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FROM NATIONAL STRUGGLE TO THE DISILLUSIONMENTS OF "RECOLONIZATION"

The triple temporality of Islamism

THE FACT THAT THE identity problematic applies more or less to the sum total of actors does not necessarily immunize the latter from history. Even if we can discern a common matrix behind the diversity and elements of continuity within the changes, the modalities of the makeover of an individual between two affiliations ("secular," "French," "religious," "Islamic," etc.) are not strictly speaking equivalent, whether in space (social or national) or in time. Therefore, though it may be legitimate to consider that each member of the successive "generations" of the Islamist mobilization participates in the same assertion of his Muslim identity in the face of the Western alter ego and the regimes accused of pandering to it, it is important to continually reconfigure within each historical context this homogeneity of the identity problematic, in space and time.

The diversity of Islamist itineraries

In the nineteenth century the initial responses of the Muslim world to the thrust of Western hegemony were of an intellectual nature. It was on the pediment of such reformist thought, within the context of enduring British occupation, that the initial expression of the ideas of the Muslim Brothers subsequently crystallized in Egypt during the first third of the twentieth century. The United Kingdom at the time was protecting a fragile parliamentary monarchy, whose elites nonetheless enjoyed a certain pluralism of parliamentary expression. A generation later, the national ideological environment had changed: borders, nations, and mental patterns had been disrupted by the creation of Israel, the thrust of Arab nationalism, and the tripartite expedition organized in 1956 by London, Paris, and Tel Aviv to counter the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Replenished by the dividends of their nationalist victories, the authoritarianism of the successive regimes grew more pronounced. The entry

"into Islamism" is obviously, on multiple levels, tailored to individual histories and national contexts. In their reversion to the fold of religious thought, Nasserists and Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, or Arab Baathists did not follow the same itineraries as those who, in Sudan, Egypt, or elsewhere, set aside their traditional membership in Sufi brotherhoods to rally to the reformism of a less passive and therefore more political Islam.

In Yemen, the Muslim Brothers (formed in Cairo by Hassan al-Banna) initially received, in their struggle against an isolationist and conservative religious Imamate, the support of Hassan al-Banna and then that of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, at the very moment when the latter was subjecting their counterparts in Cairo to a terrible campaign of repression. While in 1995 Mohammed Atta (1968–2001), an Egyptian architecture student in Hamburg, had so far internalized the categories of Sayyid Qutb's theology that he was ready to place his life on the line to make it triumph, it was in reaction to current events beyond anything Qutb might have known or imagined that he nevertheless forged the death-bent determination which eventually led to the organization of the September 11 attacks.

To render as well as possible both this plurality and the chronological ratcheting up of Islamist logic, I propose here to distinguish three broad contexts and hence three successive overarching sequences in the deployment of its mobilization.

The first sequence was that of the emergence of Islamist mobilization as a foil to direct colonial presence. In order to define its mechanism, it is nonetheless necessary to recall, however briefly, the reformist preambles of the nineteenth century. The second sequence, immediately subsequent to independence, was that of the assertion of cultural options and of the increasingly authoritarian political formulas of the first generation of nationalist elites. The third began in 1990 following the collapse of the USSR with the birth of a so-called world order which increasingly revealed itself to be conspicuously "ordered" around solely American interests. During this third timeline, in the former colonial peripheries, the Western counterpart, with its convergence of interests with the national elites in power becoming more blatant every day, insensibly again became the main foil for oppositional struggle: faced with the progress of a sort of rampant "recolonization," the loss of autonomy of the "independentist" elites stripped them of their ranking as primary adversary, to the advantage of the global superpower.

Iraq after Saddam Hussein provides a paradigmatic example of such a configuration: even more than the new elites elevated into office by the American military occupier, it is the latter that has become target number one for the resistance to a political order justifiably perceived as imposed by the United States.

The reformist preambles of the Muslim Brothers: from al-Afghani to 'Abd al-Wahhab

During the *first temporality of Islamism*, the resources of the endogenous religious culture were progressively mobilized to fuel the political resistance to the direct stranglehold of the Western colonizer. In 1928, ten years after the carving up of the Ottoman Empire and four years after the dissolution of the caliphate, the last institutional expression of global Muslim unity, eight years before the Treaty of London, which recognized the independence of Egypt in 1936 (while retaining the British military presence in the canal zone), the foundation of the Muslim Brothers by Hassan al-Banna can be considered to be the very first manifestation of the "Islamist reaction."

Nonetheless, the emergence of the Brothers owed much to the heritage of prior intellectual mobilization, which proceeded from a very similar logic. The existential question ("What is to be done to resist Western pressure?") had indeed already been raised by the founders of the trend identified with the thought of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), and Rashid Ridha (1865–1935). Essentially, the Muslim Brothers prolonged the first intellectual efforts of their predecessors by transposing them into the political field. The testimony of a large majority of "founding fathers" thus contradicts the existence of any rupture between contemporary Islamists and the reformist thought of their elders.[1]

On this ground, the Algerian experience of Malek Bennabi – already mentioned above – is particularly illuminating. Bennabi paradoxically rediscovered the Arab and Turkish Orient, from which he had been insulated by the dominant north–south flows of colonial exchange, by reading French Orientalist literature. The latter provided him with an aesthetically enhanced image of the Orient. But there was a dearth of the key readings necessary to empower an explanation of its terrible state of decline. As he explained in his memoirs, it was the works of Muhammad Abduh and the Lebanese reformist Ahmed Ridha (1872–1953) which gave him the – political – key to this Oriental decline:

> Finally and above all, I discovered at the En-Nadjah Bookshop the two books that I consider to be the earliest and most decisive sources of my intellectual vocation. I am referring to *La Faillite morale de la politique occidentale en Orient* (The Moral Bankruptcy of Western Policy in the Orient) by Ahmed Ridha and the *Rissalat al-tawhid* by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, translated by Mustapha Abderrazak, in collaboration with a French Orientalist. These two works, I believe, made an impression on my entire generation at the *madrasa*.[2] In any case, I owe them my turn of mind from then on. Indeed, with an abundant documentation on the splendors of Muslim society at the apex of its civilization, Ridha's work gave me a precise yardstick with which to measure its currently depressing social distress. Abduh's work – I am thinking of the important introduction by its translators, which dwells on the wealth of Islamic thought over the centuries – gave me a point of reference by which to judge its appalling present state of intellectual poverty. This reading chastened my spleen, that nostalgia for the Orient which Pierre Loti, Claude Farrère, and even Alphonse Lamartine and François de Chateaubriand had imparted to me. They revealed to me a historically real Orient whose currently miserable condition I could no longer ignore. They constituted a force, an intellectual call of quite another order which prevented me from lapsing into the romanticism which at the time was so fashionable among that generation of Algerian intellectuals.

There exist numerous other "object lesson" illustrations of this continuity of thought between the reformists and the Brothers. At the other end of the Arab planet, in the Yemen of Imam Yahya, the modernizing movement of the "Free Yemenis,"[3] which we will return to below, never politically distinguished the influence of al-Banna's Muslim Brothers from that of the reformist currents which preceded them.[4]

In this Arabian Peninsula, in Yemen but also in Saudi Arabia, reformist endeavors had certainly been the forerunners of the al-Afghani current. Can they also be associated with the inception of the Islamism of the twentieth century? The least known are the initiatives of the Yemenis Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Amir (d. 1769) and Muhammad al-Shawkani (1760–1834).[5] The latter, for almost forty years a Zaydi (Shiite) judge at the service of the imams of the uplands of North Yemen, was one of the first to denounce the bad effects of ill-considered imitation (*taqlid*) of tradition to the detriment of the innovative adaptations rendered possible by *ijtihad*. His thought also contained an embryo of reference to constitutionalism and to a limitation of the powers of rulers, whom he prompts to accept the advice of the nation.[6] His thoughts deeply inspired Abduh.[7] Finally, and above all, he attempted to transcend the divisions between the different legal schools and the Zaydi (Shiite) and Shafii (Sunni) sectarian allegiances.

These reformist antecedents to the colonial shock and the continuity between Abduh and his Yemeni ancestor al-Shawkani relativize the theory of a Muslim world which only confrontation with the West had been able to extricate from its doctrinal stasis. On the contrary, they support the idea that the reformist dynamic already underway before the colonial confrontation was plausibly derailed only when its contributions had been assimilated with possible concessions to the culture of the invader. The wellsprings of this reactive logic, which marked the whole epoch then opening, have been brilliantly demonstrated in the formula of Tariq al-Bishri, an Egyptian jurist close to the Muslim Brothers: "While we resist, do you think it is possible for us to advance?" (quoted by Bennabi).

Whatever the posterity of al-Shawkani's efforts, at least one argument nevertheless suggests not directly associating him with this sequence of a reformist preamble to contemporary Islamism: contrary to members of the later school of al-Afghani, al-Shawkani did not mobilize under the pressure of a clearly identified Western menace. He perhaps only sought to help the Zaydi Imams, whom he served faithfully for forty years, to emerge from the ghetto of their sectarian allegiance to better legitimize their domination over their Sunni Shafii vassals. Above all he sought to transcend the divisions among different juridical schools and their sectarian allegiances.

Among the reformists of the eighteenth century, one whose notoriety has widely survived is "the Saudi" Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab.[8] Beginning in 1744, the Najdi preacher undertook a rigorous reinstatement of monotheism and divine unicity. He placed his preaching at the service of the nascent dynasty of Muhammad ibn al-Saud, with whom he threw in his lot, providing what might be called the ideological underpinnings which enabled the sovereign to unify a large part of the Peninsula and to give birth to a stable and autonomous political entity. From the perspective of contemporary Islamism, the status of 'Abd al-Wahhab's approach is therefore somewhat more ambivalent than that of the Yemeni al-Shawkani.

Even if it was not the product of a reaction to the Western threat, its message did indeed have a "nationalist" resonance with international implications. It contributed to help a new Arab nation emerge, to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire. It had a federal dimension, since it enabled a centralized political power to transcend the divisions of the different Sunni schools. It also had reformist implications: the federalism of "Wahhabism" indeed denounced illegitimate political-religious forms, considered to be a challenge to divine unicity. It therefore waged war against Shiism and the "cult" of Ali in the East and, almost everywhere, against the intermediation of the saints

advocated by the Sufis. The stamp of Wahhabism, although often caricatured in contemporary literature,[9] left an indelible imprint on later expressions of the dynamics of re-Islamization, including (in its reserve toward certain expressions of Sufism) the thought of the Muslim Brothers.

Essentially, in the context of the colonial confrontation, the first Islamist generation then contributed to reaffirming the place of the religious reference within the lexicon of pro-independence struggles, as not only intellectual but now also political. Even if it was used a lot, the Islamic lexicon did not monopolize the expression of pro-independence anti-Western mobilization.[10] The first generation of nationalists drew heavily on the conceptual arsenal of the colonial power and even more so from its Soviet alter ego and competitor. "Anti-imperialist" socialism as well as "ethnic" nationalism – that is, the so-called secular Arabism, whose original ideologues, first and foremost led by the Syrian Michel Aflaq, included a significant number of Christians – occupied a wide swath of the space traditionally allocated to the religious reference. Many future members of the Islamist generation passed through this universe of "socialist" and "secular" Arabism before experiencing, at the end of highly diversified itineraries, an identical need to restore the religious reference to its place in the expression of the pro-independence project.[11]

The first Islamist generation, notably in Tunisia and Algeria, nonetheless failed to capitalize on the political fruits of its efforts and to control the state apparatus vacated by the departure of the colonizers. Its representatives, be they the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, the trend of Malek Bennabi and the Association of Ulamas founded by Sheikh Ben Badis in Algeria, or the Tunisian Youssefists,[12] were almost systematically excluded from the exercise of power, to the benefit of the so-called secular pro-independence elites. All the complexities of this process, and particularly the role played by the colonial powers in the co-option of their pro-independence "interlocutors," especially in the case of the Algerian NLF, have not yet been completely documented.[13]

The disillusions of decolonization: from cultural divide to political authoritarianism

The *second Islamist temporality* stretches from the period of independence until early in the 1990s. This was the period of assertion of the political formula of indigenous elites who had succeeded in coming to power. It was also the period of an increasing calling into question of these same elites. Today the main political opponent of the founders of al-Qaeda appears to be this "Nasserian" or, elsewhere in the region, "Nasserist" generation of pro-independence elites. It was progressively on the receiving end of a double indictment on the part of the rising Islamist generation. One was having betrayed the promises of independence by not having pursued a clear symbolical rupture from the colonizer. The other, which emerged more slowly, was having merely responded to the first demands for political participation with a repressive authoritarianism.

Between the Islamist trends, which were mainly in the opposition, and the elites in power, the dispute focused primarily on a sort of "cultural" deficit observable in the realizations of independence. The Islamists wanted to pursue on the ideological and symbolical levels the process of putting the colonizer "at arm's length," which had just been achieved in the political arena before being extended on the economic level with

the "nationalizations" (of oil, arable land, the Suez Canal, etc). They called for a rupture with the mainly Marxist categories of "anti-imperialism" and "Third-Worldism" applied throughout the first temporality of the nationalist dynamic. The modernizing elites in power were therefore criticized for not having carried out the expected cultural and symbolic rupture with the colonial universe – in other words, their inability to perfect the "distancing" of the foreign master by restoring the primacy of the "Islamic," that is, "endogenous," symbolic system. In the Maghreb, the tensions linked to the persistent use of the French language and the state's marginalizing of the religious institutions (notably the universities) inherited from the precolonial "Islamic" system provided the visible part of this process. The elites in power were very soon identified as belonging to "the French party." Indeed, as the Tunisian Rashid al-Ghannoushi, in exile from "Bourguiba's army of the vanquished" to use his own expression, testified, independence, "much more than a victory over the French occupier, constituted instead a victory over the Arabo-Islamic civilization of Tunisia."[14]

The cultural nature of these first claims subsequently expanded to include the more banal denunciation of the growing authoritarianism of regimes and the premises of an "Arab political formula," behind which the pro-independence elites having come to power very soon felt the need to protect themselves. This lock-out of the political field progressively appeared all the less acceptable for benefiting from a watchful tolerance and, often enough, explicit support on the part of the former colonial powers. Beyond any reaction to colonial violence in itself, it was as a stand against the repression brought to bear by the pro-independence elites (Nasser's repression of the Muslim Brothers is paradigmatic here) that the first radical offshoots (above all in the case of Qutb) emerged in the course of this second temporality. In the immense majority of cases, the expressions of Islamist mobilization were very soon denied access to the legal political arena. Hence their members were long confined to clandestine action or, in the most favorable cases, to the associative or trade-unionist institutional outer fringe of political life. The more their capacity for mobilization was asserted, the more the policies of exclusion of the regimes and the ostracism of the Western media cracked down.

Despite the diversity of national configurations, the recipe for the radicalization of part of the Islamist population gelled thanks to the same ingredients: the regimes, having exhausted the capital of nationalist (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco) or revolutionary resources (gained in the course of popular revolutions following independence, Egypt, Libya), progressively harmonized their governmental practices within the mold of a quasi "Arab institutional norm." Despite the patent discrepancies with all the humanist precepts lionized by the West, they thus benefited from the active support of the latter.

After a phase of nationalist exuberance, an inversion in the trend of oil prices and the mechanisms of global economic integration inexorably led the pro-independence elites to accept, from the 1980s onward, new forms of dependency, making even more concessions to their Western environment as their own popular underpinnings weakened. Progressively, the heroes of independence and the other Third-Worldist revolutionaries – or their inheritors – were accused not only of rehashing the terms of cultural domination but, increasingly, of endorsing, under the most dehumanized arsenal of political repression, a new "re-dependence," first economic and then political (and even military in the Middle East, as soon as the states of the region stopped resisting Israel's demands).

In the conservative oil monarchies which had purportedly remained closest to the religious reference, the passage through a certain "secularization," then through autocracy and (re)dependence, was in fact very real and fueled identical tensions.[15] In Saudi Arabia during the 1980s (to which we will return below) the *ulamas* were reduced to the role of accessories to power, purveyors of financial *fatwas* legitimizing modes of development, or to silent opposition. The expropriation of the religious norm progressively narrowed to the space of mere personal status, conquering only one new field of action, that of so-called Islamic finance. In Arabia, the political price of dependency on the West was revealed to be proportional to the European and American appetite for oil. Authoritarianism and concussion with Western powers inexorably set up the podium from which the first Islamist demands and the subsequent radicalization of some of their members were to be launched.

Facing "recolonization": al-Qaeda and the third temporality of Islamism

> *After years of being perceived as a problem solver, the United States itself has now become a problem for the rest of the world. After having been the guarantor of political freedom and economic order for half a century, the United States appears more and more to be contributing to international disorder by maintaining where it can uncertainty and conflict.*
>
> —EMMANUEL TODD, *AFTER THE EMPIRE: THE BREAKDOWN OF THE AMERICAN ORDER* (2004)

> *Did you ever wonder why it wasn't Sweden that we attacked?*
>
> —OSAMA BIN LADEN, MESSAGE TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE (NOVEMBER 2004)

The *third Islamist temporality*, during which the gravitational pull of al-Qaeda's influence began to come into its own, emerged in the early 1990s. It underwrote a sort of transfer, or better a "return," of the oppositional struggles of the Arab world to the international scene. For a whole political generation, the Western powers, with the United States as self-imposed leader, gradually "reverted" to the status of main adversary, just as they had been during the colonial period.

The image of a new transition "from close enemy to distant enemy" – used by the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri to describe the strategy of his extremist organization – thus amounts to a return to the binary confrontation of the colonial configuration, the overwhelming power of the foreign enemy reasserting itself against the intermediation of local governing elites, reduced to the rank of protected go-betweens for the new holders of the title "empire."

Three great "denials of representation" were fundamentally instrumental in the radicalization and transnationalization of the rebellion which spread through part of the Islamist constituency. The first was the denial endured by a rising generation of opposition to Arab state regimes, which year after year has come up against the great firewall of conservative political engineering which almost everywhere has replaced the fugitive promises of "democratic transition." The second "failure of the political" was regional: it resulted from the exacerbation of the Israeli–Arab conflict, more

"asymmetrical" than ever,[16] and from the state of abandonment in which the hopes of the Palestinian camp, already weakened by the collapse of its traditional Soviet ally, ended up when the paralysis of the 1993 Oslo Accords finally locked in. The third political dysfunction has been global: by bringing the division of the "Western camp" to an end, the collapse of the USSR has abrogated an essential means of regulating the bouts of bulimia of Washington, whose foreign policy from then on increasingly lurched toward unilateral interventionism. As Rashid Khalidi emphasizes, the 2003 American war against Iraq was fought

> … firstly to demonstrate that it was possible to free the United States from subordination to international law or the U.N. Charter, from the need to obtain the approval of the United Nations for American actions, and from the constraints of operating within alliances.… it was a war fought because its planners … saw the tragedy of 9/11 as a golden opportunity to achieve this long-cherished goal."[17]

The correlation of these three levels of crisis – national, regional, and global – gradually widened the gap of misunderstanding between, on the one hand, the millions of citizens in an entire region of the world who deem themselves to be its victims and, on the other, the coalition of those who, at the global, regional, or national domestic levels, stand to reap benefit from it: the American administration and its neo-conservative ideological henchmen, then Israel, largely supported by its public opinion and its powerful communication capabilities, and finally the Arab governing elites, more often than not completely devoid of any public support. It was arguably this general failure in political regulation of world tensions which, early in the 1990s, took the lid off the Pandora's box of Islamist radicalization. The al-Qaeda insurgency, that monstrous progeny of the world's most perverse injustices, can be considered one of its most hyperbolical expressions.

In the globally democratic Western environments, the claims of the alter-globalization movement have highlighted, through radically different means, political and economic malfunctions which, *mutatis mutandis*, are not entirely foreign to those which have nurtured the emergence of al-Qaeda. In lands where – oil interests and Israeli security so demand – Western domination has intensified to a particularly high pitch and where, above all, conservative local political arrangements have prohibited all forms of legal protest, the radicalization has been spun into the emergence of revolutionary rhetoric and practices and the sectarian radicalization of Osama Bin Laden and his operatives.

The impunity of the "Arab Pinochets"

The grip of the Arab "institutional norm," endorsed by the international order, manifests itself above all through the outlawing and gradual criminalization of real political forces.[18] Parties deprived of their existence or of all access to the legal political arena represent in their immense majority the mainstream of the Islamist trend. The regimes have substituted oppositional "partners," tailored to the requirements of a "pluralist" narrative intended above all to lend credence abroad to a democratic façade. By refusing to pay the price for the existence of genuine mechanisms of representation, these

regimes have reverted to repression to confront the tensions inescapably born of this deep dichotomy between reality and institution.

From Riyad to Rabat, the use of torture has become banal and systematic. It targets not only political prisoners but very often also their close family, male or female.[19] The presence of an extremist fringe – but also its regular, often massive, manipulation in the scenographies of the mass media – provides the pretext for an iron foreclosure of the legal political scene. Egypt, in which President Mubarak could be "elected" again for a fifth six-year term in September 2005, has been living under a state of emergency since 1981. Almost everywhere, the electoral system, dispossessed of any grasp on the balance of power in the upper reaches of the state, or "defused," to adopt the excellent expression coined by the Moroccan political scientist Mohamed Tozy, is in fact running idle.[20]

Last but not least,[21] this "Arab political formula" has been consubstantial with practically unreserved Western support. The first contradiction of the new American world order has therefore been adapting to the profound discredit of the authoritarian regimes that underpin it. This shows an obstinate blindness, born notably from an American propensity, inherited from the 1979–1980 Iran crisis, to indiscriminately criminalize a whole Islamist generation. Or, alternatively, great lucidity concerning the nationalist bearing of the Islamist thrust and the advantages that, albeit at the price of sacrificing a few sacred principles, the present formula bestows on those who are its chief architects.

The wellsprings of the mobilizing resources of Bin Laden's followers therefore are replenished by the frustration of a political generation which perceives itself to be caught between the increasingly heavy hammer of American interventionism and the anvil of the repressive authoritarianism of its own governing elites. During the 1990s the strategies of liberation gradually came to focus on the American hand perceived as wielding that heavy hammer.

The walling-up of Palestine

At the dark heart of the malignant dysfunctions of the political regulation of the world there lies, unsurprisingly, the ever-recurrent Israeli–Arab conflict over Palestine. Through the 1990s, as the real contours of the Oslo Accords came progressively to light, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had taken the spectacular step of officially recognizing the state of Israel, received only illusory administrative compensation. The image of an archipelago of asphyxiated Bantustans, ceaselessly redefined by colonial excrescences, was inexorably substituted for any viable form of a Palestinian state, whose creation was continually postponed. Long before Likud came to office, the Labor Party, reputedly composed of "supporters of peace," initiated this systematic colonization of the West Bank, which rendered meaningless the proclaimed principle of an "exchange of land for peace."

From the end of 2000 on, the second Intifada gave the hawks of the Sharon camp the pretext purely and simply to reoccupy the Palestinian enclaves and ratchet up the violence to a new level. Refugee camps were assaulted with heavy armor and bulldozers. Even more than in its principle, it was in its mapping that the "security wall," which authorized the annexation of hundreds of hectares of Palestinian land, demonstrated the reality of the Israeli strategy. For all Palestinians, and for those elsewhere in the

world who have preserved the privilege of accessing relatively objective sources of information, it quickly became self-evident not only that the Israelis did not want peace but that they also coveted the land occupied since 1967. It also became clear that the American administration, whether under Bush Junior or under Clinton, did not harbor the least real intention of opposing this unacknowledged policy of annexation of great swaths of the West Bank.[22]

"Against God" rather than "Against His Saints": al-Qaeda attacks the American world order

At the beginning of the 1990s the postcolonial formula gave way to a new "imperial" order, even more obviously dominated by the United States than before.[23] The methods that Washington has employed to perpetuate or to perfect its hegemony are certainly not new. In 1973, in Chile, a first "September 11" gave birth, on the ashes of a "rebel" democracy, to a "subserviently" terrible dictatorship.[24] To the objectives targeted by the subjection of the entire South American continent[25] were added, in the case of the Middle East, the strategic nature of oil interests and the security requirements of Israel. The principle of the eviction of a government duly elected but considered excessively nationalist in favor of a more conciliatory authoritarian regime had been inaugurated in the region by the overthrow of the Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh, with British connivance, in August 1953.

The Second Gulf War in 1991 marked the overture of an American decade of intervention in the Peninsula. Hitherto a major ally of the United States, the Iraqi dictatorship was to pay the price for its "unfortunate" attempt, in August 1990, to seize the oil wells of Kuwait, bearing the brunt of a U-turn in American diplomacy and the mobilization of the United Nations. After the sacrifice of whole divisions of Saddam Hussein's army, carpet-bombed by B-52s, it was the Iraqi civilian population, by the hundreds of thousands, who would foot the bill for the economic embargo subsequently enforced by the coalition. The disarmament of the only regional power capable of militarily resisting Israel also gave Washington the opportunity to perpetuate its armed presence in countries neighboring Iraq, such as Saudi Arabia. The founding episode of the armed annexation of the largest oil reserve in the world had just been played out.[26] It was at the core of the incipient rebellion to be staged by the al-Qaeda camp.

The theater of operations of the most disputed initiatives of American and Western diplomacy in the 1990s was not limited to the Arabian Peninsula. The decade opened in Algeria with a double electoral victory (June 1990 and December 1991) for an opposition rallied under the umbrella of the "Islamic Salvation Front." The ISF was probably not significantly more democratic than the military whose interests it threatened, but hardly less so either. The all-powerful presidential institution, which forecloses the constitution and controls the armed forces, considerably limited the maneuvering space for its possible parliamentary majority. Under the pretext of "preserving democracy," Europe and the United States allowed the military junta to suppress the results of these first free elections ever and to implement, from January 1992 onward, an unusually perverse repressive strategy.

The silent approbation of the United States was echoed by the open political, economic, and media-hyped support of France under François Mitterrand. In the view of the vast majority of opinion, which, in the Muslim world, gave no credence

to the explanation that Paris and Algiers were attempting to legitimize, the conviction of a cynical Western dualism was further reinforced. The same dualism was palpable in 1995, when, in Bosnia, thousands of Muslim citizens were massacred despite the presence of Western troops under a United Nations mandate, supposedly there to protect them.

Finally, beyond the Middle East but still on Muslim lands, the new American world order granted its former Russian enemy *carte blanche* to wage in Chechnya, amid the rubble of its own empire, a colonial war every bit as barbarous as the one which it had just lost in Afghanistan.[27]

From the transnationalism of security policies to the internationalization of "Islamic" resistance

In the mind of an entire generation, and not only among Islamists, the political crises within the Arab world and part of the Muslim world are ever more systematically associated with an order that claims to be global but increasingly seems to be solely American. Washington's propensity to resort to "hard power" has grown, in line with that of its Arab puppet states to have recourse to repression. Both convey a common deficit of political legitimacy. Not only is this world order "Americanizing" (due to the collapse of the Soviet counterpower), but it is becoming increasingly confessional as the neo-conservatives make growing use of Christian references. It is also tending more and more to forgo the endorsement of the ever less credible international institutions dominated by Washington.

For millions of citizens of the Arab world (and not only for them), the mirage of a disinterested, pacifist, and universalist global "new order" has irresistibly evaporated before the hard reality of the support which an arrogant and ever more obviously autistic superpower has by all means at its command, including military, granted to one of the camps, whose actors are easy to identify. These are, first, the bearers of its own financial interests and narrowing ideological vision, that is, respectively, a small military-industrial caste closely linked to those in power and a highly coordinated Christian and Jewish electorate; second, the regional state actors who connive in their defense: Israel on the one hand, the Arab authoritarian regimes on the other.

During the 1990s the correlation between American interventionism and the repressive clout of the domestic Arab state orders was becoming increasingly self-evident. Even before September 11, 2001, the systematization and institutionalization of security cooperation endowed it with a heightened expression. The "War on Terrorism" would lead to the identification of certain Arab regimes with the American order and, conversely, of American interests with the durability of such regimes, notwithstanding their obvious unpopularity.

The formula which welds together this illegitimate transaction between the world order and sundry dictatorships rests on an exchange of resources: the authoritarian regimes "repay" Western silence and support with concessions which may range from massive arms orders to help in controlling oil prices, not to speak of more personal emoluments – which will leave lasting scars on not only the history of bilateral American–Saudi relations, of course, but also that of Franco–Algerian relations.

The first major world summit against (Islamic) terrorism at Sharm-al-Sheikh in March 1996 amounted to a particularly emblematic expression of this process. It was

held some five months before Bin Laden's first call for "War against Americans," made on August 23, 1996. A significant double convergence in policy and rhetoric locked in, between the titleholders of the American order and their Arab and Israeli allies. The common enemy of the likes of Bill Clinton, Vladimir Putin, and Benjamin Netanyahu, and also of all Arab dictators, was thereafter characterized as "Islamic terrorism." An alliance involving the American and European (including Russian) security apparatuses, the Israeli services, and the repressive machinery of the most dictatorial Arab regimes was forthwith proclaimed. The enemy was indiscriminately dubbed "Islamic terrorism." It encompassed a wide medley of realities: that of Palestine for Netanyahu, of Chechnya for Boris Yeltsin and then for Putin, of the Algeria of the generals and the Tunisia of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

The rhetoric of Sharm-al-Sheikh to some degree sanctioned the criminalization of all resistance, armed or not, to the dysfunctions of a very wide array of national, regional, or global authoritarianisms. All the actors in these oppositions and this resistance thus came, by an identical stigmatization, to be "invited" to identify with one another. Where this symbolic and political coordination had not already taken place, this was indeed what was to happen. In the eyes of many of those who were designated as being "on the receiving end," the transnational extension of the repression of all forms of protest or oppositional expression employing an Islamic lexicon reinforced the legitimacy of and the necessity for a correspondingly transnational extension of resistance.

For the militants of al-Qaeda, the "distant" American "enemy" thus sealed its own fate, henceforth to be shared with the "close" and long top-priority "enemy" represented by the Arab regimes. In the Islamic sphere, the internationalization and the reterritorialization of the armed struggle took shape concomitantly, echoing the American globalization of an increasingly disputed order.

"Mujahidin without borders" or the role of Afghanistan

The integration of several thousand young Muslims (between 10,000 and 15,000) into the ranks of the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation (from 1979 to 1989) constituted an episode that the analysis of the al-Qaeda generation must obviously take into consideration. This "Afghan factor" – and the opportunity given to several, thousand militants to participate in a victorious armed struggle against the second global superpower of the period – clearly played a significant role in the crystallization and self-affirmation of the al-Qaeda generation, just as the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and, later, in Chechnya also did to a certain degree. It cannot, however, be inflated into the sole or even the central explanatory factor.

More than being just an opportunity for military training, it no doubt facilitated the "path to action" by accelerating the circulation and transnationalization of revolutionary strategy. It also boosted, at the expense of other political strategies, the credibility of the efficacy or simply the feasibility of armed struggle against one of the pillars of the world order. The thrust of the "rejectionist camp," composed of a minority of proponents of armed action, was indeed favored as much by the failure of the struggles waged within the "national" arenas (notably in Egypt and Algeria) as by the blatant absence of any alternative route offered by the world order and its local intermediaries to the legalism of the central nexus of Islamist movements, notably and above all the Muslim Brothers.

The Afghan episode was constructed around successive and relatively different phases and processes. The first, at the beginning of the 1980s, was that of the legal, even official (from both the Arab and the American point of view), mobilization of thousands of young volunteers in the ranks of the resistance to the Soviet occupation. The legal presence of these "combatants without borders," for a long time known as "Arab Afghans" (even if they came from the entire Muslim world), coincided with the victory, which was also theirs, of the coalition of opponents to the Kabul regime and the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet forces.

In 1992 began a four-year civil war between the victors. At first the "Arabs" bore the brunt. The necessity for most of them to fall back on positions outside the Afghan sanctuary coincided with the beginning of a phase of increased repression by the regimes of their respective countries (notably Saudi Arabia and Algeria), which were wary of such operatives too rashly sent or allowed to go abroad for training in *jihad*. In the eyes of the Western media, these "combatants of the faith" abruptly morphed into "God's madmen."

The rise to power of the Taliban in 1996 once again inverted the regional situation. The deal struck with them by Osama Bin Laden received the support of Ayman al-Zawahiri and the members of his Egyptian organization Jihad – the second, with Jamaa Islamiyya, of the two branches of Egyptian radical Islamism in open revolt against the regime – which had survived the particularly effective repression of previous years. Al-Zawahiri then decided to relocate the front of his old (and inconclusive) struggle against the "close" enemy, the Egyptian state, to an admittedly "distant" (American) enemy, against which an exponentially increasing number of malcontents could be recruited. This last phase gave the signal for the "legal" (from the point of view of their Afghan hosts) deployment of the international networks of al-Qaeda.[28]

The accusations and claims that the Islamist generation had long directed at their respective regimes were thus turned in top priority against the former European colonial powers or, more precisely, against the – American – apex of the global power structure, which, following the defeat of the USSR, seamlessly took over their role.

It was in this context that, in April 1996, an Egyptian named Mohammed Atta sat down to write his will. It was also on that date that most of the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks set out with him on the long road which, via Afghanistan, Hamburg, and a handful of American civil aviation schools, culminated one morning in September 2001 in the firestorm of the World Trade Center.

Notes

1 See, above all, the thesis of Tariq Ramadan, *Aux sources du renouveau musulman, d'al-Afghani à Hassan al-Banna: un siècle de réforme islamique* (Paris: Bayard/Centurion, 1998).

2 An educational establishment for Algerian Muslim students. [The French edition gives no source for this quotation – Trans.]

3 Leigh Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935–1962* (Beirut: AUB, 1987).

4 François Burgat and Mohamed Sbitli, "Les Libres' yéménites, le courant réformiste et les Frères musulmans: premiers repères pour l'analyse," in Chérif al-Maher and Salam Kawakibi (eds.), *Le Courant réformiste musulman et sa réception dans les sociétés arabes*,

Aleppo Symposium marking the hundredth anniversary of the death of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, May 31–June 1, 2002 (Damascus: IFPO, 2003).

5 See in particular Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

6 See in particular Franck Mermier, Bernard Haykel, and Gabriele Vom Bruck, in Franck Mermier et al. (eds.), *Le Yémen contemporain* (Paris: Karthala, 2003). "On the one hand, he who governs in the name of Islam has a responsibility toward the nation. On the other hand, the nation itself has obligations toward him. One of the former is obedience. The other is to provide council."

7 He wrote: "I raised my voice to call for two very great undertakings … The first was to liberate thought from imitation [*taqlid*]. The second … was the necessity to differentiate the obedience that the people owe to the government and the right of the people to justice from the government" (quoted by Ahmed Amin, *Zu'ama al-Islah fi al-'Asr al-Hadith* [The Fathers of Reform in the Contemporary Era] [Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1979], p. 84).

8 See Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Guido Steinberg, *Religion und Staat in Saudi-Arabien: Die wahhabitischen Gelehrten, 1902–1953* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002); see also *La Pensée* 335 (July–September 2003).

9 Pascal Ménoret, "Wahhabisme, arme fatale du néo-orientalisme," *Mouvements* (November 2004).

10 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); French translation: *La Pensée arabe et l'Occident* (Brussels: Naufal, 1992). For Algeria, see, for example, Jean-Robert Henry and Claude Collot, *Le Mouvement national algérien: textes* (Paris: L'Harmattan-OPU, 1978).

11 See Henry Laurens, *L'Orient arabe: arabisme et islamisme de 1798 à 1945* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993).

12 The modernity of this is perfectly illustrated by the thought of Malek Bennabi (see Malek Bennabi, *Vocation de l'islam* [Paris: Seuil, 1954]).

13 One of the most emblematic situations is no doubt that of certain future high-ranking Algerian military officers: young officers in the French Army, many of whom only deserted to join the freedom struggle a few months before Independence. They then succeeded in taking a very firm hold on power and, in the 1980s and 1990s, played a well-documented role in foreclosing the political system.

14 Quoted in François Burgat, *L'Islamisme en face*, 3rd ed. (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), pp. 48ff.; English translation: *Face to Face with Political Islam* (London/New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1999).

15 See Pascal Ménoret, *L'Énigme saoudienne* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004).

16 Bertrand Badie, "Palestine, quelles perspectives?" conference held at the Paris Institut d'Études Politiques (IEP), January 19, 2004.

17 Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), p. x.

18 See in particular François Burgat, "De A comme Arafat à Z comme Zîn al-'Abidîn Ben Ali: la pérennité de la formule politique arabe," in *L'Islamisme en face*, pp. 244ff.

19 Other than the converging reports of Amnesty International, see in particular Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l'Homme en Tunisie, *La Torture en Tunisie 1987–2000: plaidoyer pour son abolition et contre l'impunité* (Paris: Le Temps des Cerises, 2004); Mahmoud Khelili, *La Torture en Algérie (1991–2001)*, Algeria-Watch,