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Religion Is Not The Answer: How to Turn Restlessness Into Meaningful Change - The Egyptian Conundrum

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RELIGION IS NOT THE ANSWER: HOW TO TURN RESTLESSNESS INTO MEANINGFUL CHANGE - THE EGYPTIAN CONUNDRUM

by

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ABSTRACT

RELIGION IS NOT THE ANSWER: HOW TO TURN RESTLESSNESS INTO MEANINGFUL CHANGE (EGYPT)

by

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The situation in Egypt and elsewhere in parts of the Arab world is to some extent reminiscent of the situation that prevailed before 1914 in Europe, where a motley array of unharnessed popular micro-nationalisms (today, instrumentalized religious fervor) combined with big power politics and interests and led to the cataclysm of war. With regard to Egypt, there is also a huge generational gap, with 2/3 of Egypt’s population below the age of 35 years. The so-called “solutions” of the past, whether religious or secular, will no longer work if the voice of the young people is not heard by their elders.

In a first chapter, I intend to look at the origins of the current restlessness, which, is fed from a collection of wellsprings, including a wide sense of humiliation in Egypt and the Arab world, and thwarted or unsuccessful emulation of Western societies in part due to ongoing resentment of its alleged “arrogance” seen as aimed at imposing its values on the Arab world.

In a second chapter, I would like to understand why “Islam is the solution”. The majesty of the religion and its feelings can be overwhelming and give sense to lives otherwise unfulfilled and dreary. However, genuine “democratization” through religion seems to me a dangerous fallacy, playing out on a daily basis. Like in World War I-type situations, the older leaders are tempted to use for their own ends the “excessive enthusiasm” of the faithful, financed by the oil wealth of patrons from the Gulf States to push for unanimity and strength of the *Umma*, though misguided means. These developments have led to stalemate, with the forces of Islamism pitted against those of a (secular) security apparatus, both of them looking resolutely backwards.

In a third chapter, I would like to explore possibilities on the way forward. What is at stake is how to turn conservative societies like Egypt into models of the rule of law.

In the conclusion, I would like to make a few prognostications as to whether the above is grounded on a realistic appraisal of the situation on the ground.
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INTRODUCTION

Building on a previous research, I propose looking into ways to understand why so much emphasis is put on religion rather than other social forces in society. In particular, I am interested in whether the “restless” forces that erupted in Cairo and other cities can be harnessed and channeled to achieve a better life for the Egyptian people. We are at an important juncture, as some leaders of the Tamarud movement that helped to topple Presidents Mubarak and Morsi, are now breaking away from their de facto alliance with the Egyptian military. The Tamarud movement now believes the Army threatens democracy.

The situation in Egypt and elsewhere in parts of the Arab world is to some extent reminiscent of the situation that prevailed before 1914 in Europe, where a motley array of unharnessed popular micro-nationalisms (today, instrumentalized religious fervor) combined with big power politics and interests that led to the cataclysm of war. With regard to Egypt, there is also a huge generational gap, with most of Egypt’s population below the age of 35 years. The so-called “solutions” of the past, whether religious or secular, will no longer work if the voice of the young people is not heard by their elders. It seems that the prevailing “restlessness” could lead to larger scale mayhem and slaughter committed by governmental forces together with the most radical of the rebel groups. A similar fermentation of the situation occurred in Syria and Iraq under the eyes of a bewildered, divided and at times powerless international community. A larger conflictual abyss awaits the region unless the zeal and excess of youthful

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1 The ideas expressed are my own only and do not represent those of my employer.
fervor can be channeled into a path that would lead to an open – and democratic - society.

Let us take stock of the latest developments, which carry huge political implications in the long-term. First, on the domestic scene, on 9 August 2014 in Cairo, the highest administrative court decided, in a judgment not susceptible to appeal, on the legal abolishment of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is an ominous sign for the advancement of democracy in Egypt, with we believe untoward consequences as a trend-setter, as it completes the disenfranchisement of the Brotherhood, already declared a “terrorist organization” in December 2013, in connection with accusations that they were linked to Al-Qaeda and organized a violent campaign against the State security forces. After being democratically elected, President Morsi was deposed and arrested on 3 July 2013 following massive popular protests with assistance from the Egyptian military forces. Marshall Sisi’s security apparatus began an unforgiving chase of pro-Islamist forces².

The conviction of three Al-Jazeera journalists by an Egyptian court in mid-June 2014 for doing their jobs was a clear signal sent by the country’s military-backed rulers that they would crush any challenge and all dissent (the US reaction was to put it mildly “unsatisfactory” and President Sisi refused to intervene). The alarming verdict was a chilling and intimidating message not just to other journalists working in the country but to Egyptian citizens as well. In the meantime, the quasi-totality of the Brotherhood’s leadership and the Freedom and Justice Party has been imprisoned and many of them face the death penalty³. Already, hundreds (at least

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² Ex-General vows to end Brotherhood if elected, by David D. Kirkpatrick, New York Times, 5 May 2014. Mr. Sisi said that “we are unable to live together,” His emphatic comments were his first indication that he might seek the long-term eradication of the Islamist group. Mr. Sisi, who was named Defense Minister by ex-President Morsi in August 2012, had issued a vague call for “reconciliation” at the time of the military takeover. But his comments appeared to extinguish any such hopes. Mr. Sisi said that security forces had stopped two assassination attempts on his life, but either the interviewers did not ask for further details or, more likely, their attempts to do so were edited out of the video. It is not a good foreboding of future inclusive policies …
³ See article by Ms. Louisa Loveluck in New York Times of 27 March 2014: “529 reasons to doubt Egyptian justice”. The condemned are accused of belonging to the banned as terrorist group Muslim Brotherhood. Prosecutors say these convicted people all attacked a police station in the Upper Egyptian city of Minya in August
of members of the Muslim Brotherhood, including their Supreme Guide, Mohamed Badie, have been condemned to endure capital punishment in mass trials, denounced by the United Nations as “without precedent in recent history”. In April 2014, in a move that directly contradicts democratic norms and principles, an Egyptian tribunal prohibited members from the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party to field candidates for the legislative and local elections scheduled later this year.

Second, in the international arena, the African Union having suspended Mr. Sisi after his election by 96% of recorded votes (less admittedly than those the late Saddam Hussein was able to garner4) as the new President of Egypt, solemnly reinstated Egypt. President Sisi was invited to attend the US-Africa Leaders’ Summit, hosted by President Obama from 4 to 6 August 2014, focusing on business opportunities for US companies. Globetrotting Secretary of State John Kerry has assured Mr. Sisi of the US’ continued good will towards Egypt. As an objective and silent partner of Israel, Egypt has helped broker a fragile temporary truce between Israel and Hamas (which the Egyptians perceive as being connected to the Brotherhood and has triggered the Sisi State apparatus’ efforts to cut Hamas’ economic lifeline by the closing of the tunnels). Egypt has thus signaled that it is back in the pro-US camp, at least for now.

In a 2014 poll conducted by Jeune Afrique, less than 10% of all Egyptians expressed a favorable opinion of the US. In the words of the great French statesman Talleyrand, Foreign Minister under Napoleon I, “worse than a crime, it is a mistake” or “one can do everything with 2013, killing an officer and stealing weapons. Television stations have aired footage allegedly showing a wounded policeman being given medical assistance after the attack, surrounded by a crowd. According to defense lawyers, however, no such evidence was presented in court. Few here in Egypt believe the verdict will hold. There is generally little evidence to suggest that attacks on security forces have been led by the Brotherhood; they have been claimed by a group linked to al Qaeda. Regardless of the outcome for the 529 condemned to death, for many the sentences confirm the belief that the Brotherhood is to be shunned, and not to be defended.

4 It is estimated that only about 47 percent of the country’s 54 million eligible voters cast ballots, thus depriving Mr. Sisi of the overwhelming mandate he had counted on as proof of legitimacy after leading a coup and a wave of repression. The turnout was significantly less than the 52 percent who voted when Mr. Morsi became Egypt’s first democratically elected president in 2012.
bayonets, except sitting on top of them”. These warnings still ring true.

The long-term solution: perhaps less religion (or excessive influence of religion) and more humanism? Omar Khayyam’s view (he would probably be killed as a “heretic” by one or the other jihadist groups operating in the region)\(^5\) offers a world-weary and wise solution to look at problems with a sagacious and witty dose of sound skepticism. The road pursued by fanatics, in Winston Churchill’s memorable words people “who do not change their views and do not change the subject” either or, a personal favorite of mine, from Alfred Hitchcock’s 1940 “Foreign Correspondent” people who "combine a mad love of country with a mad indifference for love"; just replace “country” with “religion” and there it is. But, the world has changed since then, and dangers are looming as large as ever to engulf it into conflict unless new courses are chartered by far-sighted statesmen (a rare commodity, alas, these days) from the region and beyond. “I'll see you in New York”, those were Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s parting words reportedly to his US captors in 2004 when he was handed over to the Iraqi government, which subsequently released him.

What I said in an earlier term paper (Religion is not the answer: The Egyptian conundrum, 15 December 2013) remains valid. I am concerned by the “infantilisation” and Disney-isation” of old venerable ideas which belong to the quiet of the academia to avoid their misuse; for religious interpretation should be left in the libraries of religious scholars who devote

\(^5\) The Rubayyat, 2nd edition, quatrains nos. 67 and 68:

Strange, is it not? That of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of darkness through
Not one returns to tell us the road,
Which to discover we must travel too.

and

The revelations of devout and learn'd
Who rose before us, and as prophets burn'd,
Are all but stories, which, awoke from sleep,
They told their fellows, and to sleep return'd.
their lives to the better understanding of what they believe is the word of God. Tolerant inter-religious dialogue and individual freedom of choice of lifestyle and creed should be the norms. Only a strict separation between state and (organized) religion can achieve a modicum of quiet and multi-cultural societies. Given the dearth of lawful democratic free expression, the current political and legal trends in Egypt will not provide the solution.

Religion and non-conformist free-thinking expressions do not mix easily, as will be demonstrated in this dissertation on Egypt. Egypt will need to find this truth through its own search for a national solution. Outside influence if benign can only be recognized as such by politically pacified societies. Islam (or any other great religion) is not in itself incompatible with democracy, provided it accepts (or is compelled to accept through constitutional means) the freedom of choice. Too much religion intermingled with the State and statecraft remains dangerous for democracy and obfuscates the real issues. Anti-Semitism is highest in Arab societies, not surprisingly alas (87% in Algeria, 92% in Tunisia), the result of decades-old wars and lack of democracy and of free-thinking influential, middle-classes.

In his article “Faith-based fanatics”, Timothy Egan⁶ notes that while of 1,723 armed conflicts documented in the 3-volume “Encyclopedia of Wars”, only 123 (less than 7%) involved a religious cause, in 2014, the ancient struggle of My God versus Your God is at the root of dozens of atrocities. Sunnis are killing Shiites in Iraq and Syria, and vice-versa. Also, a worrying statistics, a majority of the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims are peaceful, but a Pew survey found that “40% of Sunnis do not think Shiites are proper Muslims”. The “Enlightenment” experts will need to take a closer look at these untoward facts in the early 21st century.

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CHAPTER I: BEWARE THE BEGINNINGS

In this first chapter, we intend to look at the origins of the current restlessness, which, I would submit to the reader audience, is fed from a collection of wellsprings, including a wide sense of humiliation in Egypt and the Arab world, and thwarted or unsuccessful emulation of Western societies in part due to ongoing resentment of its alleged “arrogance” seen as intending to impose its values on the Arab world. Added to this some wrong turns following the end of colonialism and the toppling of the Egyptian ruling dynasty in the period of the Cold War - when Egypt sided with the Eastern Block, associating itself with anti-Western policies, state-run economies and military oppressive rule - and generally the weight of the past since times immemorial including authoritarian tendencies behind the veneer of cosmopolitanism and an upper class open to outside influence, and minorities and liberal couches of reformist academicians and intellectuals and modernist entrepreneurs, whose fear of Muslim extremism is engineered and played upon by the military security apparatus since Nasser. This “permanent stalemate” in Egypt has to end.

Mark Twain is alleged to have said that history never repeats itself but it rhymes. What happens in Egypt (and other Arab countries) has consequences far beyond their borders; 60% of the Arab population is less than 35 years old i.e. 216 million out of 360 million people (in Egypt, 60% are below the age of 29 and three quarters of the people are less than 40 years). The Arab liberation wars and revolutions failed to generate mutual understanding and modes of peaceful coexistence between ethnic and religious communities, thus laying the foundations for conflict between them. We would be tempted to echo what an old Jewish sage (or perhaps a “holy fool”) is reported to have said while walking up and down the streets of Jerusalem “I have the answer: who has the question(s)?” Where did it all begin and what questions should be asked to get to
“the heart of the matter”?

In our view, the Egyptian (and the broader Arab world) society suffers from what one could call “collective cognitive dissonance” (if applied to whole societies as compared to individuals). Egypt’s history of the recent past is also filled with “missed opportunities”: 1) the legitimacy experienced by leaders of the 20th century (Wafd, Nasser and his successors) left unattended massive political and societal issues, for which viable solutions still need to be found; 2) religion since the dawn of time has always been co-opted by the state in a “Pharaoh’s design”, which is no longer tenable and has bred dissatisfaction, conformism of the thought and “disquiet in society” (not unlike European society before World War I); 3) the youth’s demonstrations on Tahrir Square in 2011 and 2013, as admirable and courageous as they may be, are not like US and European student demonstrations of the 1960s confronting their elders over Vietnam and private and political freedom issues, as they operate in an autocratic and very conservative state and societal ambiance, in which religion is always lurking around the corner (no “libertarians” around this time); 4) the liberals have not convincingly dissociated themselves from the military regime and, conversely, insufficient bridges were spawned between them and the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood affiliates because the gulf between their respective visions of society remains too broad; 6) the absence of strong independent check and balances among non-institutional actors of political parties and civil society in Egypt (in contrast to Tunisia); and 7) the Western nations have not remained equal in what should have been an unequivocal stance towards free elections and peaceful lawful transfers of power in accordance with popular will.

Above it all, 8) an overall looming mindset, which has not yet agreed on the rightful place of

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7 I propose this terminology for the purpose of this paper. In psychology, cognitive dissonance is the excessive mental stress and discomfort experienced by an individual who (1) holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time or (2) is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values. Included, stress and discomfort may also arise within an individual who holds a belief and performs a contradictory action or reaction. When inconsistency (dissonance) is experienced, individuals largely become psychologically distressed.
religion in what should evolve into a modern, open and truly tolerant society.

The current military path is a resolute step backwards borne, we would submit, out of a mixture of fear of one’s own boldness into treading into unknown territory (perhaps a “Planet of the Apes” scenario), well-entrenched interests of the “deep state” of politico-military beneficiaries, a fundamentally conservative risk-averse mentality spurred by Saudi-Arabian moneys and religious Wahhabi influence, and confusion among the educated and young over what should be the way forward. As General de Gaulle once said about one of his ministers (and future French President), Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, “his problem is the people”. Their hearts were not captured – and retained – by the reformists in the absence of a viable socio-economic and political model.

Let us make a short escapade into history in an attempt to explain the above, from the religious angle. Herodotus\(^8\) already noted in 5th century BCE the all-encompassing importance of religion in Pharaoh’s Egypt, and the influence of the priesthood; many of its gods later on found their way into Ancient Greek worship of the gods. But, theirs was not so different from a political standpoint at that time with other peoples in the region: the alliance and at times opposition between the secular and religious powers. In his 2013 masterpiece, Professor Simon Schama\(^9\) noted that, as guise of example throughout the history of the Jewish kingdoms, in the two centuries BCE the Jewish aristocratic-government caste (Sadducees) which favored the Jewish Hasmonean kings was opposed by the purist Pharisees, for whom the only sovereign was the Torah. He argues that the Judaic reversal of assumptions, in contrast to other monotheistic book-faiths which allied word and sword rather than divorced them for most of their recorded history, would turn out to be a uniquely Jewish vision after the destruction of the Jewish political

\(^8\) In The Histories, chapter two. The bibliography at the end of the dissertation contains in particular the references in the footnotes.

\(^9\) The story of the Jews: finding the words 1000 BCE-1492 AD. A second volume is to be published soon.
power between 66-135 AD: Jewish life was Jewish words, and they could and would endure beyond the vicissitudes of power, the loss of land, and the subjection of people. “Paul”, Schama added, "unstated himself”. One could argue that in modern times, when Europe stood at the pinnacle of power between the 18th and 20th centuries, Islam remained the refuge of Egyptian masses, where the flame and spirit of the nation were kept alive when under foreign control.

One could see a parallel between the waning of Western influence and the rise of Islam (or Islamic values). The historic difficulty lies in dissociating domestic political and social reform from accusations by (secular) nationalistic and religious circles of Western “interference”. The West will need to continuing trying to find this very thin margin between “willful neglect” and “not too distant engagement” with all forces across the political divide except violent jihadists. In other words, the democratic societies need to regain their credibility with the peoples of the region, who themselves need to re-think a certain number of their own shortcomings and prejudices.

In his book, Mr. Tignor\(^{10}\) noted that since Napoleon’s short-lived conquest of Egypt (1798-1801), leaders such as Muhammad Ali and Khedive Ismail and later on a succession of Prime Ministers fielded by the Wafd party in the first half of the 20th century had to struggle with the challenges of modernity, which was viewed with suspicion as connected with the overlord behavior of European colonial powers. Egypt fell under British domination in September 1882 following Prime Minister William Gladstone’s decision to protect the Suez Canal and the Empire. Evelyn Baring (Earl of Cromer since 1892), his virtual ruler for the next 25 years (1907), depicted the country as a place of no fixed identity. It was composed of racial, religious and linguistic groups. It held Jews, Copts, Armenians, Syrians, Europeans, etc. and

\(^{10}\) Egypt: a short history, Robert L. Tignor, 2010
would in his view fall apart without (British) supervision\textsuperscript{11}. Most Egyptians were undedicated or illiterate, poor peasant stock and the ruling class needed to be in the hands of a thin veneer of individuals who were of such different backgrounds that political unity could not be achieved through them.

In 1922, Lord Allenby came to Egypt as a special envoy and unilaterally declared Egypt’s independence and the end of the protectorate rule. The ruler of Egypt became a King. The British imposed 4 limitations: protection of foreigners and control over the operations of the Suez Canal, over Sudan and over Egyptian foreign policy. In 1936, the Wafd party signed a peace treaty with the British. It confirmed the 1922 British grant of political independence, but continued to reserve certain powers to the British. They remained: protection of foreigners, and control over the Suez Canal, Sudan and foreign affairs. Egypt obtained 3 concessions: the treaty was valid only for 20 years (1956); the British force was limited to 10,000 men and was to be housed away from major population centers of Egypt in the Suez Canal Zone once a suitable base had been constructed; and Egypt was to become a member of the League of Nations. But these concessions hardly provided the full-fledged independence that nationalist demanded and the Wafd lost much of its legitimacy. A military British presence remained in-country until 1956, and a more radical, politically as well as socially, voice came to the fore: the Nasserite revolution, still unfinished.

The 1919 revolution had led to a new constitution, the proclamation of independence, a new government. It brought with it social and economic changes, in particular the development of a banking and business middle and upper class. Modernity and traditionalism clashed also

\textsuperscript{11} Foreign minorities were only less than 2\% (200,000) and with Copts and Jews added, the total percentage of minorities was less than 10\% of the population. Except the Copts, these minorities left after Nasser’s take-over in 1954. It could be argued that one of the roots of religious extremism came as a result of a “mono-cultural” approach by which the influence of modernizing, partly Westernized and politically secularized (many Egyptian Communists were Jewish) was dramatically curtailed, without allowing freedom of expression to religious (Islamic) currents.
within the privileged classes. Safiya Zaghul, wife of Prime Minister Saad Zaghul (from the Wafd Party), was known as the mother of the Egyptian nation. While a feminist, she was not as radical as Huda Sharawi who stopped wearing the veil, founded the Egyptian feminist union and worked for women’s rights.\footnote{The practice of veiling was known at the time by al hijab (different from today’s head scarf) while unveiling was called al-sufur. By 1923, only 15% of the women wore the burqa, the veil that covered the face from beneath the}

In my view, we see today the late-blossoming effects of the West’s lack of vision and foresight in handling the affairs of the Middle East (and elsewhere), as a result of its damage-control foreign policies following the radical weakening of its civilization in World War I (soon to be followed by an even more calamitous conflict). A deeply wounded civilization, in retrospect, tried to include in its political, cultural and educational system and Weltanschauung the educated, refined but also corrupt elites detached from the everyday life of their own people.

The West did not try, beyond occasional inroads, to radically improve the lives of the ordinary fellahs (peasants), whose well-being was left at the tender mercies of their own landlords. The greatest blunder on the part of the Wafd (largely representative of the urbanized elites, but which enjoyed also the support of the peasantry) and the Liberal Constitutionalist Party (representing the landowning class) was that it advanced the political cause for independence, but did not undertake the large-scale social and educational reforms required to move the country forward onto the path of modernity. It is, as I believe, a question still behind today’s turmoil.

A storm was in the making, and it started as early as 1928, when a young firebrand orator, Hasan al Banna, reared in the Delta but posted as teacher in the Suez Canal region established a new organization (in Ismailia) destined to shape political thinking throughout the Muslim world, namely the Muslim Brotherhood. He asserted that a return to the authentic form
of Islam as practiced in the early centuries of the faith would provide full answer to modern-day problems. Parliamentary governance was a sham imposed by the powerful and wealthy on the poor to keep them in place. Al Bana was murdered in 1949. The list of “martyrs” that followed since then has been in the thousands; it continues to this day, with a Western world cowed into silence in view of its own tragically short-term vision of “stability”.

In the late 20th century radical Islam became the most powerful opposition within the Muslim world and a challenge to the (ever so fragile) “hegemony” of the West. There was a time – and perhaps it will come again – when secular nationalism and reformed Islam had been on the rise at the turn of the 20th century. Muhammad Abduh, Egypt’s most respected religious scholar, made strong efforts to find compatibilities between Western learning and values and traditional Islamic teachings; his voice was not heeded, alas, by his successors. The leading journals were beacons of scientific inquiry and champions of the virtues of Westernization efforts. In 1925, Ali Abd al-Raziq a judge in the Islamic legal system issued a treatise on Islam and the basis of rule which contended that the Caliphate had no basis in the scriptures or law of Islam and was a “plague for Islam and Muslims, a source of evil and corruption.” In his view Muslims did not need to be bound by the political traditions from centuries past. They could innovate with polities close to those in the West. In 1926, Taha Husayn, a brilliant young scholar13, wrote a book on pre-Islamic times and early Islam in Arabia, in which he suggested that some stories of the early times were probably myths. The two thinkers were criticized by conservatives and ended up ostracized as a warning to others who thought “differently”. This conservative and conformist message is well and alive in today’s Egypt …

The Wafd’s closeness with the corrupt royal court led to its demise. Following the

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eyes. Ordinary peasant women had never worn veils working in the fields. The most popular of the veils worn by upper-class women before 1939 was a thin white veil (yismak) which declined in popularity in the 1940s.
overthrow of the monarchy in July 1952 by the Free Officers and after a brief interlude, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the son of a postman, emerged as the absolute ruler of Egypt in 1954, until his death in 1970. Allow me to recapitulate the main aspects of the Nasser era, because they set largely the stage, in my view, of Egypt’s continued search for its own path.

We believe that had Nasser not only been a great social reformer but also abstained from creating the modern police and security state that Egypt is still today, the course charted by the Middle East would be quite different, and the influence of jihadism, made the convenient boogeyman of societal ills and (rightly so) the focus of the West’s greatest fears, would be on the wane. Actually, had the 2013 military coup not occurred, as I will try to show in his essay, chances were that the excessive influence of religion (including the Muslim Brotherhood’s) could have been channeled durably, as it was confronted with the realities of power-brokering and could have been, in the long term the best political and moral tool to combat violent extremists on their own turf.

Be it as it may, Nasser remains the central figure of Egypt’s 20th century history. His charisma, his moral and political influence (including of the rabid anti-Western stance) and his social reforms remain unparalleled; all his successors remain in his shadow. In his book\(^{14}\), Nasser mentioned the need for the “political revolution” (i.e. without King Farouk) to parallel the “social revolution” to root out feudalism, foremost by limiting the ownership of agricultural land (the agrarian reform law of September 1952 limited land ownership to 200 acres) and undertaking large land redistributions. Huge (steal) industries were nationalized with many new factory jobs created. For the first time in Egypt’s history, labor laws were enacted with time limits on working hours and guaranteed minimum wages. Business law and criminal law codes

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\(^{13}\) His autobiography al Ayyam won him great praise as a portrait of a youngster growing up in a traditionalist milieu set up against the modern world.

\(^{14}\) The Philosophy of the Revolution came out in 1959.
were reformed. Working class and rural women received an education to allow them to join the labor force necessary for the heavy industry plants being established across Egypt.

Some statistics are revealing of the societal changes. From academic year 1953-54 through 1965-66, overall public school enrollments more than doubled. Millions of previously poor Egyptians, through education and jobs in the public sector, joined the middle class. Doctors, engineers, teachers, lawyers, journalists, constituted the bulk of the swelling middle class in Egypt under Nasser. At the same time, there was a population explosion, in no small part due to better state health provided services in the Nasserite era, with Egypt’s population rising from 21.5 million (1950) to 48.5 million in 1986 to over 85 million in 2013 (Cairo’s population rose from 1.3 million in 1937 to over 9 million people in 2013). At the time of the fall of the Egyptian monarchy, less than half a million Egyptians were considered upper class and rich, four million middle class and 17 million lower class and poor. Fewer than half of all primary-school-age children attended school, and most of them were boys. Nasser's land reform and distribution, the dramatic growth in university education, and government support to national industries greatly improved social mobility and flattened the social curve.

The discourse of revolution and development and the real course of action did not always match. The revolution remained incomplete in many regards, and did not yield all the results that reformers from across the spectrum of society would have hoped for. Nasser never really touched the tenets of traditional conservative Islam in the crucial part of the legislative reform concerning family law, marriage, dowry, and inheritance - issues which crippled women’s emancipation in particular in the rural areas while allowing them to join the workforce needed for the President’s industrialization projects.

Nasser was not a feminist reformer, as Mustapha Kemal “Ataturk” had been. Nasser did not follow through on the emancipation efforts undertaken since the 1920s by a number of
remarkable Egyptian feminists under difficult conditions when they were denied participation in the practice of national sovereignty in the all-male elections of 1924. Equally, female Arab writers tried boldly to confront issues of personal freedom in the context of social expectations and the constraints of political inertia. Land redistribution remained incomplete, with a sense of drift and uncertainty. It was described as poorly planned, and the initial plots and financial assistance (public or private generated) were deemed to be insufficient to allow for the large-scale development of truly self-sustaining independent farming communities. These incomplete reforms continue to haunt Egypt today. At the time of this writing, estimates are of a population growth to reach 100 million souls by 2030 and to reach a plateau of 115 million by 2065. This entails a need for new space and arable land, with nearly one third of the population living in Cairo (25% alone) and Alexandria. Explosive urban growth had defeated urban planning, with problems aplenty with public water supply.

The human costs of this era, afloat with experimentations of large-scale social engineering, were huge as Nasser forced Egyptian society into monumental changes for which it was ill-prepared. His attempts at building a state socialism central bureaucracy, modeled after the Soviet economy and focused on shifting Egypt's economy from a mainly agricultural society to one dotted with heavy industry plants, led to the uprooting of millions of people from the countryside who began to flood the urban Northern centers and settled in vast slums. It was a gigantic reform effort from top-down aimed at creating a more equalitarian society, an objective not reached so far. The nationalization of huge industries and privatization of small enterprises scared off potential investors and prevented the accumulation of technological know-how. The population was forcibly mobilized with the aim of Egypt reaching a sufficient accumulation of resources and revenues to lay the foundation of the development of a heavy industry sector, with
little consideration for the welfare of the population (Stalinist model)\textsuperscript{15}.

In my view, Nasser’s worst legacy was the establishment of an authoritarian state structure characterized by a bloated, inefficient, intrusive and corrupt bureaucracy, and a huge security apparatus; people across the Arab world (Algeria, Syria and Iraq being much worse cases than Egypt) became accustomed to large-scale bloodlettings and killings by state actors, currently taken over by non-state actors schooled for two generations in increasing brutality. Nasser was not a democrat although the issue of democracy remains an unsolved conundrum in Egypt given the legacy of history (Western colonial powers were all democratic). Under his rule security forces established a brutal dictatorship that used an iron fist to crush all kinds of opposition, in particular focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood and to a lesser extent the Communist Party. In October 1954, when he was Prime Minister under General Neguib, a gunman shot at Nasser as he delivered a speech in Alexandria. He blamed the Brotherhood\textsuperscript{16}, and thousands of its members were rounded up. Six were sentenced to death and seven others were sentenced to life imprisonment. This pattern of brutality continued during his reign up to his death.

Even women members of the Muslim Sisterhood were arrested and tortured. In 1966, Nasser had the ultraconservative Sayyid Qutb executed, converting him into a martyr and cementing the Islamic Brotherhood as a model in the eyes of Islamist extremists.

I would like to mention here Qutb, an otherwise remarkable and brave if controversial and otherworldly impressive figure whose teachings were in the lineage of 14th century logician

\textsuperscript{15} For example, the construction of the Aswan High Dam on the Nile River, while bringing perennial instead of seasonal irrigation to vast areas of the Nile, also brought with it the need for the cultivation of types of crops not traditionally grown there, as well as the forced relocation, often to Northern cities, of an estimated 700,000 Nubian peasants who had lived for millennia north of the Egypt-Sudan border. Many monuments of the Pharaohs were also submerged in the dammed waters.

\textsuperscript{16} We will get back to their surprisingly flexible and adaptive manner of coping with successive repressive waves unleashed against them since the 1950s.
Ibn Tamiyyah\textsuperscript{17}. After a traumatizing visit of the US in 1948, Qutb wrote passionately of the need to take action against the spread of Western influence using violence if necessary and he espoused the fullness and correctness of Islam as practiced in the earliest days by Muhammad and the early faithful. His most important work was written in prison under the shadows of the gallows: Milestones (\textit{Ma’alim fit-al-Tariq}, 1964). An expert on the work said it was the culmination of an enormous literary production, which “has nothing to do with Islamic preaching”. Its message was that the ideologies of capitalism, collectivism and colonialism were bankrupt and godless and that “the turn of the Muslim community has come to fulfill for mankind that which God has enjoined upon it”, but the triumph of Islam would require a vanguard of believers willing to combat the elements that ruled the world and kept it in a state of darkness. Contemporary Muslims needed to look back to the time of the Prophet and the early believers to rediscover the pure Islamic doctrines, that message that was entirely based on the original principles sent by God to the first generation of faithful, not yet adulterated by knowledge derived from Greek, Roman and “Persian” sources.

To understand the ongoing fight between autocratic rule (one-man rule) and (excessive) religiosity – with the crucial question left unanswered so far: is the latter a consequence of the former or did it predate it and made autocracy unavoidable, also in light of the socio-economic structure of a country created by the Nile River going back to Pharaoh’s times thousands of years ago – we need to understand that religious attitudes had increasingly turned conservative, under social pressures and the Gulf Arab States’ religious and financial influence following Anouar al-Sadat’s\textsuperscript{18} opening (\textit{infitah}) to attract private capitals from there.

\textsuperscript{17} No coincidence if he taught a rigid interpretation of “pure Islam” after the destruction of the House of Wisdom (\textit{Dar al Hikma}) and the end of the Abbasid Dynasty in the destruction of Baghdad in 1258 by Khan Hulagu’s Mongols.

\textsuperscript{18} Sadat was murdered on 6 October 1981 during a military parade commemorating the October 1973 war with Israel by Lieutenant Khaled Islamouli (an Islamic Jihad member and head of a Muslim Brotherhood cell who had avoided detection). There are still conspiracy theories about the involvement of members of the military hierarchy.
Since the 1970s, there has been a revival of religious piety. Attendance at Friday prayers has increased significantly. Devout Muslim men take pride in the black spot that forms on their foreheads (zabib-raisin) from repeatedly prostrating themselves in prayer. The widespread use of the hijab (head scarf) is a shift in women’s dress and a political statement compared to the 1920s and 30s, when educated women began to discard the veil and moving out of the homes into public spaces with more freedom than before. Since the 1960s the same fragment of wealthy society began to adopt the hijab, partly to stress their religiosity and distinctiveness from Western women, due to a desire to establish separate identities and a disappointment over Westernized ways of life. Extremists carried out a series of horrible attacks on moderates (the liberal Egyptian intellectual Faraq Fuda was killed and the 1988 Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz injured) and on tourists (58 of them with their four Egyptian guides were murdered in Luxor in 1997) and on Copts in Upper Egypt. In a more insidious manner, there has been an increase in the limitations of freedom of thought, often a result of auto-censure due to the influence of clerics or conservative intellectuals.

At this juncture before concluding this chapter, it would be interesting to engage in a preliminary conversation on how modern Islam could be used to foster democratic mores. What follows does not change my view that Egyptian society needs to find a way to circumscribe the influence of religion in the state, by adopting a constitutional text with genuine democratic inspirations and laying the basis for deep societal changes to foster the development of a

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19 They demanded the ban of the reading and circulation of the great French Arabist Maxime Robinson’s biography of the Prophet Muhammad (1971), and succeeded. Recently in the 2000s, as reported by Al-Aswany (see footnote 17), a group of lawyers filed a lawsuit in favor of confiscating the book A Thousand and One Nights on the grounds that it contains obscenities. There are similar classics most of which contain graphic details of relations between men and women such as Kitab al-Aghani (The Book of Songs) by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, Kitab al-Imta wa-l-Muanasa (the Book of Enjoyment and Conviviality) by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi and others. Even al-Jahiz (781-869 CE) the undisputed master of Arabic prose wrote a famous epistle debate between owners of concubines and owners of ephebes in which a man who likes young boys has a discussion with a man who likes women. The work contains some obscenities but remains a beautiful literary text. In 2014, the same conservative circles who support President Sisi demanded, and seemed to have obtained, the ban of the showing of the film “Noah” deemed un-Islamic.
participatory, egalitarian and dynamic middle class, unbridled from stifling bureaucracy and clericalism, open to the world at large and not ensconced in nationalistic myths of yesterday’s yesterday.

While opposition to President Mubarak’s increasingly one-man rule and a fifth term (or taking over by his son Gamal) began to gain steam in the early 2000s with the establishment of the populist movement Movement for Change known by its nickname Kifaya (Enough), which brought together a host of disparate elements (Islamists, New Wafd members, labor supporters, Nasserists, the Ghad or Tomorrow party led by Ayman Nour and the Socialist (or Tagammu) party), fundamental societal questions remained open, centered around the issue of the head scarf (rejected by many secularists and defended by Islamists). This question, one could hope, should recede in importance from other much more salient ones in relation to building a modern society.

In this regard, I am less convinced – but ready to be corrected on this account - with the argumentation put forward by best-selling author and political commentator Alaa Al-Aswany, who says in his book20 that “true Islam is democracy”: one could contradict his relatively modernist view by asking the question of what is “true Islam”; and there would be many different answers, not all of a forward-looking nature (the same applies to “true Judaism” and “true Christianity” - see the support of the Coptic Church behind the military coup). However, his case is well presented. In his view, democratic experience began in Egypt earlier than in many European countries when in 1866 Khedive Ismail set up the first advisory council of representatives, which gained genuine authority. Egypt has more than 40 million educated people.

As for the Muslim brotherhood, they are Egyptian citizens who have the right to win elections and take part in government as long as they respect the rules of democracy. In the

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author’s view, which I share on this account, democratic reform will eliminate religious extremism, whereas in autocratic countries, even if extremist movements are repressed and crushed, the causes of extremism will remain latent below the surface waiting to re-emerge with a vengeance. The military regime ‘legitimized’ by rigged presidential elections earlier this year (others to follow) is in a race against time to deliver results, a race which I believe it will lose.

Mr. Al-Aswany puts forward other potent arguments. The gate of itjihad, or individual judgment in matters of Islamic law was closed long time ago and most experts now do no more than recapitulate legal opinions pronounced 1000 years ago. In Egypt there are many famous sheikhs who deal on all form of media with private matters such as marriage and divorce. For them religion has nothing to do with public affairs and they do not talk about democracy. Religion begins and ends with modesty for women, moral virtues, and performing religious obligations, and they do not discuss political rights and public freedoms. Sins in the Qur'an are divided in minor and major sins, the latter deserving punishment by God in this life and the afterlife. Bearing false witness is one of the gravest sins and the Holy Book advises strongly against it. Rigging elections is worse as bearing false witness deprives an individual or a family of their due while rigging elections deprives a whole nation of its due. Rigged elections do not lead to genuinely elected leaders, but to in fact “self-appointed” leaders through fake elections.

I disagree here with Mr. Al-Aswany. The fact that preachers have nothing to say when fundamental public and private freedoms are trampled upon, to wit - freedom of peaceful assembly; freedom of speech within the bounds of civility and excluding hate speech; freedom of traveling; freedom of religion and right to exercise it within the confines of the law; freedom from arbitrary arrest and right for habeas corpus; independence of the judiciary from interference by the executive – is in itself a highly political act. It demonstrates that as long as the privileges of the clergy and the outer trappings of religious procedural piety takes precedence over what
should be safeguarding an ethical concept that preaches the sanctity of life within the confines of a civilized body politic abiding by the rule of law for all (irrespective of gender, religion, nationality, origin, political opinion peacefully expressed), there can be no democracy within a broader religious entrapment. Its purpose is merely to serve the powerful in an everlasting status quo and provides the most idealistic but misguided clerics or “reactionary rebels” with vehicles of destruction, which if not countered with the opening of political space in a given society, will fan the flames of insurrection, without addressing, I fear, the deeply entrenched privileges of the beneficiaries of the “deep state”.

This last step, Mr. Al-Aswany and many other liberal thinkers, have not taken, namely to fully separate the religious (private sphere) from the secular (public sphere) in the makings of modern democracy, open to all its nationals. The fact that the Prophet Muhammad did not choose a successor because he wanted Muslims to be free to choose their ruler and that the first four Caliphs (Commanders of the Faithful) were chosen by the people) is admirable, but happened 1,400 years ago. While I bow to the wisdom of the first ruler in Islam, Abu Bakr, who when taking office said in an epoch-making sermon:" I have been given the authority over you, and I am not the best of you. If I do well, help me; and if I do wrong, set me right … obey me as soon as I obey God and his Messenger. But if I disobey God and his messenger, you owe me no obedience", this unwritten Constitution binding ruler and ruled at the beginnings of a new world religion set in an austere desert Bedouin setting did not last. It could not because of the administrative and political new realities stemming from the lighting Muslim conquests, which required an elaborate bureaucracy, a standing army and a distant ruler governing diverse and restive populations with an iron fist; that is how the Omayyad dynasty was overthrown by the more pitiless Abbasids themselves to succumb to other leaders.

The Qu’ran (as Holy Books of other great religions) may be a solace and provide a
prevalent source of deep philosophical and spiritual well-being and satisfaction, but liberty and freedom in complex societies facing the ever-growing challenges of modernity need to also embrace alternative options which do not contradict in essence the religious tenets. Open-minded interpretation of religion requires a democratic mindset, not the other way round. In another passage of his book, Al-Aswany agrees that Muslims “in their deficient understanding of Islam are the victims of two types of cleric: the Government's clerics and the Wahhabi (Salafist) clerics” who either select from Islam what supports the wishes of the ruler however corrupt or repressive he may be or distract them with everything that is secondary in religion. Freedoms are inseparable, in particular freedom of creativity. Where there are no such freedoms, there cannot be, in my view, democracy which is not to be equaled with “rule of the majority” but requires stern defense of the rule of law, equality of all before the law and the protection of minorities.

This requires education propitious to secular and inquisitive thinking, which cannot be dissociated from the larger political freedoms, as enjoyed in Western societies, as otherwise maligned they may be in some quarters. It is not what is happening under our nose and our culpable silence in the “new Egypt.” The West, and other democracies, for the illusion of stability, short-lived as it may be, will pay a stiff price in terms of reduced long-term influence in the region, violence directed against minorities and its own citizenry and generally the loss of the panache of “democracy”, a word hollowed out by the successive betrayals of decision-makers and other political pundits for the sake of siding with the powerful of the moment. The “moderate Islamists” whatever their lacuna and second thoughts on inclusivity may be, should not be hounded down without the alarm bells going off in the diplomatic chancelleries. In his heart wrenching article smuggled out of the prison in which he has been languishing in extra-legal detention. Mr. Khaled al-Quazzaz21 rightfully asked the question: “Why is the world silent: disappeared by Egypt’s military? New York Times, 27 June 2014.

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silent?” (except Human Rights Watch) as he has spent a year in prison, mostly in solitary confinement after being “the Foreign Relations Secretary to Egypt’s first democratically elected President, Mohamed Morsi, in July 2012”. Presenting himself as an open individual who represents “a generation that crossed borders, that lives in a truly global community” and who lived in diverse societies and sees “more common ground than disagreement with other faiths and cultures” while viewing Canada as a model of tolerance and multiculturalism. He appeals to his "brothers and sisters in humanity”. His appeal should not go unheeded, for the sake and future of the idea of “democracy” in its truest meaning. In early March 2014, Saudi Arabia, a widely acknowledged model of democratic virtue (…), placed the Muslim Brotherhood on its own list of terrorist organizations, with a sweeping ban that imposes lengthy prison sentences for even expressing sympathy for them. Mr. Abdel Moneim Abol Fotouh, one of the few Islamists left in public life after the military crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood and who had come out as fourth strongest candidate in the 2012 presidential elections, accused the army-backed authorities of creating a “Republic of fear”.

An influential columnist of the New York Times, Roger Cohen, had earlier expressed his dismay when he noted that in Davos, Secretary of State John Kerry had nothing to say about Egypt, despite the reversals suffered after the advances of Tahrir Square three years ago. Mr. Kerry was silent about a nation that is a United States ally, the recipient of about $1.3 billion a year in military aid (some suspended), and “the symbol today of the trashing of American hopes for a more inclusive, tolerant and democratic order in the Middle East”. Mr. Cohen noted that the new Constitution won the approval in January of 98.1 percent of voters, a back-to-the-future number reminiscent of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. In fact this was 98.1 percent of the mere “38.6 percent” (or less) of Egyptians who voted. In his view, Egypt is the most vivid illustration of the

American disengagement Mr. Kerry sought to rebut and it has sent a message of its retreat.

Another famous New York Times columnist, Thomas Friedman, drew attention to why so far the revolution initiated at Tahrir Square failed, a view which I broadly share. He thinks that the failure of the protesters to translate their aspirations into parties that could contest elections and then govern was their Achilles' heel.

In contrast to Egypt, Tunisia is the Arab country that had "the most robust civil society institutions - especially a powerful labor union federation, as well as business, human rights and lawyers associations - that could arbitrate between the secular and religious factions". This raises, however, another question, in my view. There are (or were) strong civil society structures dominated by pro-Muslim Brotherhood supporters since the 1980s in Egypt, but a lack of such structures with deep popular or middle-class roots among the secular supporters, probably deemed too close to the ruling elite. This is another reason why the secular parties need to shelve their fear of popular religious (excessive) sentiment and succeed in establishing a different credible narrative, neither pro-governmental nor too close to espouse religious views. It should try to forge ahead on a different approach so as to break the vicious circle in Egypt, which does not allow for political space for a third voice, once occupied by populist Nasserist and secular nationalist parties but left with little democratic credentials. Initial efforts were conducted by youth group organizers, but the roots have to go deeper to stimulate the “silent majority” of Egyptian people, so far it seems undecided and rather willing to follow the course charted by the military leadership.

Mr. Friedman also noted that unlike Egypt, Tunisia did not have a politicized military with deep roots in the economy that had incentives to meddle in the political arena. He wishes - a

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24 For example in his article The Square People, part 2, New York Times, 17 May 2014.
statement I endorse - that the Muslim Brotherhood could/should have been voted out of office. The old “strongman” paradigm applied again when the Army decided to arrest decent, non-violent civil society youth leaders (Ahmed Maher) for their protests and eliminated the Brotherhood from Egyptian political life. Perhaps The Economist\textsuperscript{26} got it right when it drew attention to the fact that while an influx of money from Arab Gulf counties keen to support Egypt’s new regime has led to cautious improvement in investor sentiment, its earlier growth rates from 2004 to 2011 were driven by real estate rather than productive economy and while Egypt needs to spend more on education, health and research, a goal enshrined in the new Constitution, much is eaten up by subsidies, a sprawling bureaucracy and payments on debt.

The real issue is that Egypt’s private sector remains dominated by big conglomerates and the army has reclaimed its prominent role in the economy, which leaves the impression of a return of a model of “paternalistic benevolent” state influence in the economy (unlike Turkey which has developed an innovative private sector).

The overall impression of “it’s the economy, stupid” implies that Egypt will need to implement modern policies and go beyond the “Pharaonic times”. However, I would submit, this would require a major change in mentalities, with unavoidably political consequences (such as calling on all stakeholders, including the Muslim Brotherhood) to unite behind a modernist project of innovation and reduction of bureaucratic red tape, another legacy of the Nasser era.

\textsuperscript{26} Pharaonic frailties, Cairo: A new regime attempts to foster growth, 19 July 2014.
CHAPTER II: “ISLAM ONLY“ AS THE NON-SOLUTION TO BROADER POLITICAL AND SOCIETAL ISSUES: RESISTING “UNANIMOUS GOOD FEELING” AND “SQUARING THE CIRCLE” RESPONSES

In a second chapter, I would like to understand why “Islam is the solution” in so many quarters (not necessarily exclusively religious). The majesty of the religion and its feelings can be overwhelming and give sense to lives otherwise unfulfilled and dreary. However, genuine “democratization” through religion seems to me a dangerous fallacy, playing out on a daily basis. Indeed, excessive influence of religion in the public domain (as compared to private worship) apparently subverts open-minded, tolerant democratic institutions with the “obsession” of moral and political supremacy. While on the surface “democratic” in the sense of a majority of the population adhering to religious instructions, it does not foster the rule of law required to establish open and tolerant societies. It is in essence anti-democratic from a philosophical and institutional viewpoint.

Like in World War I-type situations, the older leaders are tempted to use for their own ends the “excessive enthusiasm” of the faithful, financed by the oil wealth of patrons from the Gulf States to push for unanimity and strength of the Umma, though misguided means. Also, for many youth, the excess of religious feelings may also have been a way to overcome the generational gap by living their religion rather than succumbing to the charms of communist atheism or Western decadent materialism. Is this not leading to a “pseudo-revolution”, in fact a clerical-led “counter-revolution”, although many youth activists are not operating from a religious vantage point but are nevertheless instrumentalized by religious forces (see Iran)? These developments have led to stalemate, with the forces of Islamism pitted against those of a (secular) security apparatus, both of them looking resolutely backwards.
An unhealthy obsession with the West that seems to have opted for an increasingly light footprint in the region, while leaving behind more complex puzzles than safeguards: (1) a strong Israel that should extricate itself from a morally, economically and financially ruinous occupation which distracts it from the real issues at hand and strengthens similar “messianic” tendencies in a modern democracy, which should focus on (discreetly) helping its neighbors build democratic state institutions based on appropriately adapted mentalities; and (2) maintaining a finely-tuned balance of power between Sunni and Shia Muslim-led regional countries. We will revert to this question in Chapter III.

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power has a long tortuous history and cannot be dissociated from the larger political and societal turmoil, which intensified in the 1980s. It was a “preordained event” of sorts, in retrospect unavoidable.

In her book “Making Islam democratic: social movements and the post-Islamist turn”, Asef Bayat noted the deadly confrontations between Islamists and security forces in the 1990s and the extremist Jama'a reaffirmed in March 1999 its decision to renounce anti-government violence once and for all. By the early 1990s, the number of ahlis (private mosques), the author noted, numbered some 40,000, i.e. over a 100% increase since the mid-1970s; in contrast the number of government-controlled mosques had only grown by 40%. Between 1975 and 1990, the number of Islamic associations also grew by over 100% to more than 4,000. The production and sale of Islamic books, pamphlets and religious cassettes flourished. In 1994, more than 25% of all books published were religious, a 25% increase since the mid-1980s. Islamic books constituted 85% of those sold at the Cairo Book Fair in 1985. Recordings of Islamic figures such as those of Sheikh Kishk sold in the millions. Dozens of Islamic newspapers, weeklies, and

monthlies were in high circulation. Radio Qu'ran devoted entirely to religious matters maintained its highest ratings during that period. In contrast the number of movie-goers and domestically produced films dwindled. Self-censorship emerged in the production of television programs in response to popular pressure on the state, and religious programming increased by 50% between 1975 and 1990. Islamic sentiment was particularly evident in a marked decline of alcohol consumption and patronage of bars, liquor stores and nightclubs for Egyptians.

Egypt’s government promised all university graduates a job. The average waiting list is still three years, even with a college degree. Jobs were often menial. More than 70% of Egyptians in 2011 (60% in 2009-2010) between the ages of 15-29 said the government was unsuccessful in tapping human potential: providing jobs, helping new entrepreneurs and generating a sense of opportunity and respect for the young. In North Africa the jobless had a name: they were leaning against the wall (hittistes). Social media and technology offered a new means of communicating and mobilizing beyond the state’s iron-fist control. Facebook launched in 2004 revolutionized communications in the Arab world. So did You Tube created in 2005. And cell phones - 60 million alone in Egypt - made texting a critical tool in communicating and mobilizing protests. It took only 18 days to oust President Mubarak and the army helped do it as they realized that the country could not afford losing all its tourists, the spread of strikes and a complete paralysis.

What does this tell us? Was the state instrumental in promoting a religious strain which it thought was less dangerous or alien to society than Marxist or societally reformist views and more easily controllable through the clerical establishment? The Mubarak regime claimed that all laws were based on Shari'a; the notion of a hitherto secular state weakened over time. Islamic activism after the 1970s penetrated a variety of civil institutions, mass media, formal education, and community social services. By the late 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood had control over
Egypt’s major professional unions: doctors, engineers, pharmacists, lawyers, dentists, commerce, college professors and students. The 4,000 Islamic non-governmental organizations were more active than the 9,000 secular ones because they were better financed, managed and functioning. During the early 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood created Islamic investment companies, which with returns as high as 20% were able to subsidize low-income groups (until a government clampdown shut them).

In addition to civil activism, the Islamic Coalition of the allied Brotherhood and the Labor Party made considerable headway in local and national elections in Parliament from 12 (1984) to 78 (1987). Support for the Brotherhood came from diverse groups: business community, lower classes, young and old, men and women. Lower middle-class youth became the newest players in radical Islamism. To remedy corruption and cronyism in the legal profession and the bar association, the Islamist-oriented lawyers in the bar association established Sharia committees as venues for professional and political activities.

By 1992, the lawyers supporting the Muslim Brotherhood led by Ahmad Sayif al-Islam Hasan al-Banna (son of Hasan al-Bannah) had taken control of the syndicate, turning it into an "Islamic association whose members abide by Sharia and fear of God in their activities." Thus political Islam in Egypt during this period reflected the rebellion of the impoverished and morally outraged middle class, who were the wayward children of President Sadat’s privatization reforms. Their higher education fueled higher expectations of a job market that offered few prospects for economic success. Law schools, once the destination of bright children of old liberal elites, swelled with the mediocre-educated and often conservative children of lower-class families. Many law professors, in search of better pay, flocked to the rich Gulf States.

At this time, a new generation of conservative lawyers came to the fore for whom fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) became the central authority. Islamism represented an ideological
package that negated all the perceived causes of a perceived state of deprivation: economic
dependency, cultural selling-out and national humiliation (embodied in the 1967 defeat to the
Israelis and the Camp David Accords of 1978/79). They saw Islam as the only indigenous
doctrine that could bring about genuine change: they were the spiritual children of Nasser’s ultra-
nationalism. The secular intelligentsia accepted an Islamic framework and attempted to find a
compromise between Islam and modernity. The infusion of Islamic symbols in everyday life
helped produce a somewhat "secularized" religion. Egyptian Islamic private school became yet
another institution of both dissent and integration. In addition to providing a decent education
(ta'lim), which it was believed could not be obtained from the "morally misguided" national
education system private schools socialized pupils according to morality and the values of Islam
(tarbiyya). Egypt by the early 1990s experienced what some authors thought was a strong
Islamic movement without an Islamic revolution, in contrast to Iran.

The subtext of all the above is that Egyptian society, in the throes of modernity and its
travails, demographic and sociological state-engineered sea-change, looked for time-honored
traditions as anchors of stability. While the state was able for a while to co-opt, repress or control
these Islamic revivalist movements, it could only halt not subdue these trends. Just to give you an
idea of the vagaries of the state to handle the opening of political space, the book co-authored by
Professors Marina Ottaway ad Amr Hamzawy gives precious insights28. The Brotherhood

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28 Getting to pluralism: political actors in the Arab world, Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2009. For instance, a
first constitutional reform was implemented before the 2005 presidential elections in Egypt. The new article
provided for direct, universal suffrage election of the president, replacing the old system in which the parliament
chose the president and the populace confirmed the choice in a referendum. Though ostensibly more democratic, the
new constitutional provision introduced many restrictions on presidential candidates to guarantee that no viable
opposition personality would be able to challenge the incumbent or his designated successor in the foreseeable
future. A new series of constitutional amendments was approved by the parliament in early 2007 and
overwhelmingly approved in a referendum for which voter turnout was probably well under 5% (the official number
was at 25%). Presented as democratic reforms, the 34 constitutional amendments gave the president the power to
disband the parliament, removed elections from the judicial supervision that had prevented complete manipulation
by the government, gave the president wide discretion to move trips to military courts, and barred any party with a
religious orientation from registering.
adapted to the changing landscape\textsuperscript{29}, which makes it a formidable opposition party, but not (yet) a convincing ruling party, hence its current travails. It was seen as seeking power and trying to keep it, replicating the modus operandi of the erstwhile rulers, instead of focusing on needed reforms.

In a recent important study\textsuperscript{30}, the author came to the conclusion that the Islamists’ electoral successes in 2012 in Egypt and Tunisia were in part due to superior mobilization capacity and the related fragmentation or disorganization of secular opposition parties. A vote for an Islamist opposition party was also seen as the most efficient way to cast a vote against the regime in power and a vote against corruption or authoritarianism. The electorate voted “strategically” like in other parts of the world, meaning in my view that most people remain perfectly capable of rational choices, including if voting along preferably religious criteria should not be under-estimated for a huge segment of the electorate. Some very interesting data drawn from the Arab Barometer survey came to the fore as far as Egypt was concerned. The Egyptian parliamentary elections held between November 2011 and mid-January 2012 were won by the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood (\textit{Hurriya wa al Adala}, founded in May 2011), with about 38 percent of the votes as part of an Islamist coalition, with a

\textsuperscript{29} The decision to participate in a specific election involves tactical considerations. The Brotherhood being banned has decided to either run its own candidates as independents or negotiate with other political parties to run its candidates under their banner. The party participated in the 1984 elections in alliance with the liberal \textit{Wafd} party, winning 6 seats. In 1987 it formed an alliance with the Labor party, and 37 of its members were elected to parliament. The government responded with additional restrictive legal measures and as a result in 1990 the Muslim Brotherhood boycotted the elections alongside other opposition parties. In 1995, the Brotherhood again changed tactics and fielded independent candidates. Although the government cracked down on the movement, one Brotherhood member was elected to parliament. In 2000, the Muslim Brotherhood participated again and 17 of its members (running as independents) were elected. In 2005, it made an all-out effort and scored a major victory when its independent candidates won 88 seats (20\%) in the Egyptian people's assembly, becoming the largest opposition bloc in 50 years. But in the 2007 elections for the \textit{Shura} council (Upper Chamber of Parliament), in which the Brotherhood participated, a fearful government prevented its candidates from winning any seat. In the 2008 municipal elections, the government refused to register almost all Muslim Brotherhood candidates and arrested many. This caused the movement to boycott the elections at the last moment. It limited the number of its candidates in the 2005 parliamentary elections and ran independent candidates in only 144 of the 444 districts. In the \textit{Shura} council elections, the Brotherhood competed but fielded only 19 candidates for 88 seats.
significant gap between the proportion of Egyptians who had a positive view toward the party and the proportion of those who supported an Islamist agenda.

Some lessons were drawn from the post-Arab Spring experience regarding Egypt in particular. With respect to Islam, the electoral victories of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party did not provide evidence that most ordinary citizens want to be governed by a political system in which religion exercises significant influence. The party came to power (and lost it subsequently) by votes not only cast in its favor by a core constituency but also by a large number of ordinary citizens who apparently had little or no sympathy for an Islamist political agenda. The Freedom and Justice Party was led by Mohammad Morsi who became Egypt's first democratically elected leader, winning 52% of the vote in 2012.

The already difficult economic situation had continued to deteriorate and there was growing unhappiness with some of the Islamist-oriented policies and appointments and charges that the government was giving support to, or at least tolerating, more extreme Islamist elements. Although supporters argued that economic and many other problems were the result of efforts by the former regime to subvert a transition that threatened their privileges, popular disappointment and discontent became increasingly intense and widespread. Claiming a popular mandate to intervene, the army removed and arrested President Morsi. These developments suggest that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (and the Ennahda (Renaissance) Party in Tunisia) had lost the support of perhaps most of their strategic supporters (who had voted for them in spite of their Islamist credentials and commitments out of disillusion over the Mubarak regime). Also, the percentage agreeing strongly or agreeing that religious leaders should have influence over government decisions declined substantially, from 37 percent to 20 percent during the nearly 20

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30 Arab attitudes towards political Islam after the Arab Spring: The impact of political transitions experienced in Tunisia and Egypt and observed in other Arab countries, by Mark Tessler, Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan, prepared for the Conflict and Prevention Forum, April 2014.
months between the 2011 and 2013 surveys and, in my view, would have declined further if the Morsi government had not been ousted by what amounted to a military coup. The percentage of core constituencies for political Islam remains at probably 20% to 25% in Egypt. In contrast to them, polling experts believed that there were growing numbers of those who believed that Islam should play an important role in personal life but be kept apart from the affairs of government.

In my view, this study is a showcase for allowing Muslim-majority societies to find, slowly, painfully but steadily, their way out of a mindset built around the prevalence of one mode of authorized thought. I call it the democratic awakening moment which has, alas, been thwarted for now. This study may show the way for policy-makers intent on finding suitable bridges between religious observance and democratic advances in deeply polarized societies.

How come that the Muslim Brotherhood, before making grievous mistakes when at the helm of the nation, was so resilient and was (and is, I would argue) so deeply entrenched in the fabric of Egyptian society? I can point to a few reasons, among them: the Muslim Brotherhood worked at the grassroots level; they were seen as more socially responsive to the needs of the population, including of spiritual nature; they had to survive harsh repressive measures etc. But perhaps over it all hoovers the thought that somehow they represented the nation’s “dignity” when under direct or indirect foreign rule (the Western-imposed “immoral” models which were at times “aped” by the ruling class) and that made them so dangerous to Nasser and the rulers of modern Egypt: they represented a credible alternative to a secular nationalistic discourse and if given the opportunity to vote the electorate may well have chosen them as their legitimate leaders. They could be seen by many as the true “heirs of Nasser”, at least until 2012. It was because the mystique of the “unselfish” Muslim Brotherhood was partly destroyed by its own leadership in 2012/13 that the opposition to the military coup was not immediately palpable. This may change again, depending on the way the new military leadership will rule the country. I will
not hold my breath about the outcome, sooner or later the Brotherhood will re-emerge but it remains to be seen whether they would have been chastised towards more inclusivity (and not have an exclusivity claim about “Egypt being the Brotherhood”) or hardened and more intolerant. The bets are still out.

Interestingly, feelings about the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*) were ambiguous among the youth before their downfall from power in July 2013. They were respected for their fortitude and success, but opposition to them was prevalent among many youth interviewed, as expressed by secularists, Salafists and non-Brotherhood Islamists. They thought they lacked “innovation, value systems, of thinking out of the box, having space to be creative" or simply because they were now “the system” and part of the “elite circulation” in a pre-revolutionary mode mimicking the Mubarak regime that they apparently succeeded. This demonstrates that the Brotherhood was never really able to integrate the fact that they were now at the helm of leadership and should have heeded the calls for reform of the “deep state”. They did not, and out of fear or paranoia, started to fill key positions with their own supporters, thus paving the way for their overthrow by the “masses” aided and abetted by the ever so helpful military and the more secular former regime opponents. The ambiguity did not pay off, as the Brotherhood created disillusion among its young supporters without creating buy-in from the old Mubarak cronies and security forces who had the most to lose if the Morsi regime had succeeded in its reform efforts.

The organization had been barred from legal participation in politics with the exception of the period from January 2011 to September 2013. However, by Mubarak's period, the Brotherhood had developed an extensive political base and acquired political capital based on social legitimacy.
It was tolerated by Mubarak, which allowed the Brotherhood to take part in elections and political life extra-legally in order to bolster its own legitimacy. Youth distrust of the Brotherhood is based on the Mubarak era chapter of their history. It was deepened by the Brotherhood's initial hesitation to participate in the revolution and its interactions with the military after the revolution. Morsi's government was not seen by youth to be confronting the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf) and the military but rather to make deals with it. Morsi did replace the head of the Scaf but he did not make any observable attempts to dilute the power of the military. The military trials of 12,000 protesters who had been detained during the protests against Mubarak in 2011 were allowed to continue. All youths interviewed were against the trials. Many political parties were cautious in joining the Revolution; most have not pressed for action against the military and yet have not been as tarnished by it as the Brotherhood.

There was also distrust by the youth against the Ikhwan’s slogan "Egypt is the Brotherhood and the Brotherhood is Egypt". The idea that the Brotherhood could recreate Egypt in its own image is a powerful one that has been in currency since Nasser. It continues to be promoted by the military, which positions itself as the guardian of Egypt's sovereignty against the threat of a Brotherhood takeover (the same discourse is adopted by autocrats all over the Arab world, from Syria … to Saudi Arabia). Most youth interviewed in the period from mid-to late 2012 including the severest critics of the Brotherhood were however unified in viewing Morsi as the legitimate president.

It is interesting to see from these youth polls that while some of them may be attracted to extreme views, the majority is against a “system” in which Morsi became the lightning rod for dissatisfaction with the Muslim Brotherhood but also with its failure to deliver an improved standard of living. Let us not be too wide-open eyed. A huge percentage of the Egyptian youth...
The electorate has Islamist or ultra-Islamist tendencies, including among the youth; it is by and large seen as one of the most conservative societies (but not the most violent-prone) in the Middle East. For instance, the ultraconservative Salafi Nour Party won 30% of the seats in Parliament in 2012, representing a constituency on the far right of the Brotherhood. They campaigned for the most conservative causes in the constitution and favor the institution of sharia law. They also supported the military-led ouster of President Morsi in July 2013. There could be a number of reasons for this support in my view such as: of opportunistic nature – let the military destroy its most important competitor and meanwhile await the hour when the military will be discredited to rise up; of ideological nature – they are in the same camp as the military with a very dim view of any attempts to democratize and open up society towards more personal freedoms; or just because they don’t seem themselves as part of any system not fully governed by God’s law. By all accounts, this party has kept its credibility, including with the youth.

Egypt's polarization has been couched in terms of an identity crisis. However, one theory suggests that the reported "identity crisis" is not a function of the struggle between Islamists and secularists, but rather is a mainly classical politically-driven issue centered in particular on the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian politics and society.

Other Islamic entities such as the al-Azhar clerical establishment and the Salafists remain acceptable to both the military and the public. Al-Azhar was co-opted by President Nasser, following which its clerics have continued to bow the state line. The Salafists were tolerated by Mubarak who did not see Salafi preachers as a threat, unlike the organized Muslim Brotherhood. I do not fully subscribe to this viewpoint, as I believe that the religious Weltanschauung is at the

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Institute, 2013.

32 There are many polls on the topic, sometimes conflicted. A 2011 Gallup poll indicated that only 9% of Egyptians favored a separation of “church” and state, and 14% were in favor of theocratic rule. The great majority, at 69%, described themselves as agnostic about the idea of religion in politics.” Other polls were less clear on this dividing line.
core of the crisis, and that the difficulty for Islamists making comprises out of realism could be quickly construed by their many foes as abandoning ideological purity for short-lived political gains.

At the end of the day the enmeshment of politics and religion at this stage makes separation between the two a quasi-impossible proposition, unless carried out by statesmen with profound understanding of their societies and the necessary credibility to carry out key reforms for societal modernization. President Morsi did not emerge as a statesman of that caliber; he was not able to purge the “culture of censorship” in the media and rein in police brutality and military influence. "Mubarak is gone, but Mubarakism will take much longer to go" was the expression often heard in Cairo after the revolution. The "deep state" or *feloul* remained. In my view, this is just a temporary setback for the Islamists; one way or the other, the Muslim Brotherhood will find its way back to power, under other denominations.

I hope the Muslim Brotherhood will draw the right lessons for a chastised and wiser way of governing, able to allay the fears of minorities and secular parties alike. There should be no misunderstanding: the secular parties, including the West’s “darlings” have so far failed to gain the hearts and minds of the overwhelming part of society. For example, the *Dustour*

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33 The secular parties have always moved between adhesion to military rule out of fear of Islamists and stated acceptance of democratic principles. They were and remain in essence elitist parties. Not one of these “secular” parties accepts the term, fearing it implies a rejection of Islamic culture and values which they in fact accept. It is true that these parties are not militantly secular a la Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, or ideologically committed to a French-style laïcité. They simply do not embrace a political platform inspired by religious ideals. The multiparty system expanded gradually. By 2006, it included more than 20 legal parties, most of which can be classified as secular. The multiparty system had 2 serious defects. First, it was the transformation of the former single party into a new hegemonic party headed by the president. Secondly was the plethora of legal and political restrictions (many parties' requests for legalization denied, no free campaigning, outright repression and manipulation…) imposed by the government to limit the role of leftist and liberal opposition parties. Although Egyptian party laws banned only religious parties - a ban that was enshrined in the Constitution in 2007 - even secular political parties encounter severe restrictions when they sought to register as legal parties. When President Sadat reintroduced limited pluralism in 1976, he deliberately promoted the formation of liberal and leftist parties, placing his own National Democratic Party (NDP) in the center. In 2009 only four opposition parties were represented in the People's Assembly (Lower House of Parliament). Typically two were liberal - the new *al-Wafd* (Delegation) party and the *al-Ghad* (Tomorrow) party and two leftist parties: *al-Tajamu* (Unionist) and the *Arabi al-Nasri* (Arab Nasserite) party. Together they won 5% of the seats in the 2005 parliamentary elections. In contrast, candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood claimed almost 20% of the seats, emerging as the strongest opposition bloc even though the organization was banned and
(Constitution) party, a secular-leaning party founded in April 2012 by Nobel Prize winner Mohamed elBaradei and other intellectuals or the Egyptian Current party (Tayyar Masri) founded in June 2011 by youth (active in Tahrir Square activities) who left the Muslim Brotherhood never really took off as mass parties. In sum, the failure to identify potential new constituencies and to bring them into the organization is the greatest weakness of the secular parties. The weakness of the secular parties was due to different factors, one of them was their incapacity to transform their considerable historic legacy into present-day political capital. I would add that another factor, deeper perhaps, is that they were not able to offer a truly different convincing narrative to the electorate by which they would be able to spearhead societal reforms that would truly weaken the deep state to which they are beholden and be seen as credible nationalists in the footsteps of President Nasser.

Interestingly in both religious and secular parties, a generation gap seems to be growing, which is perhaps the most overlooked or misinterpreted fact by strategists: a growing chasm is developing between young and old in Egypt (and beyond), with huge consequences for Egypt’s future stability (as reported by Mr. David Kirkpatrick and Ms. Mayyi El Sheikh). They say that a growing number of young Egyptians say the government’s heavy-handed crackdown on any hundreds of its members in prison. The performance of the first ever (direct) presidential elections was dismal. President Mubarak had no difficulty in getting re-elected.

The most striking example is the new al-Wafd party. The "old" al-Wafd party was the party of the national independence movement and of secular Egyptian nationalism that advocated equal rights for the Muslim majority and the Christian (and Jewish) Coptic minority/ies. Between 1923 and 1952, it was the majority party and frequently formed the government, sharing power with the monarchy and the British administration authorities. Al-Wafd’s previous popularity helped the new al-Wafd party to a strong start, but then it foundered. Although it appointed as its first chairman Fuad Serag al-Din, a well-known al-Wafd leader before 1952, in a show of continuity, it conveyed more a sense of fatigue than one of dynamic revival of an old liberal tradition. The party turned against its legacy of secular nationalism and forged an election alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s. Later it fashioned a party program based on economic liberalization. Its messages do not resonate with the population and are hardly distinct from the newly adopted liberal policies of the NDP. Leftist parties also have found it difficult to build on their Arab nationalist legacy, particularly since the government has laid claim to much of it. Most of those parties have their origins in the Nasser period 1952-1970. Under Nasser, socialism was declared the ideology of the state and Arab nationalism became its Egyptian brand (Nasserism). To this day, despite some economic liberalization, the leftist heritage remains strong.

Citing pressure and threats, Egypt’s answer to Jon Stewart calls it quits, New York Times, 2 June 2014.
opposition is widening a generation gap, which poses a longer-term threat to stability.

They are lashing out at their parents’ whole generation, which presided over three decades of economic, cultural and political stagnation and now seems to be repudiating the 2011 uprising for interrupting that stasis. Even Egyptian popular culture is stuck in a decades-old rut, they argued: people are still laughing at the clownish comedian Adel Imam, now 73; still listening to the pop heartthrob Amr Diab, now 53; and still admiring retouched magazine photographs of the glamorous actress Yousra, now 58. They seem them as “a generation holding on to the 1980s as tenaciously as a playboy holds on to his youth.”

The low turnout by youth set off a public debate about their disaffection, even as the police continued to use deadly force in crackdowns against young people — Islamists, liberals or left-leaning — for staging anti-government protests. Sixty-two protesters were killed in clashes with security forces on 25 January 2014, the third anniversary of the 2011 uprising, while a mostly older crowd gathered in Tahrir Square to celebrate Field Marshal Sisi, who is 59. “Gray hairs in the queues, black hairs in the graves,” is the epigram making the rounds among both liberal and Islamist activists. “Youth make up the majority, but the elders are still in control of everything” and Alaa al-Aswany, 56, who was (is?) supportive of the military takeover, urged the military government to listen to the young. Starting about 10 years ago, members of the younger generation in Egypt began to rebel against the stultifying stability of Mr. Mubarak’s 30-year rule. They found new ways to express themselves through the internet, thronged to the Kifaya movement against President Mubarak’s monopoly on power and formed their own grass-roots organizations, like the April 6 youth movement. Many saw the Tahrir square sit-in of 2011 as their generation’s Woodstock, and the overthrow of Mr. Mubarak as their mark on history. In his column, Mr. Aswany marveled that “a generation of youth emerged that was like a mutation.” Several of the best-known youth leaders, including Alaa abd el-Fattah, a pioneer
dissident blogger, and Ahmed Maher, a founder of the April 6 group, are now behind bars.

Islamists say that a generation gap is widening in the Muslim Brotherhood as well, with young members blaming their elders for bungling their chance to rule. Mr. Morsi and the older generation were suspicious of non-Islamists, and sought to do it alone on a gradual “political path” that avoided direct confrontation with the institutions of the police state, said a young spokesman for the Brotherhood-sponsored anti-coup Alliance. But younger Brotherhood members preferred “a revolutionary path” of collaborating with more liberal groups to take on the old institutions. Interesting alliances which may form here … The youth is seen by many as the torchbearers of future democratic hopes (without losing religious identities). It is not in my opinion a “Woodstock crowd” but possesses what Egyptian historian Mahmoud Sabit described as their trump card: "an honest conscience”.

The way will be long but the trajectory is clear in my view. It centers on the way the notion of Islam huwa al-hal (Islam is the solution”), popular among Arab Islamists (in contrast to most Iranian intellectuals), will be reinterpreted. Modern thinkers believe that Islam is compatible with democracy, including a women-centered reading of Islamic sacred texts. They feel that democracy with its emphasis on rights is essentially different from and preferable to the feeble Qur'anic notions of shura (consultation) or bey'a (allegiance) which are informed by obligation.

However these notions could be reconciled, in my view. For instance in 1997, for the first time, Mustafa Mashhur, the Muslim Brotherhood leader, spoke of "pluralism" emphasizing that his organization was not a Muslim party (Jamaa al-Muslimin) but a party with a Muslim membership (Jamaa min al-Muslimin). The "younger leaders" went so far as to attribute the

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36 Youth’s unrest was seen in civil society in the April 6th youth movement founded in 2008 and instrumental in the downfall of both Presidents Mubarak and Morsi (disagreements in April 2012 led to a split in the group, in which 550 members left and formed the April 6th Democratic Front).
global idioms of democracy, civil society and transparency and accountability to the thoughts of
Hasan al-Bannah. Some even spoke of women's and minority's rights which they thought could
be accommodated within an Islamic polity\textsuperscript{37}.

Other thinkers, such as Mark Huband\textsuperscript{38}, believe that the Arab world is ripe for change. He
pointed to the case of Egyptian-American sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim accused by the
Egyptian regime on very flimsy grounds smacking of politically motivated reasons, of
embezzlement of funds. No wonder that over 850,000 Egyptians had voted with their feet and
left the country. He also drew attention to innovative projects such as the Bibliotheca
Alexandrina's annual budget of 1.5 million US$ intended to create a collection of 8 million
books. By 2020, it should be one of the most ambitious efforts undertaken in the Arab world to
reconcile the historic variety that lies at the heart of the Arab culture with the current climate of
political rigidity, anti-intellectualism and religious friction, an impossible undertaking in my
view, mere window-dressing. Huband also noted the terrible words uttered by US historian
Bernard Lewis after 9/11 which sounded as self-fulfilling prophecy: "If the peoples of the
Middle East continue on their present path, the suicide bomber may become a metaphor for the
whole region and there will be no escape from a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-
pity, poverty and oppression, culminating sooner or later in yet another alien domination." There
is truth in these words, but also too much of a “blissful forgetfulness” for sins of omission or
commission of outside backers of derelict regimes.

Is Islam compatible with democracy? The real question is how the fundamental principles
of Islam are interpreted and by whom. A party cannot call itself Islamist if it renounces sharia as

\textsuperscript{37} These modern concepts were a step forward from the Muslim Brotherhood’s earlier adherence to shura, a vague
notion postulating that an authoritarian but just ruler (who is vested with both temporal and spiritual authority)
should be subjected to the principle of "consultation".

\textsuperscript{38} Brutal truths, fragile myths: power politics and Western adventurism in the Arab world, Westview Press (Perseus
the basis of legislation. Most Arab constitutions tiptoe around the issue by stating at least that Sharia is a source rather than the source of legislation. What is the Islamist project? In her 2002 classic, Ms. Carrie Rosefsky Wickham pointed to the importance of the Da’wa (call to God): the Islamist project of ideological outreach. The prototypical target of Islamic outreach was the "ordinary Muslim" (al-Muslim al-ado) who was born into the faith, was more or less observant, but did not realize all the rights and obligations that a full commitment to Islam entailed. By contrast, the "committed Muslim" (al-Muslim al-multazim) understood the norms of Islamic conduct and applied them in practice. The goal of outreach was to propel ordinary Muslims toward a greater commitment (iltizam) to Islam. There was the da'wa amma with institutional forms of outreach and trying to define the role of women.

As many scholars noted, at the core of Islamist outreach was a massive ideological project to capture the hearts and minds of educated youth. Islamic ideology gave voice to the moral outrage felt by those graduates who regarded themselves as unjustly deprived of their due rewards as an educated (meritocratic as opposed to class) elite.

At the same time, it offered them a new conceptual language for understanding the predicament of contemporary Egyptian society, the vision of a better alternative, and an agenda for change. The Islamist outreach helped give rise to a new Islamic community that included a committed core of Islamist activists and a broader "supportive public”.

At this stage, we should ask ourselves what “reform” actually means? Are we in fact heading towards a more conservative spectrum of societies, where the term “revolution” is meant to mean exactly its opposite, namely a clerically-driven popular “counter-revolution”? Historically speaking, were the lower and middle classes of Egyptian (and Arab) societies ever really involved in their destinies? Was Islam, event at the height of the brilliance of its urban

39 Mobilizing Islam: religion, activism and political change in Egypt, Columbia University Press.
civilization in highly hierarchical societies really sold on “modernity” or was this fact hidden or “forgotten” by scholars who remain enamored by the gardens and palaces of Cordoba, Cairo, Constantinople (Istanbul) and Bagdad and Damascus? Was the countryside, which now populates the sprawling urban centers, included in the Enlightenment or are we witnessing this awakening now, with at times disturbing consequences? I dare say that the youngsters who mesmerized the world in Tahrir Square are both the illustration of a generational gap - and momentarily only I believe silenced – and of an ongoing search for a value-oriented society which I hope will in the end be inclusive and tolerant. But the struggle has just begun and in that regard, President Sisi (and his foreign backers) are leading rearguard battles which will just delay the inevitable rise of a popular sovereignty, inclusive of the forgotten and voiceless segments of the population.

These youngsters are hardly the replica of the Western world students protesting the Vietnam War or calling for more private freedoms in particular regarding their love and cultural preferences in societies which had largely succeeded in creating peaceful political space. The Arab young people are calling for the establishment of a form of democratic body politic, which will then be widened by other types of reforms of more private nature; it is not the priority for most demonstrators, usually more conservative than their Western counterparts. This part of the conundrum is not addressed, we feel, in the usual handwringing about perceived Arab inconsistencies. If we see the current dramatic events in the broader seep of History, we may well think that we are only in fact now at the beginning of the reform process under way. Typical of the Western inability to see this search in another manner are twin articles from The Economist, which while perceptive in terms of apparent causes of unrest do not seem to give too much thought to the deeper reasons, common in fact, in all societies undergoing transformation.
In the first such article, The Economist wondered why the Arab world is in such a “weary and wearying mess”. It is not a new question—Arab intellectuals of the 19th century pondered the puzzle of their ancient civilization’s weakness in the face of an imperialist West. Most academics have been wary of pointing to Islam as a fundamental impediment to modernization, yet some, and not only Western ones suspect it plays a role. Timur Kuran, a Turkish-American economist, argues that Islam’s rigidly egalitarian inheritance rules have hindered the accumulation and mobilization of capital in a way that hampered industrialization. The unresolved issue of proper relations between Islam and the state represents a chronic conundrum.

For most of the time since the first Caliphate governments have outwardly endorsed the notion that temporal laws must be subservient to religious rulings while doing as they wish and ensuring that jurists toe the line. In the 19th century, The Economist reminds, us the governments of Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia all moved to trim the influence of Sharia judges, not under European pressure but because their unpredictable rulings were an obstacle to rational commerce and government power.

Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood stress that the founding texts of Islam provide a template for every aspect of life, including government. These texts are however open to widely varying interpretations and it is hard to balance the notion of a fixed, immutable source with changing democratic politics. The Economist notes, in essence rightly, that Islamism is itself a creature of modernity born from an increasingly repressive background. In the past two generations the proportion of Arabs who can read has soared from less than a quarter to more
than three-quarters. The subsequent breaking of a priestly class’s monopoly over interpreting the
faith has been replaced by an Islamic onslaught of ideas packed with new brands using modern
technology to their advantage. Among those “whose heroic nihilism most appeals to alienated
youths” was Al-Qaeda and now increasingly ISIS… To this has to be added the legacy of
colonialism, combined with hatred of Israel, which led many Arab states to ally themselves with
the Eastern Block during the Cold War. Conservative Arab monarchies tilted the other way, and
their Western allies did not push for democratization. The past is now catching up with us.

The late Samer Soliman, a political scientist, called this poor model of development “the
paradox of the weak state and the strong regime”. During the 2000s he noted a decline in the
Egyptian state’s ability to mediate disputes as well as a further collapse in state education. As
The Economist noted, Islamist groups often stepped in to provide social services, while police
preoccupied allowed petty quarrels to balloon into ugly sectarian clashes. In the aftermath of the
2011 revolution, the “deep state” in Egypt centered on the army and the security services found it
“expeditious first to make the Muslim Brotherhood its ally in controlling the streets, then to
demonize it. The bloody crushing of pro-Brotherhood protests in the wake of last year’s military
coup predictably provoked terrorist responses. These in turn have justified a wider crackdown
that has effectively if not yet completely silenced even the secular critics whose hopes for
liberalizing reforms inspired Egypt’s brief spring”. As Amr al-Zant, an Egyptian scientist and
columnist, has noted it takes openness for societies to progress. I agree that closed politics may
be tempered by openness to ideas and an open economy, as in China. Open politics can make up
for poverty and a paucity of human resources, too, but, as the article concluded “to have closed
politics and closed minds together is a recipe for disaster. The proof is the Arab states”.

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populations, particularly in cities where millions of displaced peasants struggle to cope with urban life. For many
years it was fashionable for historians to point the finger at Western imperialism.
In a second article on the same day (5 July 2014), The Economist\textsuperscript{41} lamented the fate of the once brilliant Arab civilization. A thousand years ago, the great cities of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo took turns to race ahead of the Western world. Islam and innovation were twins. Why Arab countries have so miserably failed to create democracy, happiness or (aside from the windfall of oil) wealth for their 350 million people is one of the great questions of our time.

One problem is that the Arab countries’ troubles run so wide. Islam, or at least modern reinterpretations of it, is at the core of some of the Arabs’ deep troubles. The faith’s claim, promoted by many of its leading lights, to combine spiritual and earthly authority, with no separation of mosque and state, has stunted the development of independent political institutions.

The Economist states that religious extremism is a conduit for misery, not its fundamental cause\textsuperscript{42}. Economic stagnation bred dissatisfaction. Thanks to the electronic media, the young were increasingly aware that the prospects outside the Middle East were far more hopeful. The article concludes by stating that “Pluralism, education, open markets: these were once Arab values and they could be so again”. I full-heartedly subscribe to this recipe, adding however my mantra: religion is part of the solution only if it is harnessed as part of a comprehensive humanistic democratic model.

The terrible danger looming now after the outlawing of the more moderate Islamists around the Muslim Brotherhood - who, in my view, with their many failures, internal dissent and hesitations of doctrinal nature, were engaged on a slow reformist path, which could have ultimately led to a more inclusive nature of the political scenery involving the Coptic minority,

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\textsuperscript{41} The tragedy of the Arabs: a civilization that used to lead the world is in ruins – and only the locals can rebuild it.
\textsuperscript{42} While Islamic democracies elsewhere (such as Indonesia) are doing fine, in the Arab world the very fabric of the state is weak. Few Arab countries have been nations for long. Arab countries have not yet succeeded in fostering the institutional prerequisites of democracy—the give-and-take of parliamentary discourse, protection for minorities, the emancipation of women, a free press, independent courts and universities and trade unions. The absence of a liberal state has been matched by the absence of a liberal economy. After independence, the prevailing orthodoxy was central planning, often Soviet-inspired. Virtually no markets were free, barely any elite companies developed, and educated Arabs who wanted to excel in business or scholarship had to leave the country.
women and the less tied to the deep state secularists - is the rise of the extremists from their midst. Their growth is preordained and engineered (Algeria-like) by those who believe in the status quo. A deadly trap for the Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers would be to take that route instead of forging alliances with diverse secular, youth, minority and other civil society and political pressure groups to bring about change peacefully. This would also require engagement with sympathetic groups in Western and other countries who take a dim view of the ongoing repression. But the temptation of violence and lack of inclusivity is there, as was noted by journalist David D. Kirkpatrick. He also noted, in a more positive vein in that same article that after the government had outlawed the April 6 movement, there may now be room for both currents to learn from their mistakes (implying possible alliances), facilitated by the fact that the Salafist Al-Nour Party seems to have accepted the military coup, not exactly a bonus for its democratic credentials…

Another question of importance is religious tolerance, which does not seem to fare well under the new regime, official allegations to the contrary, and the support of the supreme hierarchy of the Coptic Church, criticized by many Copts and Muslims alike. Although Mr. Sisi is eager to demonstrate religious tolerance (he said he had grown up in Cairo near the “Jewish alley” and main synagogue, and that he listened to the bells of a nearby Coptic church), in the same manner as he is in fighting “nepotism” it seems, the situation is not very encouraging, with

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43 As moderate Islamists retreat, extremists surge unchecked, New York Times, 18 June 2014. Many of the extremists are lashing out at the fundamentalists whom many moderate politicians hoped to tutor as political allies. Instead Egypt’s ultraconservative Salafis supported the military takeover, saying that it would limit social strife. Some moderates play down their own mistakes, and insist that the main lessons to be learned are about the strength of their enemies, not their own shortcomings. Or they portray the reversal of their fortunes as a kind of divinely ordained test to be endured. The extremists always warned the moderates not to trust the military, Several Islamist leaders (like Tunisian Ennahda’s Mr. Ghannouchi) said the solution for the Islamist movement was not to fight back with weapons, but to further embrace pluralism, tolerance and compromise. “But a second camp of Islamists, including many of the Brotherhood’s younger members, are searching for answers about what their leaders did wrong, and what they might do differently, refusing to return to what their elders faced for another 50 or 60 years. If another chance at power emerges, these Islamists are asking, should the Brotherhood abandon its traditional gradualism and swiftly purge the police, the judiciary and other institutions? Should it seek to collaborate with noni
government clampdown and limitations on religious freedom. In his article of 25 April, David Kirkpatrick\textsuperscript{44} reported that Egypt’s freethinkers and religious minorities are still waiting for the new leadership to deliver on the promise of religious freedom and pluralism. The new military-backed government may have fallen back into patterns of sectarianism that have prevailed here for decades. Prosecutors continue to jail Coptic Christians, Shiite Muslims and atheists on charges of contempt of religion. A panel of Muslim scholars has cited authority granted under the new military-backed constitution to block screenings of the film “Noah” because they say it violates an Islamic prohibition against depictions of the prophets.

Mr. Sisi has listened attentively as Muslim clerics allied with him have offered religious justifications for violence against his Islamist opponents. A prominent Muslim scholar compared him and his security chief to Moses and Aaron. The new government has tightened its grip on mosques, pushing imams to follow state-approved sermons\textsuperscript{45}. Many Coptic Christians and other religious minorities cheered the military takeover because they feared the Muslim Brotherhood whose leaders have a history of denigrating non-Muslims. The military authorities shut down ultraconservative Islamist satellite networks that had stigmatized Christians or Shiite Muslims. And the military sponsored constitutional revisions that scaled back the references to Islamic traditions and declared with new directness that religious freedom was now absolute. In some ways, however, sectarian tensions have worsened: Coptic Christians, who make up about 10

\textsuperscript{44} Vow of freedom of religion goes un-kept in Egypt, New York Times, 25 April 2014.
\textsuperscript{45} Egypt steps up campaign to control mosques, by Reuters Agency, New York Times, 10 April 2014. Reuters reports that the Egyptian government has stepped up a campaign to curb Muslim Brotherhood influence over mosques, saying it has licensed more than 17,000 state-approved clerics to give Friday sermons to stop places of worship falling "into the hands of extremists". The military-backed authorities have been trying to bring mosques under tighter control since the army toppled Mr. Morsi. All of the newly-approved clerics had been trained at al-Azhar University. In September 2013, the Religious Endowments minister said unlicensed clerics would be barred from delivering sermons at mosques - long a recruiting ground for Islamist parties. The government statement said the ministry of religious endowments had taken "a big step" towards addressing a shortfall in "qualified preachers". Around 12,000 preachers not approved by the state had been removed from service, the statement added, without giving a time frame. The minister of Religious Endowments said he aimed to bar 55,000 unlicensed clerics.
percent of the population, have faced violence and scapegoating from Islamists angry about the church’s support for the takeover. Prosecutors and police officers have done little to protect the Christians or other religious minorities, rights advocates say. Despite its sweeping language, the revised constitution still limits religious freedom to Muslims, Christians and Jews. It also stipulates that parliament should regulate crimes like contempt of religion. Christians and religious dissenters may “feel better psychologically” because the Islamists have been pushed underground, said Ishak Ibrahim, a researcher at the Egyptian initiative for personal rights. But the “culture of sectarianism” persists in practice, he said.

The dispute over “Noah” is a high-profile test. Early last month, a panel of Muslim scholars issued a statement about the film that began by pointing out that the revised constitution not only continues to incorporate the principles of Islamic law, but also makes their institute, al-Azhar, the exclusive authority on interpreting Islam. The film is “religiously prohibited” as “a clear violation of the principles of Islamic Shariah.” The culture minister fired back that the decision was up to the censorship board. But it has not yet authorized the film, and this month the board and the culture ministry declined to comment. In 2012, Karam Saber, the author of a short-story collection “Where is God?” was sentenced in absentia to five years in prison for blasphemy, after complaints by ultraconservative sheikhs. But after the military takeover, an appeals court solicited a review of the book by a committee of al-Azhar scholars. Last month, the court upheld the sentence. In the Suez Canal city of Ismailia, prosecutors have detained a student, Sherif Gaber, since last fall on allegations that he started a Facebook page for atheists. When open atheism in Alexandria was discussed on a talk show, the city’s security chief promised to crack down there. Shiite Muslims — considered heretics by many in Egypt’s Sunni Muslim majority — have also been a target “in the hunting of religious minorities”.


The clerics closest to Mr. Sisi can be harsh toward those they deem “bad” Muslims. Last month, for example, state television cameras followed Mr. Sisi to a military installation for a Friday prayer service led by Sheikh Ali Gomaa, a former mufti and a close Sisi ally. During the broadcast, Sheikh Gomaa referred indirectly but unmistakably to Mr. Sisi’s Islamist opponents as a “faction of hypocrites” who were “plotting schemes against the Muslims.” He lauded the soldiers and police officers who fought such “terrorists”: “blessed are those who kill them, as well as those whom they kill,” Sheikh Gomaa declared.

But the complaints about continued sectarianism have not deterred Coptic Church leaders from firmly supporting Mr. Sisi as their protector against worse treatment by the Muslim majority. The Coptic Pope, Tawadros II, has hailed Mr. Sisi as overwhelmingly popular, “a competent patriot” on “an arduous mission,” and “the one who rescued Egypt.” Over Easter weekend, Mr. Sisi made a private visit to the pope at the main cathedral but, unlike a rival presidential candidate, declined to attend mass. The mass nonetheless erupted into prolonged applause at the mention of Mr. Sisi’s name, state news media reported. Michael Hanna, an Egyptian-American scholar at the Century Foundation and a Coptic Christian, called the pope’s statements “stupid and myopic,” arguing that they perpetuated an intermingling of religion and politics that hurts minorities.

In an interesting study produced in April 2014 on whether “political Islam was dead”46 Professor Masoud replies in the negative. A November 2013 survey of 2,500 adult Egyptians demonstrated that large majorities of citizens continue to espouse views more associated with the Muslim Brotherhood than with the secularists who called for the movement’s excision from political life. In the survey, 74 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition that “government and parliament should enact laws in accordance with the Sharī‘a”.

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Similarly, 72 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the belief that penal laws should be based on Sharīʿa, while more than 88 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the position that personal status laws, such as those covering marriage and divorce, must be Sharīʿa compliant. Egyptians may have turned their backs on the Brotherhood (although the fact that President Mursī (Morsi) was removed by coup rather than election renders it impossible to know for sure), but they do not appear to have turned their backs on the things for which the Brotherhood and its conservative Islamist allies campaigned. In other words, Islamism without Muslim Brotherhood … a very interesting corroboration that most likely most Egyptians wish to see an overriding influence of religion in most aspects of public and private life, although other polls had mentioned that state and religion could be separated. Perhaps this is an indication of the state of confusion prevailing in Egypt.

In the survey, I quote liberally from the article, 54% of respondents would like to apply ḥudūd punishments for theft (amputation of the hand). Similarly, 59% believed that genders should be segregated in universities, 48% believed that those who change their religion should be punished with the death penalty (not exactly encouraging after decades of state-sponsored school education…), 42% felt that the veil (hijab) should be imposed on women, and 87% that alcohol and gambling should be banned, with 57% in favor of banks be prohibited from charging interest (prohibited under Islamic law as ribā or usury) on deposits. A solid 52% expressed the view that “Western tourists bring to Egypt shameful behaviors that violate Egyptian social values”, which is perhaps also an indictment against culturally insensitive tourists from opulent countries who do not always demonstrate the level of respect they should give to the cultures they approach.

Most importantly, fully 65% of respondents believed that al-Azhar University should be given the right to veto laws that fail to conform to the Islamic Sharīʿa. This latter prescription

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46 Is political Islam dead? By Tarek Masoud, Associate Professor of Public Policy Ash Center for Democratic
was encoded in the now-abrogated constitution passed by Muhammad Mursī’s allies in December 2012 and was the subject of fierce criticism by the Muslim Brotherhood’s political opponents. The fact that almost two-thirds of Egyptians continue to support such a measure is powerful evidence of the fact that the Brotherhood’s own loss of popularity should not be interpreted as the end of political Islam, a conclusion I fully support. Further, although the Muslim Brotherhood’s appeal is significantly diminished, it continues to enjoy more support than any other political party in Egypt. More than two-thirds (67%) of Egyptians polled declared that they had “no confidence” in the Muslim Brotherhood—or, more specifically, its Freedom and Justice Party. However, a different picture emerges when Egyptians were asked to compare the Brotherhood to other political parties. More than half said they were confident in “no party.” but the party with the largest support was the Muslim Brotherhood (with approximately 12 percent). Second place (at 7.4%) was a tie between the Wafd party and the ultra-Islamist Nūr party. The National Salvation Front (NSF) —a coalition of non-Islamists led by former Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa, leftist politician Hamdīn Sabāḥi, and former International Atomic Energy Agency Chairman Mohamed Elbaradei—came in third at just under six percent.

This is significant because the NSF was the spearhead of the movement to overthrow President Morsi. In other words, even after massive public demonstrations against the Muslim Brotherhood and a military coup that removed it from power, the Brotherhood remains twice as popular as the political coalition that was instrumental in bringing about its overthrow. Furthermore, the 12% of people who declared support for the Muslim Brotherhood may actually be an under-estimate of the movement’s true popularity in Egyptian society. Approximately 15% of Egyptians declared the Muslim Brotherhood’s members to be “honest and full of integrity,”

Governance and Innovation, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.
compared to only 7% for the NSF and approximately 8% for the Wafd party. More than 16% of Egyptians believed that members of the Salafist Nūr party were “honest and full of integrity.” Further, approximately 28% of Egyptians said that the Brotherhood’s party provides a “high level of services” to the people, compared to only 2% each for the NSF and Wafd. Again, the Nūr party also fared well, with 14% of Egyptians saying it provides a high level of service to voters.

The evidence is clear and I agree with the article’s conclusion that a return to peace and some semblance of democracy in Egypt hinges upon finding ways to include peaceful Islamists in the political process. More broadly, the events in Egypt reveal the vital importance of mediation efforts among Islamists and their rivals throughout the Middle East and North Africa. As the article pointed out, one of the reasons that the Muslim Brotherhood was the subject of such large protests in the summer of 2013 was that the movement had tried to exclude members of the Mubarak regime—and particularly the National Democratic Party (NDP)—from participating in elections. In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood’s 2012 constitution included an article (232) banning senior NDP members and former NDP parliamentarians from running for office or voting for 10 years. If the Muslim Brothers had been more inclusive toward members of the Mubarak regime, it is possible that Egypt’s democratic experiment would not have fractured47.

As a result of these politicians’ games, reminiscent of a fable of French moralist La Fontaine, a third player (Army and deep state) scooped them all up and declared that the “pause was over”, at least for now. In short, (moderate) Islam will be decisive to steer any democratic process forward, even if there are misgivings in many quarters about undue influence of religious circles over the future of the nation. They need nevertheless to be brought in the process and not left outside as the perennial disenfranchised spoilers.

47 Under Mursi, it was the NDP that played the spoiler. Today, it is the Muslim Brotherhood.
How to characterize ultimately the July 3, 2013 coup? It could be argued that it was in fact a “counter-revolution”\(^{48}\) masquerading as a popular revolt (“revolution” of sorts) against the oppressive rule of the Muslim Brotherhood. It has not brought back, however, popular rule, the rule of law, the establishment of progressive societal and social legislation and the empowerment of the “powerless” (youth, poor, women and minorities). Looking at the inordinate social influence and retention of privileges of the military caste (as enshrined in the January 2014 Constitution) and the clergy (both Muslim and Coptic), the return albeit still discreet of the former Mubarak era cronies, the conservative orientation of the military regime (with Saudi Arabia’s support), the trappings of this new-old regime are more a return to the past than an open-ended invitation to talent and innovation to spring their wings. It is a déjà-vu prevailing feeling of turning in circles and prioritizing the secondary (Islamic law interpreted by conservative to ultra-conservative pro-government state-appointed clerics etc.) over the immediate priorities of opening up political space and economic rejuvenation. This formula will not work, in my view. The combination of political and religious forces once again makes for strange bedfellows: procrastination, maintaining status-quo and financial and social status has

\(^{48}\) As recognized early on in December 2013 by Ms. Sara Khorshid in her article: Egypt’s counter-revolution, New York Times, 30 December 2013. In her view, the army has been empowered by popular support from a considerable segment of the population as an ultra-nationalist mood sweeps the country. Its absolute dominance will be more solidly institutionalized after 2013 draft constitution is adopted (it was ratified in the 2014 January referendum). Regarding the draft constitution’s 240-plus articles, all the details are overshadowed by the articles enshrining the military’s special privileges. Article 234 gives the military the final say over who may be appointed as defense minister. Others mandate that the military’s budget be listed as a single entry in national accounts and that civilians may be tried before military courts if they assault members of the armed forces in military zones and military-owned properties, which in Egypt includes everything from gas stations to wedding halls. The army runs its own shadow economy, which reportedly constitutes at least 25% (perhaps up to 40%) of the country’s economy and there is no transparency. This is particularly disturbing given that Transparency International already ranks Egypt 114 out of 177 countries on its corruption perception index. Articles on rights, including women’s rights, have dominated the media frenzy over the constitution. But such articles are of little value in a country where extreme poverty already forces some families to sell their underage daughters into temporary, recurrent marriages to Arab Gulf millionaires. Instead of insisting on democratic values and civilian rule as a framework for the transitional period, many Egyptians seemed nostalgic about a romantic image of the army as the only savior from “foreign conspiracies.” With all the privileges and powers it enjoys, the army has so far failed to bring stability. There are elites who seem to believe that their interests will be guaranteed by the army’s hegemony, namely Egypt’s upper-middle class citizens whose priority is to sustain their comfortable lives. They are joined by corrupt businessmen,
tied the fate of the al-Azhar clerical class, who for many should logically have sided with the Muslim Brotherhood in its travails, to the one of the military hierarchy (and the old regime). It has been observed under other latitudes … with the same results, ultimately\textsuperscript{49}. The army may ultimately lose, unless it will bring about important positive changes especially on the economic side, more than it has gambled for: public trust and the perception of being the ultimate recourse.

\textbf{CHAPTER III: THE WAY FORWARD?}

In a third chapter, I would like to explore possibilities on the way forward, with the help of far-sighted decision-makers, especially from democratic nations. This should entail allowing the people of Egypt and other countries in the region, of making full use of social media (the Tweet, Facebook and other Information Technology), to continue the conversation on Egyptian democracy among themselves without undue interference or insinuations of external “plots”. What is at stake is how to turn conservative societies like Egypt into models of the rule of law. I believe that a local, national way needs to be found to separate state and religion, which alone would qualify as a true “revolution of the mind.” The international community, in particular democratic nations, should be able to lend a hand in this undertaking without, as in the past, sacrificing principles for expediency, which has stymied especially Western foreign policy in the Middle East since the 1950s. “Times they are a changing ….” In my view, this has to happen now.

For Plato\textsuperscript{50}, only those who have the knowledge (education) can be in charge of the machinery of the ideal authoritarian state he dreamed about. What kind of knowledge though?

\textsuperscript{49} Blocked societies, with growing social injustice and lack of economic perspective. As one of the characters (Prince Tancredi Falconieri) in Tomasi di Lampedusa’s immortal novel The Leopard (\textit{Il Gattopardo}) says: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.” \textit{Plus ça change …}

\textsuperscript{50} Throughout his work (The Republic, The Laws).
And what did Christopher Clark51 have to say about the terrorists of Sarajevo? It sounds familiar when we read about the profiles of the “young angry men” who have brought so much devastation to the world - and are unlikely to be stopped in the short or medium term. Are they not the mirror image of the military or sectarian dictators who have been the rulers of these areas for a very long period, and play with the fears of the world about these new-old threat as an ideal vehicle to remain in power?

In one of his articles, Thomas Friedman52 once again warned about the perils of monoculture. Describing the threatened eco-system in Madagascar, he draws a parallel and expresses concern that in the Middle East, the last remnants of poly-cultural states and communities are being wiped out. Christians are fleeing the Arab-Muslim world and Jews and Palestinians, Shiites and Sunnis keep forcing each other into mutually exclusive ghettos. It may create “comfort zones’ but as the columnist warns “a human rain forest once rich with ethnic and religious diversity is becoming a collection of disconnected monocultures, enormously susceptible to disease - diseased ideas”. That is the greatest threat, in my view, of the future and needs to be addressed – now!

Despite their ideological shortcomings and beliefs fundamentally at discrepancy with modern inclusive societies, the Muslim Brotherhood was coming of age just before the 2012 elections and may have needed more time for a still steep learning curve. All this came to a halt with the military coup, which left over 3,000 people dead since July 2013, over 16,000 arrested (including former President Morsi) and has led to a slow-simmering but continued insurgency in

51 In his 2013 book The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went To War In 1914. He wrote: “The boys had little in the way of bad habits. They were made of that somber, youthful stuff, rich in ideals but poor in experience, that modern terrorist movements feed upon. Alcohol was not to their taste. Although they were heterosexual by romantic inclination, they did not seek the society of young women. … The boys dwelt at length on the suffering of the Serbian nation, for which they blamed everyone but the Serbs themselves, and felt the slights and the humiliations of the least of their compatriots as if they were their own. Sacrifice was a central preoccupation … The grooming by older men of younger men for induction into the networks was a crucial element in the success of the irredentist movement.”
parts of the country, including the Sinai Peninsula, parts of Upper Egypt and the Libyan-
Egyptian border areas of the Western desert.

In his 2011 published book, Robin Wright\textsuperscript{53} noted that the attraction of the jihadists was waning, including in the Arab Gulf states. New types of imaginative rebellions had sprung up. One had happened in Egypt to overthrow the dictatorship. The second category was the “counter-jihad” unfolding among the wider Islamic bloc of 57 countries and Muslim minorities worldwide, with every reliable poll since 2007 steadily showing declining support for the destructive and disruptive jihadists. The third category was the rebellion against Islamic ideology most typified in Iran. There was a drive to be “part of the 21st century” and Al Qaeda’s leaders had cornered themselves. The mass murder events of 9/11 were “acts of craziness” even according to some of those close to Al-Qaeda. An overwhelming majority of Muslims have integrated into US society (Keith Ellison became the 1st Muslim member of Congress in 2007 and took the oath of office on a Qu’ran once owned by Thomas Jefferson). According to Mr. Wright’s findings (just before 2011), most Muslims are no longer attracted to what constituted the 3 templates of political Islam: Al Qaeda’s pure Salafism, Iran’s Shiite theocracy and Saudi Arabia’s rigid Wahhabism, which are all exclusive of each other. The new movement is about pluralism. The alternatives they create (it will take a long time) may not be liberal in the Western mode. Alcohol and pornography are (sometimes hypocritically) not on the freedoms embraced even by liberal Muslims, so would be marriage between a non-Muslim and a Muslim woman.

But most Muslims do want to end political monopolies and open up space - to play whatever music they want as well as to have a genuine choice of political parties. An Egyptian poet who joined her children to protest against Mubarak said ”The majority of Muslims today believe in Allah, the Koran, the prophets - all of them, dating back to Abraham, Moses and

Jesus…. They pray occasionally, pay alms when they can afford, although the majority can’t afford it right now and fast during Ramadan. That is as Islamic as their behavior becomes. Extremism is less attractive today than it has ever been”. To topple a tyrant, Egyptians rejected both Al Qaeda’s extremist ideology and its violent tactics, although the anger that ousted Mubarak came from the same grievances as those exploited by the terrorists. Women were at the forefront of the fight against jihadist ideas, in many ways⁵⁴. There is also the new phenomenon of some satellite sheikhs and you tube imams who have thrown their lot in the fight against extremist ideas⁵⁵.

Egypt’s uprising would not have succeeded without the Muslim Brotherhood’s acceptance, but they had decreed that Christians and women were “unsuitable” for presidency. Some of them had called for all legislation to be approved by a panel of Islamic scholars before a parliamentary vote. The Brotherhood lost further ground when it decreed that no member could join another party than the Freedom and Justice Party.

It was interesting to note that among the young, Ibrahim Houdaiby symbolized this alienation. Both his grandfather and his great-grandfather had been supreme leaders of the Brotherhood. He himself turned to pragmatism, greater religious tolerance, and women’s rights. He often discussed these questions with his grandfather and one of the debates was what comes

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⁵⁴ In 2009, Mr. Wright told us, the Veiled - or al-Motahajiba – was (is) one of Cairo’s new fashion centers combining Islamic feminism and cool. “The veil is the mask of Egyptian women in a power struggle against the dictatorship of men” believes the author of the Politics of Religion (Nabil Abdel Fattah). The veil gives women more power in a man’s world. Recent polls also suggest that in most parts of the Muslim world, people believe that equal education for boys and girls is important. As a result, young women of all classes entering universities in the Islamic world are no longer dominated by English-speaking or Westernized elites. The only woman mentioned by name in the Koran is the Virgin Mary. Women reinterpret Islam insofar as God’s relationship to the individual is based on piety not gender (Qur’an and woman - Amina Wadud). The oldest center of Islamic learning, al-Azhar approved publication of the first Koranic interpretation by a woman (Saud Saleh, one of the world’s leading female scholars on Islam, launched Women’s fatwa, on an Arabic satellite television station to issue rulings from a female perspective. In the early 21st century, a majority of Saudi university graduates are young women, yet the female workforce is under 15% .
⁵⁵ They are often in jeans (al Shugairi) and irritate the traditional clergy. There is criticism by Saudi preachers like Jamal Khashoggi of the teachings of ibn Tamiyya, who inspired Wahhabism. He was fired. …
first: freedom or sharia. The (late) grandfather said that sharia leads to freedom. His grandson said that in the Koran it is said “let there be no compulsion in religion” and that freedom comes first and he ultimately resigned from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Among Islamists the behavior of the Salafists, ultraconservative radicals inspired by Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabism, remains dubious. Many renounced violence. But their willingness to share power and be part of the “counter-jihad” is not all that convincing. Their goal, with peaceful means in 2012, was still to create an Islamic state...

A less benign view of a state controlled by religion, Iran, was found in the book The Gaze of the Gazelle: The story of a generation containing terrible indictments of the Islamic Republic of Iran (public executions including of young women forcibly married to/raped by their wardens before being executed permissibly as no longer being "virgins"; the minefields where thousands of children and youngsters died willingly; the unnecessary prolongation by Ayatollah Khomeini of the war with Iraq; rigged elections, Ayatollah Montazeri’s house arrest, young protester Neda's death captured on video hence the title of the book). Late Ayatollah Khomeini had come up with the doctrine of the Velayat-e Faqih (rule of the Islamic jurisprudent according to which an Islamic government should be ruled by a Shiite Faqih acting as a Vicar for the Hidden Imam during his occultation).

Another encouraging trend is the yearning for education displayed by many young Arab students, as shown by Mr. Friedman in one of his articles on information technology. Beginning March 2 (2014), the article said, Professor Hossam Haick, will teach the first ever massive open online course, or MOOC, on nanotechnology in Arabic. Applicants’ questions include: are you a real person? Are you really an Arab, or are you an Israeli Jew speaking Arabic, pretending to be an Arab? Mr. Haick is an Israeli Arab from Nazareth and will be

teaching this course from his home university\textsuperscript{58}, the Technion, Israel’s premier science and technology institute. His course is entitled “nanotechnology and nano-sensors”. If you had any doubts about the hunger for education in the Middle East today, Haick’s MOOC will dispel them. So far, there are about 4,800 registrations for the Arabic version, including students from Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and the West Bank.

Democracy is at war on two fronts, as well described by famous writer Alaa al Aswany in one of his regular New York Times OP-ED from the end of last year. To note that this “voice for democracy” illustrates the ambiguity of the Egyptian liberal class: one the one hand inspiration for the 2011 Tahrir Square demonstrations which topped President Mubarak; on the other hand instrumental in the overthrow of President Morsi. His initial enthusiasm for the military take-over might have cooled down in the meantime, but freshly minted or old-fashioned liberals may find themselves between the devil and the blue sea if out of the current conundrum no credible alternative democratic option arises. In my view, only an alliance between younger moderate secularist and religious decision-makers seeking inclusive solutions, with the approval of the educated upper and middle class, can open the path for durable stability and democratic overtures. It is worthwhile detailing this article as it points to the questions I raised earlier.

Mr. Aswany expressed his outrage at the death of a little Coptic girl in a terrorist attack\textsuperscript{59}. He noted that according to officials in the Coptic Church, there have been attacks on 73 churches, in addition to scores of Coptic-owned homes and businesses attacked in the second half of 2013. Supporters of Mr. Morsi were incensed that Coptic Pope Tawadros II supported the army’s plan for ending the Brotherhood’s rule. More problematically, Mr. Aswany blamed

\textsuperscript{57} Breakfast before the MOOC, New York Times, 19 February 2014.
\textsuperscript{58} He should by now have begun. But perhaps the latest conflict between Israel and Hamas may have impeded the project. It would be worthwhile enquiring further.
“Morsi supporters” for ongoing attacks against soldiers and police officers, which have caused hundreds of deaths. Egyptian television broadcast a report showing Islamists attacking a police station in the town of Kerdasa on 14 August with rocket-propelled grenades, causing the deaths of 15 policemen. They stripped the bodies and paraded them on the street. He also supports the trial of former President Morsi for his alleged role in 11 deaths in a clash between his supporters and opponents in December 2013. He blames Mr. Morsi for turning into a “violent dictator” and drew attention to the statistics offered by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, an advocacy group, which found that “3,462 people had been arbitrarily detained, and 143 protesters killed”, since Mr. Morsi took power — compared with some 18,000 arrests for political reasons during the nearly 30-year rule of President Mubarak. In August 2013, an Amnesty International report documented torture, including severe beatings and electric shocks, suffered by opponents of the Brotherhood.

In Mr. Aswany’s eloquent words, “Mr. Morsi entered office on a wave of hope and exited on a wave of despair”. In the spring of 2013, young activists instituted a campaign, called Tamarrod (Arabic for “Rebellion”), that collected millions of signatures for a no-confidence petition demanding Mr. Morsi’s ouster. It was Tamarrod that called on Egyptians to go onto the streets on 30 June to show their dissatisfaction. The army intervened “with Egypt on the brink of a civil war”, according to Mr. Aswany who believe(d) that the new state apparatus will carry out reforms against the will of Mubarak allies who amassed fortunes during his reign. In the meantime I regret to inform Mr. Aswany that, contrary to the hopes of so many genuine reformers and democrats who risked their lives in street demonstrations against the former (and still the same) security forces, the new constitution does not ban the trial of civilians by military courts nor subject the presidency to oversight by independent authorities. The issue of a more

progressive tax system and reduction of income inequality has also not been addressed so far. It
does not seem either that the new President will gladly accept being the subject of satirical jokes
against his illustrious persona even before he ascended the presidential seat. As Mr. Aswany
acknowledges, the television host Bassem Youssef, Egypt’s answer to Jon Stewart, whose
satirical news program had devoted whole episodes to the antics of President Morsi and whose
program had been pulled back after Mr. Morsi fell from power, came back on air only for a short
while. After Mr. Youssef dared poke fun at then Army chief, General Abdul-Fattah al-Sisi, the
channel that produces the series took the program again off the air … The winds of change are
not blowing hard enough it seems …

Time is of the essence. The “Hour of the West” has literally arrived, perhaps to conclude
and bring to a fitting end the distant legacy of the post-World War I order. Are we seeing the
unravelling of the 1916 Sykes-Picot “agreement” which basically redrew the maps of the old
Ottoman Empire? France and Great-Britain have left the area, newcomers such as the US may
decide to leave on tiptoe, and whole countries could fall apart. It is said that chaos brings forth
new aspirants; victory often goes to those with the clearest vision, the greatest daring and
ruthlessness.

Could what happen in the Cham area of Syria and Iraq spread to Egypt and beyond? It is
a fact that some ruthless killers have, not since yesterday, declared war on religious minorities, as
noted by Israel’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Ron Prosor who
noted the dramatic decline in religious diversity since the beginning of the 20th century⁶⁰: “…the
Middle East may be the birthplace of the 3 monotheistic religions but some Arab nations appear
bent on making it the burial ground for one of them. At the turn of the century, 26% of the
Middle East's population was Christian, now it is less than 10%. Open Doors documented that

⁶⁰ The Middle East War on Christians, Wall Street Journal, 17 April 2014.
9/10 of the most oppressive countries for Christians were Muslim countries (the 10th is North Korea). … 800,000 Jews left their ancestral homes after campaigns of terror by the leaders against them …“. He further noted that Israel is the only country in the region with a growing Christian population, from 30,000 in 1948 to 140,000 today.

It will be noted that these extremist groups have become more lethal since the civil war began in Syria (and now resurgent in Iraq) and, perhaps not a coincidence, since the overthrow of a legitimate Islamist regime in Egypt by an extra-legal coup (in Tunisia, a compromise was reached among secularists and Islamists, without involvement of the security forces). While there is little danger that very old nation-states like Egypt or Tunisia will go the way of Syria or Iraq, these old authoritarian regimes share one common danger: the “wind of change” is blowing, but it is still unclear what will be its nature: the harsh desert wind of the extremist Islamist groups, which horrible deeds of murder and mayhem are now the staple of world news or the less vivid but more sweet and enduring scent of a light Mediterranean breeze, carrying with it the distant hopes of democratic aspirations which eluded the region for much too long, with , alas, Western complicity and duplicity? At the present time - save for hard-core realists, the “I told you so” crowd of yesterday’s soothsayers of doom and gloom - any decision to back democratic change can admittedly backfire but nevertheless needs to be very closely followed and pursued. The current “I don’t know what the left hand and the right hand are doing” prevailing viewpoint is no longer tenable, because it carries with it the stench of moral cowardice and political indecisiveness, not a recipe for winning the trust of either existing regime supporters or pro-democracy advocates.

That authoritarian regimes like Russia (and more prudently China) are supporters of fellow authoritarian regimes, seen as bulwarks against widely shared popular religious extremism and anchors of stability is clear and should be expected: it is rational no-nonsense
state policies, in the name of well understood national interest. The moral high ground that the West seeks to achieve in world politics (some may say “soft-power” as the last refuge of those unwilling to use, or incapable of using, “hard power”) will be the yardstick on which its policies towards authoritarians will be judged. And here is the supreme irony: from a Hegelian-Marxist standpoint, the horrible jihadists stand out as the best allies the embattled authoritarian regimes will ever have. There is now emerging evidence, which should not come as a surprise, that these regimes used the ultra-violent groups for their own purposes: divide and weaken the democratic or more moderate opposition; frighten the West and others with the perspective of these groups taking over and massacring or chasing away remaining religious minorities before preparing to launch massive attacks against countries outside of the Middle East, etc. Oscar Wilde said “one can never be too careful in the choice of one’s enemies”, and here is the ideal enemy: cruel, fanatic and driven by lust for blood and conquest. It is not by coincidence, if one may add, that the new Egyptian President, now duly “elected”, has so far not outlawed or fought the Nour Salafist party, close in mindset from extremist religious views (and like Mr. Sisi, close to Saudi Arabia), while breaking all bridges with the far less (for now) extremist Muslim Brotherhood.

Will the West be an accomplice in that new paradigm? I hope not, but signs are not positive. For me, the so-called “Realpolitik” view is in fact outdated and dangerously simplistic, but appealing in its simplicity and – yes – cynicism. For the proponents of this theory, the West can only securely leave - if it chooses to do so, an ever more problematic proposition - that explosive region if it leaves behind a number of stability building blocks, comprising the old and newly fashionable autocracies of the region: no “regime change” at hand. President Obama recently declared at West Point (28 May 2014) that one of the US’ top priorities was to “fight terrorism”.

The Realpolitik is based on large part on the late Professor Morgenthau’s views on
diplomacy, with four cardinal rules (and five less important ones) - diplomacy must be divested of the crusading spirit; objectives of foreign policy must be defined in terms of national interest and supported with adequate power ("a peace-loving nation" must be able to defend its national territory and its institutions); look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations (defined in terms of their national security); and nations must be willing to compromise on all issues that are not vital to them. In my view, this in fact sophisticated viewpoint has been laid bare to the knuckles by much more pragmatic hands-on “experts” driven by great power status quo mentalities, not by foresight and abiding by the essential principles on which their own nations are built, and the results are there for all to see. Another type of Realpolitik is required, not devoid of its own dangers. Mr. James A. Baker III’s views remain partly pertinent, when he called, in reaction to President Obama’s speech at West Point, for thriving “for greater stability in the Middle East involving all the players” and, in a gibe at Mr. Obama to be “careful about making promises or threats without considering the consequences.” In essence, it could be read as meaning that the US should retain its influence as a key power broker in the region, based on “stability”, i.e. working constructively with the current leaderships, in the absence of viable alternatives. I believe that Mr. Baker, who remains highly respected for his canny display of US leadership in the region in the early 1990s, is probably right in the short term but his position betrays a lack of vision for the long-term among mainstream policy-makers, which is a matter of concern.

Samuel Huntington, of “Clash of Civilizations” fame had foreseen the democratic failures. According to Bret Stephens, Huntington who saw that earlier waves had succumbed to (autocratic or extremist) reaction, believed that only if democracy were to yield benefits of higher growth, lower unemployment, better living than autocracies would they have a survival

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chance. I believe that the same can be said of autocracies as a counterpoint: if they do not deliver better services, see Egypt’s immense infrastructure, major electricity blackouts (as happened in August 2014), sewage, and joblessness problems in confined living space essentially centered on the Nile Valley, their life expectancy may not be high either. There are other, more optimistic prognostics about the spread of democracy.

In my view, what the world may achieve short-term - stability - it will pay in hard currency in the long-term, with neither stability nor democracy for boot. What will be weakened durably is the appeal of Western-inspired and nationally digested democratic values (already palpable in African countries which seem to think that the fixation of elections has brought neither stability nor prosperity), hence the ability to influence future economic and political strategic orientations. A West tucked between the old-realist school and wavering democrats will not play the role it could be playing on the world stage, with or without military prowess. One gets the uncanny feeling, looking at Mr. John Kerry’s “valse-hésitation” that the US (and its European allies) does not know how to handle the Egyptian conundrum. Egypt is playing, they say, a “constructive” role in the current Gaza crisis, in fact as an “objective ally” of Israel against Hamas, close to the Muslim Brotherhood (former Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yassir Arafat was a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and kept his ties with affiliated groups). It is a comfortable pas-à-deux, who needs an annoying outside meddling overlord? …

What would be needed is what we would suggest to name a new “Democracy-value based Realpolitik”\(^{63}\): neither abandoning of fundamental values nor softness towards a threat that needs to be addressed by democratic firmness, coupled with good governance and inclusivity, foremost by the national actors in the first line of fire. The old authoritarian formula will not

work. That would mean that there should have been unequivocal condemnation of the July 2013 military coup, the rigged presidential elections and a withholding of aid to Egypt. A risky proposition, yes, undoubtedly, but it may have preserved some level of respect among important segments of public opinion and decision-makers alike for an ally which remains true to his proclaimed ideals, and hence keeps a modicum of credibility. We can appreciate the laughing waves that must have rippled through the Egyptian leadership when it called on the US to “exercise restraint” when dealing with racially charged demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri⁶⁴. What it truly indicates is that the Egyptian rulers have come to the conclusion, probably rightly so, that the US and its allies will continue to pro forma protest against excessive police and military force against Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers and demonstrators, but refrain from further action in light of the Islamist onslaught in the region. Stability at all costs …

Was it not Mr. Brzezinski, former Security Advisor under President Carter, who called on the “adults” in the region (Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia among them) to tackle the Islamist menace? And has the protest against the terrible methods used by the Assad regime against its own people not abated as of late? Perhaps just a coincidence while new power configurations emerge … However, to work closely with systems that do not guide or inspire legitimate aspirations of their peoples is just postponing the we believe inevitable day of reckoning, and being riled with “guilt by association”. Will the reform process take a long time? To be counted in decades, centuries perhaps? Yes, I believe so.

It took Spain nearly 200 years to free itself from the stultifying influence of the Catholic Church after the French Revolution (and Napoleon’s ill-fated invasion in 1808). The Jews of Europe left the ghettos under the mostly ultra-conservative leadership of the rabbinate after the

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⁶³ I propose this new “ideology” for the purpose of this paper …
⁶⁴ Egypt urges US restraint over Missouri unrest, United Nations News Monitoring Unit/News and Media Division, Department of Public Information, 19 August 2014.
beginnings of the Enlightenment at the end of the 18th century, only to end crushed by the most horrible consequence of World War I, the invention of state-sanctioned industrialized “mass murder” that migrated from the trenches to civilian dwellings in the Second World War, an idea which does not seem to have lost its attraction to killers hailing nowadays from other cultural and religious epicenters located in the Arabic heartlands of Islam … The struggle will be long, with many at times bloody setbacks to be expected and not all segments of the population will enthusiastically rally around the flag of individual freedoms, including private mores and habits … But I believe that a critical mass of especially young freedom-seekers and liberals, with the at most passive support of their societies, will eventually prevail, hopefully not requiring a too protracted struggle. That is where new policies of support should be developed among the truly like-minded, also for the sake of well understood long-term sustainable national interests.
CONCLUSION: LOVE-(BITES) AND PEACE: THE “ALL RIGHT” NIGHT

WATCH TOWER SOLUTIONS FROM AFAR …

In the conclusion, I would like to make a few prognostications as to whether the above is grounded on a realistic appraisal of the situation on the ground or mere wishful thinking of yet another misguided liberal... I happen to think that hard-nosed realists can and should be guided by a sense of working for the betterment of mankind, without illusions though about the pitfalls in waiting.

Let us think of the admonitions of Marcus Aurelius 65 where he thought of a state in which there is the same law for all, “a state administered with regard to equal rights and equal freedom of speech and the idea of a kingly government which respects most of all the freedom of the governed”. “The end of rational beings” he said is “to follow the reason and the law of the most ancient city and commonwealth” and to “be neither the tyrant nor the slave of any man.”

In his 1859 classic On Liberty, John Stuart Mill66 argued that it is “in the Koran, not the New Testament” that it is written that "a ruler who appoints any man to an office, when there is in his dominions another man better qualified for it, sins against God and against the State". He acknowledged that it was important to respect feelings which were prohibiting anything seen as personal immoralities, i.e. respect the customs (and prejudices) of others if a solid foundation of stability could be found67, while stressing that the mental well-being of mankind (on which all their other well-being depends) depends on freedom of opinion and freedom of the expression of opinion. Balancing off these principles is in my view, the true mark of the statesman.

65 In his Stoic Meditations (second half of second century AD).
67 Ibidem- “no stronger case can be shown for prohibiting anything which is regarded as a personal immorality (eating pig for Muslims or a married clergyman for Spaniards) than is made out for suppressing these practices in the eyes of those who regard them as impieties, and unless we are willing to adopt the logic of persecutors, and to say that we may persecute others because we are right, and that they must not persecute us because they are wrong, we must beware of admitting a principle of which we should resent as a gross injustice the application to ourselves”…
It is against the new types of fanatics that a race against time has begun, and time is of the essence. Most Muslims are horrified at the crimes committed in their name, but “silent majorities” do not carry the day against committed extremists as history has shown time and again. Losing further precious moments to time-sanctioned - but no longer functioning - recipes is time wasted. What is required instead is to try undertaking the necessary reforms of governance and political opening in multi-cultural and religious societies. That is, in my view, the only workable “Realpolitik” over time. As the late great (Marxist) historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012) wrote in his posthumously published book *Fractured times: culture and society in the twentieth century*, secularism meant (he wrote about Jewish emancipation in 19th century Europe) not necessarily the abandonment of faith, which would be a fully unrealistic view of Arab societies today (and societies with Muslim majorities broadly). Secularism would mean “the reduction of religion from an unremitting, omnipresent and all-embracing framework of life to something that, however important, filled only part of it.” In Hobsbawm’s view, this should include intermarriage between people of different faiths. Or put it differently, religion as an individual (I stress) motor of spiritual embitterment, not imposed on people of other faiths or philosophies, is a perfectly legitimate aspiration.

What it will require will be a different type of education: only state-sponsored, broadly secularized universal public quality education (primary, secondary and university) will do, as

68 A good example is the article: Houses of Worship: dishonoring the message of Ramadan, by Salim Mansur, Mansur, Wall Street Journal, 10 July 2014. In the Islamic calendar, Ramadan is a holy month commemorating when Muhammad received the first of the revelations from the angel Gabriel that make up the Quran. As Muhammad's renown as the messenger, or the prophet, advanced, Ramadan became known as a sacred time. The significance of Ramadan as a month for prayers and meditation would be confirmed in the Quran's second chapter, known as Surah al Baqarah. The relevant verse declares, "Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may learn self-restraint." Ideally, then, Ramadan is the month for Muslims to turn inward. Fasting should be an act of remembrance with gratitude for what God has provided, and of striving through prayers and meditation so that the heart may be illuminated by God's mercy. As the Quran states, "not blind are the eyes, but blind are the hearts within the breasts," and the Prophet, according to tradition, said: "for everything there is a polish that taketh away rust, and the polish of the heart is remembrance of God." In recent years, especially since 9/11, the world of Islam has become a strange and fearful place. We subscribe to the beauty of these words.

happened in Europe and was attempted - too late too little – in the Middle East before the region was overcome by secular and religious revolutionary waves. The common characteristic was fascination for heavy-handed methods to forcibly “convert” the citizens to the new order. It is not working any more.

I believe that Egypt needs a new democratic political order and the rule of law, and however circuitous the path may be, the universal outcome will be a more dignified life in complex modern surroundings. Ideally this should occur detached from any specifically Western-oriented way of life but arrived at in a new societal compact, freed from hypocritical or uneducated following of merely ritualistic uncritical unanimous worshipping (inspired by state-inspired or religious zealot behavior) and guided by the lodestar of deep spiritual longing for a better operating system for society and politics. The anchors of the past should not be unmoored but neither should they be a handicap to living a free life in a progressive society at peace with itself and the world at large.

If I look around I see that there are people ready to defend a more liberal view of Islam in the Arab world and allow it to turn into viable democracies. The recently deceased Fouad Ajami70, on several occasions blamed the Arab world for its ills (“Arabs have nobody but themselves to blame”). Just before 9/11, in October 2001, he wrote – and it makes for chilling reading - that

“a darkness, a long winter, has descended on the Arabs. Nothing grows in the middle between an authoritarian political order and populations given to perennial flings with dictators, abandoned to their most malignant hatreds. Something is amiss in an Arab world that besieges American embassies for visas and at the same time celebrates America’s calamities. Something has gone terribly wrong in a world where young men strap themselves with explosives, only to

70 These excerpts were published in the Wall Street Journal.
be hailed as "martyrs" and avengers. …” Ajami’s ire directed at Mubarak’s Egypt was clear. In February 2013, he wrote that: "throughout his reign, a toxic brew poisoned the life of Egypt—a mix of anti-modernism, anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. That trinity ran rampant in the universities and the professional syndicates and the official media. As pillage had become the obsession of the ruling family and its retainers, the underclass was left to the rule of darkness and to a culture of conspiracy."

While it may sound a little bit self-serving for the West (and others), I concur with these views. Let’s call it “tough love”, a notion too often misused nowadays. The ringleader of the 9/11 killers was some Mohamed Mohamed el-Amir Awad el-Sayed Atta, a university-educated terrorist who came from a middle-class Egyptian family and had been exposed to Western life in Germany and the US. Growing up in a “pro-Western” dictatorship probably contributed to his deep hatred for Egypt’s “distant masters” (in Al-Qaeda lore). We have here a combination of factors. It is quite possible that the Mubarak regime, now virtually indistinguishable from that of President Sisi’s, used ultra-nationalistic propaganda interspersed with anti-Western (and anti-Jewish) rhetoric to deflect popular anger. This was done using state-sponsored media and preachers.

This has also contributed to increase the danger of terrorist attacks against Western tourists and populations (similarly, France is seen by jihadists as backer of the Moroccan and Algerian regimes), and is good news for the incumbent autocracies that present themselves to their allies and their constituencies as the only efficient bulwark against terrorist onslaught, while (indirectly) inciting their disenfranchised youth to seek out these very avenues. Once started, this method seems to get a little bit out of hand. This would illustrate my point about the new type of Realpolitik that I would recommend to put in place, as ultimately the old order will wither away, hopefully in a peaceful evolutionary manner if carefully prepared.
Tolerance for others especially religious minorities can only blossom in democratic environments under the rule of law applicable to all. If the West continues to ignore its own recipe, it does it at its own peril. It (Europe) may face refugee flows from this and other parts of the world who vote with their feet. This could overwhelm especially European absorption capacity and lead to further polarization in its own societies at times of economic hardship. However, our decision-makers seem to go into the opposite direction in supporting archaic regimes after what they felt were ill-advised interventions in Iraq and Libya. One could argue, however, that it is “too early” to know for sure. Time will tell.

The great Chinese strategist Sun Tzu\textsuperscript{71}, whose quality of strategic thinking remains unparalleled until today, warned would-be “puppet-masters” not to turn into “puppets of the puppets”. That is exactly happening today (the US and Russia did not seem to have learned some otherwise important lessons from Vietnam or Afghanistan). This brings me to the question of corruption. In a June 2014 academic article which findings I fully support, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace wrote about the detrimental effects of corruption\textsuperscript{72}, including for global security. Their definition of one of the worst cases of state corruption was perfectly adapted to Egypt, as they said: “One of the endemic corruption cases is where corruption is relatively structured, whose governing system have been bent to benefit one or a very few cliques, best thought of as networks. States may have one or multiple kleptocratic networks which often coexist only uneasily.”

\textsuperscript{71} His historicity is uncertain, perhaps 544-496 BCE.
\textsuperscript{72} Corruption: the unrecognized Threat to International Security, by the Working Group on Corruption and Security of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace. “ … Kleptocratic networks control the government functions that master. Gamal’s network captured its own armed branch, the detested \textit{Amn al-Shurta}, or auxiliary police, omnipresent throughout Egyptian life. Judges in Mubarak’s Egypt retained a significant degree of formal independence - although the rules of criminal procedure removed much of their discretion and cultural factors encouraged a legitimist stance. As a result, the judiciary could not constitute an effective accountability mechanism. The retired administrator of an urban zone in Alexandria remembered how Ahmad Fathi Sorour, speaker of parliament under Mubarak ”made laws for Gamal so he could circumvent the whole judicial system”. … in Egypt … the civil service siphons significant public funds into private purses through fraudulent contracting procedures”.
One example of this type is former president Hosni Mubarak's Egypt, where two main networks controlled much of the economy - the military and a crony capitalist network led by Mubarak's son Gamal on the other” (see footnote 72 for further details). Readers will note the involvement of the military in the corruption schemes, not a good foreboding for future developments. Police and judiciary are also part of the problem. It is this web of lies and deep state embezzlement of funds which has driven young people to terrorism, and the backers of the current regimes do not seem to have sufficient leverage (or will) to bring about change, or are themselves beneficiaries of these practices. Their people will eventually be presented with the butchers’ bill. As the Carnegie Endowment article noted, for the late Atiyah al-Rahman, a prominent al-Qaeda member killed in a US drone strike in 2011 the main rationale for the 9/11 attacks was the US enabling role for Arab kleptocracies. In 2009, he had denounced US and Western officials "for setting up in our countries treasonous regimes loyal to them, then backing these corrupt regimes and governments against their populations.” This would be eloquent testimony to look into the current Realpolitik practices that do not seem to have worked as well as some may suggest. How to govern effectively is key and large-scale corruption practices in dictatorships and formal democracies alike spell disaster. But one could argue that the rule of law and an independent judiciary and long-time honored practices of good governance will eventually stabilize democracy including in initially infertile soils.

To further strengthen my point, I refer to the aforementioned article in the New York Times of 17 May 2014 by Thomas Friedman73, where he pointed to the work of democracy experts such as Mr. Daniel Brumberg (Georgetown University and the United States Institute of Peace). The latter pointed out that Tunisia, in contrast to Egypt, was able to forge a new democratic constitution, in great part because it was the Arab country that had the most robust

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73 See footnote 24, The Square People, part 2.
civil society institutions (especially a powerful labor union federation, as well as business, human rights and lawyers associations) that could arbitrate between the secular and religious factions. Also, Tunisia had an army that stayed out of politics (and business\textsuperscript{74}) and secular and Islamist forces had reached a balance of power, requiring them to be inclusive of one another. In other words, salvation is in strengthening institutions in all walks of life and not in reveling in the diktats of a “strongman” like Sisi.

In another long article, The Economist\textsuperscript{75} lamented the difficult times for democracy: Even though 40\% of the world's population (more than ever before) live in countries that will hold free and fair elections in 2014, democracy's global advance has come to a halt and perhaps may go into reverse (as seen in Egypt). Freedom House reckons that 2013 was the 8th consecutive year in which global freedom has declined, and that its forward march peaked around 2000. In contrast, China is a successful model of authoritarianism. According to Mr. Larry Summers (Harvard University), when he US was growing fastest, it doubled living standards roughly every 30 years; China has been doubling living standards every decade for the last 30 years … Would China (or Russia) offer to countries like Egypt an alternative option to its Western lukewarm backers? In Egypt, building the institutions to sustain democracy is slow work and dispelled the notion that democracy will blossom rapidly and spontaneously once the seed is "planted".

Although democracy may be a "universal aspiration" (Messrs. Bush Jr. and Blair), I agree with the article’s main tenet that it is also a culturally rooted practice. Almost all Western countries extended the right to vote long after the establishment of political systems with powerful civil services and entrenched constitutional rights in societies, including individual

\textsuperscript{74} As a reminder, 40\% of Egypt’s economy is said to be in its hands, see reports of recent major Suez Canal infrastructure overhaul work.

\textsuperscript{75} What’s gone wrong with democracy? 1 March 2014.
rights and independent judiciaries. Plato's great worry about democracy that citizens would "live from day to day indulging the pleasure of the moment", has proved prescient, as democratic governments got into the habit of running big structural deficits as a matter of course, borrowing to give voters what they wanted in the short term, while neglecting long-term investment … or far-sighted foreign policies.

I also agree, as said before that Western democracies need to overcome the fear of jihadism paralyzed by the thought that that democracy could produce rogue regimes or empower jihadists. One reason why many democratic experiments have failed recently is that they put too much emphasis on elections and too little on the other essential features of democracy: individual rights such as freedom of speech and freedom to organize (and freedom of religion) must be guaranteed. The most successful new democracies have worked because they avoided the temptation of “majoritarianism”, the notion that winning an election entitles the majority to do whatever it pleases.

On the other hand, it needs to be acknowledged that the transition from dictatorship to democracy is not an easy task, with parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood traumatized by decades of state repression, imprisonment, torture and extra-legal killings and therefore obsessed by secrecy and power-grabbing. These new actors should be engaged, as they will not go away and if so, could be replaced by worse actors, not at all devoted to the idea of popular democracy. The Muslim Brotherhood by trial and error may have succeeded over time, or lost the elections by popular vote, but not giving the democratic experience in Egypt the time to nurture and mature is a grave strategic error, in my view.

While some believe that there are no political “moderate Islamists” and that the US should have strengthened the Muslim world's secular democratic parties and empower their

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supporters and that it should now engage with the government of President Sisi, I believe that the true friends of Egypt should engage with all parties concerned (Government, secular and religious forces, and minorities), while upholding their own fundamental principles and stressing the need for inclusive dialogue, the end of repression, and a due legal process for all. This should apply to all, from journalists to followers of any political party including the Muslim Brotherhood. Too many Egyptian liberals are marked by their fear of the segment of their society that is rural, pious, illiterate and (very) conservative.

In concluding remarks, I suggest that a new catchword should be adapted from the Marxist lexicon: “Democrats of all countries unite”!! Time is now and we should not shrink from our duty in our smaller “flat” world. The twin forces of globalism and localism need to be harnessed, rather than resisted or ignored. In that regard, let me end this paper on yet another article by Thomas Friedman where he refers to one his teachers, Dov Seidman, author of the book “How” and CEO of LRN, who looks at the world through the framework of “freedom from” and “freedom to”. I concur with Mr. Seidman’s view to look at the world through the framework of “freedom from” (dictatorship) and “freedom to”; the latter (and the most important) is about the freedom to “live your life, speak your mind, start your own political party, build your own business, vote for any candidate, pursue happiness, and be yourself, whatever your sexual, religious or political orientation”. Egypt requires first, in my view, the consolidation of the “freedom from” at the level of the society as a whole before turning to the “freedom to” type. For Mr. Seidman the “freedom to” requires “the kind of laws, rules, norms, mutual trust and institutions that can only be built upon shared values and by people who believe they are on a journey of progress and prosperity together.” Such values-based legal systems and institutions are what many societies, including Egypt, have failed to build after overthrowing

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their autocrats (and have regressed again in the category of “freedom from”)\(^78\).

The difficulty to get from “freedom from” to “freedom to” is compounded by disorderly vacuums in the world today. The biggest challenge for the world of order today is collaborating to contain these vacuums and fill them with order, thus increasing nation-building. And that is what the proponents and supporters of the status quo bet on: no country (including the US and the European countries) has the wherewithal, resolve, funds, standing power and – yes – moral authority, to impose changes for more inclusivity on their autocratic “allies”, because they fear instability and the monsters it spawns more than the established “order”. It would take wise statesmanship and strategic vision to help usher a new order of democratic shared values, including pacified religious thought and mores, that would be the true bulwark against those who use the tenets of an honorable and venerable religious philosophy to impose a “new order” (or rather “disorder”). Religion is the answer if – and only if – it is not exclusive of other aspirations of important humane and humanistic visions of societies anchored in the rule of law, the protection by law and custom of peaceful opinion, thought and faith arrived at freely.

\(^78\) I also agree with Mr. Seidman’s three-pronged description of political spaces. First, the countries with “sustainable order” i.e. the order based on shared values, stable institutions and consensual politics. Second, the countries “with imposed order”- order based on an iron-fisted, top-down leadership, or propped-up by oil money, or combinations of both, but they have no real shared values or institutions (Egypt and most autocracies, but the price to keep them in place is growing, and it is untenable in the long run). Thirdly, the countries and “regions of
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