

THE DIALECTICS OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN NORTH AFRICA

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As the most intensively colonized region of the Muslim world for the longest periods of time North Africa deserves special attention from U.S. policy makers and analysts concerned with the evolution of political Islam. Indeed, policy-making circles in the Pentagon were reported to be viewing "The Battle of Algiers" (1965) as the situation in Baghdad worsened.² American policy makers need to understand the colonial and postcolonial dialectics of political Islam, now that the United States has become the principal imperial power. The film, however, gave them the wrong message – that one can beat down an urban insurgency – because the French could not win the war. Like our "global war on terror" (GWOT), it was essentially a political rather than a military contest.

In all of its many forms, ranging from reformist movements to transnational jihad, against "far" as well "near" enemies,³ political Islam must be viewed as a series of responses to the penetration of Western ideas and practices into Muslim societies; and North Africa, geographically closest to the European imperial powers, suffered the most penetration and has exhibited the greatest variety of responses over the past

century. Now that the United States has replaced the Europeans as the principal hegemon and foil for political Islam, it is especially instructive to review its evolution in North Africa over the past half century and the mutation of some of its elements into "al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghrib."

This paper will argue that transnational movements, however nebulous their online presences, need local roots in the existing international order of states if they are to survive.⁴ Consequently, the best way to combat violent transnational self-proclaimed enemies, such as al-Qaeda, is to isolate them politically in their home states, so that their respective populations, not just governments, perceive them to be criminal elements. Postcolonial North Africa offers an interesting laboratory, and the four contrasting national experiences suggest alternative strategies for criminalizing them. The stronger the legacy of Islamic reform, the more favorable the prospects will be of submerging violent new elements in a relatively tranquil, but unforgiving, sea of law-abiding political Islam. Conversely, the weaker the legacy, the easier it may be for violent groups to use Islam in distorted ways to legitimate opposition to an incumbent regime – or even against an entire

society.⁵ Yet an indiscriminating repression of Islamist oppositions may spark more violence and weaken moderate reformists, thereby further strengthening the hand of hardliners in the government. Massive repression and more discriminating strategies have all been attempted in North Africa, with mixed results. Morocco had the most successful strategy of selective co-optation and repression, while Libya succeeded best with a repressive strategy.

It will be shown here that Morocco and Tunisia had greater potential than Algeria or Libya for a successful discriminating political strategy. Better preserved Islamic legacies offered more opportunities for dividing and controlling the oppositions, but strategies are matters of political choice that are not predetermined. Each postcolonial regime provoked new Islamist oppositions and essayed a variety of strategies to contain them. It will be seen that one set of Algerian reformers (the Hamrouche government, 1989-91) attempted to defy the odds but was prevented from sustaining simultaneous economic and political reform. By contrast, an authoritarian regime in Tunisia consolidated power by taking a violent path and polarizing the political community into fearful Westernized elites and resentful counter elites. Morocco was better able to contain its postcolonial oppositions by judicious use of pre-colonial institutions and a multiparty system inherited from colonial times. It can credibly criminalize transnational al-Qaeda while coexisting with tamer varieties of homegrown Islamism.

This paper unfortunately cannot examine the new local roots of violent transnational Islam being cultivated in Iraq under the American occupation or in various EU countries, where North African as well as other Muslims are recruited for

Iraq and other transnational causes. More political beachheads and recruiting grounds for al-Qaeda are opening up in the Paris suburbs and provincial cities like Montpellier than in any of the North African states. The "near enemy" of apostate or infidel rule may be merging in the perceptions of some North African immigrant communities with al-Qaeda's "far enemy" (Sarkozy's France, backed by the United States). But North African immigrants and their second- or third-generation offspring will be less vulnerable to such propaganda to the extent that al-Qaeda is effectively criminalized in the eyes of public opinion in the home countries.

COLONIAL LEGACIES

French colonial rule gave rise to the Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian nationalisms that in turn activated "political" Islam as they sought roots in Islamic as well as national identities. Political Islam in turn shaped the nationalist movements against the French presence in all three of its North African possessions, but the contexts of anti-colonial struggle varied, depending on the extent and longevity of colonial rule. These were greatest in Algeria, and greater in Tunisia than Morocco. France assimilated Algeria (1830-1962), eradicating its ruling Ottoman infrastructure, populating it with French citizens and assimilating native Jews, expropriating much of the best land for the settlers and marginalizing the bulk of the Muslim populations. In the protectorates of Morocco (1912-56) and Tunisia (1882-1956), by contrast, the French deliberately preserved the precolonial political orders, even while repopulating them with French settlers -not so many as in Algeria but more, as a percentage of the respective

populations, in the older protectorate of Tunisia than in Morocco. The French virtually destroyed Algeria's Muslim social infrastructures, such as schools, courts, tribes and religious orders, while trying to preserve them in Tunisia and especially Morocco, the last territory to be colonized, after learning expensive military lessons in Algeria about how not to pacify a Muslim country. The religious centers of learning in Fez (Qarawiyin) and Tunis (Zitouna) also survived, whereas the French invasion of Algeria "ruined charitable institutions, dropped the schools, and dispersed the seminaries," as Alexis de Tocqueville lamented in 1847.⁶ So also in Libya, Mussolini's conquest in the 1920s virtually decimated the population, but Italian colonization (1911-42) was briefer, leaving the Sanussi religious order intact with help from the British.

In the course of their respective nationalist struggles, political Islam consequently took different forms and served different functions, depending on the orientations of their emerging political elites. Early nationalists embraced France's civilizing mission and desired only to be treated equally. Rebuffed by heavy-handed colonial administrations, they lost the political initiative to traditional notables, who asserted their Muslim identity and rejected foreign domination, much like the stubborn slave in Hegel's classic dialectic.⁷ In Tunisia, however, a third generation of children of provincial elites and middle classes effected a synthesis of those earlier moments of the colonial dialectic. While asserting their Tunisian Muslim identity, they also fully assimilated French culture and those other aspects of the French civilizing mission, such as techniques of mass mobilization, that could turn the colonial relationship on its head (just as Hegel's slave

ultimately becomes so efficient that he transforms the master into his dependent).

Reformist Salafi currents associated with Mohammed Abduh and Rashid Rida found fertile soil in Tunisia, where earlier Muslim reformers had already established receptive foundations. Modern Quranic schools, first founded in 1906,⁸ proliferated in the interwar period and would be a significant relay for Tunisia's third generation of nationalists. The modernizers instrumentalized the Salafi movement and, shortly after independence, integrated Islam's traditional center of learning, Zitouna University, into a Faculty of Theology of the University of Tunis, an institution of higher learning inherited from the French colonial authorities. That is why the Islamist opposition that emerged two decades after independence may have incensed incumbent Tunisian authorities more than their regional counterparts, as if all the lessons of the heroic Tunisian struggle for independence had been forgotten.

The same Salafi movement eventually reached Morocco and encouraged the formation of modern Quranic schools, but they were formed later and enjoyed fewer ties with Morocco's less developed nationalist parties than with Tunisia's Neo-Destour party. The largest of them, the Istiqlal, was relatively weak by Tunisian standards and contained both second-moment traditionalists and third-moment modernizers in precarious equilibrium. These would divide shortly after independence, setting the stage for political pluralism orchestrated by a monarch who, as "commander of the faithful," could also dominate the religious field and serve as arbiter among different religious currents. By exiling Sultan Mohammed V to Madagascar (1953-55), the French made him a

national hero and enabled the Palace to encourage and control multiparty politics after independence. Consequently, the system could absorb and balance various political expressions of Islamic sentiment, whether Salafi or Sufi, tied to religious orders that had flourished in precolonial North Africa.

The Salafi religious-reform movement paradoxically had the most political impact, however, on the society it penetrated the least, colonial Algeria.⁹ While it established relatively few schools on the ground, it served to redefine Algerian history in ways that eventually serviced a revolutionary elite. Tawfiq al-Madani, a publicist of the Association des Ulama musulmans algériens, founded in 1931, joined the Provisional Government of the Algerian Revolution and wielded considerable influence in shaping official images of Algeria's "presumed authenticity." Others argued this "authenticity," centered on a particular reading of Salafi reformism, "was in fact its exact opposite, an *alienation* of Algerians from their own imaginations of themselves, fixing them in a closed and homogeneous destiny."¹⁰ Whatever the truth of the matter, colonialism had devastated traditional culture so much that interpretations of Islam seemed to be up for grabs, and the government, by projecting a monotone "langue de bois" from above, set the stage for religious oppositions to vent their undisciplined imaginations in what still amounted to a cultural vacuum.

Salafi reform, though coming from neighboring Egypt, seems to have been weakest in colonial Libya. After independence in 1951, granted "accidentally" by the international community, the leader of the Sanussi religious order became king.¹¹ Salafi reformers, insisting on scripturalist

interpretations of Islam that any literate person could discover, generally attacked religious orders as superstitious saint worship because they prescribed intermediaries. But any potential opposition based on a reformist movement was then cut short by Muammar Qadhafi's military coup in 1969, and his *Green Book* (1974-76) subsequently outdid Algerian state-sponsored religion in promoting a "pure" universal theory alleged to be the true Islam.

POSTCOLONIAL ISLAMIST OPPOSITIONS

The principal oppositions to the postcolonial regimes assumed Islamic forms adapted to their respective contexts, replacing Marxism in the 1970s as the ideological vehicle of protest. Each opposition in a sense mirrored the regime it was opposing, or, as François Burgat quipped, each regime got the opposition that it deserved.¹² In the same spirit, a Tunisian sociologist once opined that Rashid Ghannouchi was the illegitimate son of Bourguiba, while others have viewed the Algerian Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) as a stepchild of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). Reflecting their better-preserved cultural heritages, the Tunisian and Moroccan Islamist movements projected moderate images in keeping with a prevailing urbane piety, whereas Algerians and Libyans were less cultivated.

The Tunisian single-party regime, product of a colonial dialectic that had successfully mobilized Islam for the purposes of nation-building, went furthest in reforms that upended the religious establishment. Although by 1970 President Bourguiba, after suffering heart attacks and reverses of his economic policies, made peace with the Zitouna scholars and

even tolerated the formation of an Association for the Safeguarding of the Quran, many of the less privileged and less Gallicized middle classes felt left out of postcolonial elite culture. Unable to make it in the French system, Rashid Ghannoushi had migrated to Syria, where he eventually rediscovered Islam in a Baathist prison. After returning to Tunisia, founding the *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* in 1979, and pressing for political pluralism, he was jailed by Bourguiba but subsequently released by Ben Ali, who overthrew Bourguiba in 1987. Although the regime, despite accepting the principle of multiparty pluralism, did not recognize Ghannoushi's Nahda party, it was by all accounts one of the most pro-democratic and moderate Islamist parties in the Arab world.¹³ Ghannoushi was obliged to respect Bourguiba's reformist legacy in order to constitute a viable political opposition to Ben Ali. Running independent candidates in the 1989 parliamentary elections, the Nahda registered overwhelming victories over other opposition candidates and gained close to 30 percent of the total vote in Tunis, even by official vote counts, but no seats in parliament. Had it been recognized, the Nahda party might have eventually won power through free elections, although the initial goal in 1989 was modest: ten seats in parliament (then totaling 141 deputies) to promote educational reform, its leader claimed.¹⁴

In Morocco, an Islamist opposition was also displacing associations of Marxist inspiration in the universities by the mid-1970s, although the king had hitherto dominated religious discourse, and Salafi reformism had come later to Morocco than to Tunisia. After independence, the revered King Mohammed V took center

stage, serving as arbiter of the various secular and religious reformist currents of the nationalist movement. Allal al-Fasi (1910-74), its principal Salafi leader, headed only one of several political parties represented in government, and elements of his *Istiqlal* party who were critical of arbitrary royal rule under Mohammed's successor, King Hassan II, were either jailed or cajoled back into the royal stables. As the party leadership aged and lost touch with younger generations, Abd al-Salam Yassin (1928-), jailed 1974-77 for a critical letter he wrote to the king, inspired a new following outside the decaying multiparty system. By the late 1980s, however, his *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* (Justice, Prosperity and Charity) movement seems not to have gained the sort of support achieved by Ghannoushi's Islamic Tendency Movement in Tunisia.¹⁵ The party continues to be illegal, and Yassin has been in and out of jail and house arrest, but other associations and parties subsequently emerged. The Justice and Development party became the third-largest in Morocco's parliament after the September 2002 elections. Evidently playing by the king's rules, it presented candidates in barely half the contests so as not to gain a clear-cut victory.¹⁶

As in Tunisia, Islamist opposition movements in Morocco were largely peaceful, ready to work within existing constitutional structures to achieve their aims. Even Yassin, although refusing to be politically co-opted, was committed to change through peaceful means.¹⁷ Salafi reformism coexisted with Sufi religious orders in Morocco under the overall supervision of the Alawi dynasty, which had played on both traditions since its emergence from maraboutic origins in 1666. Contemporary Islamism developed

more slowly than in Tunisia, where the colonial dialectic had progressed further, but the new cultures of political Islam rested on firm precedents. The same could not be said for Algeria, where the revolutionaries instrumentalized a relatively small movement of Salafi reformists and created a state religious establishment with some help from Egyptian Muslim Brothers and other foreign assistance that was primarily focused on Arabizing the old French – colonial educational establishment.

In Algeria, the hegemonic FLN tried to contain the Salafists within its ranks and even shut down *Al-Qiyam al-Islamiyya*, an independent cultural association founded by French-educated and other Salafi reformist preachers. This movement had radical requests (full implementation of the Sharia, the prohibition of alcohol sales, the exclusion of non-Muslims from public jobs), and was tolerated until 1970. The authorities were kinder to Malek Benabi, a distinguished Islamic reformist with a background in electrical engineering and director of higher education 1964-67. He was permitted to encourage the creation of a mosque in the downtown Faculty of Letters of the University of Algiers¹⁸ and continued to direct seminars about Islam, but he died in 1973 just as students were moving away from Marxism toward political Islam, as in Tunisia and Morocco. His former students constituted the core of the *Jazara*, or "Algerianist" rather than Salafi Islamists, the two strands of Islamism that would come together in the FIS in 1989. Out of meetings in the mid-1970s at the University of Constantine, Abdallah Djaballah (1956-) and others would subsequently become Islamist politicians. Only a few, like Djaballah, had time to acquire some solid religious training before the era of multiparty politics opened up.

Meanwhile, however, by the late 1970s, some of the Islamists, including Abbassi Madani (1931-), began to speak more critically in the mosques against authorities that were used to giving directives to pliant functionaries presenting Friday sermons. One group of self-proclaimed free preachers emerged under the leadership of Mustapha Bouyali (1940-86), a former freedom fighter (like Madani) in the Army of National Liberation and subsequent FLN activist "who tried unsuccessfully to get himself elected to the National Assembly" in 1982 but was dismissed from the party.¹⁹ Later in the same year, shortly before Madani and others were being arrested for inciting students, he took up arms against the regime rather than submit to a police check. His Algerian Islamic Movement would be pretty much rounded up by 1986, its leader killed in a police ambush, but Bouyali established a precedent for Islamist violence in Algeria. Significantly his brother-in-law admitted that Bouyali "did not have the required level either in his knowledge of the Book nor that of the Sunna" to preach, just "faith, which permitted him to become conscious of the situation in which the country was living."²⁰ Indeed, the International Crisis Group prefers to classify Bouyali's movement "as a rebellious offshoot of the FLN-ALN tradition, which expressed itself in Islamist terms in deference to the ideological fashion of the 1980s..."²¹

With the Sanussi religious order driven underground, Libya has experienced relatively weak Islamist opposition. Salafi and other currents carried by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood have attracted little following outside the country's restricted intellectual circles.²² There is a radical

tendency: for instance, the Islamist Fighter Group of Libya. Traditionalist Islamic opposition to Qaddafi's radical puritan reinterpretations of Islam may be greatest in Cyrenaica, where the Sanussi have the strongest roots. Perhaps, too, despite their ideological differences, the Sanussi protected some of the more radical splinter jihadist groups in the late 1980s and 1990s, given their shared hatred of the regime.²³

STRATEGIES OF CONTAINMENT

The North African regimes have tried a variety of strategies to contain their Islamists. At opposite ends of the spectrum between divide and rule and direct repression, the strategies of the Moroccan monarchy and Libya's Qadhafi have been the most successful.

Qadhafi preempted political Islam. He expressed a "puritan" Salafi version of Islam in its logically most extreme form. It is the purely scripturalist version of religion, the truths of which are ascertainable by any literate individual.²⁴ As stated in Article 10 of the Great Green Charter promulgated in 1988, religion was declared subject to "personal and direct relations with the Creator, without intermediary."²⁵ Although exhortations to promote the universal theory of his Green Book across the world may fall on deaf ears, his version of Islam is calculated to ridicule the religious scholars and others who pronounce their interpretations and fatwas, whether they are Salafi reformers, Muslim Brothers, traditional ulama or adepts of religious orders such as the Sanussiya. It seems to work in a society atomized by a brutal colonial situation and saturated with oil revenues that discouraged most opposition and supported Qaddafi's gangs of revolutionary committees, which repressed

the remainder. A radical direct democracy of sorts contained and controlled most political expressions of Islam. When, as in 1989 and in the mid-1990s the Islamist opposition resorted to violence, it was the popular committees that led a brutal suppression, not the army, which Qaddafi weakened for fear of possible alliances between officers and Islamists. But, although Libya avoided Algeria's civil war, Yahia Zoubir observes that "Libyans nevertheless consider that Islamist resistance to the regime is legitimate."²⁶

At the other end of the spectrum, the Moroccans have selectively empowered a multitude of Islamist movements, associations and political parties, beginning with the Istiqlal party after independence, the more plausibly to criminalize others in the eyes of public opinion. The palace encouraged or tolerated the creation of many Islamist opposition factions to compete with one another, rather than frontally assaulting them. King Hassan II also managed delicately to neutralize Abd al-Salam Yassin, his principal opponent in the mid-1970s. After writing his open letter in 1974 to the king challenging his religious legitimacy, the Islamist philosopher was so certain he would face execution that he even prepared the linen for his funeral shroud. The king, however, preferred to intern him for three years in a psychiatric hospital.²⁷ While permitting him to think and write, the palace effectively put him in political quarantine rather than making him a national martyr around which a national opposition might solidify, as had happened when the French authorities exiled the royal family in 1953. Yassin inspired many other activists, but the palace handled them in the standard ways it had treated secular progressives in earlier years, by police

repression and selective co-optation.

A variety of Islamic youth groups emerged in high schools and university campuses in the mid-1970s, including Chebiba Islamiyya, which the Moroccan police may have used as a cover to assassinate Omar Benjelloun, an important Leftist dissident.²⁸ Some of the radical youth, like Abdallah Benkirane, moved over to the conservative al-Tawhid wal-Islah (Unity and Reform) movement, which in turn joined forces with Abdelkrim Khatib's Democratic and Constitutional Popular Movement and merged it into the Party for Justice and Development (PJD) to compete in the September 2002 parliamentary elections. Although Dr. Khatib, himself an Islamist of a more traditional school as well as leader of Morocco's Army of Liberation before independence, left the party in 2004, the young Islamists had achieved respectability as Morocco's third-largest party and seemed poised to win a plurality of seats in the legislative elections held on September 8, 2007. In the event, however, the party came in second, winning only 46 seats, barely half what it had expected, in a lackluster election in which only 37 percent of the electorate bothered to vote. Perhaps the PJD still did not command "the same respect or popular support as Yassine's al-Adl wal-Ihsan,"²⁹ although it still offered the regime a veneer of legitimacy.

While selectively repressing Islamist groups in the 1980s and 1990s, the monarchy also attempted to improve its abysmal human-rights record – the worst of any Maghreb country in the 1960s and early 1970s – by freeing most of the original Leftist generation of political prisoners and then engaging in a truth-and-reconciliation process loosely modeled on South Africa's.³¹ Consequently, when King

Mohammed VI inherited his father's throne in 1999, he projected the image of an aspiring constitutional democrat. The suicide bombings of Casablanca in May 2003, followed by the commuter-train explosions in Madrid in 2004, involving a number of Moroccans, led to massive arrests of Moroccan Islamists. But those who were tied to the incidents and to al-Qaeda were indeed criminals in the eyes of most Moroccans. When, in September 2006, the police arrested 59 people and seized 30 tons of TNT, the same sort of explosive used in 2003, some observers tried to link them to the PDJ, but the party had already gained respectability³² and indeed succeeded, despite intra-party strife over the selection of parliamentary candidates, in winning an additional two seats in the September 2007 elections.³³ The palace evidently made the necessary distinctions between non-violent Islamists ready to work within the constitutional order and al-Qaeda. In addition to Islamist elite parliamentary politics, the regime also enabled massive Islamist demonstrations to occur peacefully – hundreds of thousands taking to the streets in March 2000 against proposed reforms of the family law, at least a million demonstrating for the Palestinian cause in April 2002 and against al-Qaeda in April 2005, protesting the killing of two Moroccan embassy employees in Iraq.

Quite possibly, the Algerians kept their Islamist oppositions in as close check as the Moroccans, but the cost mounted to the hundreds of thousands, not just hundreds of broken lives as in Morocco. First, the Algerians bottled up their Islamists in a single-party system that allowed so little room for dissent that Bouyali, as has already been mentioned, took to the maquis. When the single-party system

finally imploded in October 1988, President Chadli Benjedid hastened the demise of the FLN by promoting multipartism. By late 1989 the regime had recognized over 60 new parties, including several Islamist ones, and sponsored a new government, headed by Mouloud Hamrouche (the president's former director of protocol), to promote economic and political reform.

The strategy of the president and the new prime minister was to tolerate political Islamism as a way of containing various military and FLN factions. But one of the Islamist parties, the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), erupted on the political scene like a prairie fire, marginalizing all the other young parties, Islamist and secular alike. It captured majorities in most local councils in the July 1990 elections, whereas the FLN fared better in Saharan Algeria, where religious orders were stronger than in the more populated and colonially devastated north. Meanwhile the Hamrouche government went ahead with a novel program of economic reforms that had been gestating in the presidency since 1985. Among them was a gradual readjustment of the artificial foreign-exchange rate, in line with IMF recommendations. Coincidentally, the FIS party platform that was unveiled in the summer of 1989, when the party gained official recognition, advocated removal of artificial government controls in favor of market forces. Opposition to the Hamrouche reforms came not from the new mass party, however hard inflation might have been hitting its constituencies, but rather from cliques of military officers and civilian elites whose economic interests were threatened. These factions used the May general strike called by some of the FIS leadership – even though it was fizzling out – as a pretext to terminate the govern-

ment in July 1991. The new government was then pressured to alter the electoral law for the upcoming parliamentary elections in ways that unintentionally resulted in a mass victory for the FIS in the first round, held in December 1991. There would be no second round. Voluntarily or not, President Chadli Benjedid resigned,³⁴ postponing any Moroccan-style efforts to selectively co-opt moderate Islamists.

What followed in 1992 was a resurgence, first, of surviving elements of Bouyali's Algerian Islamic Movement, regrouped in a Mouvement Islamique Armé (MIA), and then the formation in mid-October of the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) under the leadership of 33-year-old "Emir" Abdelhak Layada until July 21, 1993, followed by a succession of younger ones, including Djamel Zitouni (October 27, 1994 to July 16, 1996) and Antar Zouabri (July 18 to February 8, 2002).³⁵ Reacting against the excesses of the GIA, another terrorist group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), surfaced under the leadership of 29-year-old Hassan Hattab in 1996 and gained international notoriety in 2003 by kidnapping 32 European tourists in the Sahara. Far from being evidence of al-Qaeda in the Sahara, the kidnappings suggested that any link between the GSPC and al-Qaeda was purely formal and reflected a serious split within the GSPC. Apparently Hattab had rejected any allegiance to al-Qaeda and would have preferred instead to negotiate a peace with the authorities.³⁶ After holding out for negotiations, he in the end surrendered on September 24, 2007, a month after Smain Lamari, his apparent negotiating partner as well as head of Algeria's military counterintelligence bureau, died of natural causes.³⁷

Meanwhile the Armée Islamique du Salut, the armed wing of the FIS, made its peace with the military in 1997 and again after President Bouteflika's election in 1999. He then launched a reconciliation policy process culminating in a referendum approving the National Reconciliation and Peace Charter in September 2005. Algeria now contains most Islamist elements in political parties that participate, almost Moroccan-style, in a formal politics of parliamentary democracy. But Algeria paid a much heavier price than Morocco for this eventual success.

By most reckonings, over 100,000 Algerians were killed during the height of the insurrection, 1992-98. The mass slaughters of 1997 were particularly odious, putting an end to any popular sympathies with Islamic terror.³⁸ To what extent, as has been claimed, did the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS), the Algerian army's intelligence service, penetrate and guide the various terrorist groups to sow popular confusion and win militarily a contest that had been lost in the 1991 elections? General Khaled Nezzar, one of the principal "décideurs" in the 1990s, sued Habib Souaidia, a former Algerian special-forces officer, for libel for alleging in his book, *La Sale Guerre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), that the military pretended to be Islamist terrorists and engaged in massacres. The verdict of the French judges was ambiguous: "Il ne nous appartient pas de juger l'Histoire."³⁹ While the Algerian officers denied engaging their troops in massacres, they admitted arming over 100,000 men in self-defense units. The Algerian army stood at about 126,000, and the police numbered only 40,000 at the start of the insurgency.⁴⁰

Whatever possible conspiracies there

may have been,⁴¹ the insurgency has continued at a much reduced level since 1999. The most recent incidents, including a bombing outside the prime minister's office in April 2007 and the bombing of a military barracks precisely three months later, remain a mystery. Voicing more conspiracy theories, some observers have suggested that the supposed perpetrator, the GSPC rebranded as "Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb," is yet another disguise for the DRS.⁴² Ironically, the much-heralded mutation of the GSPC into "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," finally announced "officially" by Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri on August 5, 2006, meant "that it has exhausted its other strategic options and so is a sign of weakness rather than strength."⁴³ The Algerian GSPC, successor to the GIA, had become so weak and divided that it needed some crumbs of international legitimacy gained by associating with the struggle against the "far enemy."⁴⁴

Many Tunisians have pointed to the Algerian situation as confirming the wisdom of the Ben Ali regime in refusing to recognize the Nahda as a legitimate party. But, in recent years, Algeria has imitated Morocco by tolerating a plethora of parties, including Islamist ones such as Abdallah Djaballah's Ennahda, recognized in December 1990,⁴⁵ whose leader continues to enjoy a measure of credibility in the face of orchestrated challenges to his leadership. Tunisia's political Islamists, however, were more deeply rooted and also took a cautious approach to reform, largely accepting Bourguiba's legacy. Common to both Algeria and Tunisia was the use of Islam as a protest vehicle against arbitrary one-party rule. But Tunisian civil society could have better supported pluralism, even though the new

Tunisian parties, formed since the early 1980s, lacked the maturity of their Moroccan counterparts. Instead, the Ben Ali regime, after originally liberating Ghannouchi and others from jail in 1988, indiscriminately repressed the party in 1991-93, arresting tens of thousands on the pretext of plotting against the regime. The Nahda was portrayed to Tunisia's secular elite as a threat to their way of life. The regime thereby built up strong bases of support, especially among women, and then proceeded even to jail politicians who had been officially designated to lead token opposition parties. The police state rapidly expanded the forces of law and order, at least doubling the number Algeria had in the early 1990s for only one-third of the latter's population.⁴⁶

All political movements in Tunisia were forced either to go underground or into exile, creating a political vacuum that could only encourage violence. Al-Qaeda agents blew up a synagogue in Djerba, killing 19, including foreign tourists, in April 2002; and two intensive shoot-outs with the police occurred in late December 2006 and January 2007. An unknown Tunisian group, Youth of Tawhid and Jihad, claimed to be the new armed presence, although the Tunisian interior minister claimed "Salafists from Algeria" to be responsible. Was this one of a number of new appearances of "al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghrib," as Jane's *Foreign Report* suggested?⁴⁷ One of President Bouteflika's top security aides dismissed this shadowy mutant of the GSPC and asked that it not be given "more importance than it deserves," as it would soon be "totally eradicated," a comment that could be interpreted as indicating imminent changes within Algeria's top leadership but

not in time to prevent the simultaneous April attacks in Algiers on the prime minister's office and a police station, killing 33 and wounding over two hundred.⁴⁸ According to one source, Algerian Interior Minister Yazid Zerhouni cast doubt, however, about the nature and source of that attack as well.⁴⁹

In the summer of 2007, the international press speculated about a growing threat from al-Qaeda across the Maghreb,⁵⁰ and Assistant Secretary of State David Welch testified before the House Foreign Relations Committee: "Terrorism is perhaps the most pressing of the issues that the Maghreb faces. The merger in September 2006 between al-Qaeda and Algeria's primary homegrown terrorist group, the GSPC, marked the beginning of a troubling trend that we have since seen across the Maghreb.... [T]he region's terrorist groups are increasingly attempting to build ties with each other and with the global jihadist network."⁵¹

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is a sad commentary on the Bush administration's GWOT that a degenerated GSPC could be trying to regain legitimacy and a measure of support by linking to al-Qaeda's global jihad. The Pentagon, in turn, has used alleged al-Qaeda activities in the Sahara as a reason for developing the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership with a number of African countries, including Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, thereby confirming the proximate presence of the "far enemy" and legitimating al-Qaeda in the eyes of GSPC remnants and new generations of potential recruits.

A wiser policy might indeed take Algeria's civilian leadership, notably its Ministry of the Interior, at its word and put

"Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb" in perspective. Rather than fueling it with new anti-imperialist grievances, including a deepening American military presence in the Sahara, the United States would do better to remain quietly on the sidelines and let the Maghreb countries do any necessary counterinsurgency work. Each has demonstrated ample capabilities. Morocco has used its considerable political infrastructure to good effect, co-opting or neutralizing its home-grown Islamists, none of which has encouraged either internal or global jihad. At much greater cost, Algeria has also succeeded in eliminating its internal jihadists and now practices a Moroccan style of politics whereby it manipulates its various political Islamist oppositions and blocks its most credible opponents. Like Morocco, Tunisia never had an internal jihadist opposition, but Ben Ali has managed to create the most promising climate for global jihad in the Maghreb by foreclosing all opportunities for moderate political Islamists to engage in politics.⁵² Rather than strengthening Tunisia's repressive apparatus, the United States might consider encouraging the country's human-rights activists, including moderate Islamists, but any encourage-

ment, to be taken seriously, would need EU backing as well, notably that of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. Were Tunisia to measure up to Moroccan or even Algerian standards of tolerating Islamist oppositions, its authorities could focus more on the real criminals.

The United States may have other strategic reasons for expanding its military presence deep into Africa, but the GWOT should not be counted among them. The "global war" should not be extended to North Africa, as it only strengthens the hand of al-Qaeda, giving it a dignity it does not deserve and transforming it into a further focal point, in addition to Iraq and Palestine, for anti-American sentiment. To be sure, the United States must quietly track down the remnants of al-Qaeda and any other global jihadists pointed against "the far enemy," but a shadowy "al-Qaeda in the Maghreb" is not a legitimate pretext for supporting the human-rights abuses of GWOT allies. A wiser strategy against global jihad would take national self-determination more seriously, not by adding to the repressive capabilities of states but by leaving them alone, subject only to human-rights campaigns and actions of the international political community.

¹ I wish to thank Dr. Louisa Dris-Ait-Hamadouche for her helpful comments on an earlier draft, including additional information that I have incorporated here. I am also grateful for Yahia Zoubir's fine editorial hand.

² Charles Paul Freund, "The Pentagon's Film Festival: A Primer for The Battle of Algiers," slate.com, posted August 27, 2003.

³ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also François Burgat, *L'islamisme à l'heure d'Al-Qaida* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), who observes three distinct phases of Islamist opposition: the period of opposition to colonial rule, then to postcolonial rule, and finally to American hegemony. For an excellent analysis of the various types of contemporary Islamic movements, see International Crisis Group (ICG), "Understanding Islamism," Middle East/North Africa Report No. 37, (March 2, 2005). The article presents a threefold classification of Jihadists, i.e., Islamic activists who espouse violence: 1) the jihadi Salafiyya, "composed of people of a Salafi outlook who have been radicalized and have abandoned the non-violent activism of the da'wa [religious call] to enlist in the armed jihad," 2) the followers of Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), "initially disposed to wage jihad against 'the nearer enemy,' that is, local regimes, denounced as impious (*kufir*), notably in Egypt, before deploying to the global jihad against the 'further enemy,' namely Israel and the West, notably the United States," and 3) Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, "a synthesis of jihadi-Salafi and Qutbist elements" (p. 4). The ICG sharply distinguishes these

"Sunnis on the warpath" from other forms of political Islamism and missionary activities. Like Gerges, the ICG sees jihadis as having three distinct strategic visions: 1) the internal one, combating their own regimes; 2) the irredentist, joining other Muslims to combat foreign rule (eg., Algerian jihadis going off to jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s or Iraq after 2003); and 3) the global jihad against the West, notably the United States. The Anglo-American occupation of Iraq has developed considerable overlap between the second and third strategic visions.

⁴ Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), stresses the need for the cosmopolitan activist to be locally rooted and, p. 63, that global framing presupposes some domestic claim.

⁵ Exemplifying this ultimate distortion of *takfir al-mujtama*, Djamel Zitouni, who headed the Algerian Groupe Islamique Armé in 1995-96, is alleged to have taken the position that the entire Algerian society, having participated in the presidential elections of November 1995, "had left Islam" and should be considered apostate." See International Crisis Group, "Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page," Middle East Report No. 29, July 30, 2004, p. 13, for this extension of Sayyid Kutb's theorizing about the apostate (Nasser) regime.

⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), III, p. 323. Reporting to the French National Assembly in 1847, Tocqueville notes that 600 to 700 students were studying the Quran in secondary and higher institutes in Constantine in 1837, where there were also 90 primary schools with 1300 to 1400 pupils. Ten years later, after the French conquest of the city, there were only 350 pupils in 30 primary schools and 60 students engaged in higher education.

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, J. B. Baillie, trans. (MacMillan, 1949), pp. 239-40.

⁸ Clement Henry Moore, *Politics in North Africa: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia* (Little, Brown, 1970), p. 64.

⁹ Ali Merad, *Le réformisme musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1940; essai d'histoire religieuse et sociale* (Paris, 1967). Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁰ James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 235.

¹¹ Dirk Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹² François Burgat, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa* (University of Texas at Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1993), p. 306.

¹³ See, in addition to Burgat, *op. cit.*, Azzam S. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (Oxford University Press, 2001). For a contrasting view, see Michael Collins Dunn, "The Al-Nahda Movement in Tunisia: From Renaissance to Revolution," in John Ruedy, ed., *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa* (St. Martin's, 1994), pp. 149-165.

¹⁴ Personal interview with the author in Austin, TX, January 1990.

¹⁵ Burgat, *op. cit.*, p. 178, observed that Yassine's review then had a circulation of about 3000, compared to a similar Tunisian magazine's 28,000.

¹⁶ Marvin Howe, *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and Other Challenges* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 240-249.

¹⁷ Emad Eldin Shahin, "Secularism and Nationalism: The Political Discourse of 'Abd al-Salam Yassin," in John Ruedy, *op. cit.*, pp.167-186. Also see Henri Lauzière, "Post-Islamism and the Religious Discourse of 'Abd al-Salam Yassin," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 37, N. 2 (May 2005), pp. 241-261, for a further analysis of Yassin's quietist but hardly "post-Islamist" theorizing.

¹⁸ Séverine Labat, "Islam and Islamists: The Emergence of New Types of Politico-Religious Militants," in John Ruedy, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

¹⁹ Achour Cheurfi, *La classe politique algérienne de 1900 à nos jours: Dictionnaire biographique* (Algiers: Casbah Editions, 2001), p. 133; Lt. Col. Zerouk, "Le terrorisme: le precedent algérien," paper presented to International Colloquium on Terrorism, Algiers, October 26-28, 2002, p. 3.

²⁰ F. Burgat, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*, p. 265.

²¹ International Crisis Group, "Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

²² Maham Abedin, "Libya, Radical Islam and the War on Terror: A Libyan Oppositionist's View," *Spotlight on Terror*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (March 25, 2005), Jamestown Foundation: http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?issue_id=3277.

²³ Yahia H. Zoubir, "Libye: Islamisme radical et lutte antiterroriste," *Maghreb-Machrek*, Revue Trimestrielle (Paris), 84 (summer 2005).

²⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²⁵ See Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, chapter 6.

- ²⁶ Zoubir, "Libye: Islamise radical."
- ²⁷ F. Burgat, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*, p. 167.
- ²⁸ Ibid., recording the words of the alleged instigator of the crime, pp. 172-173.
- ²⁹ John P. Entelis, "Morocco; Democracy Denied," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 2002.
- ³⁰ Susan Slyomovics, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).
- ³¹ "Des inquiétudes pour le Maroc," thalys.com, October 10, 2006: <http://libertedexpression.skynetblogs.be/post/3767207/des-inquietudes-pour-le-maroc>.
- ³² For instance, it enjoyed backing of the Carnegie Endowment. On the PDJ website see Bachir Niah, "Washington PJD's Experience Hailed in America," September 5, 2006: http://www.pjd.ma/article_en.php?id_article=1435.
- ³³ For recent articles on its web site, see <http://www.pjd.ma/sommaire.php3>.
- ³⁴ Major General M. Touati, "L'A.N.P. face au danger d'effondrement de l'Etat National vise par le terrorisme islamiste," speech delivered to the International Colloquium on Terrorism, Algiers, October 28, 2002, insisted Chadli voluntarily resigned. Earlier he explained to the author that the tanks he had seen on the hills overlooking Algiers on January 9-10, 1991, were there not to threaten Chadli but to insure order in the forthcoming round of elections.
- ³⁵ Lt. Col. Zerouk, *op. cit.*, offers an official narrative and police biographies of many of the emirs. He credibly asserts, p. 31, that the GIA kidnapped a religious scholar to get him to make fatwas justifying assassinations and then, not getting satisfaction, murdered him on November 26, 1993, a time when by other sources the GIA was out of control. Zerouk also offers samples, pp. 40-46, of fatwas fabricated by the GIA's in-house legal aides to justify mass slaughters in 1997.
- ³⁶ International Crisis Group, "Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria," *op. cit.*, p. 16. See also Jeremy Keenan, "Waging War on Terror: The Implications of America's 'New Imperialism' for Saharan Peoples," *Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 10, No. 3/4 (Autumn-Winter 2005), pp. 610-638; "Security & Insecurity in North Africa," *Review of Political Economy*, No. 108 (June 2006), pp. 269-296.
- ³⁷ *Jeune Afrique* No. 2439, 7 October 2007.
- ³⁸ Ali Yahya Abdennour, chairman of the Algerian League of Human Rights, claimed in 2004 that up to 18,000 Algerians were still missing, more than twice the number officially recognized. See Lahouari Addi, "Political Regimes and Human Rights in the Maghreb," *Confluences Méditerranée* No. 51 (2004).
- ³⁹ *La Nouvelle République*, Septembre 28, 2002, cited by Algeria Watch: http://www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/nezzar_souaidia/nezzar_interview.htm. For an account of the writing of Souaidia's book by ghost writer, see Mohamed Sifaoui, *La sale guerre: histoire d'une imposture* (Batna: Chihab Editions 2002).
- ⁴⁰ General A. Maïza, Chief of Staff of the 1st Military Region, "L'engagement de l'Armée Nationale Populaire face au terrorisme," and Police Chief Col. Ali Tounsi, "La police algérienne face au fléau terroriste," International Symposium on Terrorism, Algiers, October 26-28, 2002.
- ⁴¹ See Lounis Aggoun and Jean-Baptiste Rivoire, *Françalgérie, crimes et mensonges d'Etats* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004), relying heavily on Mohammed Samraoui, *Chronique des années de sang* (Paris: Denoël, 2003), whose work is summarized in "DRS, GIA and Impunity," *Algeria Watch*, July 2003: http://www.algeria-watch.org/en/analyses/samraoui_drs.htm. See also an artful summary by Adam Schatz, "One Big Murder Mystery," *London Review of Books* Vol. 26, No. 19 (October 7 2004): <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n19/shat01.html>. François Burgat, *L'islamisme à l'heure d'Al-Qaïda* (Paris: LaDécouverte, 2005) briefly discusses Algeria, pp. 173-178, and criticizes some French media and intellectuals, pp. 178-186, for their neo-orientalist disinformation or silence about the sources of the massacres. See also Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005).
- ⁴² François Gèze and Salima Mella, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the April 11, 2007, Attacks in Algiers: Clashes between Factions against Geopolitical Backdrops," *Algeria-Watch*, April 21, 2007: http://www.algeria-watch.org/en/analyses/geze_mellah.htm.
- ⁴³ Hugh Roberts, "Logics of Jihadi Violence in North Africa," in Rik Coolsaet, ed., "*Us*" vs. "*Them*": *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge in Europe* (London, Ashgate, 2007/2008).
- ⁴⁴ In his third major interview presented by Al-Sahab on May 5, 2007, Dr. Zawahiri mentioned al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb only as an afterthought at the very end of a video lasting more than one hour. See <http://www.archive.org/details/Third-Interview>.
- ⁴⁵ Michael Willis, "Algeria's Other Islamists: Abdallah Djaballah and the Ennahda Movement," *Journal of*

North African Studies, Vol.3, No.3 (Autumn 1998), pp. 46-70.

⁴⁶ Estimates of the number of police varied from 80,000 to 150,000, from double to almost four times the force of the mid-1980s. Even the lower number that circulated among foreign observers in Tunisia suggests that with one agent for every 110-115 Tunisians, the country had more than twice as many police officers per capita as Britain, France or Germany, and six times as many as Algeria, the Philippines or Pakistan. See Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire: Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* (Paris, 2003), pp. 204-205. For some Asian police to population ratios see the Rapid Action Battalion, Bangladesh, website: <http://www.rabbd.com/peoporat.html>.

⁴⁷ "Al-Qaeda resurfaces in the Maghreb," *Jane's Foreign Report*, May 16, 2007: http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/fr/fr070516_1_n.shtml.

⁴⁸ Bouazza Ben Bouazza, "Algeria: Al-Qaeda Not a Threat," *News24.com*, Jan. 31, 2007. "Murder in the Maghrib," *The Economist*, February 15, 2007, also recognized the limited geographic expanse of the GSPC-Qaeda after 7 simultaneous bombings on February 13 and an earlier attack on foreign Halliburton contractors: http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=8706454.

⁴⁹ "The lead of the kamikaze having targeted, among others, the Government Palace is not plausible. [...] I personally believe that they were mandated with a mission and then they were 'explosive' in order to leave no traces," *Le Jeune Indépendant*, April 17, 2007, cited by François Gèze and Salima Mella, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *op. cit.* The authors suggest that the operation was made to look like a suicide bombing, foreign to Algeria and thus signaling the merger with al-Qaeda, when it was most likely an internal Algerian power struggle.

⁵⁰ "Africa and the 'War on Terror': Policing the Undergoverned Spaces." *The Economist*, June 14, 2007: http://www.economist.com/world/africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=9340544.

⁵¹ Remarks by Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch, House Foreign Affairs Committee, June 6, 2007: <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/wel060607.htm>.

⁵² Clement M. Henry, "Reverberations in the Central Maghreb of the 'Global War on Terror,'" in Yahia H. Zoubir and Haizam Amirah-Fernández, eds., *North Africa: Politics, Region, and the Limits of Transformation* (Routledge, 2007).