions. Political divisions were exacerbated by the widespread human rights abuses by government agencies which deepened these divisions. No doubt

this civil schism has escalated because people from the different communities monitor each other's responses to the widespread government human rights abuses, terror campaign, and reactions to government excesses. The call to turn the Sunni provinces into federal political entities is gaining popularity. Sunnis see it as the only viable option to save them from the wrath and abuses of the security services and the Iraqi army. In our October issue of *The MENA Report* we stressed the importance of monitoring state sponsored violence since the majority of the terrorist acts in the Middle East are in fact a reaction to state-sponsored terrorism and human rights abuses. Al-Anbar Province in Iraq is a case in point since the province was virtually al-Qaeda free since 2008.

What complicates the struggle to find a solution to Iraq's continued crisis is the apparent transnational network the IDP is linked to. This transnational religious affiliation and the strong liaison between Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, limit the manoeuvrability of the decision-maker in Iraq. Central to the cohesion of these Shi'i transnational linked groups are the religious networks spread all over the Gulf region, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. The political dimension is intertwined with the religious through hierarchal nodes of clergy linked at the top to religious leaders in Iraq and Iran in particular. Consequently, Iran has the overall say on policy making in Iraq, and satellite religious and political groups in the region such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthies in Yemen. This gravitational political force explains the tendency of some of the arch and vocal opponents of Iran in Iraq and even Syria to seek its approval from being targeted through the judiciary and other "independent" agencies such as the Independent

Election Commission from disqualifying their election candidacy. Physical assassination by the strong and often violent Iran-backed militias is another worry for politicians and other professionals in the region.

Reliable sources from inside the Sunni al-Iraqiyya election list confirmed to us that many of its prominent politicians, despite their anti-Iran public rhetoric, keep good links with the Iranian government and its security officials³. These efforts are meant to persuade the Iranians that their criticism of the conduct of the Iraqi government is not directed against their government. The influence of the Iranians inside Iraq and the region is such that Saleh al-Mutlaq, a Sunni MP from al-Hiwar al-Watani (National Dialogue) election list and the current deputy for the Iraqi Prime Minister, which is widely known to represent the defunct Ba'ath Party, met Iranian officials a number of times in Lebanon and Germany just before the last general elections in 2010. Al-Mutlaq met senior Hezbollah officials in Beirut in 2010 to seek their approval to lift his name from the blacklist of the Iraqi Independent Election Commission.⁴ It is important to mention that al-Mutlaq's efforts to be allowed to participate in the general elections of 2010 were successful, proving that Iran has an undeniably strong and viable influence, not just over its allies in Iraq but also on the state's institutions that are considered to be the key nodes in the democratic infrastructure, such as the Independent Election Commission, the judiciary, and the Accountability and Justice Commission.

To those monitoring events from the outside, the

fighting and instability in Iraq are seen from the simple point of view of government forces fighting against the resurgence of al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations. This rhetoric is not just jumped up by the Iraqi government, but is becoming the official line adopted by the West in general and the United States government in particular.⁵ In reality the picture is far more complicated as there are a numerous intertwined local and regional players, political interests and grievances which make up the current crisis, not just al-Anbar Province but all over Iraq.

The Iraqi government is working hard to give the impression that the Western part of Iraq is under the control of al-Qaeda, hence the international community is invited to help the government to eradicate the terrorists and their bases. At the same time the Sunni politicians, and in fact many Western academics and politicians, portion the blame on al-Maliki's style of governance and on his overzealous use of military and the security services in dealing with his political and armed protagonists⁶. There is a consensus among high-ranking American officials that the Iraqi Prime minister is largely to blame for the surge of violence in Iraq after the American withdrawal in 2011.⁷ According to official American sources, al-Qaeda operatives in al-Anbar Province are, at most, in their hundreds. While the Iraqi Army is massing at least four divisions on the gates of the city of Fallujah, apart from tribal forces loyal to the government such as the Awakening Councils and the militias.

The puzzling political map among the Sunni community is adding to the difficulty in finding a

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Whether Iraq stays as a single unit in the next four years [will be dictated by] American policy concerning the Middle East for the next decade or so.

solution. Among the tribal forces facing the Iraqi government in al-Anbar is a concoction of interests and networks extended to the Gulf States, Salafi groups and ex Ba’thists. Nearly all these groups distrust Sunni politicians participating in the political process. For the Ba’thists, they know very well that the ordinary Iraqis associate Ba’thism with dictatorship and the worst decades of sanctions and autocracy. They also know that the current framework of the political process is constitutionally arranged to bar members of the Ba’th Party and all those who are suspected of having previous or present affiliation to the party. Similarly, al-Qaeda, which is in essence an ultra-Salafi ideology, sees the political domain through a very limited window where it has to have total domination with no room even for different shades of ideologies.

The negative campaigning against Sunni political blocs and parties from within the Sunni community is causing irreparable damage. The turnout in the previous local elections in the most populated Sunni Province of Naynawa was 8%.⁸ The same election apathy is predicted for the next general elections in April 2014 ushering in a new age of more Sunni political and social marginalisation. Consequently, it will have a dire impact on issues such as federalism, violence, and economic and political instability at least for the next term of the Iraqi parliament. The biggest current Sunni bloc, *Mutahiddun Lil al-Islah* (United to Reform) expects that its number of MPs will fall to 35 from the current 40. In fact, as we were finalising this report, a senior member in the list informed us that they expect a deeper loss than previously expected due to the ongoing military operations in al-Anbar

and their inability to stop the military operations against the province.⁹ The loss of political representation will translate the deficit to increased Shi’i domination. The reaction will have no political space to fight back, hence the Ba’thists and other extremist groups will be more suited to lead large sections of the Sunni community.

One of the major factors which will decide the direction of Iraqi politics and whether Iraq stays as a single unit in the next four years is the direction and dynamics of American policy concerning the Middle East for the next decade or so. Signs of policy change are obvious when the West and the United States in particular, overlooked its previous hard-line stand against Iran and its Syrian vassal. Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf States are very nervous of the new change of policy. Their fear emanates from a lack of political legitimacy, weak armies, and a huge population deficit compared to Iran. It is obvious that the present economic difficulties and past tragic involvements in Iraq and Afghanistan contributed significantly to dampening the appetite of the American public and their government for future interventions in the Middle East. The natural cycle of military expansion and intrusive political involvement took its toll on the United States. There is no doubt that Russia, Iran, and China all played a major role in creating operational difficulties for the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.¹⁰

Consequently, America’s difficulties presented Iran with an opportunity to expand its social, religious and military influence from Afghanistan to Lebanon, and from Iraq to Yemen on the Arabian Sea. In turn, the unprecedented Iranian expansion

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Limited economic resources and logistics would be the major factors in the collapse of the Iranian regime under the weight of foreign commitments.

presents the United States with an equal opportunity to weaken Iran economically and militarily. Looking at the continued Syrian crisis from the angle of the aforementioned depressing political episode it is clear that the low intensity civil war will continue for months, if not years. The untold atrocities by the Syrian regime, which is very much sustained and supported by Iran, was left to continue without allowing the Free Syrian Army to be better equipped to defeat the Assad regime. The Syrian opposition insists that the United States thwarted many regional and international attempts to equip the Syrian opposition with much needed weaponry.¹¹ On the other side, Iran will not relinquish its ideological and political hegemony over Iraq, Syria, and other hotspots in the Gulf region without a fight.

Generally, this will incur more marginalisation for the mosaic of communities in Iraq, and in particular within ministries and the government realm where most of the current corruption and human rights abuses are a common occurrence. The army, security services and the judiciary are considered to be the main government domains where the majority of the human rights abuses are committed and legitimised. Sunni political leaders, such as the speaker of the Iraqi parliament, the moderate Sunni Islamist and nationalist political party's legitimacy and base of popular support are eroding significantly. Since the invasion in 2003, people in Iraq have grown to believe that peaceful political participation in the dynamics and structure of the political process will not transition their miserable reality to a better future.

One of the major factors in fuelling the inter-

communal tensions and violence is the propensity of the Iraqi government to use sectarian militias in conjunction with the security services to carry out violent acts against civilians. In these circumstances, and if there are no fundamental changes to reform and restructure the political process to make it more inclusive, fair and transparent, the majority of the people will continue to see democracy and its bureaucratic mechanisms as the main obstacle to communal harmony, security and economic development. Just like Egypt when a large section of the population seemingly traded the myriad of freedoms under a democratic administration, though with known shortcomings, for a callous military rule.

If the above prognosis of the current American policy towards Iran and the stretching of its hegemony proves correct, as some regional politicians suggest, then this will be added to the previous Administration's misconceptions of the culture and political dynamics of the Middle East when it invaded Iraq in 2003. Much of the overstretching theory depends on the conception that limited economic resources and logistics will be major factors in the collapse of the Iranian regime under the weight of foreign commitments. Current Russian and Chinese eagerness to dislodge the United States from its position as the only superpower capable of long and sustained foreign military commitments, the specific religious and ideological factors, and the willingness of the Shi'i minorities in the region to fall within the Iranian strategy, will cement Iran's hegemony over the its neighbours -- at-least for the next decade. This is already obvious as we gestured earlier, from our extensive contacts and empirical perception, we



believe that Iran has by far more influence than the United States on Iraqi local politics. Also, the majority of political parties and politicians have some sort of link with Iran either to gain an advantage over other political entities, save themselves from being targeted by the Iranian-backed militias, or keep the official political vetting institutions and the judiciary onside.

As we explained in our December (2013) issue of *The MENA Report*, Iran has a flexible policy in creating a network of contacts and links even with its most distant ideological adversaries. It has no inhibition when it comes to its national interests. In fact, it followed the most practical and Machiavellian approach to extend its influence in trying to orchestrate political dynamics. Its links to al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria, despite their bombing campaigns against the Shi'i politicians and government institutions in Iraq and Syria, are widely acknowledged by high-ranking Arab and American politicians. A leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood expressed dismay at Iran's 'double-faced' politics, as he called it. According to him, Iran contributed to Morsi's downfall with its support of Tamarrud, a secular militant organisation with direct links to the military junta in Egypt¹². Tamarrud was launched in April 2013 with the sole aim to depose the Islamist-leaning Egyptian government.

Simultaneously, and according to the same source, Iran was trying to reach out to the organisation and Morsi's government to forge an alliance to counter the pressure and leverage of the secular trend in the Arab world.¹³

It is only a matter of a time when the political dynamics of the region readjust to the new emerging gravity of Iranian politics. The low technological level of the current civil wars in the region, poor economic performance, and the low quality expectations of product consumption, all are factors that lay more weight to our aforementioned premise. For example, Iraq's current trade deficit with Iran is more than 12bn dollars annually.¹⁴ The same goes for Syria, Lebanon, and Afghanistan which are also known to fall within the sphere of Iran's economic and political influence. The American withdrawal from Afghanistan later this year will no doubt strengthen Iran's geopolitics and give it more strategic depth and the upper hand in its struggle with the low-level insurgency on its eastern borders. Factors such as the strong links with the Northern Alliance and the Shi'i minority will solidify the belief in the tenacity and prudence of Iranian politics and it will restructure some of the hostile Sunni political opposition to be more accepting of Iran's interests and aggressive politics in the region.

Our researcher managed to interview the Iraqi Parliament Speaker, Osama al-Nujaifi shortly after his visit to the US. From what he heard from al-Nujaifi it was apparent that the Speaker was aware of the above scenario but what concerned him the most was the current violence, unrest, and the possibility of the recurrent civil strife of 2006. His criticism of the Prime Minister was sharp and unrelenting: he accused him of stoking the fire of sectarianism through his policies of marginalisation, human rights abuses and flagrant disregard for the constitution. His simple argument is that to defeat terrorism and check its continued

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The Iraqi constitution granted the Iraqi people the right to reorganise their local provincial affairs to avoid over-centralisation of the state.

growth in Iraq, a concord between the different political and religious ideologies must be achieved. The absolute dependence on force with no regard to the rights of the people is counterproductive. In fact, and according to the Speaker, al-Qaeda was revived and gained new ground that it did not hold before 2010 only because people distrusted the government and its tactics.¹⁵

The demand for a meaningful strategy of power sharing and redrawing the map for the relationship between the centre and the provinces was also high on the agenda of the Speaker. In a lecture at the Brookings Institute, al-Nujaifi he explained that the Iraqi constitution granted the Iraqi people the right to reorganise their local provincial affairs to avoid over-centralisation of the state and its intrusive and heavy-handed policies.¹⁶ Surprisingly, the Administration received this call with little enthusiasm. Vice President Joe Biden proposed instead to postpone the drive for more provisional autonomy for ten years at-least. He argued that there are more urgent issues that need to be agreed between the different political communities in Iraq such as the Hydrocarbon Law.¹⁷

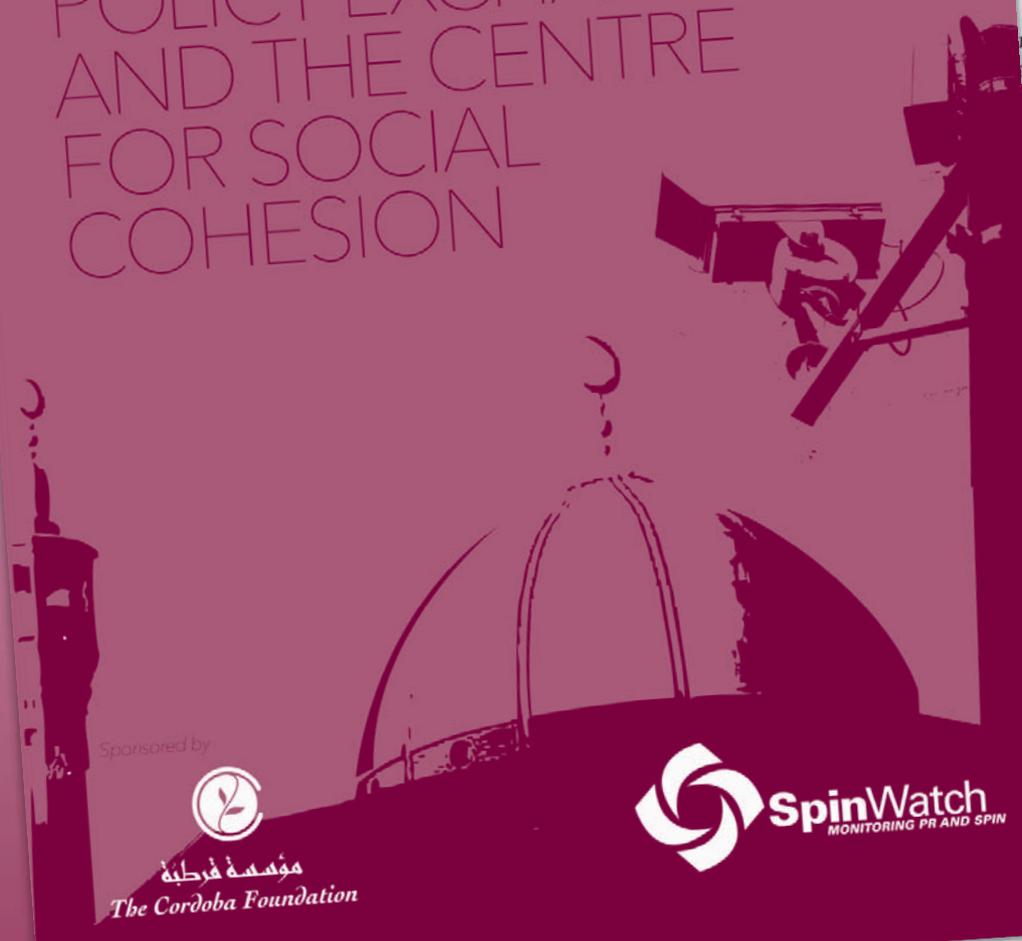
Endnotes

1. The 2013 and 2014 Human Rights Watch reports are clear indication of the current political trend and strategy of the Iraqi Government <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/iraq> <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/06/iraq-security-forces-abusing-women-detention>
2. <http://www.iq.undp.org/content/dam/iraq/docs/dem-gov/UNDP-IQ-DG-anti-corruption-survey-2013-EN.pdf>.
3. Interviews and private discussions with a number of prominent MPs over the last few years.
4. Interview with an MP from al-Hiwar al-Watani Election list, in Irbil, Iraq - September 2013. The information was corroborated by a member of the Lebanese Amal Movement. The source claimed that Saleh al-Mutlaq kept regular contacts with Hezbollah and Amal officials in Iraq for the past few years and during his visits to Beirut and Germany under the cover of seeking medical treatment. The extra length taken by al-Mutlaq to keep his contacts covert is to protect his image among his Sunni constituents and to keep good relations with his financial backers in the Gulf region.
5. Interview with an Iraqi MP, who was part of the Speakers' delegation to Washington DC in January 2014.
6. A number of academic articles and statements by Iraqi politicians were referenced in the previous editions of *The MENA Report*.
7. Interview with Anas Alikriti, CEO of The Cordoba Foundation, who accompanied the delegation of the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament to the White House on January 2014.
8. Interview with Osama al-Nujaifi, speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Washington DC - January 22, 2014.
9. Interview with a senior member in Muttahiddun, Baghdad, Iraq - March 10, 2014.
10. Interview with a Muttahiddun MP present at the meeting with the Secretary of State John Kerry - January 21, 2014. Kerry was adamant that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is a creation of the Iranian and Syrian regimes.
11. Interview with Walid Saffour, the Ambassador of the Syrian Coalition to the United Kingdom - February 13, 2014. London
12. Senior member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood based in London - December 2013.
13. Interview with a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, *Maktab al-Irshad (Guidance Office)* - November 24, 2013, London.
14. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/iran-iraq-trade-ties-strengthen.html#>
15. Interview with Osama al-Nujaifi, Washington DC - January 25, 2014
16. <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2014/01/23-iraq-once-more> http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2014/1/23%20iraq/20140123_iraq_transcript.p12

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SEPTEMBER 2011

THE COLD WAR ON BRITISH MUSLIMS: AN EXAMINATION OF POLICY EXCHANGE AND THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL COHESION



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Interview with Waleed Abboud Hamad al-Muhammadi – Iraqi MP representing the Muttahidun List

MENA Insights conducted a short interview with a member of the Iraqi Parliament from Muttahidun Lil Islah to put the on-going military operations in al-Anbar, the oncoming general elections and the relationship with the government in Baghdad into perspective.

Dr Waleed Abboud Hamad al-Muhammadi served on the governing council of al-Anbar province from 2008-2010, and has been a member of the Iraqi House of Representatives representing al-Anbar since 2010. He worked as Imam (religious preacher) and teacher at the Ministry of Awqaf (Ministry of Religious Affairs) in a number of mosques and civil society organisations. He is also a member of Iraq's Religious Scholars Council and the Federation of Arab Historians.

A Shari'a graduate from the University of Baghdad, al-Muhammadi obtained his doctorate from the Arab History Institute for Higher Education, where he successfully defended his dissertation, entitled, "Daba Tribe and its role in Arab history until the end of the Umayyad Era". His MA dissertation was awarded from the same institute, which was titled, "Al-Asha'areen Tribe and its Role in Arab and Islamic History until end of al-Rashidi Era".

MENAI: A number of terrorist groups recently tried to assassinate you in al-Anbar Province. Why do you think you were targeted, particularly since you are known for your staunch support for the rights of the people of the province in its struggle against the government in Baghdad?

WAM: Definitely, we are targeted for reasons to do

with our religious and political representation of the Sunnis, particularly in al-Anbar Province. It is also because we have demonstrated our steadfastness with the protesters (al-Hirak) and demanded staunchly their rights. I can honestly claim that there is no other political group or organisation that has championed the Sunni's rights as strongly and as selflessly as we did. Our people have been denied proper political rights within the present political structure. Today, we hear that many of whom are affiliated with al-Anbar revolt are trying to side-line the Islamic Party. The Ba'athists in particular believe that the Iraqi Islamic Party is their main competitor in the Sunni majority provinces; hence the slurring and defamation campaign against us to affect our public support. The extremists, including the Takfiris, believe that we are the only organised group that cannot be fooled, tricked, or blandly follow political projects that do not fulfil the interests of our people. Other political adversaries, particularly from among the Shi'i affiliated organisations, believe that our party causes them problems in Sunni areas, a matter which prevents them from spreading their hegemony over al-Anbar and other Sunni provinces.

In short, our detractors have no specific project; all they are after is to turn the tables on us.

MENAI: Can you draw a simple map for the conflict in al-Anbar Province? What are the main factions, and is there any hope for a political solution, especially that the positions of the protagonists are too far apart?

WAM: It is no secret that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was allowed by the Iraqi

government to enter the province believing that they will be able to control them. Unfortunately for the government this tactic backfired, and is now causing a loss of credibility and tarnishing the image of the Iraqi Army after the heavy losses it sustained in recent clashes.

The people of al-Anbar have lost faith in the Prime Minister and his army. They don't believe in any of his promises; consequently the ISIL filled the void literally overnight. Today, our people's predicaments are embodied in two forces on the ground in the province: the Iraqi Army and the ISIL. Their presence is not welcomed by our people. The solution is for the people of al-Anbar to have their local police comprised of people from the province assisted by tribal forces. Regrettably, this proposal is difficult to execute as a workable project because there is so much animosity between the Iraqi Army and the government on one side and the armed groups on the other. The differences and gap are too deep to bridge.

MENAI: You have mentioned many times that you prefer the Federal solution based on the administrative borders of the governorates. Do you believe this is realistic in light of the current political and security situation, and what is the position of the Kurds regarding your project?

WAM: There is no realistic solution other than Federalism, however the government does not agree, nor do the neighbouring countries. The Iraqi government believes that it should have all of Iraq under tight control and no part should escape it. As for the Kurds, they are the most enthusiastic and always blame us for not demanding and establishing a province.

MENAI: What are your main points in resolving al-Anbar crisis, and what is the difference between your election list presented to solve the crisis and the one proposed by the Prime Minister? The Prime Minister announced that he will side-line all other politically- motivated projects designed to serve as election propaganda. Who does he mean?

WAM: The most urgent demand is for the Iraqi Army to stop its shelling of our cities and to withdraw from the province. The solution is mainly political. What separates us from the Prime Minister is his lack of credibility. He says one thing and does another; and never keeps promises. His remarks are primarily directed against Muttahidun when he voiced his intentions to side-line political and electoral agendas. He has only succeeded in deceiving the Shi'i community with electoral promises under the premise of combating terrorism, ending the large scale peaceful picketing and demonstrations and the arrest of the Iraqi MP Ahmed al-Alwani. Unfortunately none of his supporters are questioning his disastrous military campaign and the tarnished image of the state.

MENAI: Do you envisage a day when Iraq will supplant its identity politics with the politics of economic and development projects, or this far-fetched dream given the presence of the deep sectarian and other divisions?

WAM: The people of Iraq have never been sectarian or divided into factions. Our people were forced into it by actions and policies perpetrated by the political groups and parties, autocratic tendencies, the urge to have all the strings of power in the hands of one person, and the mass arrests and assassinations targeting specifically the Sunni



community in al-Anbar, Baghdad, Mosul and Diyala. Other factors such as the deterioration of security, public services, economy, and rampant corruption all played a part in dividing the Iraqi society.

Iraq will not be liberated from its present predicaments until true national partnership is established and all Iraqis are allowed to enjoy equal opportunities in jobs in the state institutions without prejudice of any sort. The government has to fight the monstrous corruption that is plaguing the state, though it has to clean its own house before targeting state institutions. Above all, the government has to respect the constitution and abide by its articles. These are not just allegations; I can assure you we have plenty of proof which incriminates the government without a shadow of a doubt.

MENAI: Terrorism is a scourge that impedes development, social harmony and stability in Iraq and the neighbouring countries. In your opinion, what are the main factors that helped the latest resurgence of the terror groups in Iraq? Also, do you have a vision for combating terrorism?

WAM: To eliminate terrorism you have to start with recruiting the right people for the job. During the period 2006-2008, terrorism was effectively eradicated with the steadfastness and professionalism of people from the Sunni provinces. They handed the province of al-Anbar to the security services of the central government effectively clean of terrorist organisations. Regrettably, the government broke all its promises. Instead of honouring their achievement, the government embarked on a campaign of arrests on

the premise that they had killed Iraqis, and they were pursued with lawsuits targeting so-called 'secret informants'. The government did not investigate who the informants were. Later on, it turned out that all the allegations lodged against them were submitted by the terrorists themselves or their relatives. We informed the government and warned it against this heinous act which would end all efforts fighting terrorism, since people will be hesitant to come forward and fight terrorism if they believe that the government will forsake them and leave them at the mercy of the unreliable evidence of secret informers.

To prove my argument, you can refer to the government's attempts to re-contact the same people it hunted for years to resume their fight against terrorist groups after it was rendered impotent in combating these groups. Over the past few weeks the government approached one of those it jailed for three years to join the anti-terrorism campaign. Hamad al-Fahdawi was recruited for his bravery and vast experience in fighting al-Qaeda. He is known to have been high on the wanted list of the terror groups.

MENAI: Administrative and financial corruption exhausted Iraq's economy. It also contributed to sustaining terrorism and organised crime which impedes the process of development. Why in spite of all the efforts supposedly spent by the government and independent institutions failed to put an end to it?

WAM: We suffer from financial corruption – a matter that has placed us at the top of the list of administratively and financially corrupt nations. To fight corruption you have to be incorrupt. Sadly, in

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Foreign governments chose to side with the Bashar regime regardless of the injustices and atrocities committed against the people.

our case this is not true; in fact, our government sanctions and encourages corruption. It has never been serious in stopping it. To prove my point just look at the sacking of judge Rahim al-Akili. He was one of the most professional and honest people committed to ending corruption in the government institutions and agencies. The Prime Minister deposed him as the director of the Integrity Commission, comparable to the SFO in the United Kingdom. He lost his job after confronting powerful and corrupt government officials. Large numbers of corruption cases were prepared and ready to be presented to the courts, but all cases were shelved following al-Akili's sacking.

Right has become wrong and vice versa in Iraq nowadays, and the examples are too many to list in this short interview.

MENAI: Is there any a breakthrough in the tension between the Centre and the Kurdish Regional Government with regards the foreign investment in the oil industry in the KRG region? Also why hasn't the Hydro Carbon law been ratified yet?

WAM: The Hydro Carbon law is one of the most difficult to ratify. I believe if a consensus is reached and the law is ratified by the parliament, many problems will be automatically solved at the top. The law will establish a formula for revenue sharing between the provinces which will regulate the relationship between them and the Centre. Each will be assured of its share of Iraq's natural resources. This is one of Iraq's major challenges.

MENAI: What is your evaluation of the situation in Syria? Do you believe, as do some Western commentators, that the regime has won the battle?

WAM: Unfortunately, foreign governments chose to side with the Bashar regime regardless of the injustices and atrocities committed against the people. In my opinion, Assad has not won the battle because he has lost all legitimacy for good. But the regime and Iran are attempting to hoodwink international public opinion on the premise that the regime is fighting terrorism, whereas in reality, it is they who are committing these terrorist crimes against the ordinary people. Unfortunately, willingly or otherwise, international public opinion started to accept such claims. There is ample proof that many of the terrorist groups inside Syria were and are manufactured by the trio alliance of Iraq, Iran and Syria.

MENAI: It is apparent that Arab official opinion is uneasy about the latest nuclear agreement between Iran and the West. Saudi Arabia was the most uncomfortable and vocal about its dissatisfaction. Do you share their concerns?

WAM: I believe that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait committed grave mistakes by supporting the military coup against a legitimate government in Egypt. This policy was adopted in order to appease major political players in the region such as the US and Iran. This action is wrong and criminal. They should have united with friendly nations in the region to check the regional ambitions of Iran and its allies. The generous financial support to General Sisi will backfire on the three countries – and this is the straw that will break the camel's back.

The Sunni majority in the region have lost faith with all regional government. The Saudi and the UAE governments shot themselves in the foot

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These elections under the present circumstances will not project a true and accurate picture of our people's political opinion and choice.

since they have lost major allies and public sympathy in an effervescent region with an emerging regional nuclear super power.

MENAI: The Muttahidun List is accused of not having done anything constructive for al-Anbar Province during the current crisis; how do you respond?

WAM: It is not only Muttahidun that has not provided enough for Iraq in general, and al-Anbar in particular, but rather all Sunnis. They have failed themselves with their own hands. Our public opinion is falling prey to the propaganda of a number of satellite channels with the malicious agenda of dividing our Sunni community. These channels appear to pity the Sunnis, but have actually requested money from Muttahidun and others, but when the latter refused to pay, they were targeted with a catalogue of lies and baseless accusations. It is actually these satellite channels that have lost all their credibility and respect among the Sunni community. I can honestly say that Muttahidun is the voice of our down-trodden people. There is no better political entity that will genuinely represent our grievances or interests. We are used to the flood of lies and inaccuracies by our competitors and adversaries from all parts of the political and ideological spectrum, notwithstanding those who deceived our people and encouraged them not to participate in the political process causing us a loss of political potency, and severely limiting our footprint in the Iraqi government and its institutions.

MENAI: We cannot deny that Iran has a strong role in the region, particularly in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East. How do you evaluate this role? Are there other countries who may balance the

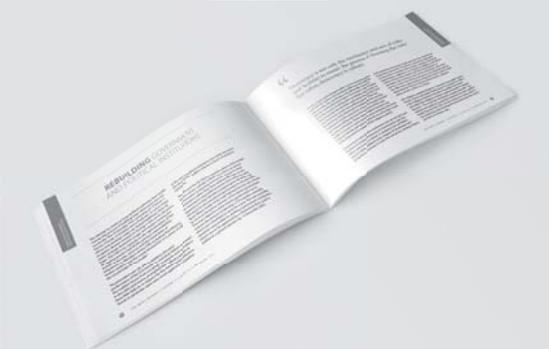
scale, like Turkey for example?

WAM: Nobody can deny the negative role of Iran in Iraq, on all levels. But what matters is that there should be powers that redress the Iranian influence. Only Turkey can do this. But I believe Turkey has not embraced this role until now. What is preventing Turkey from assuming this role is the divisions between the different Arab countries. Ideally, Arab states should come together despite their ideological and political differences and ally themselves with Turkey to form a strong front to protect the economic interests and the security of the region. Unfortunately we are only good at disagreeing amongst ourselves and looking after our own selfish interests.

MENAI: How do you view the forthcoming elections? How many seats do you believe Muttahidun will win, particularly in these unfavourable circumstances, with a concerted attack on its performance especially regarding the on-going crisis in al Anbar?

WAM: The elections will be held on time, but due to the deteriorating security situation, many electoral stations have not been opened in many of our cities, such al-Ramadi and al-Falluja. These two cities alone comprise 70% of the governorate's vote. Therefore, the elections will be a mere formality and those with the highest votes irrespective of the set national barrier will win. I believe these elections under the present circumstances will not project a true and accurate picture of our people's political opinion and choice. Prior to the present crisis, we had anticipated that Muttahidun will win 8-10 seats, but because of the anticipated limited participation, the election list will win only 6 seats.

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Africa's water scarcity is pitching Egypt's military rulers for a new gamble

OUR world today is a commodity and a by-product of an accumulative history of the dynamics of competitions, co-operations, wars, ideas, ideologies and the scarcity or abundance of natural resources. Civilisations and big cooperative communities are established and sustained mainly by two factors, a consensus on an idea or ideology and the abundance of natural resources. The natural resources have to be enough to sustain the growth of the necessary structure of the founding community which is modelled on the shared ideology.

Wars have been fought since antiquity principally to gather more resources to feed its ideological perceptions or demographic growth. Egypt has been the most prominent and imposing civilisation in the African continent since at least 2500 BC. Even after the Arab conquest of North Africa in the 7th century AD, again Egypt emerged as the new cultural hub and military force in the region for the following centuries. Undoubtedly, the Nile River was the backbone of Egypt's successive strong states compared to its neighbours and is certainly the main source of its survival. Life *is* the Nile as the Egyptians are known to call it, since the river basin is where the fertile soils have been farmed for thousands of years. Each year the predictable rise and fall of the Nile's water level fills the canals and tributes made by Egyptian farmers leaving rich silt deposits vital for agriculture.

The Nile is the longest river on earth. Its 6583 kilometres are shared by eleven countries before it exits Egypt northwards to the Mediterranean Sea. Contrary to common belief, the Nile has never been a thorn or a major issue that caused political tensions and economic deprivation as we have seen

happen on the banks of the Euphrates in Iraq and Syria. However, things could change dramatically after the completion of the Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile in Ethiopia in 2017. The reservoir created by the dam will hold 63 billion cubic metres of water making it the 13th largest in the world. Potentially, this project will situate the control levers of Egypt's economic, social and political future in the hands of Ethiopia's rulers. This is because 82% of the Nile's water comes from inside Ethiopia. In March 2011, the late Prime Minister Meles Zinawi laid the foundations of the new dam that will span sections of the Blue Nile, a major tributary of the Nile River. The project is set to be one in a series of dams along the Blue Nile to harness the power of the water flow for generating electricity.

When completed, the power generated would be a major contributor to the Ethiopian economy. The ambitious expected power production of the series of dams on the Blue Nile is 15000 megawatts of electricity. However, this is the first stage, and after the completion of the Renaissance Dam the total capacity for power generation will be 6000 megawatts. In simple arithmetic, the 15000 megawatts would cover the consumption of more than fifty million African homes if we use the average consumption ratios in 2010 of a relatively developed African nation such as Egypt compared to the rest of the continent.¹

On average, when the whole project is completed this should project potential revenue for the Ethiopian treasury (if the whole of the 6000 megawatt is exported) to nearly 3 billion dollars a year.² It is not a huge amount considering Ethiopia's population of nearly 92 million and the huge

economic, social and development challenges facing the government ahead.³ The fact that the country has seen rapid annual growth of about 8% in recent years, coupled with population growth, means that electric power production in the next few years will be exhausted, bearing in mind that at the moment only 50% of the country is linked to the national grid. The huge impact on the local economy can be reversed if the Ethiopian government ignores the concerns of The Sudan and Egypt. Over 125 million people in both countries working in agriculture, industry and power generation depend solely on the flow of the Nile. The Renaissance Dam could have a negative or positive impact depending on the strategic policy of the government in Ethiopia. The Grand Renaissance Dam also has the opportunity to stabilise the region through the forging of new treaties between the riparian countries based on the growing needs of each country without putting each other at the perils of each other's national interests.

There is no doubt that old agreements regulating water sharing between basin countries were skewed to the benefit of Egypt and The Sudan. For example, the agreement of May 7, 1929 between Egypt and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan gives Egypt and the Sudan the lion's share of the volume of water. It also gives Egypt the right to veto any construction projects that would affect her interests adversely. Furthermore, the agreement awards Egypt the right to undertake Nile River related projects without the consent of the upper riparian states. However, it is not in the interest of Ethiopia and other riparian countries to add geopolitical tensions to the region by causing Egypt and The Sudan economic hardship. Ethiopia is aware of its ethnic and religious diversity and the religious

tensions which flared-up between its Christian and Muslim populations. This on-going tension is easily provoked in Africa to destabilise the country's social and economic progress. Similar devastating conflicts are already causing grave social and economic instability in Nigeria, Congo, Somalia, and the Republic of South Sudan.

Nonetheless, what is clear right now is that Egypt's troubled economy has added another unpredictable and destabilising factor which it basically has no control over. Our analysis and assumptions are based on the experience of the past 60 years of military rule in Egypt. There is no doubt that the country will follow the same economic and political strategy that eventually caused the popular uprising in 2010 after 60 years of military rule. It is highly unlikely that the new military regime will follow a meaningful political and economic policy since its main priority in the next few years is to secure its powerbase and public acquiescence. The past 60 years of military rule in Egypt started with The Free Officers coup against King Farouq in 1952. They annulled all democratic institutions, practically banned all political parties, and circumvented free speech and association.

Moreover, the Egyptian Army was turned into a holding company, safeguarding state institutions from internal competitors. To do so, the military elite had to control the state through its economy and government institutions. A conservative estimation put the army's control of the Egyptian economy at more than 50%. The army owns spaghetti making factories, football stadiums, heavy industry, domestic appliances factories, and even tourist resources. It is literally a state within a state that runs a communist-style economy to

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Egyptian state propaganda is directing the Egyptian people towards only one choice, of seeing the world in black and white, outstripping their mental capacity to fathom the context and apply the principles of justice and equality.

ensure the hegemony of elite army officers. Egypt is in need of proper economic reform through proper laws and regulations to entice foreign companies and investment. In the present circumvented circumstances the economy will continue to suffer leaving the ruling military elite no option but to stoke up internal resentment against “foreign conspiracies” to destabilise Egypt. The siege mentality is prevalent within the ruling strata of the modern Arab state. Arab governments, in particular left leaning states and military- based rules try to bring the society to believe that the rest of the world is conspiring against them. Their basic premise is that the West is bent on to discredit and dislodge Arab nationalists’ “superior ideology”, or to strip their natural resources, or both. Under this heavy influence of negative rhetoric and the feeling of imminent threat, every single policy or act by ‘the other’ is interpreted as having the most contrived, complicated, and ill meaning intentions. In such circumstances, rational debate within the government and society is not permitted. The only space allowed is to further expand the conspiracy theory either out of fear or the willingness to progress in the state’s hierarchy.

The main reasons for the current siege mentality rhetoric in Egypt are to convince local people that their “superior culture”, social cohesion, and livelihood is under attack and the army is the only force able to defend them. In such circumstances the suspicion is not only directed towards old established enemies, but friendly states are also included in the accusation to complete the circle of distrust and cynicism. For example, the United States and the European Union have strong political and economic ties with Egypt and

certainly with the Egyptian army since the peace agreement in 1976. In fact, America was one of the first countries to covertly condone the military coup on the 30th of June, 2013 with a statement by foreign secretary John Kerry.⁴ Nonetheless, the heavily controlled state media trumpets ludicrous allegations of Muslim Brotherhood control and infiltration of US government agencies, or that the American president is a member of the proscribed organisation.⁵

Dangerously enough, the coup is preparing the Egyptian people for the worst through such malicious and ludicrous propaganda. Egyptian state propaganda is directing the Egyptian people towards only one choice, of seeing the world in black and white, outstripping their mental capacity to fathom context and apply the principles of justice and equality. Hence the governments predicted economic, health, and social and political reform failures will be insinuated as a direct result of Western conspiracy and foreign cahoots with Ethiopia and the rest of Egypt’s neighbours. A prelude of this policy is already under way against the government of Hamas in Gaza, accusing it of invading Egypt in 2011 and being responsible for the attacks on prisons and government institutions.

In such a sensitive environment, Egypt’s attitude towards its neighbours and international politics will be strategic and irrational rather than cooperatively inclined and tactical. We have already seen unscheduled visits by high-ranking Egyptian military and political officials to Russia, Iran, and China to try to forge new alliances. No doubt the military junta knows how dependent the Egyptian economy has been on Western investment, tourism, and American aid for the past 40 years but the



diplomatic flurry is serving two purposes. The first is to convince their Egyptian audience that they are serious in their rhetoric and second, to indicate to their Western allies that they have an alternative option on the international stage. What complicates the Egyptian scene and makes its foreign policy entrenched and more susceptible to risky choices in regards to the Ethiopian project and other regional issues is the rigid perception and suspicion orchestrated and propagated by state media, cultural and educational institutions.

Egypt's military government knows very well that through maintaining the status of 'siege mentality' they can justify circumventing internal freedoms and rational debate. To garner public respect and legitimacy, their foreign strategy has to maintain the same rhetoric, consequently exposing Egypt's economic and geopolitical interests to instability and possibly war.

What should be worrying for the Egyptians is the possibility that their army will be entangled in an unwinnable war against Islamist rebels and the inhabitants of the Sinai Peninsula. The unacceptable level of violence and heavy punishments used by the army against the civilians is creating new enemies every day. Israel is monitoring the situation carefully; they will intervene to recapture part of the Peninsula to protect its borders and further circumvent Gaza and stop any attempts at links with the Sinai rebels. The results of the presidential elections in Egypt are already decided. General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi's, the next president, has limited options. To attract investment and expand the troubled economy, Egypt needs a new policy of openness and reaching out to the opposition. But the regime knows very well that

this policy will create conditions similar to the ones that kicked off the Arab Spring. Hence, al-Sisi's safest option is to continue with his policy of crackdown on his political opponent's at-least for the first term of his presidency until such time the conditions are right for him to open-up the political domain for a limited exhibition of democracy. Until such time, Egypt's future will continue to be vulnerable.

Endnotes

1. http://www.iec.co.il/EN/IR/Documents/IECs_Presentation.pdf
2. The price projection is derived from the current average price of megawatt of electricity sold in the developing countries. For example, Pakistan is currently importing 74 MW of a day electricity from Iran reportedly cost around 3 million USD a month.
3. <http://countryeconomy.com/demography/population/ethiopia>
4. http://thecordobafoundation.com/attach/tcf_mena_july_final.pdf page 16.
5. <http://classic.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&issueno=12704&article=742780#.UxB9kM7pibM>

Social and political research under the spotlight

WHEN studying a given subject, some people tend to draw conclusions in haste mainly out of a personal experience usually marred by personal perceptions and biases. The haste to write and present our own take on events, coupled with erroneous methodology, or at least the lack of it, is not just an abuse of one's conscience and duty to search for the truth and justice but it also contributes to the on-going suffering of people, especially those under autocracies and tyrannical regimes. Producing knowledge is something we as human beings spend our lives trying to achieve. Since knowledge is power, it is one of the factors in life that decides the way and standard of our lives. This knowledge or the lack of it (i.e. when proper scientific research methodology is compromised) is embedded into our social and political context. Even those who use the various research methodologies available are prone to fall into the trap of oversimplification, false readings, or simply following ulterior motives. Understandably, these motives are very difficult to note or prove.

Scientific research depends on empirical data, which in turn, is not entirely safe to base our research and informative assumptions upon unless we scrutinise the background knowledge that makes the compilations, statistics, or given data believable. Often facts are rejected, not because they were false or gathered in haste for example, but mainly because they are not interpreted in the proper context. Background knowledge (i.e. paradigms) is essential to recognise in our research since this knowledge is determinant in how we gather and interpret data to make sense of the

world we live in. A rational model in social science to understand natural and social phenomena is recognised as the model of falsification. In this model, an assumption or hypothesis is tested using empirical data. If the empirical evidence does not corroborate the theory it will be rejected, and through this process an alternative is offered and then subjected to similar empirical scrutiny. This model is the most rational and objective paradigm in the social science approach to studying events, social, and scientific phenomenon. However, this positivist approach is not the only paradigm available to researchers. Since the 1950s, social scientists have developed interpretive and constructions paradigms. Each of the above paradigms has its supporters, as each paradigm suites the scientist's preferences in constructing realities and understanding social and political events and phenomena.

The interpretive paradigm places its weight on meaning and conceptualisation of the truth. This qualitative research starts with *tabula rasa* and allows the concepts to emerge from the field research and direct contact with the researched. On the other hand, constructionism assumes that people create their own knowledge of the world through reflecting on their experience of events and the world around them. In effect, this method posits that people are authors of their own knowledge. Hence, our prior knowledge is important to understand how we construct present realities and our interpretation of events and information.

The aforementioned paradigms will always be subjected to the worldview in which the scientist or

the scholar lives. His or her research questions, analysis, and compilation of the results are governed by features of the landscape of knowledge which engulfs the scholar. Unlike the hard sciences, and according to the influential scientist Thomas Khun in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), the social scientists can utilise different paradigms at the same time. This inter-link between the paradigms and the imprecise nature of social sciences being dependant on human evidence with ulterior motives prejudices the scientist's personal conception of the world. The open scope to cross the boundaries of methodological paradigms offers an opportunity in the social sciences to cross reference between the evidence but at the same time it allows the researcher an escape hatch to ignore certain realities and undesired results. Paradigm shifts in the social sciences are unlike the natural sciences because there is this possibility of a cyclic shift and possible return to aspects of, or entire discarded paradigms.

This paradigm malleability in the social sciences is what keeps scientists, researchers, politicians, journalists, and all those who are involved in the social sciences talk across each other without reaching a conclusion and a unifying result. Research is a powerful tool often used to prove a given position or proposition rather than a genuine struggle to chart new avenues and challenge the predisposed dogma. Organisations such as research centres, think tanks and policy institutes conjure an image of highly disciplined, strict scientific and ethical institutions driven by the urge to further the boundaries of human knowledge. However, in reality most of these institutions spring from a

given assumption based on a prior conception of what constitutes knowledge, reality, and the truth. No one is exempt from the errors of bias, ulterior motivations, and wrong perceptual starting points. Nonetheless, the state of the world today and the dire consequences for humanities present and future generations dictates that there should be some sort of international governing body to regulate and check scientific credence against a background of agreed methodological rubric.

It is evident that some academics jump between quantitative and qualitative methodologies, but at the same time they do not adhere to the chosen methodology's governing philosophy and techniques. By-and-large, research data achieves significant scientific progress when based on a theoretical background which, in essence, is a theory with a probability that it could be proven inaccurate. However, apparent scientific progress is mainly trying to discredit competing accounts and proving a previously-posed point, or at worst to advance a carrier, influence cultural position, or government policy.

In the Middle East, and among the safe haven of autocracies, the natural sciences have suffered direct state intrusion, corruption and neglect.¹ However, what is evident is that the social sciences, even when not linked to the state suffer from similar acute methodological errors and biases. There is no distinction between government sponsored and so-called independent institutions. After a quick look at the research studies, websites, articles and TV programmes, one would be amazed by the partisan demeanour and skewed evidence presented by the academics and scientific



community. Take Egypt for example, since it enjoyed a relatively free academic and political atmosphere over the past 30 years compared to the wider region and its neighbours such as Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iraq. Virtually no-one in the scientific community including think tanks, research institutions or known social and political scientists who are supposed to champion free speech, plurality and ethical scientific research, ventured out of the official account of the military coup. Even social scientists supported by the West during the reign of President Mubarak for speaking against the regime turned into nothing more than cheerleaders for the coup and apologists for the long catalogue of human rights abuses.²

Within the deductive theory, which is one of the most commonly used to regulate the relationship between theory and research, the researcher draw a hypothesis based on the information known about a particular realm that must be subjected to empirical scrutiny. The researcher has to plan his work based on the concepts within the hypothesis and formulate a strategy of how data is to be collected in relation to the concepts that are formulated.

However, what is really practiced by many institutions in the Middle East and the West in organisations such as the Quilliam Foundation,³ Ibn-Khaldun Centre,⁴ Nile Centre for Strategic Studies, Al-Mesbar Studies, and many other think tanks is to the contrary of scientific logic and regulation.⁵ The majority of research conducted by these institutes and think tanks act nothing more than issuing political statements dictated by predisposed ideological positions or government affiliations. Indeed, many of the autocratic regimes

are willing to sever diplomatic relations with neighbouring states and even threaten to go to war just for the sake of silencing research centres that deem present results contrary to their presupposed social and political theories. A clear example is the demand by three Gulf countries of Qatar to close Al-Jazeera Satellite TV and a number of research institutes, among them the Brookings Centre in Doha.⁶

Social research is a vital tool for the autocracies to mask the catalogue of human rights abuses, corruption, and mismanagement through the accumulation of false and inaccurate information. The United Arab Emirates is a case in point. The regime of the UAE shut down two NGOs and refused to allow any independent foreign or local research institutions to be based in the region.⁷ In 2012, the Dubai office of the U.S based National Democratic Institute was shut down by the authorities followed by the closure of the German based Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung the following day. According to the CNN website, both pro-democracy groups saw their offices raided and shut down in Egypt the year before⁸. The power of scientific research is undeniable even by regimes that do not place a priority and emphasis on the validity and importance of proper science. Without a doubt, the accumulation of erroneously collected data, incorrect analysis, and false social and political hypotheses will have an adverse effect on not just the people directly linked to the regimes cited above, but it will have an adverse effect on the rest of the international community, including the scientific.

One clear example is the case of Iraq. Since the

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Iraq was an enigma to outsiders and to its people as well. It is no surprise that the American invasion of 2003 was based on old useless information.

revolution of 1958 against the monarchy, state institutions, people, and geography were practically closed off to the outside world, and in particular to proper scientific scrutiny with special attention given to the domain of the social and political sciences. The last known anthropological study was carried out in Iraq by a Western institution and was probably done in the early 1960s. Nothing was really known from proper scientific investigation about Iraq's different communities, people, differences, sects and political affiliations. Iraq was an enigma to outsiders and to its people as well. It is no surprise that the American invasion of 2003 was based on old useless information, but what is more worrying are the catastrophic decisions endorsed by religious, political, and tribal leaders which added to the on-going civil strife and instability. Undoubtedly, these decisions were based on perceptions manufactured by the regime rather than based upon sound scientific research. Similarly, in previous issues of *The MENA Report* we alluded to similar circumstances relating to the discrepancies in research data gathered by international research institutions in the Arab world when depending on official and unofficial sources alike.

What is needed is a ranking for the research institutions and think tanks based on known and practiced research methodologies to serve as a warning against agenda-driven, rather than the pursuit of academically honest knowledge. Progress, development, and stability are directly linked to the pursuit of knowledge which involves an honest and proper account of delivering the appropriate questions, collecting data, and analysing it.

Endnotes

1. Recently the Egyptian government declared on state TV that the Egyptian Army doctors managed to find a cure for AIDS and the Hepatitis C virus by administering the disease on a Kofta skewer to the patient. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/10665410/Egypt-army-embarrassment-after-it-cures-Aids.html>
2. <http://www.ibnkhalduncenter.org/news/arc.php?rw=145>
3. <http://www.ibnkhalduncenter.org/news/arc.php?rw=247>
4. <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/> - This was founded by two former leaders of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Ed Hussain and Maajid Nawaz. The foundation, which purports to tackling extremism and radicalisation amongst Britain's Muslim community, was funded and set-up by the British Government following the 7/7 London Bombing in 2005.
5. Founded by Saad al-Din Ibrahim; an Egyptian American social scientist. On 2nd August 2008, an Egyptian court sentenced him to two years of prison for defaming Egypt. He was consequently released after heavy pressure from the US government and other unofficial initiations.
6. Al-Mesbar is a research centre founded by the UAE government mainly dedicated to discrediting calls for democracy in the Gulf region and the Arab world. <http://www.almesbar.net/>
7. <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/riyadh-demands-qatar-shuts-down-al-jazeera-1.1304168>
8. <http://www.akhbar-alkhaleej.com/13140/article/12184.html>
9. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/31/world/meast/uae-organizations/>
10. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/31/world/meast/uae-organizations/>

Oil, religious ideology and a non-existent measure of realpolitik - a recipe for **a different Middle East**

THE modern history of the Middle East is characterised by continued ideological tensions and struggles over asserting national and ethnic identities. However, is it not feasible that the above statement could be superimposed on any geographical region the size of the Middle East with its plethora of religious and ethnic identities? Others disagree, citing the examples of Europe and North America after the Second World War. The two continents relished decades of peace and stability apart from the civil war after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in 1991. In the past three years the Arab streets managed to create change but failed to create a workable system. The forces that held power for the past 60 years are still fighting for survival in an ever changing world and will continue to do so well after the notable success it achieved in Egypt on the 30th of June, 2013.

The dynamics for stifling the Arab Spring and reinstating old authoritarian paradigms gathered pace with the emergence of a new alliance headed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait as the most active and overt members in this coalition.

The return to the old Arab State narrative and rigid nationalistic political rhetoric within the ascendancy of liberal values around the world dictates a new transient period of tight security measures, circumventing the already tightly controlled press and freedom of speech. When we refer to liberal values in the Arab world today, it entails dividing it into personal and corporate values. Absolute Monarchies and autocracies are in favour of liberalising their societies on the personal level with freedoms and rights landing

short of the political domain. On the opposite side, the highly organised and active Islamist opposition are not clear about their political and social project. The spectrum of their political, social, and religious is diversified to the extent where a clash between them was inevitable and at times deadly.¹ Eventually, the internal debate and tensions, scholarly revisions, and exposure to Western liberal political theories in practice will close the gap one way or another and bring the majority towards a more liberal political and social theory. Neither autocratic regimes nor proponents of political Islam will be able to stem the progression of liberal ideals in the present globalisation and inexorable progression towards a range of values, political paradigms, and epistemologies. Although we cannot be 100% sure, looking at the continuous gains Western political theory has been achieving, at-least in the past 40 years, dictates that this is the main direction were we are all heading towards unless a new political, social and moral system emerges based on a new epistemology that offers a fairer and morally superior paradigm.

Take for example the rhetoric of the autocratic regimes in the Arab world trying to prevent the slow progress towards liberal democracy. Their most common excuse is framed into the regime's struggle to protect the freedom and dignity of their people from the clutches of foreign powers, in particular Western and American cultural and economic subordination. A random glance at the government-backed media in Egypt reveals a pattern of blatant xenophobic and ultra-national rhetoric. Take for example, *al-Ahram Daily* newspaper, under an article entitled "Why does America support the Muslim Brotherhood?", the writer answered himself in a tone akin to the

Nasserite era, accusing America of supporting political Islam primarily to put the spanner in the works of their unification process, derogate Arab nationalism, and encourage their disunity and sedition.²

The recent military coup against the Islamist-leaning government in Egypt had much popular salience and support, primarily because it was framed by the premise that political Islam will deny the open-minded and extrovertly tempered Egyptian people their personal freedom and cultural diversity. Assuming this charge is true; this would dictate that the regime has to ensure that Egypt will progress towards more social and political freedoms. However in reality, and based on past and current events, it is expected that the regime will put more emphasis on freedoms in the social domain to compensate for the latter, synonymous to what is currently happening in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi regime is gradually opening up and relenting on the personal level in limiting the power of the moral police (*Hay'at al-Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi an al-Munkar*), allowing intermixing of sexes at some universities and giving ample space in the media for liberal intellectuals to deconstruct the conservative religious normative model.

Liberalism in the West which was actually the vehicle for democracy is the product of the breakdown of feudalism and the growth of market society. It carried the aspirations of classes of people depending on industry, trade, exploration and settlement. It was no longer that the majority of people directly depended on a land owner or the sovereign to provide. Their economic independence dictated that their interests

are best served if they each have a say and the sovereign's duty should be limited by an agreed constitution. This natural progression towards economic autonomy, and eventually the demand for democracy, is very much on the minds of autocracies in the Arab world. For example, the Egyptian Army has been in control of the economy in Egypt for the past 60 years. Similarly, the Arab Gulf States use the proceeds of oil to buy their citizens' acquiescence and maintain their dependence on government handouts. The lack of economic autonomy relegated the fight against the Mubarak regime, for example, from the pursuit of freedom for the majority of the Egyptian people to the schisms between the secular and the religious. Political ideology was abstracted to the debate on the space allowed for religion to play in the life of ordinary citizens.

The issue was no longer the freedom of the individual to run his or her economic and political affairs but it was metamorphosed in to the freedom from ethical and moral values dictated by religion as it was framed to the masses by the Egyptian media and the military. For the benefit of the Islamists in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, their limited political rein was closer in principle to the ideals of liberal democracy than the secular ruling elites in the Middle East. Nonetheless, the proponents of political Islam should bear some portion of the blame, for their recent history was riddled with mixed signals and shaky commitment to democratic values. Although it is wrong to portion the blame on the entire spectrum of Islamism but their failure lies in the perception they generated, which is what matters in contemporary democracy.



Individualism is the core principle of liberalism and democracy which in essence is the core principle of the monotheistic religions with the salvation of the individual as the basic tenet of their teachings. It took centuries for the liberal democracies to evolve and construct a society in which the individual can enjoy his or her free will and decide what is best. Though this individualism is restricted within the law of the land, the maximum possible freedom is the objective course of the liberalist ideology. Furthermore, reason and critical enquiry is the epistemological foundation for this ideology giving the individual his/her rights to maximum free will since our world is rationally structured as they believe. Even if the world is rationally structured, reason is not a uniform capacity shared by all human beings. In fact, our rationality is restricted by three factors; one is internal, and two are external.

The internal factor relates to our intrinsic capacity to absorb, store, and decipher the available information. Externally, our rationality is bounded first, by how the significance and magnitude of the information available in the outside world and what is behind the rationality of the rationally structured world. The latter is very important because liberal assumptions of the rationally structured world are either based on our empirical study which could be fooled by our senses and perceptions, or it is based on innate religious beliefs which are mainly based on revelation and dogma. Maximum individual freedom and the pursuit of personal benefit proved to be the best philosophical answers to the exploitation of human beings under different claims and philosophical paradigms over the long history of humanity.

Without the core principles of individual freedom and rational approach to reaching judgment and choices, the most egalitarian and liberal ideologies, religions and corporate philosophical principles can be rationalised to justify inequality, prejudice, and absolutism. As we have elaborated in the previous editions of *The MENA Report*, the conservative religious establishment and strangely enough, assisted by the secular elites in the Middle East rationalise absolutism. Religious conservatism in the Arab and Muslim world justify their absolutism on the basis of reinterpreting malleable religious texts, while the secular elite put more emphasis on the protection of personal moral choices. Inadvertently they separate free political will from personal moral choice, handing the former to the ruling elite in exchange for freedom in the latter.

A society is the total sum of its individuals and the individual is mainly motivated by expediency, without totally negating the ideological and religious. A factor such as how well the economy functions is undeniably a major decider in creating an opportunity for political activism. Thus, the evolution of Middle Eastern societies towards a more liberal approach to governance and free choice for the individual will basically be a process born out of the challenge to elevate people's living standards clothed in ideological attire. Empirically speaking, whilst those who create these ideological frames motivate and continue their struggle to convince the majority despite the risks posited by the absolutist state, they are always a tiny minority. Even so, and retrospectively speaking, a failing economy is a legacy of a failed political ideology to evolve and deal with an ever-changing social

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Religious ideology, as it is promoted in the Middle East, is divisive. It will certainly lead to further disintegration of the region.

and political context. Take for instance the Turkish Islamist AKP party (Justice and Development Party) which has been in power since 2001. Its economic success has been lauded as a triumph for Islamism by sister organisations and even by a number of secular Arab parties. Public opinion surveys showed that the landslide victory of the AKP in 2002 was decided mainly on the factor of the economy. Only 14% indicated democratisation as their main factor to vote, while 11% voted against the AKP fearing that the Islamist leaning party will reverse Turkey's modern secular foundations.³

Based on the previous premise we shouldn't expect political change in a rentier state without external intervention. Take Saudi Arabia and the UAE as clear examples of acquiescent public opinion despite flagrant human rights violations, heavily circumvented public opinion, and the lack of any space for either public or elitist political participation.⁴ However, in troubled economies such as those of Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, The Sudan, and possibly Saudi Arabia, the change is inevitable. These economies can no longer sustain their present levels of inefficiency, corruption, and unemployment without an eventual popular backlash sometime in the near future. The nature and dynamics of change, if it ever happens, will determine if the state takes the direction of liberal democracy or that of disintegration into national fiefdoms akin to what is currently happening in Libya, Syria and Iraq.

Egypt had an ample opportunity to function and evolve into a workable democratic system, because unlike Iraq and Libya, the army, police, and state

institutions remained intact and functional.

Unfortunately for the Egyptians, as stipulated earlier, secular elites and the conservative religious establishment (both Christian and Muslim) chose the option of protecting personal moral freedoms in exchange for their political freedom.

Religious ideology as it is promoted in the Middle East is divisive; it will certainly lead to further disintegration of the region. The shared principles between the main monotheistic religions along with their sectarian derivatives which constitute the ideological umbrella for the people in the region are relegated to the back seat. In essence, people are challenging each other's identities rather than promoting existing shared ethical and moral values. Ethnic and sectarian identities in places such as Iraq overwhelmed all political identities including the most secular such as Arab nationalism, Communism and the Ba'ath Party. Over the past sixty years the Middle Eastern autocracies used the secular ideologies as a vehicle for control and oppression. They were helped by the tribal nature of the society and the primitive nature of the economy, leading to mass delusion with secularism. The shift to political Islam was not as substantial as presented by many scholars and people interested in the region. However, it was enough to put them at the helm of the executive power whenever there were free elections with a limited majority. When in power, Islamism did not function as an absolutist religious ideology but rather surprisingly operated as expedient secular political entities.

For example, in Egypt, Turkey, and Tunisia, the governments did not insist or push to stop dealing

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with Western-based banking system which is considered to be un-Islamic. When in power, social, economic, and political constraints limited the proponents of political Islam from applying strict Islamic principles. Gradualism and political pragmatism will consequently limit the Islamists drive to create new social and political order. In fact, this gradualism and the reformist identity of organisations such as the AKP in Turkey, the FJP in Egypt and al-Nahda in Tunisia are what distinguish the Muslim Brotherhood-based political ideology from other extremist groups that uphold literalist Salafi strands of Islam. Although from experience, the literalist Salafi groups will be forced to follow suite once they are allowed to participate in the political process. The logic here is that it is not the Islamic Shari'a or abstract principles that will dictate how the state and its institutions will be shaped but rather it is the measure of political power born out of the plethora of social and political challenges.

Furthermore, the realm of Sunni Islam has no religious hierarchy or ecclesiastical institution which will offer an overall say in how the state should be run. This mandates that the political authority has no religious institution above it which dictates how the state should be run. Paradoxically, when contrary to the tradition of Sunni political Islam a religious hierarchy is founded, it is traditionally chosen to side with absolutist secular and nationalist ideologies. This tendency of the conservative religious trend to align against the proponents of political Islam is interpreted by some as a proof that the Islamic state is not an imperative since scholarly religious institutions are content with being subordinated by the political rather than

the opposite. Either way, the proponents of an Islamic state and their conservative detractors are united in the principle that political power is the arbiter of the Shari'a. The second principle is that Islamism places more weight on the political realm compared to the conservative trend which lays more weight on the Shari'a and its applications.

With the apparent strong opposition by old state institutions aided by the secular trend against the proponents of political Islam's drive to exercise political power in the MENA region, a conservative trend is in the making. The main feature of this new trend is a respect and satisfaction with the established political order is being created irrespective of its ideological identity or its position vis-à-vis human rights and political freedoms. For this political tradition to win public support, the Arab Spring countries have to be presented as failures and hotspots for mayhem and instability. The drive to create this perception is also extended to Turkey. The war of words and media campaigns on state-sponsored Egyptian, UAE, and Saudi media is quite shocking in its vigour and candidness.

Contrary to common perception, Turkey's social and political makeup is quite fragile, especially with the on-going civil war in Syria. Turkish support for the Free Syrian Army animated deep animosity by the Alawite minority against the AKP ruling party in Turkey. Moreover, the one year old truce between the government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is looking more uncertain to hold. Things could escalate and pose a real threat to the Turkish AKP and the country if two particular factors materialise. First, the possibility

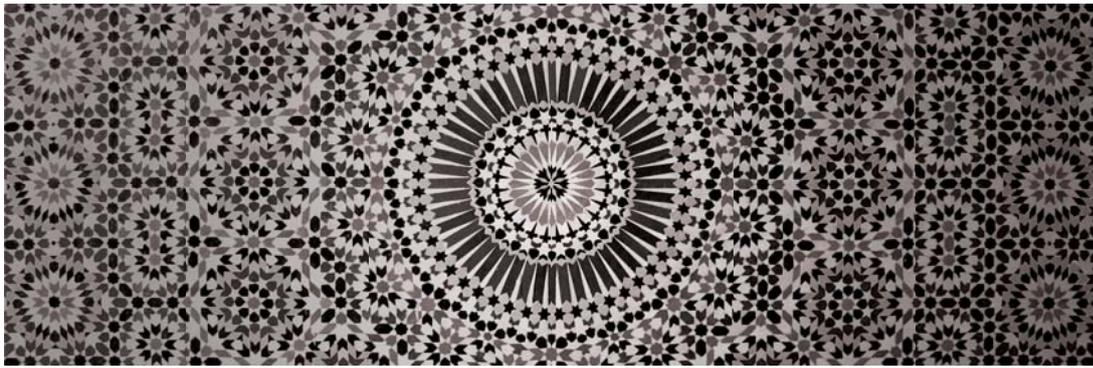
that the war of words by the Arab Gulf states develops into financial and military aid for the PKK, while the second is the expected declaration of independence by the Kurdish Regional Government in the northern part of Iraq.

If Turkey is further weakened, the door will be left wide open to Iran and its allies in the region to further their political influence on the Gulf, in particular the eastern part of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. In fact, this scenario is already happening with the inauguration of a terror campaign in Bahrain with the explosion that killed three policemen.⁵ Unfortunately for the weak Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, the only superpower capable of protecting the integrity of their borders and archaic political system is weighing its options. The United States can no longer convince its internal public opinion to commit to foreign campaigns amid a weakening economy; the emergence of new military and economic powers such as India, China, and Russia and the new conviction that Sunni extremism poses more of a threat than Iran's revolutionary rhetoric. Finally, the United States no longer worries about Israeli's security since it is assured by the growing gap between its military and economic capabilities compared to its neighbours.

All of the above factors will contribute to the instability of the region in the next decade or so contrary to America's belief and assurances to the Gulf monarchies. Political and social settlement and stability will continue to be elusive until the Gulf States succumb to popular pressures of self-determination, or at least meaningful political participation in the provinces where the Shi'i

constitute a majority. Knowing the autocratic and tribal nature of the ruling families, the latter option will most certainly be their choice to avert losing more power. This scenario is already happening in Yemen with the rapid military gains by the Huthis with direct assistance from Iran. They have already secured large geographical gains which will definitely be interpreted towards political power and more recognition.

The Saudi government is irritated by the new America policy of negotiating with Iran over its nuclear programme. Its response has been somewhat strange since it intensified its clamp down on the proponents of political Islam on the local and regional front.⁶ Destabilising its internal front, when concurrently it is facing regional threats on its eastern and southern borders is a gamble. Public opinion in Saudi Arabia is enraged by their government's keen and rushed support for the coup leaders in Egypt. In the first day after the Saudi government recognised the legitimacy of the new regime in Egypt the Royal Office for Public Affairs received 24,000 complaints.⁷ There is no accurate measure of the strength of the support for the Muslim Brotherhood, the Sururi's, or the plethora of small religious groups who support the principles of an Islamic state. However, what is obvious is that the regime is engaged in a low intensity repression campaign against people calling for reform and more political participation. Increasing the pressure on the local front while the government is looking increasingly impotent in Syria, Yemen will probably ignite popular dissent and disturbances for the first time and on a large scale in the kingdom.



On the contrary, Iran managed to free the hands of its policy-makers from the constant threat of an American strike and sanctions. Its economy is mending and its Syrian vassal is not under mortal threat. Should the worst materialise, Iran will be able to carve out a sizeable chunk of Syria for the Alawites. Sensing the predicament of the Saudis, Iran is trying hard to tighten the noose through continuous attempts to reach out to the Saudi latent Sunni opposition. They have failed until now primarily because of two major factors. First, the perceived negative role Iran is playing in Syria at the moment; and second, the controlled level of repression levied against the Sunni opposition by the Saudi regime. There is no doubt that if the Saudi regime step-up the pressure against its internal opposition, Sunni Islamists might reconsider their choices. Iran has good contacts with the AKP party in Turkey, al-Nahda in Tunisia, and with the Sudanese government. Any of these governments could play a role in hammering out a deal which is looking more likely by the day. Iran and its allies in the region have the most to benefit since they were exhausted in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

The challenge of peace could prove more problematic for the Iranian government since it needs all its resources to keep its internal front muffled. Moreover, the American withdrawal from Afghanistan later this year will animate another front with the Taliban on its eastern borders. From present experience of the Saudi support for armed groups in Iraq, the Iranians have no doubt that they will do the same in Afghanistan.

The current impasse in the Crimea and the Western

inability to influence events is another example of the waning of the Western powers to forcefully intervene in the Middle East. The only beneficiary in the Gulf region and the Levant will no doubt be Iran. It enjoys fanatical public support from the religious and the poor segments of society. It also enjoys religious and political support from outside its borders in Iraq, Bahrain, Syria and Lebanon. Ayatollah Khamenai, the Supreme Guide, is the only religious and political leader that enjoys wide popular support outside Iran's borders - a position none of the Sunni Islamist governments managed to create over the past 80 years. To the contrary, many of the Sunni moderate groups and political organisations are content with their Islamic projects nationally. While the ultra-Salafi groups, extremist organisations, and al-Qaeda and its affiliates don't even acknowledge the present Islamist governments such as the AKP in Turkey and al-Nahda in Tunisia as legitimate Muslim authorities.

In a sense, Iran is the only political system where we can truly recognise a unity between the political and the religious spheres, a proper theocracy. In the Sunni strand of Islam, a theocracy is impossible to create because Sunni religious scholars are respected for their knowledge but not revered. They don't have this special and sacred connection to the cult of saints (Imams) as the Shi'i do, hence their knowledge is considered as human and not infallible.

Despite all the civil wars in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, and despite all the efforts by the MENA regimes to stifle the opposition and their demands for democracy, the die has been cast, change is

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Political change will come when a synthesis is built on the possibilities for collective action, political opportunities... the social and political networks become ready and available.

inevitable. As long as there is a free flow of information across international borders directly to the people, ethical and moral values, political paradigms and rhetoric will be remoulded and reshaped. Activism and the drive towards change and establishing new democratic order requires a rational weighing-up of the dangers and gains against the moral and ethical values of the individual. Political change will come when a synthesis built on the possibilities for collective action, political opportunities, the degree of grievances, and the available social and political networks become ready and available. The only certainty is that the change will be rational and morally-balanced to liberate people from the clutches of dogma and irrationality. The Middle East will eventually follow this route because the benefits are seen and felt by other nations that pursued the same road decades before.

Endnotes

1. Recent infighting between the plethora of Islamist groups in Syria, the tension and war of words in Turkey between the AKP and the Gülen Movement and before that in Iraq, Algeria and Afghanistan.
<http://tinyurl.com/qyf8zfp> (ahram.org)
2. <http://tinyurl.com/omcwbf> (books.google.co.uk)
3. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/saudi-arabia?page=1>
4. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/united-arab-emirates>
5. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-2642174>
6. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141038/william-mccants/islamist-outlaws?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=*Mideast%20Brief&utm_campaign=Mideast%20Brief%203-18-14
7. The information was relayed to our researcher by a prominent official in the Royal Office for Public Affairs (*Al-Diwan al-Malaki*).
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Is the spirit of the Arab Spring dead?

THE Cordoba Foundation partnered with the Critical Platform on Thursday, the 20th of March, 2014, in launching a seminar series Themed, The Arab Spring – Three Years On, the event was held at Queen Mary University of London. The seminar reflected on the three years of unprecedented changes in the Middle East and North Africa, ranging from free and fair elections to the violent suppression of change.

Helping shed light on the topic, a distinguished panel of scholars and experts addressed the topic from numerous angles and took questions from the floor.

The audience comprised of academics and teachers, students, campaigners, faith and community leaders as well as the media. A number of prominent media agencies covered the launch, including Aljazeera Mubashir (Live), and Al-Arabia TV.

The Panel

The panel consisted of Dr Maha Azzam, a prominent academic specialising in Political Islam, Islam and globalisation, Middle East politics, and Islamist groups in the Middle East with particular reference to Egypt. She is the Chair of Egyptians for Democracy UK. Oliver James McTernan, Director of Forward Thinking. He was senior advisor to the Club of Madrid, a group of former Heads of State and Government committed to supporting governments in transition to democracy. McTernan is the author of *Violence in God's Name*, which explores the roots of violence within

faith traditions. The final member of the panel was Dr Anas Altikriti, founder and CEO of The Cordoba Foundation, Director of the Nyon Process - UN Alliance of Civilisations; Global Strategy Consultant, and a Hostage Negotiator.

Key Points From The Panel

Oliver McTernan

Oliver McTernan's speech was entitled "Critical Analysis of Western Response to the Arab Spring"

"To start with I will give a back drop of the Cold War to understand Western attitudes to events and politics of the Middle East today. After the Sykes-Picot agreement [[date?]] which carved up the Arab countries between Great Britain and France, a regional order was established. It was held from the Second World War until the dawn of the Arab Spring in 2010. The West in general was seen by the Arab public, the Muslim Brotherhood and Arab intellectuals in general as putting stability before democracy or putting our interests before our values. If we look at policies during that period we will find the criticism is very valid. Putting interests before values was exercised in the context of the Cold War.

The roots of the Cold War were about the West's stand against Soviet and Communist Totalitarianism. So in many parts of the world we upheld many totalitarian regimes either to secure our economic or military interests in the context of the Cold War. In that sense we compromised our principles in protecting the individual's civil and human rights.



In 2006, when Hamas surprisingly won the Palestinian elections, the immediate Western response was to put conditions on Hamas's participation in government. In fact, the West knew beforehand that these incapacitating conditions were impossible to fulfil by Hamas, why was this? I believe that the West was worried of the possible success of an Islamist government which would put pressure on friendly autocratic regimes in the region. I am sure that this is the reason for refusing the democratic will of the people in the Middle East. I remember in the run-up to the American elections in the primaries before the Democratic Party was going to choose between Hilary Clinton or Obama, an American analyst and specialist on the Middle East said it doesn't matter who gets elected, our foreign policies are dictated by our domestic interests. We all remember Clinton's slogan during the elections, which was "It is the Economy Stupid".

Suddenly in 2011, a significant shift happened with the dawn of the Arab Spring in North Africa. The major demand was freedom, bread, and dignity. In fact it was about the agency over people's lives and future. There was excitement in the Arab streets that this would bring a profound change and a new world order. The changes would shape how the states and power blocks relate to each other.

The reaction of the West did not promote our claim that we promote democracy and human rights. Organisations such as the European Union and many Western government reactions were a mix of ambiguity and ambivalence. On one hand, we have people focusing on democracy and changing the stagnant political reality and the other side is arguing for stability and economic and political

interests. The arguments were frequently presented as 'just wait and see', 'let us see who those new people are', and 'don't rush in'. In fact, money that was smuggled by dictators and held in the West was kept in the West. It was not released because the prime argument was to wait and see how the new government behaves before releasing their money. Vital support for a successful transitional period was denied because of Western worries and inability to engage. It was that ambivalence and ambiguity that enabled Arab rejectionists to seize their moment.

The rejectionists managed to produce a scary narrative to dissuade people inside and outside the country from continuing with the process of change. I recall in 2004 when I was in the Gulf speaking to an Arab leader about Gaza and the need to support the people and end the blockade. His response was immediate. He said 'if I was an Israeli I would build a bigger wall and point more guns in the direction of Hamas'. I asked why? He said 'you are naive, you don't go to mosque on Friday, and you don't hear the message'. It is fascinating that this rhetoric was the main argument coming from the Gulf and other regions that rejected the Arab Spring. It was this argument that led to the coup in Egypt and was followed by more ambiguity and ambivalence by the West. Again, there was a compromise of our principles because we weren't sure of where are our interests lay.

All along, what the West should recognise is that our values should be our interests. It shouldn't be cheap oil, cheap labour, or military bases, but rather we should uphold the values we believe in. One of the lessons we learned in the past few



months, is that elections alone cannot secure real democracy. There are a number of studies which show that without institutions that guarantee the dignity and rights of the individual and the principles of justice, there will always arise the possibility of the derailment of a nascent democracy from the elements of the so-called 'deep state'. Without these institutions that guarantee equality, people's frustrations will be exploited. I just returned from Tunisia yesterday where I took part in a meeting for all the political parties and European experts from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The European experts were trying to share their experiences after the collapse of communism and how countries in transition coped with it. What was clear to me is that we have no effective policy for helping countries in transition. The politicians were presenting the reality and the actual needs while the experts were offering the will to help but no policies, and the need was lost in the middle.

The question has always been around the compatibility of Islam with democracy, it is a valid question. However when we see the cooperation and work that brings together all political parties left, right and centre, including the Islamists, all trying to find a consensus to move their country together and forward, it is something very special. It is one of the most beautiful plants that the Arab Spring sowed. This spirit needs to be protected and supported. What really worries me is we don't have the expertise to enable and help build these institutions to protect the newly born democracies.

The Arab Spring might have hit frost-bite but it has not ended, the seed has been sown, the seeds are

there and it's just a matter of time that the seeds will shoot-up again.

I hope when this time comes the West would have learned from its mistakes and provide help and support for the people to gain agency over their lives and build a better future."

Dr Maha Azzam

"It is a huge subject but I will try my best to cover part of it in the limited time I was allotted. Let me start with the military regime and the coup in order to understand what has happened to Egypt's nascent democracy. We will find from the very start in January 2011, the military was extremely reluctant to relinquish power. Essentially, the military junta has been in control of Egypt's politics and economy for the past 60 years. Therefore, as with many autocracies around the world, the military does not give up power easily. So what we are witnessing in Egypt now is a power struggle between forces that want democratic change and those who are against it. At the top of those who against democracy in Egypt is the Military High Command, it is the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces).

We have to be careful and precise to pinpoint the Military High Command as the leader and instigator of acts to derail democracy and the democratic wishes of the people. They allowed their Commander in Chief, President Hosni Mubarak, to step down but they worked hard to keep their interests in running Egypt through derailing democracy and annulling our people's rights and say. On five occasions our people have

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What we are witnessing now is the second wave of the Arab Spring and to say it has died is wrong.

cast their votes to elect their parliament, president and their constitution. All these efforts and rights were set aside by the Military High Command. The army, with the help of the security forces used, and continue to use violence against the Egyptian people to suppress their aspirations for meaningful change.

Following the military coup an estimated number of 3000 people have been killed by the army and the security forces and 22 thousand were unlawfully imprisoned. The army and the security forces committed a massacre at peaceful sittings at Rabi'a al-Adawiya, and in other parts of Egypt there were similar patterns of the use of violence and an unrestricted and unjustified level of force. This is an ugly military regime by any standard, whether you compare it to the military junta that ruled Turkey in the 1980s or the militaries in Latin America. In terms of resemblance of governing style, it resembles the police states in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the struggle of Egyptians, whether they are Liberals or Islamists, for an accountable system of government is a very difficult one and against all the odds which are stacked against them.

The Arab Spring was generally welcomed by the West, understandably more in places than others, but ultimately was given a nod. Some governments adopted, as explained earlier, the policy of 'wait and see', but this policy was changed to an acquiescent one with the coup in Egypt justifying it depending on the roadmap proposed by the Military Command. There has been a clear campaign of violence and human rights abuses carried out against the Egyptian people since the

start of 2014. Unfortunately, Western governments have been weak in their responses, yes they have been issuing a few statements condemning human rights abuses, but this is not enough. They should be more proactive and forthcoming in standing firm and coming down hard against the military junta.

Every day thousands of peaceful protestors march through the streets of Egypt, the majority not affiliated to any political party while others are supporters of President Morsi, which should not negate their right to demonstrate. The demonstrations are gathering pace day-by-day, the majority are ordinary people aspiring for a state of law, democracy and human rights.

Only yesterday protesters were murdered in the streets, scores died at the hands of the security forces. The West, and particularly the United States and the European Union's positions are very important. Their silence and indifference gives a tacit support and abets the military junta in its terror campaign against the ordinary people in Egypt.

What we are witnessing now is the second wave of the Arab Spring and to say it has died is wrong. What is happening in Egypt is a wave of fresh air for the Arab Spring; we don't know how many waves it will take until we pluck our rights from the clutches of coup leaders. Our present generation is unwilling to remain shackled by the dominance of the Army controlling over 40% of our economy or the corrupt elite who are siphoning Egypt's resources, as they don't pay taxes, live on commissions, and have created such a huge gap

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History is not made by today's or yesterday's headlines. History is made through phases in which the accumulation of human practices, operations, actions, failures and triumphs culminate into shaping a phase of time.

between the rich and the poor. What the Egyptian people are after is a better infrastructure and good health service, and a fairer system of taxes and wealth distribution. The tiny minority are making billions out of our poverty. Money that should have been spent on the poor is in fact smuggled to foreign banks illegally. The barrier of fear has been breached. Peoples' courage was gradually built-up since the 2000 and peaked in 2011. Despite the terror campaign waged by the military our people will rise again to reform a system that has been corrupt for 60 years.

The military offered the Egyptians and the international community a roadmap to democracy. However, it has nothing to do with democracy; it is a roadmap to oppression and violence. There are commonalities between all autocratic regimes, they all discriminate against a particular group of people, in Egypt it is the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is used as an example to scare all the political parties and the ordinary people that their fate will be similar to the Brotherhood if you aspire to, or call for democracy. Egypt has been polarised, our people divided, they were encouraged to stand against each other by the military regime to undermine any sense of unity and kill their aspirations for democracy. Our state institutions have been reduced to nothing but an arm of the coup leaders. The judiciary, media, and the police are nothing more than a tool in the hands of the regime. It is a state akin to a fascist state where fear rules and suspicion is used as a tool in the hands of the one party state.

If the drive for democracy fails in Egypt, this will undermine all young democracies in the region.

I can clearly state that the current struggle is not between the Islamists and democracy because the vast majority of them are after an accountable democratic government. The struggle today is between democracy and authoritarianism, not just in Egypt but worldwide. It is a symbolic struggle that should be supported by democratic nations for the good of people around the world.”

Dr Anas al-Tikriti

“The Arab Spring is a process that will take time, it will go through lulls and highs that need policy, culture, and activism to reach its goals. Therefore, I will talk about the very concept of the Arab Spring. I feel we often make the mistake of confusing two things. To start with is a reading of today's headlines and seeing from them a shaping of history. History is not made by today's or yesterday's headlines. History is made through phases in which accumulation of human practices, operations, actions, failures and triumphs culminate in to shaping a phase of time. Therefore it is wrong to decide and judge the fate of the Arab Spring from a single story or event.

My second issue with the analysis and reading of events is not to judge from a single paragraph but rather we need to read the whole chapter before passing judgment. For example, we cannot read and judge the Arab Spring in Egypt from one event only such as the military coup of July 2013. A couple of hours ago I was on the radio and someone argued with me that the fact that there have been thousands killed protesting in the streets and tens of thousands imprisoned is the fault of those who protested. It is their fault to stand in the



way of the bullets. This statement is not just wrong and erroneous; it is deeply inhumane, offensive and immoral. Revolutions are expensive, a radical change needs a hefty price and part of that is for people to stand and say we will not accept the status quo, we will not accept for things to go the same as they have been for decades and decades.

Those people put their lives on the line for future generations to enjoy their free will and dignity. It is an on-going process; therefore it is wrong to judge the fate of the Arab Spring from the short period of events during the past six or twelve months alone. Those of you who have done academic research know that it is virtually impossible to get the right reading without giving the experiment time to offer results and rest. The Arab Spring is still in motion; it needs time -- long time before we can pass judgment.

Some of us speak of the Arab Spring as a failed venture, some even protest the name. I am not here to argue about the name or to pass quick judgments. It is the concept of the Arab Spring that is important and in desperate need to be studied and analysed. What we witnessed in 2011 is a historic event not simply because a number of dictators were toppled because that is just a by-line footnote. What was really noticeable is a series of nations who have been judged to be incapable of producing anything of benefit. The region was said to have produced only two things in the past 40 years, oil and violence. The region proved under autocratic regimes to be a failure at every level over the past 60 years. For the same people being condemned for being dead and incapacitated to rise in a way that the world has never ever seen before

is almost unprecedented. All of a sudden the reality in the Middle East changed from having no hope to having hope with real prospect for a meaningful change.

The negative judgment on the people of the Middle East was a normative judgment and accepted as a reality before the Arab Uprising in 2011. We were told that the same people, if they were offered democracy, would reject it in favour of a dogmatic ideology without given it a thought. After all, this wrong perception of the people of the Middle East, amazed us with the way they proved everyone wrong with their peaceful protests and drive towards emancipating themselves from the shackles of autocracies and military regimes. People were slandered with the acquisition of adopting an al-Qaeda ideology, forcing the *hijab* and moral conduct on people and waging holy war on their neighbours. People in that region proved their critics to be very, very wrong. They proved that they understood the concepts of democracy, human rights and freedoms, faiths and cultures. Their respect and understanding for the diversity of cultures and humanistic concepts even superseded some of those who lives are lived in established democracies.

I also challenge those who claim that the Arab Spring was a revolution of the hungry. I suggest otherwise, let us go back to revisit the events in 2010 in a small town in Tunisia where the first spark of the revolution was ignited. A simple street vendor was happy with the meagre takings he was making from his fruit and vegetable stall. A police woman argued with Mohamed Bou-Azizi to move his stall somewhere else without giving him a



reason. Eventually she smacked him knowing that she is protected in whatever she does against the ordinary people.

Bou-Azizi set himself on fire, not in protest at the lack of employment or the meagre pennies he was getting from his simple job, but his protest was simply about his dignity and the rights of his people. Soon, people rose against the Tunisian dictator demanding their rights and dignity. That is what the Arab Spring is all about, it is about people realising that for far too long they have been humiliated, their dignity stripped away, their humanity deconstructed and disseminated. No riches were promised in these revolutions but the promises of dignity, humanity, and a riddance of corruption.

The values of the Arab Spring should be cherished by every one of us even here in Europe because each one of us has been a victim of one way or other. If people in Libya, Syria, Egypt and Yemen have been victims of tyrants, we too have been victims of a corrupt banking system, pension schemes that disappear, mortgages that are lost, and property repossessed because people lost their jobs. So the concept of the Arab Spring is a concept that should be valued and cherished by people all over the world. The Arab Spring became an exporter of concepts of dignity, humanity, and a call for freedom and justice.

What scared people in parts of the world was the wave of revolutions, with similar slogans and aims and faces. Waves of people in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen, thousands of miles separating them but they were undistinguishable in what they demanded and aspired for. This scared

countries such as Saudi Arabia and the autocratic regimes in the Gulf and other parts of the world. It was as if nothing was going to stop these waves of enthusiasm, dignity, and freedom from reaching Dubai and Riyadh. This is why the revolution had to be killed; the West again played a role in which Oliver mentioned in 2006 when the Palestinians elected their representatives in fair elections only to be killed by Western intervention and Arab complicity.

Let us go back to a similar experiment in 1991 when an Islamist political group won the elections in Algeria, similarly, the deep state aided by some Western government annulled the elections, consequently hundreds of thousands of people were killed and even more were imprisoned.

Let us ask ourselves whether our government here in the UK, the United States, and the Western world can abide by a call for democracy around the world and stand by the outcomes of the democratic process regardless what the results of the ballot box are.

To end, I would like to mention a few positives. First, that people on their own can create change, a real change, and that change can happen peacefully and without violence. We all remember that American argument before 2003 which posited that the Iraqi people needed foreign intervention to create change, of course this argument was carried with the false accusation that Iraq had Weapons of Mass destruction. I disagreed alongside many people; we demanded that the Iraqi people be left alone because they are capable of creating change by themselves. Our argument was laughed off,

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Britain and other European Countries [should not] listen to the military junta in Egypt or other Arab delegations from the Gulf States to criminalise and proscribe a legitimate and peaceful organisation.

claiming that people in that region are not capable to change or to stand up against dictatorship.

We should also accept that people in the Middle East have a strong sense of belonging to Islam. It is no coincidence that in every free and fair election a political party with an Islamic identity wins with a sizable majority. We shouldn't be surprised that people choose to connect with their beliefs and identity. As people in the West are proud of their liberal and secular identities because it protects their rights and freedoms, similarly in the Arab world, people hold a high opinion of Islamic parties because they guarantee them rights, reform and an end of corruption. People in the West have the wrong idea of Arab liberals and secular groups. Believe me, we know what a corrupt lot they are. The tyrannies and injustices that destroyed the lives of millions upon millions of people in the Arab and Muslim world during the past 60 years were carried out by the so-called liberal and secular elites. In fact, all the attempts against the nascent democracies in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya were all carried out under the guise, protection, and support of liberal and secular groups.

People in the region have tasted the fruits of their labour, they have seen with their own eyes that they can win their freedom and no one can stop them if they come together. If the military junta in Egypt believe that they can continue their tyranny then they will be committing a grave mistake. The autocracies in the region are clamouring to criminalise a political party and a group of political and civil society activists thinking they can stifle the voice of the people and the demand for freedom. The party they outlawed is the same party

that has been elected by tens of millions of people to represent them only a few months ago. This is a fruitless and illegitimate campaign; in fact, it will create even more support for those who have been condemned today. All these efforts will end in vain and would ultimately be met with failure.

A piece of advice for Britain and other European countries, don't listen to the military junta in Egypt or other Arab delegations from the Gulf States to criminalise and proscribe a legitimate and peaceful organisation. This would be wrong and it will benefit no one, plus it will not work.

Here we have a strand of Islam that rejects violence and upholds the rights of women, human rights, rights of the minorities, and believes in multiculturalism and pluralism. They have shown time and time again that they hold democratic ideals and participated and respected the democratic process whenever they were allowed to take part in it. It is unbelievable that after all the above mentioned merits, there are those who want to lump them with nihilistic ideologies like al-Qaeda. We will do ourselves an incredible harm if this endeavour is successful.

The question was asked time and time again over the years, is Islam compatible with democracy? Past events have proved that yes, Islam is compatible with democracy and this question should not be asked again. In fact, the question that should be asked is whether the West is ready for democracy in the Middle East. The West should ask itself whether it will accept the outcome of a free and proper democratic process in the Middle East.

“

[We need to ask] how many autocratic regimes have collapsed in the Arab and Muslim world as a result of peaceful endeavour rather than counting the numbers of people killed in the streets.

We in the West and in other parts of the world should learn from the sacrifices of people in the Middle East when they went out in their hundreds of thousands unarmed against the military and security forces pledging not to return to their families until they had achieved justice. People should have the courage to object to policies that discriminate against minorities, immigrants and the poor. It is wrong of us to allow the media to unfairly target minorities, religious groups, and immigrants, to slander and demonise simply because this would serve certain political interests.

I hope that next time we meet in a similar function we will discuss how many autocratic regimes have collapsed in the Arab and Muslim world as a result of peaceful endeavour rather than counting the numbers of people killed in the streets or the number of political prisoners who languish in prisons. Let us hope for the future to be without tyrannical regimes not only in Egypt, Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf. We should also aspire for change for our people in Palestine because believe you me, people in the region feel and believe that they are one, with one destiny and interests. We want equality, justice, and freedom for people everywhere. This should be the struggle and endeavour for all the people around the world.”

The event ended with a robust panel discussion, where members of the audience were able to put questions to the speakers and engage in discussion.



VOLUME 3
ISSUE 1
MARCH 2012
ISSN 1754-7538

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Volume No. 5 • September 2012 • ISSN 1744-8108

**Sustainable Peace for a
Sustainable Future**
Commemorating the International Day of Peace (24 September 2012)

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CORDOBA SEMINARS

TITLE

GOVERNMENT "REVIEW" INTO THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN BRITAIN: UNRAVELLING THE MOTIVES

SPEAKERS

LORD KEN MACDONALD QC
DR ANAS ALTIKRITI - THE CORDOBA FOUNDATION
DR MAHA AZZAM - EGYPTIANS FOR DEMOCRACY - UK
PETER OBORNE - THE TELEGRAPH
MONA AL-QAZZAZ - MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

David Cameron recently ordered a "review" into the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain, which is to be conducted by the British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. The review comes at a time when the Muslim Brotherhood, victors in Egypt's only free election to date, is being subject to the most ferocious repression by the military regime.

This timely seminar asks whether this review represents a threat to British liberties and favours the perpetrators of human rights abuses everywhere. Moreover, is the review the result of pressure placed on the British government by undemocratic regimes abroad? Could our Prime Minister be setting a dangerous precedent by conducting this review?

DATE/VENUE

Join us for a lively discussion and exchange of views.

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