The impact of authoritarian systems on the rise of transnational Islamist movements: Egypt, Saudi Arabia & the path to Al Qaeda

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The Impact of Authoritarian Systems on the Rise of Transnational Islamist Movements: 

_Egypt, Saudi Arabia & the Path to Al Qaeda_

A Thesis submitted to the Political Science Department in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of 

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

Political Science

By

Réhab El-Bakry

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THE IMPACT OF AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEMS ON THE RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS:
EGYPT, SAUDIA ARABIA AND THE PATH TO AL QAEDA
A THESIS SUBMITTED BY: REHAB EL-BAKRY
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
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ABSTRACT

The events of September 11, 2001 have had a profound impact on the world we live in today. Not only have they changed the perception of rights and freedoms in both the developed and developing worlds, but these events brought violent political Islamist movements from the fringes of international politics to the forefront of world politics. Suddenly movements that were once seen as an issue for the Muslim world became a concern for countries worldwide as they struggled to understand the causes behind the rise of Islamist violence and figure out ways to address it.

By and large, Islamist movements, violent and non-violent, find roots in the Arab world. The authoritarian nature of these systems, which prioritizes stability of the system and the ability of regimes to remain in power over inclusion of the public and various opposition groups, have often dealt with these movements through attempts of cooption into the system or isolation, which ranges from preventing them from participating in the legitimate system to full repression through incarceration and torture. It is largely due to isolation by these systems that many Islamist movements have not only turned to violence but adopted transnational modes of operation whereby a movement based in one country will carry out violent activities in a second to bring about change in a third.

This study traces the dealings of the Egyptian and Saudi Arabian governments with their respective Islamist movements with particular emphasis on tactics of cooption and isolation adopted by these governments. It also argues that these tactics played a fundamental role in driving these movements to alter their mode of operation from limiting their activities within the confines of the political system of individual countries to adopting global jihad against the states that help maintain these authoritarian systems in place. The end result Al Qaeda is hoping to achieve is the recreation of the Islamic Ummah, through the declaration of global jihad.

Based on the study, a series of actions are recommended for several players including political analysts, the media, and political players both on the international and regional levels. These actions include the need for expanding authoritarian political theory to allow for the analysis of these new movements and to predict their future activities. Efforts need to be made to distinguish between Islam as a religion and political movements derived from it. There is also a need for limiting the demonization of Islam by the media in order to reduce the feeling that the religion is under attack, which would reduce the attraction of radical ideologies to young Muslims.
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1. INTRODUCTION & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For much of the past decade, the international community has been preoccupied with trying to address the issue of violent Islamist movements. Although these movements have existed for much of the twentieth century, the rise of Al Qaeda as the first transnational Islamist movements that declared global jihad on the Western world as well as countries of the Islamic world marked a shift in the mode of operation for these movements. Previously characterized as domestic movements of the Arab and Muslim worlds seeking to bring about regime changes either through the use of the legitimate political system or through the use of violence, the drastic shift adopted by these movements propelled them to the top of the list of issues that need to be dealt with in a global setting. Suddenly these movements were as much the problem of the United States and Europe as they are the problem of Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

This study will illustrate that the co-option and isolation activities of Islamist movements by the authoritarian Arab governments, preventing them from accessing the legitimate political systems is among the main factors that led to the rise of violent transnational Islamist movements, embodied in Al Qaeda. In an effort to survive, these movements had to amend their goals from attempting to bring about change to the authoritarian systems of the Arab world by working within the borders of a single country to attempting to bring about change by declaring global jihad on the international actors that help maintain the survival of these systems. This study will use Egypt and Saudi Arabia outlining how the efforts of these authoritarian governments to co-opt and isolate various Islamist movements were direct factors that led to the rise of Al Qaeda and the shift of the mode of operation of Islamist movements.
It is no longer unusual to see international coverage of Islamist movements, alleged terrorist plots and new groups as well as old ones seeking to recreate the Islamist Ummah in international newspapers, magazines, television and radio. What was previously seen as a problem for countries in the Middle East and Islamic world to deal with, is now the subject of hundreds of books and the generator of income for hundreds of analysts whose work was previously restricted to academia. This is largely thanks to the attacks of September 11, 2001 where 11 Islamist suspects hijacked three civilian jets in the United States crashing one into the World Trade Center towers in New York after which both towers collapsed, one into the Pentagon in Washington DC, and the final jet crashed into the woods in Pennsylvania.¹ The attacks killed nearly 3,000 civilians² and sent shockwaves throughout the United States and the rest of the world.

To the governments of the Arab and the Islamic worlds, this attack was simply the one that brought an issue the international community seldom prioritized, addressed or even understood to the forefront of the minds of, not only politicians, but even the average individuals in the West. Suddenly, Islam was not only a religion the general public simply knew little about, it was a religion whose followers were perceived as hating the West and everything it stood for, from democracy, to the Judo-Christian tradition, to the liberties that the public saw as being an integral part of who they are. To put it simply, the general perception that resulted from the attacks of 9/11 was that: Islam and Muslims equal terrorism and terrorists.

The attacks set a spotlight on the Muslim countries, in general, and those in the Arab world, in particular, since the 11 alleged attackers all came from the region. The group that claimed responsibility for the attack was one that the general public and even some politicians throughout the world had never heard of, Al Qaeda (The Base). While the name of the group might have been new, the names of those behind the group were not – Saudi Arabia’s Osama bin Laden and Egypt’s Ayman Al Zawahiri. Many positioned the attacks as unexpected, the people behind it unknown; but as the public and political anxiety settled, it became clear than neither assumption was true. The telltale signs of the attacks had been there for several years, with many of the governments in the Middle East fully aware of the possibility of the threat, although with no specific information of the exact target. It also became clear that even some within the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and even the media had some information but they were unable to fully piece them together and their warnings seemed to fall on deaf ears.\(^3\) Not only was the West shocked at the attacks, but they were also shocked at the politicized nature of Islam.

Although the international community saw the politicization of Islam as a recent phenomenon, the truth of the matter is that politics has always been part of the building blocks of Islam. As a matter of fact, James Bill and Robert Springborg correctly point out in their book, *Politics in the Middle East*\(^4\) that Islam is fundamentally built as an all encompassing religious, social and political system. In that sense, the politicization of


Islam is not a recent phenomenon; simply, the international community became aware of the political nature of Islam, and the fact that the pursuit of politics can take violent means, following 9/11.

“By Islamist movements, we mean those groups that take some aspects of Islam or its interpretation as the frame of reference for their existence or objectives. They act in different ways to apply Islam as they see it in their societies and areas in which it is not present. The intellectual component is vital in distinguishing between various Islamist movements. Despite other criteria that could be used to classify these movements – their social origins, political ideas, or operational tactics, a movement’s intellectual underpinnings remains the firmest basis on which to classify it.”

This study analyzes the relationship between the nature of authoritarian systems in the Arab world with relevance to their domestic Islamist movements, and the role these played in creating and fostering the rise of violent transnational Islamist movements. This is done through the highlighting of the dealings of the Egyptian and Saudi governments with their domestic Islamist movements, respectively. It illustrates that both governments shared the priorities of stability of the country and the survival of their rule. They both achieved this through the implementation of cooption and isolation tactics in their dealings with their respective Islamist movements. These tools are essential to understanding why these movements have altered courses from working to establish Islamist states within their own countries solely through violent or non-violent domestic activities to attempting to bring about domestic change by targeting international actors that help maintain the status quo in their countries. This new mode of operation is best illustrated through Al Qaeda, as an umbrella organization under which many international Islamist movements, hailing from different countries, fall. Like many other entities in

today’s globalized world, these groups act globally with the aspiration of impacting locally.

The selection of Egypt and Saudi Arabia for this study is based on several important factors that have to do with the history of Islamist movements, in general, and the ideology behind today’s transnational Islamist movements, in particular. Both countries have long histories with Islamist movements that continue to impact the nature of their domestic politics until today. Egypt has often been credited with being the home of much of the modern Islamist political thought. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, has a political system that is built around one of the most conservative interpretations of the religion, Wahhabism. Both governments have had to deal with the impact of the strong presences of religious currents in their domestic political systems over the years by oscillating between attempts to isolate these movements completely from accessing the legitimate political system and attempts to co-opt these movements into domestic politics, giving them varying degrees of legitimacy. The governments of both countries have had to deal with the sporadic rise of Islamist groups attempting to bring about the collapse of the political systems through the use of violence. But perhaps most important of these factors, is the fact that the two key players behind the creation and notoriety of Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al Zawahiri hail from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, respectively.

1.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study:

The analysis of the relationship between the Egyptian and Saudi governments and their respective Islamist movements is based on the cooption and isolation tactics adopted by many authoritarian systems to deal with opposition groups. It is important to note that,
while Arab countries claim to have a variety of political systems, such as democratic systems, absolute monarchies and even socialist systems, the reality of the matter is that few truly implement any of these ideologies in practice or even in spirit. Instead, political ideologies have always served simply as facades they adopt to decorate the fact that, for much of the past six decades, these systems have all been inherently authoritarian. Today, the majority of these countries classify themselves as democratic or participatory systems in transition since this is the dominant ideology, or in truth the fashionable ideology, around the world today. However, little changes have taken place within these systems to truly illustrate that any real transition is taking place.

Thomas Carothers argues in “The End of the Transition Paradigm“6, that much of the concept of transition was coined out of the optimism that modern states that began their rule through authoritarianism would eventually move towards more sound ideological grounds, in general, and democratization, in particular. However, he notes that this optimism towards transition has extended for too long.

“The transition paradigm has been somewhat useful during a time of momentous and often surprising political upheavals in the world. But it is increasingly clear that reality is no longer conforming to the model. Many countries that policy makers and aid practitioners persist in calling “transitional” are not in transition to democracy, and of the democratic transitions that are under way, more than a few are not following the model... It is time to recognize that the transition paradigm has outlived its usefulness and to look for a better lens.”7

The idea of being in transition was particularly appealing to countries of the Arab world for much of the 1990s since its classifications were a lot more fluid that those of specific ideologies such as communism or democracy. Republics in the region in

particular, not only used the idea of being in transition but they have abused it. Egypt, for example, is among the countries that have embraced this concept because any simple token of political change, even a superficial one, boosted the legitimacy of the system on the domestic and international fronts. Egypt’s Party Law 40 of 1977 was drafted three decades ago to usher in a new era of participation by a large variety of parties and individuals. It was also done in order to prove to the international community that Egypt was on its way to having a fully democratic multi-party system. There are some 24 political parties licensed in Egypt with another handful awaiting the approval of their licenses. On paper, it appears that Egypt has a flourishing multi-political party system. However, in reality, the majority of these parties have never elected a single representative into the People’s Assembly. At the same time, the ruling party, the National Democratic Party, has the right to suspend any political party whenever it deems that this is in the best interest of the country. Moreover, it was not until 2005 that these political parties were allowed to field candidates for president. Until then, presidents were re-elected though a yes/no referendum. But based on the number of political parties, the fact that parliamentary elections are held every five years, regardless of whether the government allows or prevents candidates from campaigning or whether or not the results are fair, Egypt’s government classifies itself as democratic – the system might not be perfect but the government argues that it is in transition, even if just on paper.

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10 Political Reform in Egypt, Egypt State Information Service. http://us.sis.gov.eg/En/Politics/reform/040600000000000001.htm
This has generally been the case for many Arab countries. The international community seems to tolerate the fact that for the better part of three decades the systems in the majority of Arab countries have remained static and effectively authoritarian. By and large, the international community has tolerated this behavior by the Arab world attributing it to a form of exceptionalism, the reasons behind which only they know. This is largely due to the argument that most modern political theory was born out of the experience of the West and does not factor in variables that are more specific to countries of the East such as culture, language, history, colonialism, religion and ethnicity. But according to Albrecht Schnabel in “A Rough Journey: Nascent Democratization in the Middle East”, Arab countries have not only failed to implement any development towards democratization over the years, but that this failure has contributed to the continuing instability in the region.

“There are many reasons for the region’s political instability, economic plight, and human suffering. However, the lack of open political systems, heavy-handed authoritarian rule by autocratic governments, and most governments’ violent and repressive struggles with opposition movements and groups are key factors in limiting these societies’ potential for human, economic and social development.”

Instead, Carothers argues that these countries are all stuck in a gray zone. More cynically, Simon Bromley argues that the only real classification through which to differentiate between Arab countries has little to do with their ideologies. Instead, he classifies them based on factors that have to do with the timeframe during which the

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modern states came to being, their relationship with the international community and the amount of resources available within these states.

“There are three ways to distinguish between the countries of the Middle East: by reference to their social structures at the outset of the formation of the modern state; in terms of the history of their entanglement with outside powers; and by whether or not they have been major oil producers in the post-Second World War period. Other differences abound, but these three have been especially important in shaping the political trajectories of the region. This classification is based on an application of a structuralist approach to the Middle East, and thus categorizes the states in terms of their inherited social structure, the impact of international determinants and the resources available to the states. ...Once the political development of the Middle East is interpreted through the framework of structural theories, its alleged exceptionalism, its apparent failure to fit into more general patterns of democratization in the developing world, is largely mythical.”

The above classification is important because both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, despite the fact that their political systems are hardly identical, have several factors in common, which facilitate the creation of a basis on which one can draw parallels for comparison. While the two have little in common when it comes to how or when their modern state were created – Egypt being a state that has long had its own boundaries with a central ruling government, etc., and Saudi Arabia only becoming a modern state in 1932 through a series of tribal wars – both states have commonalities based on the above theory.

Both countries have segmented societies. In the case of Egypt, segmentation within society is based on social connections and education, while in the case of Saudi Arabia the segmentation of society is based on tribal connections. However, in both countries, access to the political system is linked to the connections individuals and groups have to those in power. Both countries have been heavily involved with the

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international community following the Second World War, although in different capacities. Egypt emerged as a powerhouse in the region first as a country spearheading Pan-Arabism and later as the mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This position allowed Egypt to emerge as the most important political counterpart for the international community in the region. To a lesser degree, Egypt did have limited oil resources and thus played a role on the international front as a country that can secure the international supply of oil to the world.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, the fact that it is the country in which Islam began has made it of particular religious importance to the Muslim world and thus the international community has to maintain strong relations with. However, more importantly, Saudi Arabia is among the world’s largest suppliers of oil. In many ways, this is often the most important reason why the international community must maintain strong ties with it.

Based on the above, the systems of the Arab world are neither exceptional within the international community nor are they in need of a theoretical framework that is tailor-made for them. The fact still remains that since the rise of modern states in the region, they have remained authoritarian adopting nominal changes in order to impact the perception of their systems but not actually their systems. It is due to this fact that the Arab countries have failed to evolve into full democratic systems complete with open election free of allegations of tampering, the continued weakness of institutions in these countries, and the isolation of opposition groups. Arab systems are inherently authoritarian and are likely to remain so unless they embark on serious change from within.
1.2 **Authoritarian Theory:**

Authoritarian rule can be defined in many ways. Generally speaking, it is a type of rule where the control of resources of the state is concentrated in the hands of the minority that exercises control over the majority. These resources include everything from control over decision-making, prominent political positions in the system, to high ranking jobs and even the ability to participate in the political system. Resources are carefully distributed by the state as part of their effort to remain in power and to maintain control over the system.\(^{14}\) The types of systems that can be classified as authoritarian can vary greatly since they include everything from dictatorships where rule and control over power and resources rests with the individual, to autocratic rule, where control over the political system and resources rest with a small minority.

"By authoritarian we mean an arbitrary and usually a personal government that uses law and the coercive instruments of the state to expedite its own purposes of monopolizing power and denies the political rights and opportunities of all other groups to compete for that power [...]. Authoritarianism is characterized by the removal of constitutional rights and protections from political opponents, the elimination of institutional checks and balances, and the centralization and concentration of state power in presidential offices, as well as the termination of open party politics and the regulation and confinement of political participation."\(^{15}\)

Regardless of the actual form of rule, there are certain characteristics that are common among authoritarian systems. These characteristics include highly personal rule, where the ability to participate in the political system and the ability to access the wealth in the system is concentrated in the hands of one individual or a small group of

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individuals. As Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg point out in their book “Personal Rule in Black Africa”\textsuperscript{16}, personal authoritarian rule can be defined as:

“… a system of relations linking rulers not with the “public” or even with the ruled (at least not directly), but with patrons, associations, clients, supporters, and rivals, who constitute the “system”. If personal rulers are restrained, it is by the authority and power of patrons, associations, clients, supporters, and – of course – rivals. The system is “structured”, so to speak, not by institutions, but by the politicians themselves.”\textsuperscript{17}

This results in the building of patron-client relationships, whereby the ability of an individual or group to access the political systems is highly dependent on their proximity to the decision makers. The more senior the decision-maker or the patron is in the hierarchy of the system, the more access the individual or the groups that serve as clients will have to the system. In other words, the access to the system becomes highly contingent on connections with those at the center of the system.\textsuperscript{18}

“The fundamental social and political ties [in authoritarian systems] tend to be personal in nature. In moving in a wide variety of informal groups, the individual strives to broaden personal contacts in order to gain representation on as many fronts as possible. What determines [...] power and influence ‘is not the fact that he holds a certain office or even that that office affords certain opportunities for personal aggrandizement by the extent and success with which he as an individual is able to cumulate a wide range of personal ties, to display to others a number of highly valued personal characteristics [...]’.”\textsuperscript{19}

The patron-client relationship is also important because it facilitates stability of the system. While in a democratic system or even in a system of party-rule, the power rests with the voters in the first place and the party to which the ruler belongs in the second. This means that the stability is guaranteed through the democratic process in the

\textsuperscript{16} Jackson & Rosberg, Personal Rule in Black Africa.
\textsuperscript{17} Jackson & Rosberg, Personal Rule in Black Africa, 19.
\textsuperscript{18} Bill & Springborg, Politics in the Middle East, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{19} Bill & Springborg, Politics in the Middle East, 71.
first and the ability of the party to remain in power in the second. This is not the case in personal authoritarian systems. The ability of the person to remain in power in a personal authoritarian system highly depends on their network of connections with key individuals or groups. Therefore the patron-client relationships are not just important for clients but they are equally important for the patron to maintain control over the system.

In personal authoritarian systems, the ruler needs these relationships in order to create stability within the state. This leads to the second main characteristic of authoritarian rule, stability as the key to maintaining power. As Samuel Huntington points out in his book *Political Order in Changing Societies*:

“The most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. The differences between democracy and dictatorship are less than the differences between those countries whose politics embodies consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness, stability, and those countries whose politics is deficient in these qualities. Communist totalitarian states and Western liberal states both belong generally in the category of effective rather than debile political systems.”

While there is no consensus for what would constitute stability, a definition for the term can be derived based on the writings of Samuel Huntington in *Political Order in Changing Societies*\(^21\), and Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg in their book *Personal Rule in Black Africa*\(^22\). In its most basic form, stability can be defined as the reduced threat of political uprising that might bring about sudden change, violent or non-violent, to any given political system. This form of stability does not find its roots in government institutions or even popularity with the public; rather, stability is maintained through a series of alliances, announced or unannounced, that the leader brings about through

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21 Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.  

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different social, political and economic incentives. These alliances are brought about through a series of co-option and coercion tactics employed by the leader with certain groups within society in order to maintain his or her grip on the political system.

It is important to remember that authoritarian systems rarely lose sight of their priority of maintaining control over power. To achieve this, authoritarian regimes tend to prioritize maintaining stability. Maintaining stability on the domestic front is important because, not only does it allow authoritarian systems to survive, but it also earns the system credibility on the international front. Too often, the international community and sometimes even political scientists will prioritize stability while turning a blind eye to how exactly this stability is achieved. Depending on the importance of the country within the international system, the governments of other countries, including the most vocal advocates of democracy and individual rights and freedoms, will support an authoritarian system if it means stability within the country. This is mostly due to the fact that in global politics, the priority rests with the ability of any country to achieve its own interest on the global level first. So, for example, a country like the United States, one of the world’s biggest vocal advocates of democracy, will support a brutal dictatorship in order to preserve its own economic or political interests in a country or region.

Maintaining control domestically can be achieved in many ways ranging from terrorizing the public by turning the country into a police state with rampant arrests of opposition or by making them “disappear”, to using an ideology as a tool for securing public support or even using religion as a means of ensuring control domestically. While this is true of many authoritarian states, the different countries in the Arab world

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23 Bill & Springborg, Politics in the Middle East, 22-26.
have employed most of these tools at some point in their history. Egypt alone has actually implemented all the above tactics but as Bill and Springborg point out in “Politics in the Middle East”, there is never a serious commitment by those in power to any one of these methodologies. Instead, they just piece fragments of many ideas such as socialism, democracy, liberalism, and mix in nationalistic and religious rhetoric as well as the threat of possible incarceration.

“This political ideologies are subject to bandwagon effects – rapidly gaining adherents in response to successes and then losing them as a result of setbacks – indicates that those ideologies are not reinforced by being integrated into political structures. Political leaders unwilling to have their choices constrained, use ideologies not to institutionalize power but as political weapons to gain popular support that can be used to joust with enemies.”

This is particularly true when looking at a country like Egypt, for example. The modern state of Egypt came into being in 1952 following the military coup of July 23. Although this coup was not fundamentally an ideological one, President Gamal Abdel Nasser quickly adopted socialism as a tool through which he could garner public support for his newly-formed government. He mixed this with Pan-Arab Nationalism in order to appeal to a large base of followers by dangling the idea of equality for all and regaining the glory that Egypt had once enjoyed in front of the eyes of the general public.

According to Bill and Springborg, socialism and pan-Arab nationalism was used as a unifying factor for Egyptian society as opposed to a real commitment to the spirit of these ideologies by the government of Egypt. But in essence, socialism was never really implemented in Egypt. Instead, whatever form of government Nasser adopted was given

24 Bill & Springborg, Politics in the Middle East.
25 Bill & Springborg, Politics in the Middle East, 25.
26 Bill & Springborg, Politics in the Middle East, 22-26.
its own classification, Nasserism. But in reality, power and control under Nasser rested with the military and the handful of individuals he trusted from within the group that carried out the military coup. Since he needed the military to ensure the survival of his regime as his main clients and agents of ensuring stability, Nasser gave the military a lot of privileges during his time as president.\textsuperscript{27}

Similarly, the Sadat and Mubarak regimes of Egypt generally state that they are build around the concepts of democracy. But that is questionable, at best. As stated earlier in the study, Egyptian governments have been classifying themselves as in transition to democracy pointing to the large number of political parties registered in the country and regular parliamentary elections. However, these are nothing more the crutches the governments use for balance. If socialism was fashionable in the 1950s, then claiming to be working towards democracy has been fashionable in more recent decades. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who came to power in 1971 following the death of Nasser, took steps to distance himself from socialism. He took steps towards the creation of a multi-party system in the late 1970s. Sadat distanced himself from the Nasser’s model of socialism opting to gain his legitimacy first from his victory in the 1973 War against Israel. In a much more limited degree, he gained some legitimacy from allowing a large number of ideologies to co-exist but to never really gain full access to the decision-making system.\textsuperscript{28} This remains true even under Hosni Mubarak, who came to power in 1981. Despite publically claiming that the system is a democratic one, power still rests with the president and the handful of people who surround him. It is only in recent years

that the ruling party to which the president belongs, the National Democratic Party, emerged on the horizon as an up and coming player where power slowly will shift to the party, although it is unclear if this change will continue long enough to constitute a shift in pattern.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, power and legitimacy of rule do not rest within an ideology. Instead legitimacy of the ruling family, the Al Sauds, rests with their religious prowess. If Egyptian leaders have jumped on the ideology bandwagon, then leaders or kings in Saudi Arabia have jumped on the religion bandwagon. As Bill and Springborg point out in their book, Politics in the Middle East, religious revival is always included in the ideology of states in the region. For much of its history, Saudi Arabia had derived its legitimacy from Islam implying that the piety of the king gives him almost a divine right to rule. That is why the government of Saudi Arabia goes through great lengths to preserve the image of the religiousiosity of the ruling family, in general, and the King, in particular. In the case of Saudi Arabia, in contrast with Egypt for example, Islam fulfills the role of modern ideologies. The government seeks to present the image that it follows the letter of the faith and thus Islam becomes the ideology of the system. This is achieved through the fact that Shari‘a or Islamic law is followed and fully implemented. The general public is instructed that questioning the authority of the Royal Family is the same as questioning the authority of the religion. Whether or not all the kings who have ruled Saudi Arabia are religious enough to claim that they rule through the will of God is questionable, however for much of the Kingdom’s history, the public have toed that

29 Bill & Springborg, Politics in the Middle East.
30 Bill & Springborg, “Politics in the Middle East,” 57-58.
particular line. To ensure the continuation of the status quo, the Saudi government has brought the religious community under its control and employment. In other words, the government co-opted the religious community thus ensuring that their continued existence is directly linked to the royal family’s ability to remain in power. Those who have questioned the righteousness of the rule of the kings of Saudi Arabia have quickly been ostracized from the system. The best examples are the execution of the opposition group that carried out the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979. Another example from more recent history is the way the Saudi government dealt with Osama bin Laden. (The details of this particular point will be dealt with at length in Chapter 3.)

Since authoritarian rule inherently means that the rights of individuals within society and their ability to participate in the system are generally marginalized and that the priority within the system is given to stability, those who do have access to the system are generally individuals or groups who are seen as either having unquestionable support for the system or those who are seen as posing a great threat to the continuation of the system.

In the case of the latter, authoritarian leaders adopt tools of cooption and isolation – the first in an attempt to give those individuals or groups a stake in the system and thus guarantee their loyalty or the second in order to completely isolate these actors in order to ensure that they are so far removed from the system and thus no longer continue to be a threat to the system’s survival.

Briefly put, authoritarian governments use cooption as a tool through which they try to bring opposition groups within the folds of the political system by giving them

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access to some of the resources in the system, such as representation in government bodies or allowing them to partake in limited political activities. Isolation, on the other hand, refers to authoritarian governments preventing opposition groups from accessing the legitimate political system by severely limiting their activities, preventing them from participating in any capacity in the politics of the country and in many cases, arresting members and incarcerating them for long periods of time in an attempt to erode their legitimacy in the eyes of the general public, discouraging individuals from joining their ranks with the ultimate hope of bringing an end to the group and its ideology as a whole.\(^{32}\)

According to Jackson and Rosberg, since authoritarian rulers are more concerned with their own ability to remain in power, they use several tools to coerce key opposition groups in order to ensure that they have a stake in maintaining the system or isolate, even through the use of violence, those who refuse to integrate into the system.\(^{33}\) The use of co-option of opposition groups can include giving leaders of these groups positions within the government or within the countries’ representative bodies. It could also allow the group limited political freedom within the system provided they do not vocally oppose the decisions of the ruler or attempt to mobilize the public against those in power. However, should those attempts at co-opting an opposition group fail, authoritarian governments will adopt all possible avenues to discredit the group and completely isolate its leadership and members from political circles. This could include a variety of tools

\(^{32}\) Bill & Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East*, 64-65.
\(^{33}\) Jackson & Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa*. 24
from discrediting the individual or group in the eyes of the public through the media to mass arrests and torture of its members.

According to Lisa Anderson in her article “Fulfilling Prophecies: State Policy and Islamist Radicalism”, the continued use of isolation and co-option tools by authoritarian governments has several results, the most important of which is that opposition groups find themselves functioning within a system that lacks any real institutions through which they can participate in the shaping of public opinion or the decision-making process. Opposition leaders who accept being co-opted by the state lose credibility among their members and supporters. Those who resist co-option by the government are completely isolated, which often results in their radicalization.

“Opposition groups wishing to contest principles and policies within the system, [...] quickly found that the weakness or absence of formal institutions separable from the personal networks of the incumbent rulers hampered their efforts. Government efforts to co-opt individual members of the opposition with attractive government posts or other favors compromised the integrity and coherence of such opposition.”

At the same time, the weakness of these opposition groups often results in the breaking away of members that are unwilling to compromise on their principles and continue to be committed to their ideologies. Within authoritarian systems, these groups are pursued by the governments and are subjected to the full brutality of the state. This, in turn, contributes to the radicalization of the members and further de-legitimization of the state. It also drowns out the efforts of those who are trying to mediate a middle ground or those who are moderates.

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within the opposition.\textsuperscript{36} In fact, the degree to which a group has is shaping policy of the state has a lot to do with whether or not this group resorts to violence against the state and the general public.

Applying the above to the cases of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, it is worth noting that both countries have characteristics of highly personalized rule, whereby power rests with the president or the king respectively. In the case of Egypt, this remained true regardless of the ideological changes that took place between the different presidents that ruled the country: Gamal Abdel Nasser, Mohamed Anwar Al Sadat, and Mohamed Hosni Mubarak. The dealings of the three presidents with the Islamist movements of the country are completely in line with the various attempts by each of them to maintain stability of the political system of Egypt and to remain in power for as long as possible. Indeed, Nasser remained in power from 1956 until his death in 1970; Sadat remained in power from 1971 until his assassination in 1980; and Mubarak remains president since his election in 1981 until present. The details of the dealings of the Egyptian presidents with the Islamist movements and the implementation of isolation and cooption tactics will be discussed in Chapter 2.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, power rested with the king. The key was to ensure that the system remained intact not only during the lifetime of any of the kings of Saudi Arabia but also during the transition of power following the death of the one king and the ascent of the next king to the throne. Unlike Egypt, where

different presidents had seemingly different ideologies, Saudi Arabia’s respective kings had a single ideology of religious prowess that was implemented through the co-option of certain religious groups and giving themselves a monopoly on the definition and implementation of what constitutes acceptable religious behavior and what is unacceptable. Those who remained within that state’s definition of acceptable have always been and continue to remain part of the system while those who have not have faced the brutal hand of the government. The details of the dealings between the Saudi Arabian government and that kingdom’s Islamist movements will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The impact of the isolation of religious movements from the legitimate political systems by the governments of Egypt and Saudi Arabia represent a major driver behind the altering of the modes of the operation of these movements from domestic movements targeting the governments of their countries into transnational ones targeting to bring about change in the Arab world by declaring jihad against the West, in general, and the United States, in particular. The details of this transformation are highlighted in Chapter 4 of the study.
2. EGYPT & ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS

Egypt has long struggled to define its relationship with Islamist ideologies. While many Islamist movements, with various degrees of militancy, trace their roots to Egypt, the Egyptian government’s dominant reaction has been to suppress these movements through a combination of isolation and cooption. As a result, these movements have always remained on the fringes of the political system, constantly struggling for legitimacy. This chapter will outline the evolution of Islamist ideology in Egypt from the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, often perceived as the root of all modern Islamist movements in the region, to the creation of Al Qaeda, as the new form of transnational Islamism. It will also outline the tumultuous nature of the ideology’s relationship with the Egyptian government.

Often criticized for its heavy-handed dealings with the country’s biggest and arguably most threatening opposition group, the events of 9/11 provided the international community with an explanation for the Egyptian government’s often perceived brutal tactics when it comes to Islamist movements. In the Middle East, Egypt has a long history of dealing with Islamist movement with various ideologies and degrees of militancy. The most prominent of these groups include Al Ikhwan al Muslimeen (The Muslim Brotherhood), Al Takfir wal Hijra Groups, the Jihad Groups, and the Gama’ah Al Islamiya. These movements all share the goal of creating an Islamist state in Egypt through various techniques – ranging from the utilization of the current political system, to violent struggle against the government, to an all-out war with both government and society. However, after struggling for more than three quarters of a century, the rise of Al Qaeda as a transnationalist entity is emerging as an alternative route for many of
these groups to achieve their long-term goal. While traditionally these groups have all focused on changing the political system in Egypt from within, Al Qaeda is presenting many groups with the option of achieving the same goal by forcing change on the system from the outside.

2.1 The Roots of Contemporary Islamist Political Ideology:

Political Islam has deep roots in Egypt. Historically, the desire of religious leaders in Egypt to influence political decisions can be traced back to the time of Mohamed Ali, who ruled Egypt from 1805 until 1848. As Moustapha El Sayed points out in Ibrahim Eweiss’s book, The Political Economy of Contemporary Egypt, religious leaders in Egypt have constantly attempted to interfere in politics, while leaders have constantly worked to curtail this influence. El Sayed argues that during the rule of Mohamed Ali, he spent much of his rule curtailing the power of the *ulama* (religious leaders) to prevent them from sharing the political sphere. But his attempts failed since the Egyptian bourgeois continued to turn to Islam as a pillar in their social, economic and political lives. In fact, many of Egypt’s modernizationist thinkers of the nineteenth century were European-influenced *ulama*. Reformist thinkers like Sheikh Jamal al-Din Afghani and Sheikh Mohamed Abdu influenced the development of Egyptian social and political thought while using the teachings of Islam as the fundamental backbone of these ideas. Their writings would later inspire the theological foundation on which Gameiat Al

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*Ikhwan Al Muslimeen* (The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood)\(^{40}\) built their own social and political platform. The society is considered the root of modern-day Islamist revival on the social, political and economic levels. Although members have continued to argue that their ideology does not advocate the use of violence, most radical and violent movements that have come into being throughout their 80-year existence originated from within the organization.

When the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood was first created by Hassan El Banna in 1928\(^{41}\), it was intended as a social movement. Al Banna, a public school teacher, was concerned with the rapid westernization of Egyptian society and wanted to create an organization that would help people to abide by the teachings of Islam in their daily lives. El Banna feared the “full force of the destructive impact of western civilization, which deprived the inhabitants of Cairo […] of their Islamic identity and ethnicity… he regarded the phenomenon as unacceptable and felt that something should be done to stop or attack it.”\(^{42}\) In essence, the Muslim Brotherhood was born out of the fear that modernization and secularization would lead to the complete corruption of Islamic values. The Brotherhood was essentially designed to reintroduce values that were once an inherent part of Egyptian society and reinforce their existence.

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\(^{40}\) The term Al Ikhwan Al Muslimeen is the original Arabic name by which the organization came to known. For the most part, political analysts translate the Arabic name into the Muslim Brotherhood including Abdel Azim Ramadan and Gehad Auda. However, there are some analysts who translate the Arabic term into the society of the Muslim Brethren including Iysa Ade Bello. For the purpose of this paper, Gama’iat Al Ikhwan Al Muslimeen will be referred to as the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood.

\(^{41}\) There is some debate over the exact year during which the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood was first created. Although most academics date its origin to 1928, including Sana Abed Kotob and Iysa Ade Bello, a few date the organization back to March 1927, namely Abdel Azim Ramadan. Since the majority of the sources used for this research date the organization back to 1928, this paper will use this date.

Quickly, the society evolved into a political alternative within the Egyptian society. The more the agenda was developed by members, the more popularity the brotherhood gained. In what was a natural progression from the social movement, the society of the Muslim Brotherhood transformed into a full-fledged socio-political opposition to the various governments of Egypt.43 Although this might not have been the original intention of El Banna, it was a natural progression considering the nature of Islamic doctrine as a whole. This doctrine is designed to be a guide in both *al donya wa al din* (life and religion).

In modern classifications, this makes the movement typical of what Diaa Rashwan refers to in his book *The Spectrum of Islamist Movements*44 as sociopolitical movements with an Islamist platform. These movements do not typically engage in discourse to determine whether or not a society is a true Muslim or not. Instead, it accepts that the society and the individuals within it are true Muslims whose actions need to be restructured to eliminate the impact Westernization had on them and to return to following the teachings of the faith such as Shari’a.

El Banna and many other Muslim Brotherhood traditionalists listed seven goals that are fundamental building pillars of the brotherhood’s ideology. These pillars ultimately transformed the nature of the organization from a social movement within Egyptian society into a movement that cuts across continents, cultures, societies and

44 Rashwan. *The Spectrum of Islamist Movements*. 31
countries. According to Sana Abed-Kotob, these pillars turned the Muslim Brotherhood into:

“a lot more than a political party or a charitable, reformist society. Rather, it is a spiritual worldwide organization that is:

1) Al Da’wa (The Call) from the Qur’an and the Sunna (traditions and examples) of the Prophet Muhammed;
2) A method that adheres to Sunna;
3) A reality whose core is the purity of the soul;
4) A political association;
5) An athletic association;
6) An educational and cultural organization;
7) An economic enterprise;
8) A social concept.”

The members of the Muslim Brotherhood set about achieving the above goals by introducing the interpretations of religion in everyday life. They did so by focusing on the youth through presence in mosques and schools. The movement was very characteristic of the Islamic modernist school of thought that emerged in the nineteenth century mostly as a response to the presence of western colonization throughout the Muslim and Arab world. This modernist school was not particularly in favor of the use of violence as a means to achieve their goals of minimizing Western influence on the Muslim world. Instead, they saw the use of violence or jihad as a tool to be used under three main circumstances: repelling aggression against Muslims in the Muslim world, protecting Muslims living outside of the Muslim community, and in cases where a treaty between Muslims and non-Muslims was broken.

The initial politicization of the Muslim Brotherhood first emerged during the struggle against the British occupation of Egypt, which began in 1882 and ended in 1956. In ideological terms, the presence of the British in Egypt, a predominantly Muslim country, was seen as grounds for the use of violence as a means to resisting the occupation of Egypt. Like many other organizations at the time, the Brotherhood adopted the cause of ending imperialist control in Egypt as a patriotic and religious duty, raising the organization’s profile. At the time, El Banna had argued that not getting involved in the struggle for independence would be a crime against the religion since Islam was billed as a religious, social, political and economic order.

This required the brotherhood to take their activities out of mosques and schools into other arenas such as al Azhar Institution and to get more involved in secular circles such as universities, professional associations and even business organizations. However, for much of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, the literature encouraging political involvement did not refer to the establishment of an Islamic state in Egypt but was limited to fighting against the British occupation. “This was a significant development in the history of contemporary Egypt because it linked pan-Islamic Egypt before the First World War to nationalist Egypt after the war […] and so prevented Egypt from joining Turkey in a headlong rush towards Westernization.”

The fact that the British presence in Egypt was seen as grounds for the alignment of Egypt with the Allies, only gave El Banna’s argument further credence as Egypt was increasingly becoming more involved in the West’s politics. Germany’s bombing of

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Egypt and the increasing number of British soldiers on the ground also strengthened the argument that the Muslim Brotherhood need to get involved in the political arena. While the group was never overtly against the Egyptian Royal Family, a decision was made in 1948 by then Prime Minister, Mahmoud Fahmy Al Noqrashi Pasha to dissolve the Muslim Brotherhood and arrest its leaders. The brotherhood’s secret military wing retaliated by assassinating Al Noqrashi Pasha and in turn the Egyptian government assassinated Hassan El Banna on February 12, 1949.49 El Banna was shot several times as he waited for a taxi on a Cairo street. Although it has never been confirmed, it is widely held that the King Farouk’s secret police was behind his assassination.

This marks the first attempt by the Egyptian government to marginalize movements based on Islamist ideologies. Moreover, it also marks the first of many attempts by the various governments to bring about the end of these groups by the imprisonment or assassination of its leaders. However, the outcome of this attempt, as is the case with many subsequent attempts, failed as the Brotherhood did not collapse after the death of El Banna. Instead, it can be argued that this course of action set into motion the birth of radical Islamist ideologies and fueled their growth as radicals within the group argued that having a non-violent agenda did not shield them from violence by the state.

The official disillusion of the group meant that the group had to work underground between 1948 and the 1952 military coup that ended the reign of the Royal Family. While the organization survived intact, its ideology did not. The death of Hassan

El Banna is of particular significance since it clearly marks the beginning of the splintering trend within the Muslim Brotherhood. Prior to his death, the majority of members abided by the ideology upon which the group was founded, however, his death created both a power and an ideological vacuum. Many members heavily criticized the ideology of the group; this coupled with the lack of a clear leader, became the first of many schisms within the group. There were two fundamental points on which the members disagreed: the first relating to the concept of takfir or declaring society and the government as non-believing and the second being the issue of jihad or declaring a holy war against the secular Egyptian government and society.50

In Islam, takfir means declaring someone or a group of people as non-believers. Once this declaration is issued, Muslims are required to declare jihad against the non-believers. The conflict that brewed among the members of the Muslim Brotherhood was grounded in the demand by some members to declare Egypt’s secular government as kafirah (non-believers) and then engage in jihad against it. This went against the fundamental ideological foundation of the teachings of El Banna because he had never attempted to accuse any part of the Egyptian society or the government of being kafirah. However, he did argue that their concept of Islam needed strengthening and reinforcement. Less militant members of the brotherhood interpreted this to mean that their role is to strengthen the religiousiosity of society, but to do so within the non-violent parameters of da’wa or spreading the message. Umar al Tilmisani, one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood wrote:

“The Brethren do not consider revolution, nor do they depend upon it, nor do they believe in its utility or its outcome. As for rule, the Brethren do not request for themselves, if they find among the nation one who can handle this burdensome responsibility... who can rule following Islamic and Quranic mores... [the Brethren will be] his soldiers, his supporters, and his assistance. If they do not find such a leader, [then rule will follow the Brotherhood’s program].”

This would ultimately lead to the rise of splinter militant groups such as Al Takfir wal Hijra and the Jihad Groups.52

2.2 Islamist Movements & the Nasser Government:

The splinter of the Muslim Brotherhood coupled with the continued attempts at co-option and isolation of Islamists from the legitimate political realm is among the root cause for the rise of radical Islamist ideology in Egypt. While the evolution of radical ideology took place over many decades and underwent many phases, the failure of consecutive Egyptian governments to include and control the ideology within the legitimate political system is the starting point that would eventually lead to the internationalization of Islamist jihadist ideology.

One of the best ways to understand Islamist ideology and its ability to survive in Egypt, and indeed expand to the rest of the world, is to understand the political system in which it functioned. This is, in fact, typical of almost all opposition groups functioning within the confines of a single system. As Anderson argues:

“Opposition [...] has the unusual characteristic of being defined partly by what it opposes; it develops within and in opposition to an ideological and institutional framework and, as such, reveals a great deal not only about its own adherents but also about the individuals, policies, regimes, and states in

authority. This is particularly true of illegal political opposition, since the decision to prohibit the expression of dissident voices is one that can be taken only by those in a position to determine legality: the authorities themselves. Any examination of the nature of illegal political opposition also illuminates the nature of the regimes in power.\textsuperscript{53}

Although the different Egyptian governments had different national, economic, and international policies, they all shared the same techniques in maintaining control over opposition groups that could potentially destabilize the system, namely isolation and cooption. As Bill and Springborg point out, this was done by concentrating all aspects of political life and control in the hands of the president, who was at the center of the system and those who are in closest proximity to him.\textsuperscript{54} It is exactly for the same reason that all three Egyptian presidents were weary of the amount of support that Islamist ideology and those behind it had within society. While each president had a different approach, all actions taken were done with the intention of curbing their influence.

When the Free Officers carried out their military coup of 1952, under the leadership of General Mohamed Naguib and the mastermind of Major Gamal Abdul Nasser, the movement lacked the fundamental grassroots support needed in order to transform it from a military coup to an ideology on which a regime could be built.\textsuperscript{55} Instead, this was a movement with selective support within the military but little if any support from the rest of society. From the very beginning, the officers had to forge


\textsuperscript{54}Bill & Springborg, \textit{Politics in the Middle East}, 118-125.

\textsuperscript{55}It is important to note that nature of Egyptian society at the time that the 1952 Revolution, as it is referred to. At the time, the political arena was dominated by issues pertaining to the British presence in Egypt on the one hand. On the other hand, there was a strong ideological presence and debate over the merits of democracy versus a fully constitutional monarchy. There was also much debate over economic systems, namely capitalism versus communism versus socialism. To create a strong regime, the Free Officers had to adopt an ideology, one that was much stronger than simply ending the British occupation of Egypt.
alliances with as many of the already existing grassroots movements as possible in order to guarantee the allegiance of their supporters. This was to prevent these grassroots movements from plotting to overthrow the new government. Instead, they applied what Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg refer to in their book “Personal Rule in Black Africa” as co-option tactics. These tactics vary from including the leaders of opposition groups into the political and economic system in order to keep them on the side of the revolution to allowing opposition groups to function in the short-term as a way of assuring them that the new regime is not a threat to their continued existence. When co-option failed, isolation was the alternative mode of operation. This includes everything from limiting the movement of opposition groups, to outlawing these groups, to mass arrests of members in an effort to quash public support for them. The Nasser government mixed and matched these approaches depending on the group and the situation unfolding within the country.

The relationship of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Officers who carried out the revolution of 1952 is nothing short of tumultuous. When the Free Officer first came to power, their relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood was stable. In fact, prior to the overthrow of the monarchy, the paths of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Officers had crossed several times as both were among the groups working to end the British occupation of Egypt. Although most of these groups had different ideologies, the common goal of ending British rule in Egypt brought them together. The members of the Muslim Brotherhood had several alliances with several of these groups, including the Free Officers prior to the 1952 Revolution. Anecdotal information suggests that

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56 Jackson & Rosberg, Personal Rule in Black Africa.
members of the Muslim Brotherhood had come to the aid of members of the Free Officers several times.

In 1948, when a group of officers was trapped in the town of Al Falouga during the 1948 Palestine War, it was the members of the Muslim Brotherhood who were able to break through the enemy siege in order to provide the soldiers with food and supplies. Among the trapped soldiers were both Gamal Abdel Nasser and Mohamed Anwar El Sadat, the future presidents of Egypt.\(^{57}\) There have also been some suggestions that it was members of the Muslim Brotherhood who secured the entrances and exits to greater Cairo when the Free Officers actually stormed the Royal Palace on July 26, 1952.\(^{58}\) But according to Natana J. DeLong-Bas, any expectations by the Muslim Brotherhood that their alliance with the Free Officers would increase their influence in post-revolutionary Egypt were dashed within two years of the 1952 Revolution.\(^{59}\)

“The most important of these alliances [between the Muslim Brotherhood and other political groups seeking to secure the independence of Egypt from the British] was with a group known as the Free Officers, led by Gamal Abd al-Nasser, which overthrew the pro-British Egyptian monarchy in 1952. Because they had provided support for the Free Officers’ revolution, the Brotherhood expected to play a role in the new government. However, there was a major ideological difference between the officers and the Brotherhood. While the Brotherhood was an Islamist organization, the Free Officers were avowedly secular in orientation, proclaiming the ideology of Arab nationalism. In Nasser’s opinion, the key to Egyptian strength lay in its assertion of its Arab rather than its Islamic identity and construction of an alliance with other Arab countries on the basis of their shared ethnicity. Like other Arab nationalists, he blamed religion for Egypt’s backwardness in the contemporary periods and sought to remove it from public sphere. This goal was at odds with the Brotherhood’s goal

\(^{57}\) Like many other details of the dealings between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nasser Administration, most accounts of their interactions tend to be first-hand accounts of those present at the time. This particular story aired as part of a series of documentaries produced by Dream Television by the name of Awraq Al Thawra (The Papers of the Revolution) produced in 2000/2001.


\(^{59}\) DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad.
of the Islamization of society and eventual establishment of an Islamic state with Islamic law as the law of the land.\textsuperscript{60}

Within the span of two years, the society would find itself outlawed by the Nasser government, with its leader imprisoned.\textsuperscript{61} On January 14, 1954, the Nasser government attempted to marginalize the group by outlawing the Muslim Brotherhood and detaining many of its members and associates. The relationship between the government and the brotherhood further deteriorated when the Nasser government accused the Muslim Brotherhood of attempting to assassinate him in Mansheya Square in Alexandria on July 26, 1954, an accusation the brotherhood denies. Leader of the Society were arrested and imprisoned for five to ten year terms. While Nasser’s government intended for these arrests to lead to the demise of Islamist ideology, in the long-term, the decision had implications not only on political Islam in Egypt but on the evolution of the ideology throughout the world. Instead of disappearing, members of the Muslim Brotherhood who were not arrested focused their efforts on remaining out of jail, a testament to the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, their flexibility, which was borne out of their strong understanding of the political system in which they functioned, and the ability of its members to adjust to circumstances around them.

Members who were arrested became more radical in their thoughts and beliefs while in jail. Brotherhood members who did survive detention under Nasser claim to have been subjected to brutal torture while in custody. This radicalization of the Brotherhood’s ideology is best reflected in the writings of Sayyid Qutb, a high profile

\textsuperscript{60} DeLong-Bas, \textit{Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad}, 257.

member of the Muslim Brotherhood whose writings not only brought a new degree of radicalization to Islamist thought and the goals that these movements should adopt, but also the mode of operation through which these organizations should be achieved. Abdel Azim Ramadan writes:

“The Brothers’ long presence in the prisons had isolated them from society. Sayyid Qutb, forged a new ideology for the Brotherhood. He rejected Egyptian society completely, along with all other societies, which he considered jahiliyya [non-believing]... [He argued that the Brotherhood] must also reject all laws and traditions made by humans. Muslim societies governed by human laws are in reality pagan. Thus, he branded all Islamic societies with atheism and considered them Kafir. This was unprecedented in the history of the Islamic movement in modern Egypt and constituted a break from the ideology of Hasan al Banna.”

Sayyid Qutb was a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike many in the society, he was well educated both in the religious tradition as well as in secular tradition. Not only had he memorized the Quran and was well versed in its interpretation (tafseer), he had also completed a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Cairo University in 1933. He studied for two years in the United States from November 1948 until August 1950 and traveled in Europe. However, his time in the West convinced him that the introduction of secular ideologies and the departure from religion was one of the main causes behind what he saw as the moral demise of the West. It was upon his return from the United States that he joined the Muslim Brotherhood. In the time between 1950 and 1952, while the Free Officers were still planning their so called white revolution against the Egyptian government, Qutb was actually a close ally of the leaders of the band of officers planning

63 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11.
64 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad.
the revolution, according to Lawrence Wright in his book, *The Looming Tower, Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*.\(^{65}\)

“Some of the planning for the revolution had taken place in this very room [Qutb’s living room], where Nasser and the military plotters of the coup met to coordinate with the Muslim Brothers. Several of the officers, including Anwar al-Sadat, Nasser’s eventual successor, had close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood. If the coup attempt failed, the Brothers were to help the officers escaped. In the event, the government fell so easily that the Brothers had little real participation in the actual coup.”\(^{66}\)

Nasser would eventually offer Qutb the choice of becoming an advisor to the Revolutionary Council, the head of Cairo radio or the post of minister of education, all of which Qutb would turn down. This was part of Nasser’s effort to co-opt Qutb into the system. But following the attempt on his life in Alexandria, Nasser would include Qutb as one of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood to be rounded up and thrown in jail. Qutb was jailed for 10 years. His incarceration under the Nasser government, which subscribed to a secular ideology and espoused to the secularization of Egyptian society, and the torture he and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood suffered only served to prove his initial observation about the corrupt nature of secular societies. While in prison, Qutb witnessed first-hand the torture of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood by interrogators. A particular incident however marked the radicalization of his thoughts.

“Some of the imprisoned Brothers staged a strike and refused to leave their cells. They were gunned down. Twenty-three members were killed and forty-six were injured. Qutb was in the prison hospital when the wounded men were brought in. Shaken and terrified, Qutb wondered how fellow Muslims could treat each other in such a way. Qutb came to a characteristically radical conclusion: his jailers had denied God by serving Nasser and his secular state.”\(^{67}\)

\(^{65}\) Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*.


\(^{67}\) Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 34.
This led to marked radicalization of his thoughts by which he viewed any ideology other than that of Islam to be evil and should be fought by all Muslims. In his book, Milestones, Qutb clearly states that the goal of all Muslims should be to re-establish the Islamic Ummah (community) and that ethnicity, nationalism and economic ideologies should not be a reason to prevent the creation of the Islamic Ummah. He also clearly noted that this could only be achieved through jihad.

“Milestones is not an exercise in Quranic exegesis or a consideration of legal doctrine and debates in the ikhtilaf tradition. It is [...] a manifesto of action. Milestones is a sweeping ideological tract describing the cosmic battle between good and evil and the requirement for Muslims to participate in the fight against evil rather than a legal discussion of the implications of faith in monotheism and how this played out in daily life. [...] Milestones is the outline of a global order and how it is to be achieved, with Quranic verses and hadith serving as literal proof texts for points raised. [...] Milestones engages a variety of non-Quranic ideas and ideologies particularly those most prominent in Qutb’s life – Arab nationalism, socialism, communism and democracy.”

Qutb was executed by the Nasser regime in 1966. The notion that the Nasser government had that Qutb’s death would bring his ideology to an end was profoundly mistaken. Through his execution, the government had turned Qutb into a martyr, who gave his life defending Islam, a fact that would become particularly important in later years. However his ideas not only lived on, but they would later become the ideological foundation for the Al Jihad movement as well as the Takfir wal Hijra group in Egypt. They were also the backbone of the ideology of the Mujahidin who fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. His writings would also have a profound influence on

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68 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, 258.
69 Wright, The Looming Tower; Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 37.
70 It is worth noting that Qutb himself referred to martyrdom in his writings as a goal Muslims should accept when they fulfill their duty of jihad. Four decades later, seeking of martyrdom has become part of the backbone of ideologies of many radical Islamist movements. The fact that Qutb himself became a martyr only gave his cause more credence among those embarking on the cosmic battle between good and evil. Most notably, Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, which were profoundly influenced by the writings of Qutb, often make reference to this point.
the founders of non-Egyptian *jihadist* movements including Osama bin Laden, the
founder of Al Qaeda.

“The Nasserite regime thought that it had administered a fatal blow to the Islamists movement by executing Qutb and his companions, and detaining thousands of the followers of the movement. In fact, the stillness of the surface hid what was beneath: a boiling reaction to Qutb’s philosophy. His teachings gave rise to the formation of the nucleus of the contemporary jihadi movements in Egypt.”

There were also other outcomes from the incarceration of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood under Nasser. For one thing, brotherhood members learned how to efficiently function illegally underground. They also learned that the more organized and low key they became, the more likely they were to continue to spread their influence without drawing too much of the government’s attention. This also led the Muslim Brotherhood members to come to the conclusion that they can be effective if they do not put themselves in direct confrontation with government. Instead, they learned to maneuver the system both legally and illegally. This technique was first applied with the Sadat government and perfected with the Mubarak government.

### 2.3 Islamist movements & the Sadat Government:

The Nasser government had opted to use isolation in its dealings with the Muslim Brotherhood as well as most other opposition groups and movements. Today, it is clear that the Nasser government’s decision to repress the Muslim Brotherhood with brutal force rather than allowing them to function with limited freedoms did not bring the ideology to an end. However, in the case of Egypt, the degree to which Islamist

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movements were isolated from the system, or indeed the isolation of some and the co-option of others, has a profound impact on the adoption of violence by these movements. Hafez correctly points out that “the nature of state repression equals in importance the degree of system accessibility in shaping the strategic orientation of Islamist movements.”

What the Nasser government did not realize was that the “Islamist movements are not likely to be eliminated by force or repression… state violence usually increases desperation and hence feeds public sympathy and support for the Islamists.”

The Sadat government, which came to power on October 15, 1970, opted to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood in a different manner. This was due to the apparent failure of isolation to bring the ideology to an end. In fact, this was good news for the Sadat government as the policy shifted from completely isolating the organization from public life to utilizing them as an alternative ideology to Nasserism, socialism and communism, which Sadat perceived as a threat to the survival of his regime. It is important here to highlight that this movement was not done out of the genuine belief in the right of opposition groups to participate in the system, but instead, it was done out of the natural desire of the Sadat authoritarian government to ensure its ability to survive for as long as possible. This is illustrated by the willingness of the Sadat government to co-opt members of the Muslim Brotherhood while isolating the more radical currents of Islamist movements that did not fit into the plan of stabilization of the system.

74 Graham Fuller. “Islamism(s) in the Next Century,” in The Islamism Debate, ed. Martin Kramer (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle East and African Studies, Tel Aviv Universities, 1997) 143.
Sadat, being one of the Free Officers who carried out the 1952 Revolution and Nasser’s vice president, had inherited the political and social structure set in place during Nasser’s rule. Like many other authoritarian leaders, his first priority is always to ensure the stability of the system. Sadat inherited the strong relationship that Nasser had built within the military, a relationship he sought to maintain as a source of security. However, he was aware of the profound loyalty of the individuals within the system to Nasser and his ideology. Aware that this loyalty could jeopardize his rule, he opted to maintain the overall structure but replace Nasser loyalists with individuals who would be loyal to him.

On May 15, 1971, Sadat implemented “Thawrat Al Tas’heeh” or the Corrective Revolution during which he removed Nasser loyalists from key positions. These officials included the head of the Arab Socialist Union, the Head of Nasser’s Personal Security, the Minister of Interior, Head of Military Intelligence and the Minister of Defense. In total, 90 officials were removed less than a year after he came to office.

“In the Egypt of Sadat, as of Nasser, real power has rested with the military / police complex, not with civilian institutions. If anything, Sadat has enhanced the power and prestige of Egypt’s officer corp.... Also extremely important has been Sadat’s restoration of the public luster of a military career. Shortly after the war, Sadat summoned the entire military command to the commemorative session of the People’s Assembly, in which leading officers were decorated and the dead honored.”

Changing those in key positions and empowering the military illustrated that, while the source of stability for the Sadat regime still rested with the military, he was unwilling to take the risk of having those who were loyal to the previous regime in positions through which they can influence any group in society.

Aware that simply changing the faces of officials would not mean a shift in the ideology among the general public, Sadat attempted to provide the public with an alternative ideology. His choice was the reintroduction of Islam as the only ideology strong enough to counter the Nasserist ideology.

Sadat made several overtures to the brotherhood to indicate his intention to cooperate with them rather than marginalize them from the system. The brotherhood, having learned to function underground during the Nasserist era, was willing to take advantage of the leeway being offered by Sadat. As a show of good will, Sadat released all members of the Muslim Brotherhood imprisoned by Nasser and allowed all the members who had escaped to the Gulf countries during the same period to return to Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of the good tidings with the Sadat government and began recruiting members to “resume forming grassroots organizations throughout the country.”76 Members were also permitted by the government to resume publishing articles in their previously censored publication *Al-Da’wa* (The Call) in 1976, which continued to appear until shortly before Sadat’s assassination.77 The Brothers repaid the favor by publishing articles in support of Sadat and condemning Abdel Nasser. They also published articles to shift public opinion away from socialism as it opposed

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Islam. Both sides were fully aware that they would benefit from their mutual cooperation.\(^78\)

Despite the amicable relationship between the government and the brotherhood, Sadat still refused to legalize the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood, yet he did not restrict their activities either. He refused to allow them to become a recognized political party in order to avoid upsetting national unity with the Coptic Christian minority.

Anderson points out the Islamist movements that are permitted to participate in the political system in the Authoritarian Arab world generally mirror the activities of these governments. For example, if the governments in the region make rhetorical reference to democracy and inclusion, then many times, these movements will also do the same. They would generally not have objections to democracy and participatory systems.\(^79\)

The Muslim Brotherhood under Sadat, and indeed until today, exemplifies the above observation. Politically and economically speaking, the brotherhood was not opposed to democratic elections or the open economic policies that Sadat was advocating. To the brotherhood, democracy in any form would allow their participation in the system even if they were not allowed to function as an official political party. As a matter of fact Sana Abed-Kotob points out in his article, “The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt,”\(^80\) that the members of the


Muslim Brotherhood do not find democratic elections to be in any way contradictory to Islamic values. This position was first adopted during the Sadat era in order for the Brotherhood to attract more members among the educated and professional social levels. At the same time, the Brothers were supportive of the policy of economic openness (Infitah) as implemented by Sadat and first introduced in 1974. Not only were they for it, they used the opportunity to create companies for themselves and created an entire Islamic economic and baking system. This strategy allowed them to indirectly become an official part of the economy even if they were technically illegal.

Opening the door towards more religious influence not only gave the moderate Muslim Brotherhood room to maneuver within the system, it also gave more extreme Islamist ideologies room to grow. In fact, the more radical off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Takfir wal Hijra (commonly translated as the Condemnation and Migration group), a group that viewed society as non-believers and infidels and advocated withdrawal from it and subsequently declaring war on it, launched an attack against the Technical Military Academy in 1974 and kidnapped and subsequently killed Sadat’s former Minister of Endowment, Dr. Mohamed Al Dahabi, in 1977.  

However, a more important and long-lasting group was also born during this period. Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah was one of the groups that flourished during the 1970s. The group started out as a number of clubs throughout universities. Initially, not particularly radical or clandestine, the group was open to all Muslims who abided by minimal religious practices including praying five times a day, memorized the Qur’an

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and Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet).\textsuperscript{82} It is worth noting that the groups mirrored those established in universities under Nasser to promote socialist ideas.

Despite this, the Sadat government sustained the course of cooption of the Muslim Brotherhood and even tolerated the existence of other Islamist groups. However, it was the lack of real access to the political system that would eventually lead to the radicalization and splintering of Gama’ah Al Islamiyah. It was this splintering that led to the rise of jihadist ideologies among members of the group and the emergence of its clandestine nature. Along with the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah, the rise of \textit{takfir} (to declare someone a non-believer) organizations, which sought to declare those who did not subscribe to their personal interpretation of Islam as non-believers and argued that jihad should be declared against them, grew under Sadat. The fact that these groups were allowed to function in universities, allowed them to recruit better calibers in terms of both technical educations, such as doctors and engineers, as well as academically enlightened members such as philosophers, lawyers and thinkers.

While initially the group recruited openly, its splintering and its adoption of more radical ideologies impacted the way in which the organization functioned and the way in which it recruited members. As Hafez points out, the organization went from being an inclusive movement that recruited openly with little fear of the reaction from state and the impact the actions of the state could have on the movement, to a more exclusive movement. By exclusive movement, Hafez means that the organization became more careful in its recruitment efforts restricting it to those where there was natural trust, working to ensure that its membership base implemented the decisions adopted by top

\textsuperscript{82} Mohammed Hafez. \textit{Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World}. 129.
members and ensuring that its members were divided into cells whereby they limited the interaction of its members with outsiders and ensured that its members were not constantly in direct contact with one another. This way, if a handful of members were arrested, the entire structure of the organization was not impacted.83

Once again, Sadat depended on the Muslim Brotherhood as the main weapon to combat another radical ideology, namely radical Islamism.

“The Muslim Brotherhood served Sadat’s regime by confronting two political forces which threatened it – the force of the political left (Marxists, Socialists, and Nasserites) which held the door-open policy responsible for the deepening economic crisis and the widening gap between the social classes, and that forces form the extreme right (the takfir organizations.) The Brotherhood attacked communism, Nasserism and socialism in each issue of Al-Da’wa. As for the extreme religious right, the Brotherhood did not hesitate to attack the takfir organizations, condemning their ideology and interpreting their movements as a revolt against true Islam.”84

According to the theory of co-option and isolation as applied by Jackson and Roseburg,85 Sadat’s tolerance of the Muslim Brotherhood was a perfect implementation of cooption tactics. By giving members of the brotherhood a stake in maintaining the stability of the political system, he guaranteed their continued support for his regime, which he believed turned them into generators of support for him at the grassroots level. Despite being illegal, the government often chose to turn a blind eye to the activities of the brothers, both socially and politically, as long as the brothers did not physically or violently attempt to destabilize the system.86

85 Jackson & Rosberg, Personal Rule in Black Africa.
86 This relationship only applies to the Brotherhood not other Islamist groups who tend to be more violent in their attacks against member of government and even against civilians.
But Sadat had confused the brotherhood’s understanding of the symbiotic nature of this relationship with genuine support for his regime. This is apparent in two main ways: first, the Muslim Brotherhood failed to sufficiently combat the existence of more radical groups. Second, the brotherhood’s willingness to support Sadat’s agenda was rooted in its interest to function as a quasi-legitimate entity or even a tolerated, illegal entity as opposed to an illegal entity that was pursued by the government. In the case of the first, Sadat had wrongly assumed that the brotherhood would quash the radical current within society since it threatened the stability of the Sadat regime as a whole. In the case of the second, Sadat failed to see that the brotherhood’s support was a function of its own survivalist tactics as opposed to a genuine desire for the survival of his system.

For one thing, attempts to co-opt the Muslim Brotherhood did not sufficiently combat the more radical movements. Despite the limited access to the political system, the fact that there was little, if any, real access to the system to implement the Islamist agenda and bring about change, was among the main causes of radicalization. It was during Sadat’s rule that radical Islam, inspired by the writings of Qutb and the more conservative interpretation of the religion common throughout the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, came to flourish.

Radical thinkers such as Saleh Sariyah, a Palestinian-born member of a Jordanian-based group known as Hizb al Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Liberation Party), arrived in Egypt. Initially, he contacted members of the Muslim Brotherhood and soon after, began recruiting members dissatisfied with the non-confrontational attitude of the group. He also began to recruit students from universities who shared his sentiment about the

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relationship between the Brotherhood and the Sadat government. Sariyah established the group *Shabab Mohamed* (Mohamed’s Youth), which established Islamic camps for members of the various colleges in Cairo and Ein Shams Universities. The nature of these camps ranged from religious education, to creating opportunities for solidifying the relationship between recruits to actual military training. The group itself was short-lived following a confrontation with the Egyptian government after a failed attack on the Egyptian Military Academy in 1974. This was the first actual military confrontation between the Sadat Government and the more radical branches of Islamic currents in Egypt. On November 10, 1976, Sareyah and other prominent leaders of *Shabab Mohamed* were executed. The remaining members of this group would later be heavily involved in the assassination of Sadat.

Some of today’s radical thinkers including Omar Abdel Rahman and Ayman Al Zawahiri also found the space to expand their more radical interpretation of Islam during this particular time. It was during this period that radical cells began to emerge. This was triggered by the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood to press Sadat to establish Islamic rule in Egypt. Moreover, Sadat’s decision to enter into peace negotiations with Israel brokered by the United States was seen as a betrayal of Islam by the government. Echoing the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, in which he argued that there could be no peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims and that it was the duty of all Muslims to fight both Christians and

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89 Safi, *Tensions and Transitions in the Muslim World.*
91 Safi, *Tensions and Transitions in the Muslim World.*
Jews as they were conspiring against Islam, the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah, the Jihad Group and the takfir groups became more radical. They began to heavily recruit members from within universities, young professionals and the Egyptian military.

These groups were divided into secret cells. The ability to recruit from the military gave the cells access to highly trained members in the use of guns as well as in the planting and detonation of explosives. The basic ideology for Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah was to overthrow the Egyptian government and to establish an Islamic state in Egypt. At the time, the basic ideology for the radical Islamist groups was that of the near enemy as opposed to the far enemy. The idea of fighting the near enemy, namely the secular Egyptian government, was the primary focus of Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah and that this should be done through expanding their mass support by doing social outreach work in areas where the state had failed to offer basic services and through the declaration of jihad against the government. They were unwilling to accept the route adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood of working from within the system because to them, this was an acceptance of a Western construct and was thus haram (forbidden). The ideology of the group was profoundly influenced by the writings of Qutb and the ideas he raised in his writings such as the impact of secularism on society and the need to establish an Islamic society whereby government members and people observe the teachings of Islam in both the public and the private spheres. However, unlike Qutb who often

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95 Mohammed M. Hafez. Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World. 84.
96 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad.
referred to the cosmic battle between good and evil or Muslims and non-Muslims, the group focused their efforts on the Egyptian government.

Also emerging at the same time was the Al Jihad group, but unlike the Gama’at Al Islamiyah, this group was always committed to the removal of the secular Egyptian government through a military coup. According to Montasser Al-Zayyat in his book The Road To Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, Al Zawahiri was among main strategist that would emerge during this period. He was involved with several of the radical groups of that time in various capacities. He was also very heavily involved in the recruitment of members and the structuring of the cells as well as determining their various roles and assignments.97 A physician by education, he came from a middle class family of professionals. Much like Qutb, he was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood who had learned to function underground during the Nasser era. However, the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood to bring about Islamic rule in Egypt convinced him that the solution was in declaring jihad on the government. Unlike Qutb, who argued that the battle between Muslims and non-Muslims is not to be bound by nationalities or ethnicity, Al Zawahiri focused much of his militant career within Egypt.

Part of the trigger of the rise of this group was the disillusionment of its members with the Muslim Brotherhood. Whether the brotherhood was unable or unwilling to control the actions of these subgroups is unclear, however, the outcome was the same. Radical Islamist groups, whose roots can be traced the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as a serious threat to the political system under Sadat. Other than the Shabab Muhamed, several other fringe groups emerged whose members were well educated and some of

whom held well respected jobs among them was Yehia Hashem, who was a district attorney. He initially joined the Muslim Brotherhood but eventually left the group after becoming convinced that the Islamic movement could only establish control through violent conformation with the government. He briefly joined Shabab Mohamed and later became part of a cell within Al Zawahiri’s group. Eventually, he would go into hiding in Menia, a governorate in Upper Egypt, and plan the overthrow of the government.98

Sadat’s decision to proceed with peace negotiations with Israel following the 1973 War was what pushed not only militant Islamist, but even the moderate Muslim Brotherhood, who had defended Sadat and his rule, to vocally oppose the president. While thus far, the brotherhood was included in the folds of the official political system despite their continued illegal status, the decision to pursue peace was one that even the brotherhood could not tolerate. Articles criticizing the decision began to appear in their publication, Al Da’wa, which Sadat had allowed them to resume publishing in 1976. Initially, the government tolerated the publication of the newspapers, perhaps because Sadat was under the impression that the Brotherhood would eventually toe the line.

As time went on, however, the tone of the articles became more and more critical particularly following the announcement of Sadat’s planned visit to Jerusalem. In fact, this marked the beginning of the end of the symbiotic relationship between the Sadat government and the Muslim Brotherhood. As Abdel Azim Ramadan explains:

“The Brotherhood didn’t make its opposition to the trip known at the time it was announced for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that the visit was well received by the masses and a significant number of religious personalities.

To oppose the trip would also seem to place the Brotherhood in the same camp as the communists and the Nasserists.  

When Camp David was signed in 1978, the Brothers filled the newspaper Al Da’wa with articles claiming that accepting the occupation of Muslim land was against the teachings of Islam and that they oppose the system for its support of the occupation. But despite their opposition to the regime, the brotherhood stopped short of advocating the use of force against Sadat.

Starting with 1978 and until 1981, there was a clear shift in the attitude of the Muslim Brotherhood towards the Sadat government. The Brotherhood continued to utilize the venues that Sadat had allowed them to use, only no longer to support him but to oppose him. Initially, Sadat did not engage in direct conflict with the Brotherhood. But this changed shortly after.

“In 1979, Mohamed Abdel Salam Farag managed to unite several small jihadi groups under his leadership. In 1980, he made an agreement with Karam Zohdi, the leader of the Gama’a al-Islamyya. The group resulting from this merger was led by Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, a professor at the Faculty of Osoul al-Deen [meaning “Fundamentals of Islam”] at the Assyut branch of Al-Azhar University. The coalition [would eventually lead] directly to the assassination of Sadat […]”

When his intelligence apparatus informed him that something was being planned against him, he reacted with extreme wrath and resorted to violence – the other extreme of the cooption tactic. On September 3, 1981, Sadat’s security forces arrested more than 1,500 journalists, writers, politicians, as well as Muslim and Christian religious leaders.

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Less than a month and a half after what became known as the Autumn of Fury (khareef al ghadab), Sadat was assassinated by members of the coalition formed by Mohamed Abdel Salam Farag and Karam Zohdi under the leadership of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman on October 6, 1981. Once again, the Egyptian government was left to deal with the religion-based opposition group.

2.4 Islamist movements & the Mubarak Government:

While the Nasser government and the Sadat government dealt with the Muslim Brotherhood mostly through isolation and cooption, respectively, the Mubarak government dealt with what emerged as the largest opposition group through continuous alternation between the two tools. The relationship between the two is perhaps the most complicated and is what most exemplifies how authoritarian governments, in their bid to continue to survive, use these tools in order to maximize their benefit from opposition while continuing to prevent them from actively participating in the legitimate political arena in order to circumvent the possibility of them seizing power.

2.4.1 Period from 1981 to 1990:

There is no denying that the Muslim Brotherhood had gained a degree of legitimacy under Sadat, despite their illegal status. The fact that Sadat allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to have a voice in the Egyptian political system gave the movement a degree of legitimacy and, more importantly, a degree of freedom to take part in the system and even criticize it. This was never the case before. Despite the souring of their relationship with the government during the final years of Sadat’s government and the arrest of their members in 1981, the brotherhood was not the only opposition group in this position. Sadat’s dealings with almost all opposition groups turned sour following his
announcement of his intention to enter into peace negotiations with Israel. This is particularly evident in the large number of individuals arrested by the Sadat government in September 1981, who hailed from all political backgrounds.

Upon his ascent to power, Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, former head of the Egyptian Air Force and Sadat’s vice president, was fully aware that he had to delicately address the issue of the Islamist political current. While Sadat was assassinated by Islamists, the Mubarak government had to weigh its options as to whether to co-opt or isolate the spectrum of Islamists in Egypt. Much like Sadat had initially opted to co-opt the moderate stream of Islamists, Mubarak adopted a similar approach.

In order for the Mubarak government to counter the extremist Islamic groups that had emerged during the Sadat era, it would need to maintain an amicable relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood to counter the extremist currents, the same way that Sadat needed to stabilize the relationship with them to counter the socialists and Nasserites. As Joel Campagna explains in his article “From Accommodation to Confrontation: The Muslim Brotherhood in the Mubarak Years:”

“The [Mubarak] regime sought to use the moderate, non-violent Brotherhood as a political counterweight to what was viewed as the more threatening radical Islamist groups on the rise since Sadat’s presidency by permitting the still outlawed group to resume its political activities through its headquarters in downtown Cairo and once again resume publication of its periodicals. In exchange for this new-found freedom, the group refrained from voicing harsh criticism of the regime, while continuing its grassroots activism through social welfare organizations and expanding its power base throughout the country.”


The Muslim Brotherhood saw this invitation as a golden opportunity to continue their involvement in the system, regardless of their legal status. This was the first turning point that resulted from the mass arrests of the “Autumn of Fury” and the assassination of Sadat. The second turning point that resulted from the arrests of September 1981 was the mingling of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood with other political and social activists. Previously, whenever members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested, they were isolated from other political prisoners, but this time, jail cells became an ideological melting pot. The Muslim Brotherhood, which had previously been the archenemy of the socialists and the communists, improved their relationship with both the secular Wafdist and the members of the Unionist Progressive Nationalist party. This would prove a golden opportunity for the Muslim Brotherhood because for the first time, the brotherhood was exposed to other political groups, and their ideologies, who were legal standing within the political system and could nominate candidates in elections.104

While the Mubarak government allowed the Brotherhood to function, it pursued members of more extreme groups aggressively. Aware that violent Islamist currents were still in existence in Egypt, the Mubarak government’s decision not to pursue the Muslim Brotherhood reflected the awareness that identifying the more violent currents of the Islamist movement was a more pressing priority. While the brotherhood was non-violent and co-opting them could provide an alternative to the more violent movements, the government was aware that the Muslim Brotherhood could not single-handedly bring

these movements to an end as they had failed to do so under Sadat. Instead, the Mubarak government continued to pursue the more violent currents of the movement.

The first priority was arresting those behind the assassination of Sadat. According to Montasser Al-Zayyat in his book, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: the Story of Bin Laden’s Right-hand Man*, the Mubarak government actively pursued those responsible for the assassination.

“Following the assassination [of Sadat], a battle began in the governorate of Assyut between the Gama’a al-Islamiyyah and the government authorities. This ended in the arrest of most members of the two groups [formed under the leadership of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman in 1979]. The authorities divided them into three categories. [...] The first category of detainees included those who actually implemented the assassination during the military parade. [...] They were tried for assassination, accessory to assassination, and incitement, before the military court presided over by Samer Fadel.”

Those categorized in the first category included Khaled al-Islamboli, Abdel Hameed Adel Salam, Ata Tayel Hameeda Raheel, Hussein Abbas, Mohamed Abdel Salam Farag, who planned the operation, and Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman. It also included any other members who had prior knowledge of the assassination plan before hand and participated in its implementation in any capacity. The number of accused members in this category reached 24. The military court sentenced the first five to death, while handing down life sentences to the remaining members. Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman was acquitted.

“The fate of the second group of detainees was referred to the Higher State Security Court in what was called the Jihad case. The accused included 302 group members, led by Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman [...]. [...] None of this group was sentenced to death, but the prominent accused members were sentenced to harsh imprisonment, while the great majority were sentenced to three years in prison. [...] The remaining 170 accused members in this second category were acquitted. These comparatively light sentences given to those standing trial in the

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Jihad case revealed that the regime had decided to try to cool the tension between themselves and the jihadi activists.  

As for the third group, it included 178 members who were accused of subscribing to jihadi ideology. The case, which was also brought before the Higher State Security Court, lasted for more than two years, which prompted the postponement of looking into the cases indefinitely. All the accused were released and these charges were never brought up again. This was a clear reaffirmation of the desire of the Mubarak government to alleviate the tension in its relationship with Islamist movements.

In the mean time, the brotherhood began forging alliances with legal political parties in order to gain footing into the People’s Assembly. In 1983, when the Wafd Party was re-instated into political life by court order, the Muslim Brotherhood forged an alliance with the Wafd for the 1984 upcoming parliamentary elections. Their agreement was simple; the Brothers would run in a certain number of constituencies where they would receive the votes of the Wafdist, while Wafd members would receive Brotherhood votes in the other constituencies. In return for their support, the Wafd would also push of the implementation of Shari’a as the source of legislature in Egypt. While this alliance did alienate some Wafd supporters, it did not stop the union from gaining 15 percent of the vote and fifty-eight seats in the People’s Assembly (PA) out of four

hundred and eighty-eight.\textsuperscript{108} The Muslim Brotherhood candidates constituted eight seats of the elected Wafd members.\textsuperscript{109}

The success of the union was a surprise to both the Mubarak government and the Brotherhood alike. However, once they entered parliament, the Brothers made it clear that they had no intention of toeing the line when it comes to their criticism of the government. As quoted by Joel Campagna, Omar al-Tilmassani, the Brotherhood spiritual guide said in an interview:

\begin{quote}
"We were completely serious when we joined in the elections. Our aim was to reach Parliament through a legal channel, the Wafd Party, because the People’s Assembly members enjoy parliamentary immunity. The brothers who will reach the Assembly will speak on behalf of the Brotherhood, will urge enforcement of the Islamic Shari’a laws, and will embarrass the government on this issue without fear of detention or torture... Now some of them [Muslim Brothers] and People’s Assembly members, watching the government and entitled to make it account for its actions."
\end{quote}\textsuperscript{110}

Despite the Muslim Brotherhood’s declaration that it will hold the authorities accountable for their decisions, the government allowed the elected Brothers the same degree of freedom and protection as other members of the PA because the priority at the time for the Mubarak government was to maintain stability.

However by early 1987, the union between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wafd Party seemed to be on shaky ground. The brotherhood was demanding more concessions from the secular party whereas Wafdists were concerned about losing their secular supporters. Knowing that they would be heading towards an election soon, the


Muslim Brotherhood had to forge a new alliance with another legal political party. It developed a three-way alliance with the Liberal Labor Party and the Liberal Socialist Party. Running based on the same arrangement and a similar electoral platform as they did during their alliance with the Wafd Party, the Muslim Brotherhood won 36 seats in the 1987 elections. At the same time, the brotherhood worked to expand their grassroots support by engaging and taking control of national syndicates and professional associations. Campagna points out that:

“For much of the early 1980s, the Brotherhood had focused its efforts on establishing a presence within professional associations, student unions and university faculty clubs, in order to secure a forum for expressing its ideas to educated Egyptians. Likewise, this strategy also aimed at enhancing the group’s credibility and its prospects in parliamentary politics.”

By the end of the decade, the Muslim Brotherhood had managed to gain the majority of the seats on the board of every major syndicate and professional association including the Medical Association and the Associations of Engineers and Pharmacists. The only association it failed to gain any significant ground within was the professional journalists association.

Campagna argues that these victories were of great significance because they solidified the group’s prominence within civil society.

“The associations, at this time, represented one of the few avenues for organization independent of the state. The Brotherhood’s gradual control of these institutions indicated symbolically that the group had, for the first time, gained control of “legitimate” channels to further its own political aims... Now, the Brotherhood could effectively fill the void in Egypt’s..."

stagnant political system, not only through associations, but also through its rapidly growing social services network throughout the country."\textsuperscript{112}

While the Muslim Brotherhood was using the legitimate political avenues opened before them to cement their position in political life, this was not the case for those subscribing to more violent ideologies. For one, many members had alleged their abuse while in detention during the jihad case in the early 1980s. The issue was brought up during the court proceedings and while an investigation was ordered by the judge at the time, the damage had already been done. According to Al-Zayyat, members had been severely tortured by the authorities and had confessed to the whereabouts of fellow members including Ayman Al Zawahiri, who would later become Osama bin Laden’s right hand man. Al-Zayyat argues that many members, including Al Zawahiri continued to bear grudges against the government for their treatment in prison.\textsuperscript{113}

This survival of the violent Islamist ideology came about in the ability of Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah and Al Jihad movements to survive. While members of the first remained in Egypt and rebuilt their strength by establishing a strong hold in Upper Egypt, members of the latter left the country, mostly to the Gulf region, and regrouped from abroad.\textsuperscript{114}

Throughout the 1980s, the Islamist movements, regardless of their views on the use of violence, regrouped. While the Brotherhood was building their grassroots support through whatever legal means were available to them, those believing that the

\textsuperscript{113} Al-Zayyat, \textit{The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man}.
\textsuperscript{114} Al-Zayyat, \textit{The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man}.
only way to change the political system in Egypt is through violence, continued to pursue violence. Throughout the 1980s, the violent Islamist groups that had gained power and support during the Sadat era continued to build their membership base underground both on Egyptian soil and from abroad. Those who remained in Egypt built strongholds in Upper Egypt, an area that would in the 1990s become the center of violent and deadly confrontations between several Islamist groups and the government including the deadly attack on tourists in Luxor in November 1997.

The leader of Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah, Mohamed Shawqi Islamboli, moved to Malawi in the Governorate of Menya in Upper Egypt, where he began recruiting members. He also established a religious bookshop in Cairo where he distributed sermons of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, following his release from prison in 1984. The group continued to function in complete secrecy for most of the 1980s depending mostly on word of mouth as opposed to the distribution of literature promoting the movement and its call for violence against the government.

Members of the Gama’ah Al Islamiyah had established what they referred to as “liberated zones” in Upper Egypt and in impoverished areas around the capital by offering social services, controlling mosques and even creating their own security members to safeguard their interests. They also did so without drawing too much attention from the government. However, it was not until they completely controlled

full neighborhoods in Cairo, including Imbaba, Ein Shams, Al Zawya Al Hamra and Boulaq Al Dakrour, that they drew the government’s attention.117

The leader of the Al Jihad Group, Ayman Al Zawahiri, on the other hand, had moved to Saudi Arabia, where he worked as a doctor and regrouped the Al Jihad group in Egypt from there. Newly recruited members of the group would travel to Saudi Arabia, where they would receive militant instruction and then to Afghanistan where they would attend military training camps and fight against the Soviet Union.118 Unlike Islamboli, Al Zawahiri’s group recruited members and distributed his literature in mosques and universities. According to Al-Zayyat’s book, The Road to Al-Qaeda: the Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man119, Al Zawahiri criticized the fact that Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah never distributed any literature to promote their ideology to the general public:

“...One of the reasons for the failure of the Gama’a al Islamiyyah is that it is so concerned with secrecy that it would never distribute any literature that appealed to the people. He [Al Zawahiri] explained that it was for this reason that clandestine movements do not work in Egypt. He [Al Zawahiri] added that any Islamic movement that does not connect with the masses loses any reason to exist. This was the impetus for his production of literature articulating and promoting his ideology.”120

While the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah solidified their ranks in the 1980s, members of Al Jihad group had found an alternative scenario. Al Zawahiri, and subsequently his followers, began to make their way to Afghanistan to fight with the locals against the Soviet occupation of the country. This was seen as the first possible manifestation of the principle of jihad as a duty for all Muslims to protect Islam and

117 Mohammed M. Hafez. Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World. 82-83.
118 Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, 32-34.
120 Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, 34.
Muslims throughout the world. The details of the involvement of the Jihad movement in Afghanistan and the impact of this move on the development of transnational Islamist ideology will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

By the end of the 1980s, the Islamist movements in Egypt had taken alternative routes. While Al Jihad had, for the time being, relocated their activities to Afghanistan fighting alongside the Afghani militias against the Soviet Union, the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah had regrouped in Upper Egypt while the Muslim Brotherhood had continued to build their grassroots support through cooperation with other legal political parties and increased their control over professional syndicates. In an effort to maintain balance, the Egyptian government had allowed members of the jihadi movements to leave the country as part of their effort to export the problem with militant Islamists.\(^\text{121}\) They continued to keep an eye on the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah’s growing support base, particularly after some of their activities drew the attention of the government.\(^\text{122}\) The government continued to tolerate the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood despite their growing support base among young professionals as opposed to rural Egyptians with minimal education.\(^\text{123}\)

2.4.2 Period from 1990 to 2000:

The 1990s, however, would usher in a lot of changes not only to the mode of operation of Islamist groups but also to the response of the Egyptian government. In the early 1990s, the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah began a violent campaign in Egypt


\(^{122}\) Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man.

targeting secular Egyptians, thinkers, Egyptian Christians (Copts), and politicians. Although a string of small and seemingly unconnected crimes against individuals, particularly Copts, began to increase in 1990 and 1991, it was the assassination of the Speaker of the People’s Assembly, Rifaat Al Mahgoub on October 12, 1990 followed by the assassination of secular author Farag Foda on June 8, 1992, that clearly marked a shifting in the mode of operation of the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyyah. The group had created a military wing that had carried out these attacks. In response, the government began massive sweeps of the group’s stronghold areas, arresting hundreds of members. They also began to use violence against the relatives of known members. The group responded through the use of even more violence against civilians. Two years later, the group took responsibility for a failed assassination attempt on Nobel Prize Winner, writer Naguib Mahfouz. These events marked a shift in the pattern of increased control by the government over, not only the Gma’ah al-Islamiyyah but over all religious opposition groups, even those previously tolerated by the government.

“If at all, restrictions of liberties in Egypt in the 1990s have been viewed largely as the effects of the conflict between the regime and armed Islamist groups such as the Jamā’at Islamiyya (Islamic Groups), which turned increasingly violent in 1991-92 and enabled the regime to categorize all Islamist opposition forces as ‘terrorists’.”

126 Mohammed M. Hafez. Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World. 84-86.
This sparked a violent and confrontation between the Al Gama’ah Al
Islamiyah and the government in Upper Egypt in 1993. The repression of the
government was not only against members of the Gama’ah but also against members
of Al Jihad.\textsuperscript{128} Within that year, violent confrontations between the Egyptian
government and various violent Islamist movements turned deadly. On April 9, 1994,
Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah assassinated the head of counterterrorism police, Major
General Raouf Khayrat, who was gunned down as he left his home.\textsuperscript{129} On June 26,
1995, there was an attempted to assassinate Egyptian President Mohamed Hosni
Mubarak in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and later in the same year, on November 19, there
was a car bomb attack on the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, killing 16.
On April 28, 1996, there was a shooting attack on the Europa Hotel in Cairo, killing
18 tourists who they apparently mistook for Jews.\textsuperscript{130} But perhaps the most violent and
deadliest of these attacks was the November 17, 1997 Luxor Massacre in Deir el-
Bahri. During the attack, 58 tourists and four Egyptians were killed.\textsuperscript{131} In Upper
Egypt, the government waged a war against these groups in an attempt to curb the rise
of violence. It is estimated that some 1,200 people were killed during the decade-long

\textsuperscript{128} Mohammed M. Hafez. \textit{Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World}. 85.
\textsuperscript{129} Anneli Botha, “Politics and Terrorism: an Assessment of the Origin and Threat of Terrorism in Egypt.”
\textsuperscript{130} Barton Gellman, “Militant Radicals Shoot Down Eighteen Outside Cairo Hotel,” \textit{The Washington Post},
\textsuperscript{131} BBC Staff, “World Tourists Massacred at Temple,” \textit{BBC Online Archives}, 17 November, 1997
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/32179.stm>. 70
confrontation.\textsuperscript{132} There were also countless attacks on foreigners and tourists in much smaller groups.

“While 30 deaths were counted in 1991 -as many as in the decade since 1981-93 people were killed allegedly by Islamist groups in 1992, many of them after the amendment of the penal code. In 1993, the number of deaths rose to 208, and in 1995 to 373. The victims were mostly members of the security apparatus, but an increasing number were Copts and tourists as well.\textsuperscript{32} Attacks against Copts undermined national unity, while those against tourists threatened one of the country’s major sources of revenue. In fact, tourism was seriously affected after the Luxor massacre in November 1997, when more than 60 tourists were killed by armed Islamists.”\textsuperscript{133}

Although the Muslim Brotherhood had not been engaged in violence against the public or the government, the confrontation that unfolded between the violent Islamist groups and the government in Upper Egypt also translated into the tightening of the reins on the Muslim Brotherhood by the Government. The government was in full repression mode, although its dealings with the brotherhood did not involve violence. By 1992, the Muslim Brotherhood had control of fourteen of the twenty-five professional associations. However, this growth in the Muslim Brotherhood’s popularity as a grassroots movement forced the Egyptian government to reconsider its policy of tolerance. Gaining social strength allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to become more vocal in parliament and demand reform for the 1990 elections. Not only did the government refuse to meet the demands of the Muslim Brotherhood along with their political allies, but the government also amended the election rules so that candidates would run in two rounds of elections as opposed to electoral lists submitted by the parties making the vote more for the candidate as opposed to the

\textsuperscript{132} Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 258.
\textsuperscript{133} Kienle, “More than a response to Islamism: The Political Deliberalization of Egypt in the 1990s.” \textit{The Middle East Journal}: 229.
This was the first clear indicator that the Egyptian government was truly threatened by the increased popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood. In turn, the Muslim Brotherhood, its partners, the Liberal Labor Party and the Liberal Socialist Party along with the Wafd decided to boycott the elections. This was viewed by the government as an attempt to embarrass the regime. The confrontation worsened when the Muslim Brotherhood vocally objected to the Egyptian government’s support of the Madrid Peace talks between the Israeli government and the Palestinians. Still, the situation became even more confrontational when the Muslim Brotherhood failed to significantly condemn attacks by Islamic extremist on tourists, civilians and Copts in the early 1990s.

But perhaps the biggest indication of how much the Egyptian government saw the strength of the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat became clear following the earthquake of October 1992. In the hours following the earthquake, the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated the depth of their organizational skills and their influence over the different groups in society by responding to the areas most devastated by the earthquake before the government had a chance to respond. Unable to provide support for the injured and displaced, it was the Muslim Brotherhood who initiated fundraising efforts for the victims of the quake. They distributed food, clothing and even tents to those families

whose houses were devastated by the earthquake. They also used their influence over the
members of the medical association to mobilize doctors to help treat the injured.

By the time the government had coordinated its efforts, thirty-six hours had
already passed. Frustrated, the Egyptian government issued a military decree prohibiting
anyone from fundraising for the victims of the earthquake or distributing any aid except
through the Ministry of Social Affairs or the Red Crescent. The government even tore
down the emergency shelters that the Brotherhood had set up. The reaction of the
government indicated that its tolerance of the Muslim Brotherhood was running out. The
fact that an illegal entity had more control over resources in Egypt than the government
itself was seen as a cause for concern.

Despite its apparent anger and embarrassment, the government took no direct
action against the Muslim Brotherhood’s growing influence until later the same year
when members won 18 of 24 seats in the Bar Association elections. Until 1992, the
Bar Association had been classified as secular with little to no influence by members of
the Brotherhood. In fact, the elections had traditionally been dominated by candidates
affiliated with the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). Fearing that the Brotherhood
would use their influence over the Bar Association to push through the implementation of
Shari’a law, the government took specific steps to halt the Brotherhood’s challenge to the
authorities. These steps were not just designed to prevent the increased influence of the

137 Campagna, “From Accommodation to Confrontation: The Muslim Brotherhood in the Mubarak Years.”
Journal of International Affairs.
Muslim Brotherhood in the professional association elections, but, they extended to curbing their influence in mosques and universities.

Initially, the government placed all private mosques under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Al Awqaf) as a way of restricting the Muslim Brotherhood’s ability to gain more popularity. The then Minister of Religious Affairs, Mohamed Mahjoub released a statement explaining that “Egypt’s mosques will never be a place for extremism, terrorism or a strong-hold of fear or imported ideas, but always preserve their proper role in the lives of Muslims.”\(^{139}\) The government then turned its attention to the laws governing the syndicate elections and passed the Association Law (Law 100 for 1993) in early 1993. The law stipulated that in order for syndicate and association elections to be valid, a minimum of 50 percent of the members of the syndicate or association eligible to vote must be present.\(^{140}\) The winner must also gain more than 50 percent of the vote. If not, then the courts appoint a board of trustees to handle the management of the syndicate. It also banned the ability of the individual syndicates to fundraise as a way of curbing the financial independence that the Muslim Brotherhood gained by fundraising for their projects through the syndicates.\(^{141}\) In the case of the Bar Association elections that were won by the Muslim Brotherhood, the


\(^{141}\) Campagna, “From Accommodation to Confrontation: The Muslim Brotherhood in the Mubarak Years.” *Journal of International Affairs*. 74
government declared them null and void and placed the syndicate under the control of the judiciary.\textsuperscript{142}

Similarly, the government also decided to revisit the Egyptian Universities Act (passed in June 1994) in order to introduce some amendments to the electoral process of faculty clubs and student bodies. By 1994, the Muslim Brotherhood had managed to gain ground in many student and faculty bodies in Cairo, Assuit and Zagazig Universities. The new amendments repealed the elections of faculty deans who would now be appointed by the president of the university. The presidents of the universities would now be appointed by the government.\textsuperscript{143}

However, it was not until 1995 that the government took the first real retaliatory steps against the Muslim Brotherhood. After tolerating their existence, regardless of their legal or illegal status, for almost fifteen years, the Mubarak government rounded up leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood and charged 54 members with belonging to an illegal organization. Tried, convicted and sentenced in military court, the Brothers were handed down prison terms ranging from three to five years. The court also decided to close down the Muslim Brotherhood’s headquarters, located in downtown Cairo.

According to Eberhard Kienle in his article, “More than a response to Islamism: The Political Deliberalization of Egypt in the 1990s”\textsuperscript{144}, the emerging trend of intolerance

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\textsuperscript{142} Matt Bradley, “Egyptian politics play out as lawyers hold elections,” \textit{The National}, 21 May, 2009. \\
\textsuperscript{144} Kienle, “More than a response to Islamism: The political deliberalization of Egypt in the 1990s,” \textit{The Middle East Journal}: 219 -235.
\end{flushright}
by the Egyptian government, particularly towards those subscribing to Islamic ideologies, both violent and non-violent, were subject to harsh consequences by the government.

Kienle notes that the government introduced the terms terrorist and terrorist activities to the constitutions, terms that were previously unused. Moreover, far harsher terms were handed to those convicted of terrorist acts and their cases were to be heard before the Supreme State Security Courts since cases heard by this court could only be appealed on procedural grounds. He also pointed out that the types of terms being passed for those convicted of affiliation with outlawed political groups, fundraising on their behalf or being involved directly in any of their activities were considerably harsher explaining that “[p]rison terms were replaced with forced labor, temporary sentences with life sentences, and life sentences with the death penalty.” Also new was the referral of several cases against civilians to military court.

“While in the past such cases [those against civilians but referred to Military courts] were exceptions, the number of civilians tried in military courts rose from 48 in 1992 to 312 in 1993. The number fell to 65 in 1994, then rose again to 143 in 1995, and fell to 70 in 1996. Unlike their counterparts on Supreme State Security Courts, judges in military courts are military officers and, therefore, subject to orders from their superiors. They have little legal training and their appointment and tenure are entirely at the discretion of the regime. The respect of law enforcement agencies for the life, personal freedom and physical integrity of citizens has generally declined during the 1990s. The number of death sentences passed on civilians by military courts alone rose from 8 in 1992 to 31 in 1993. Between 1992 and the end of 1996, a total of 74 civilians were sentenced to death by military judges. Since at least 1993, the number of political detainees, mostly held under emergency powers, has exceeded 10,000 and according to some sources amounted to more than 16,000 in 1996. The former minister of the interior, Hasan Alfi, himself put the number at "less than 10,000." Reports of torture abound, although they are regularly denied by the regime and its representatives.”

Moreover, changes introduced to the parliamentary election rules prior to the 1990 election made it more difficult for all opposition parties and candidates to run and win seats in parliament. With only a handful of opposition members running as independents, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) secured 79 percent of the parliamentary seats. In the run up to the 1995 elections, opposition members were unable to campaign properly with the government preventing the hanging of campaign posters and signs, forcing opposition members to set-up and tear-down the set up for their rallies on the same day as the event and only allowing them minimal amount of airtime on television for their advertising.

“Regime agencies only interfered against individual NDP candidates where key opposition candidates had to win in order to guarantee a minimum semblance of pluralism, or where one NDP candidate opposed another NDP candidate. Electoral registers were frequently rigged in favor of NDP candidates and sometimes even on the latter’s initiative. News bulletins on state-controlled television left Egyptians with the impression that the NDP was the only party running. Opposition parties were only granted a few short slots for campaign statements, which were also granted to the NDP.”

While the move was designed to hinder the ability of all opposition political parties from securing voters in the election, the Muslim Brotherhood members were a particularly big target. As the oppositions block with a high degree of organization and the ability to secure voters, as demonstrated in the previous elections, the government singled them out as the ones with the biggest threat. The fact that the government was in

the middle of dealing with violent confrontation with members of more violent Islamist groups in Upper Egypt also gave it an extra incentive to curb the ability of the Muslim Brotherhood from giving the Islamist ideology legitimacy through their ability to win seats in Parliament.

“Just before the beginning of the campaign, the regime referred to a military court several prominent members of the Muslim Brotherhood whom it accused of belonging to an illegal organization. Officially banned, the Muslim Brotherhood was generally tolerated but also regularly harassed. This time the choice of the court was no less significant than the timing of the charges, as hitherto only alleged members of armed Islamist groups had been tried by military tribunals. The trial was, on the one hand, a financial blow as well as a warning to the Muslim Brothers; on the other hand, it was meant to demonstrate to the voters that votes cast for the Brotherhood's candidates would probably be lost votes. Their organization being banned, Muslim Brothers could, of course, run only as independents. On the eve of the first round of elections, more than 1,000 members and sympathizers of the Brotherhood were arrested. Most of them were campaign workers or representatives of candidates, who by law were entitled to observe the voting in polling stations, as well as the subsequent counting of the vote.”

Following the election, the NDP won 94 percent of the seats in the People’s Assembly. According to Kienle, an estimated 900 appeals were filed with the Court of Cassation, which recommended that the election of an estimated 200 members of parliament be invalidated. However, this recommendation was not observed. The 1995 election gave the NDP its largest majority in the People’s Assembly.

While the Muslim Brotherhood was still working within the political system, the confrontation between the government, on the one hand, and members of the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyyah and, to a lesser degree, members of the Islamic Jihad Groups, was getting

more violent and expanding beyond serious confrontations between the involved sides in Upper Egypt into more confrontations against officials, civilians and tourists in other major cities. In June of 1995, there was an assassination attempt on the life of Egyptian President, Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Five months later, the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah claimed responsibility for an attack on a bus filled with tourists new the Europa Hotel in the district of Haram in Cairo. Until this point, the government had downplayed the conflict and its impact on the country’s stability and economy arguing that it had the upper hand in the conflict.\textsuperscript{152} However, this changed on 17 November, 1997 when the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah carried out a deadly attack against tourists in Luxor. The attack, during which 58 tourists and four Egyptians died, was followed by a two hour-gun battle. It is at this point that the Egyptian public opinion turned against the use of violence against the state.\textsuperscript{153}

In the months prior to the Luxor Massacre, a ceasefire initiative had been drafted\textsuperscript{154} by the leading members of the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah as early as July 1997 but the government had stated that it would only agree if all factions of the group agreed. Persuading all members, particularly those outside of Egypt to actually honor the ceasefire would need some convincing.\textsuperscript{155} For the ceasefire to work, it would have to extend to all factions of the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah and of the Islamic Jihad, inside and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{154} Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Mohammed M. Hafez. Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World. 136-137.
\end{itemize}
outside Egypt. Although it took some time to convince factions of both groups to work, eventually all parties involved accepted the initiative.

However, according to Al-Zayyat, Ayman Al Zawahiri, as the leader of the Islamic Jihad inside and outside Egypt, had decided to not to accept the ceasefire and accused the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah and Al-Zayyat of forgoing the initial mission that was behind the founding of the groups decades earlier.156 Al-Zayyat notes that the Luxor Massacre and its political, economic, and social impact had turned public opinion against all factions of militant Islam. Moreover, the government’s increased crackdown on the members of the group had taken a serious toll in terms of the numbers that had been arrested and imprisoned. While militant activities in Egypt, particularly by members of the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah began to dwindle, it was not until March 1999 that the official declaration ending all armed confrontation against the Egyptian government, officials, civilians and tourists came into effect. Al-Zayyat also notes that some factions of Islamic Jihad also adopted similar ceasefire initiatives.

“One of the results of the Gama’a al-Islamiyya initiative, which Zawahiri opposed, was that even before the agreement officially went into effect, the Egyptian authorities stopped their campaign against group members all over Egypt, including those in Upper Egypt. Before the initiative, no Islamist in Egypt had felt safe, and the detention campaigns seemed never ending. At the time, the Egyptian authorities held hundreds or even thousands of members under the pretext that the atmosphere was not suitable for their release. Maltreatment was a common means of taking revenge for the activities of members on the outside. The initiative led to the release of these people after years behind bars, and to considerable improvement in the prison conditions for those who were not released. Also, the number of campaigns by the authorities against members of the Gama’a al-Islamiyya fell off significantly. The image of the Gama’a al-Islamiyya improved in the media and political circles, so much so that a number of public and political figures inimical to Islamic groups called for allowing the Gama’a al-Islamiyya to have its own legal entity. This was

156 Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, 74-82.
not even thinkable before the initiative. In Europe, the ceasefire gave the group the status of a repressed political minority, and a number of its leading figures were granted political asylum.\textsuperscript{157}

The above mentioned can be seen as a clear illustration of the ability and willingness of the Egyptian government under Mubarak to alternate between isolation of opposition groups, and in the case of the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah, full out and violent confrontation, to cooption or at least toleration, when an opposition group demonstrate willingness to accept the current political system and accept their position on the sidelines of the legitimate political system. While this might have been the case for those who agreed to ending all military confrontation with the Egyptian government, those who did not – that majority of which were members of the Islamic Jihad – continued their efforts to destablize the Egyptian government for its continued secularization and its cooperation with the West. Their struggle and mode of operation shifted from focusing on direct confrontation with the Egyptian government on Egyptian soil to an indirect confrontation on Egyptian interests outside of Egypt, mainly through attacks on embassies, and on Egyptian allies. Their case and mode of operation will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

\textbf{2.4.3 Period from 2000 to Present:}

During the latter part of the 1990s and into the early 2000s, the Muslim Brotherhood continued to work within the confines of the political system, despite the constraints imposed on them by the government through the maintenance of their illegal status and through the constraints imposed on all opposition political groups in Egypt. While the group remained outlawed and the government continued its efforts to clamp

\textsuperscript{157} Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, 95-96.
down on its activities – political, economic, and social – the group continued its policy of
gaining whatever advantages it could gain within the constraints of the system. Despite a
decision to boycott the 1995 elections, along with other opposition parties, as a response
to severe government clampdown, in the run up to the 2000 election, the Muslim
Brotherhood opted to take advantage of the constitutional right to run as independent
candidates for the People’s assembly.

By the end of the second run off in the 2000 election, the Muslim Brotherhood
had managed to secure 15 seats in the Parliament. By the end of the same phase, other
opposition parties fielding candidates, namely the Al Wafd Party, the Tagammu Party
and the Nasserist Party, had only managed to secure nine seats among them. This
effectively meant that the independents affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood would
form the official opposition to the government in Parliament. 158 The ability of the Muslim
Brotherhood to secure seats in the elections seemed to shock the National Democratic
Party, political analysts and even the general public. In the weeks leading up to the third
run off in the election, the government intensified its crackdown on those affiliated with
the Muslim Brotherhood in a last ditch effort to prevent them from voting. According to
an article published by Amira Howeidy in Al Ahram Weekly, 159 the government arrested
several Muslim Brotherhood candidates and their supporters. The group has seven
affiliated independents in the third and final phase of the run-off. The government had
charged them with exploiting the run off to incite the masses against the government.

“According to Brotherhood lawyer Abdel-Moneim Abdel-Maqsoud, the arrests raised to approximately 1,600 the number of those who have been remanded in custody since the beginning of October. Meanwhile, 2,400 more remain in detention under the emergency law.”\[^{160}\] The government’s decision to arrest members and supporters may have been one of the factors that impacted the ability of the Muslim Brotherhood to secure more seats during the final run off in the 2000 parliamentary elections. Despite that, the Muslim Brotherhood managed to secure two more seats during this phase bringing the total number of parliamentary seats secured by the outlawed group to 17, the highest majority for an opposition.

“Of the 442 members of the forthcoming People's Assembly elected so far, 17 are affiliated to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, meaning that it will be the largest force in parliament after the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). This is despite the fact that the group not only lacks legal status, but remains the one political opposition force the government is not prepared to tolerate. The Brotherhood's victory took everybody, including the group itself, by surprise. Its poor performance in the 1995 elections, coupled with systematic security clampdowns against its members, had made any form of victory seem unlikely.”\[^{161}\]

While the Muslim Brotherhood had its own political agenda, there was a conscious decision by its leadership to use their positions as the official opposition in Parliament between 2000 and 2005 to, not only further the group’s agenda, but also to prioritize issues affecting the lives of Egyptians. They had publicly stated that they would prioritize issues affecting the economy, the political reforms and even issues pertaining to foreign diplomacy. They would also continue to push their demand of adopting the


Shari’a in Egypt.\textsuperscript{162} As per statements made by the Muslim Brotherhood at the time of their election, they would try to maintain an amicable relationship with the government.

\textbf{2.4.4 The impact of 9/11:}

There is no denying that the attacks on the World Trade Center twin towers and the Pentagon in New York and Washington, respectively, on September 11, 2001 had a fundamental impact on the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization and its relationship with the Egyptian government. Since the Muslim Brotherhood has categorically opposed attacks on civilians, the group officially condemned the attacks of 9/11. However, the fact that almost all radical Islamist ideologies in Egypt had initially splinted from the group meant that, at least as far as public perception of the group in the West was concerned, the brotherhood was somehow responsible for the attacks of 9/11. Despite their illegal status in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was not added to the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations issued by the US State Department in October 2001.\textsuperscript{163} The relationship between the group and the Egyptian government was negatively impacted by the events. The international atmosphere towards any organization with Islamist-based ideologies was perceived as being hostile, especially in the first few months after the 9/11 attacks. This was also reflected in the increase in overall hostility towards Muslims in the West indicated through several incidents of attacks on the minority in various countries including the United States, France, Germany and Spain.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{164} Meetings between the members of the EU Commission in Cairo, Egypt and several leading Islamist thinkers including members of the Muslim Brotherhood. A handful of members of the press were selected
On the domestic front, the relationship between the Egyptian government and the Muslim Brotherhood became more confrontational. Although the Muslim Brotherhood had initially stated that they would maintain amicable relations with the Government during their time as the official opposition following the 2000 election, the straining of the relationship between Mubarak and George W. Bush in the months and years that followed the 9/11 gave the Muslim Brotherhood space to flex their muscles. The fact that the United States was no longer unconditionally supportive of the Mubarak government, coupled with the fact that there were several unofficial political meetings between members of the group and several officials from Western government – namely the European Union member, Canada and, to a lesser degree, the United States – allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to become more vocal in their opposition to policies proposed by the Egyptian government in Parliament. The decision by Western governments to hold unofficial meetings with members of the Muslim Brotherhood was indicative of their recognition as an official opposition bloc in Egypt. This in itself gave the brotherhood a sense of international recognition as part of the official Egyptian system, a status they had never been granted before. Thus far, there had been a “steadfast opposition [by] the Egyptian government of any Western dealings with the Muslim Brotherhood.”

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165 Meetings between the members of the Canadian and US embassies and members of the Muslim Brotherhood. These meetings took place between 2002 and 2004. Permission to attend these meetings were granted on the understanding that the names of the attendees and the exact content of the meetings would not be revealed.

Although the arrests of members of the brotherhood continued, the fact that the
government was no longer dealing with a violent Islamist confrontation, as was the case
throughout much of the 1990s, the numbers of arrests were much fewer. Also the rise of a
new, organized political opposition group created in 2004 that was increasingly appealing
to younger, centrist Egyptian voters, the Al Ghad (Tomorrow) Party,\textsuperscript{167} helped create a
sense of calmness between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Government.

While confrontations between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood
mostly remained tied to domestic politics, the newly granted international status to the
Muslim Brotherhood was seen as one of the main drivers behind the surge in the number
of seats the group secured during the 2005 elections.\textsuperscript{168} It is also worth noting that there
were changes introduced by the government to the overall electoral system during this
five-year span, the most important of which was the opening of the presidential
candidacy system, which until this point was based on a yes/no referendum.

In February 2005, the Egyptian President, Mohamed Hosni Mubarak announced
the introduction of multi-candidate presidential elections for the first time in Egypt.

\textit{“In his speech on February 26, 2005, President Hosni Mubarak amended
Article 76 of the Constitution to allow multi-candidate presidential
elections in Egypt. Mubarak's initiative for amending Article 76 of the
Constitution has also been associated with a number of guarantees to
serve the democratic development in Egypt.”}


\textsuperscript{168} It is worth noting that during the period between the 2000 and 2005 elections, the Egyptian government
was somewhat distracted by the emergence of a new political actor, which was viewed by many as a new
alternative to the National Democratic Party. Al Ghad party, under the leadership of former Wafdist Ayman
Nour was rapidly expanding its member base billing itself as an alternative centralist, liberal party that
would bring change to the current system. Not only did the party and its leader attract attention from the
Egyptian public but also from the international community. While the government spent much effort during
the first half of the 2000s trying to discredit the party and its leader, the Muslim Brotherhood took
advantage of this distraction by preparing its members for the upcoming 2005 election in which is secured
an unprecedented number of seats.
ELECTING THE PRESIDENT

- Electing the President by the Egyptian voters through contested polls.
- Providing guarantees to allow more than one candidate to run for the presidential post and be elected by the Egyptian voters.
- The presidential candidate should secure the support of [members of parliament] MPs and members of the local councils, a step meant for guaranteeing seriousness of those willing to run for the post.
- Allowing political parties to field one of its leaders to run for the presidential post in accordance with the set regulations.
- Establishing a higher commission to supervise the presidential elections. The commission should group a number of the heads of judicial bodies and public figures.
- Holding the presidential elections in one day for guaranteeing stability.
- Setting necessary regulations to guarantee a judicial supervision on the presidential polls.”

The Muslim Brotherhood did not nominate a candidate for president during the September 7, 2005 Presidential elections due to the illegal status as a political party. They also refrained from backing any of the other candidates. Instead, they encouraged Egyptians to go to the polls and vote and they concentrated on the upcoming parliamentary elections, which were scheduled to take place in three phases between November 7 and December 9, 2005. At the end of the three phases, “the Brotherhood unexpectedly won 88 seats, or 20 percent of the 454-seat parliament,” once again making them the official opposition. Taking advantage of their constitutional rights to field independent candidates, the group managed to secure the highest number of seats in its history.

While the victory may have been good news for the Muslim Brotherhood because it helped further solidify their status as a legitimate opposition bloc in Egypt, their re-emergence as a serious threat soured the group’s relationship with the government. Once again, the government had to develop a strategy for dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood in light of what is interpreted by many as growing popular support for the ideology. Since the 88 candidates had secured their seats in the PA through the electoral process, regardless of whether or not it was transparent, the government had to take the official opposition seriously responding to interpellations in parliament and including these members on official parliamentary committees. However, on the street level, the government resumed its arrest of members through a large number of charges. From their side, the Muslim Brotherhood stuck to their promise of remaining a genuine opposition to the government, questioning their decisions particularly focusing on the series of economic reforms adopted by the Egyptian government starting in the second half of 2004 with the appointment of the Ahmed Nazif government.

With parliamentary elections scheduled for late 2010, it remains to be seen how both sides will handle them. Moreover, 2011 is also a presidential election year. While the Muslim Brotherhood is still unable to field a candidate for president due to its illegal

171 It is important to note that following the 2005 elections, the government seemed a lot more preoccupied with what it perceived as the threat being posed by other secular political parities such as Al Ghad whose chairman, Ayman Nour, emerged as the only serious threat during the 2005 presidential elections, as well as other opposition parties such as Al Wafd. In the months following the election, the government seemed more focused on reducing any credibility of the secular parties in Egypt as opposed to working to erode the credibility of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is likely due to the conviction among government officials that the appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood is much easier to contain because of the extensive experience that the government has in dealing with the Brotherhood. However, secular political parties were an entirely different matter. The Mubarak government had managed to weaken most of the political parties over the years. But during the 2000s, these parties seemed to pick up momentum, mostly driven by the appeal of the alternative centrist secular Al Ghad party. The focus on these secular parties, particularly Al Ghad, Al Wafd and the leftist Al Tagamou party seemed to distract the government from dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood.
status, it does have the option of supporting a candidate of another party on the condition that its members are allowed to control certain portfolios. It also remains to be seen whether the government will adopt cooption measures or isolation measures to deal with the Brotherhood during the upcoming elections. Based on its history, the technique adopted is likely to be a combination to use both techniques with the ultimate goal of discouraging the Brotherhood of getting involved in the Presidential elections. As far as the parliamentary elections go, the Muslim Brotherhood is likely to approach them with a new found confidence based on their success during the 2005 elections.
3. SAUDI ARABIA & ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS

Saudi Arabia, much like Egypt, has a long history with Islamist movements. However, the relationship between the various Saudi governments and these movements tended to differ from that of the Egyptian governments and the Islamist movements in Egypt. The root of this relationship lies in the different nature of the Egyptian political system versus that of Saudi Arabia. This chapter will outline the nature of the relationship between the Saudi governments and the Islamist movements in the Kingdom from the rise of the Wahhabi movement, which has come to form the backbone of the ideology of the ruling Royal Family in Saudi Arabia, to the rise of radical movements leading to the rise of Al Qaeda, as the encompassing movement that is characterized as the umbrella under which many radical Islamist movements around the world fall.

Understanding the nature of the political system in Saudi Arabia requires a strong understanding of the political aspect of Islam as opposed to the religious aspect of the faith. In fact, Saudi Arabia as a modern kingdom was built through a combination of military prowess and religious cooption. While the deal that initially enabled Abdel Aziz Al Saud to unite what were warring tribes under the banner of the Saudi Arabian flag had helped create stability in country, today it is the same deal that has led to the rise of radical Islamist movements. Al Qaeda traces its roots in the ideology that has served to maintain order in Saudi Arabia and helped the Al Saud Royal Family remain in power. The confrontation between the two began to emerge with the increase of audible criticism of the current structure of power. The Saudi political system is built on cooption of certain groups within society and that isolation of others and the relationship between Islamist movement and the government was no different. To truly understand that
political system in Saudi Arabia, and why the rise of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda are truly a threat to the status quo of the system, it is essential to understand the evolution of the relationship between the Saudi government and Islamists.

3.1 **Saudi Arabia & the rise of Wahhabi Islam:**

To fully understand the depth of the relationship between the political system in Saudi Arabia and Islam, as a religious and political component of the system, it is essential to understand more about the history of Saudi Arabia and how the country first came into being. While it is not the purpose of this study to trace the historical development of Saudi Arabia, the events that led to the creation of the first Saudi state are of particular relevance to this study because it was during this phase that the *Wahhabi* movement was born. It was also the time during which the religious movement became part of the political ideology of the state, a trend that would continue to date.

Initially referred to as the Arabian Peninsula, the first Saudi state was forced into being through the military prowess of Mohamed Ibn Saud and later his son Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, whose descendents would later become the ruling family of Saudi Arabia, the Al Saud dynasty. Prior to the series of wars between the various tribes that made up the peninsula, Saudi Arabia was seen as a vast desert with little to offer to anyone in terms of natural resources. This is perhaps one of the main reasons why, unlike Egypt, Saudi Arabia has never been occupied by any foreign power, a fact that would become important in shaping its character as a country.\(^{172}\) The peninsula’s claim to fame, for lack of a better analogy, was the fact that it was the birthplace of Islam and the home of the

religion’s holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, housing the Kaaba and the Prophet’s mosque, respectively, and much later, the discovery of some of the world’s largest oil reserves.

The relationship between Islam and politics in the Arab Peninsula actually dates back to the time of Prophet Mohamed when Islam was seen as more than just a religious system but an all encompassing religious, political and economic system. While the tribes of the peninsula continued to apply the rules of Islam as the main guide for their religious, social and political existence, this began to change in the 1700s with the emergence of a religious revival and reformation movement. It is during this same period that Mohamed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi ideology, was born and raised.

Born in 1702/3, Mohamed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab came from a wealthy and influential family from town of al-Uwaynah in Najd, the central part of the Arabian Peninsula. By the age of 10, he had memorized the Qur’an. As a teenager, he had studied Fiqh, Hadith, and the writings of other religious scholars. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was highly influenced by the reformation movement that was unfolding across much of the Muslim world during the 18th century. Unlike other religious reformist movements of the 19th century, for whom the revival of religious interpretation and implementation was a reflection of the increased influence of the West over the Muslim world, the reformist movement of the 18th century was a reflection of the perceived deterioration of the Islamic world as a whole. According to Natana J. DeLong-Bas in her book “Wahhabi


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Islam: from Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, the reformist movements of the 18th century emerged to combat the rise of superstition and the dependence on saints to perform miracles. The reformist movements of the 18th century were focused on debating whether or not this was a violation to the concept of Tawhid, or the oneness of God. DeLong-Bas notes that the notion that God had to be the center of all areas of life, both public and private, along with the need for the reconstruction of the socio-moral norms of society were central to the reformist movements of the era. However, the movement did not advocate the overthrowing of governments but instead saw the implementation of these reforms as taking place through a grassroots movement that would eventually lead to changes in the decision making processes in both public and private areas of life.

“These reformers did not seek to re-create the early Muslim community, as some later movements tried to do. Rather, the goal was to rediscover the meaning of Hadith in their original context in order to determine the eternal value or ethical guideline contained within it. This value or guideline was then compared to Quaranic teachings about the same, setting the stage not only for a more profound understanding of Islam but also for a more meaningful application of Islamic values in both the private and public spheres. [...] The reformers understood their movements to be a process that would necessarily occur gradually. They were evolutionary, not revolutionary, in approach. In general the movements did not seek to topple governments, engage in coups to replace one political system with another, or organize their followers into cells to carry out terrorist activities or guerrilla warfare against existing governments. They did align themselves with political leaders, but their purpose in doing so was not overtly political. What mattered to the reformers was that the political system in place reflected and supported Islam in both private and public life. They were more concerned with matters of religious practice and adherence to Islamic law than with political systems or geographic boundaries.”

The reformists of the time had a strong understanding of the public’s resistance to the idea of changing the way their religion is to be interpreted and implemented. So to implement these changes, the reformists typically sought the protection of an influential

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175 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad.
176 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, 11-12.
policy-maker or group. In exchange for protection, the reformists would provide the policy-maker or group with religious legitimacy. It is worth noting, that these reformists typically downplayed the importance of jihad in Islam. This is in sharp contrast to the reformists of the 19th century, the majority of whom were involved in some capacity or another in independence movements. It is worth noting that this reformist movement can be seen as the first example of political cooption of religion as a way to secure political rule or the obedience of the public. However, this was a mutual cooption whereby the religious group uses the political protection of the rulers to promulgate their message, while the political ruler uses the religious group for religious legitimacy.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was not only influenced by this thought process. The writings that form the backbone of the Wahhabi movement make his teachings typical of the reformists of the 18th century. While the overall perception of Wahhabi Islam is generally that of a movement that advocates violence and seeks to recreate the Islamic community as it existed during the time of the Prophet Mohamed, DeLong-Bas notes that this is not reflected in this original writings or in the manner in which Ibn Abd al-Wahhab lived his life. Instead, it is more a reflection of the way in which his teachings were misrepresented by other scholars, particularly after his death and the way in which his teachings were implemented by later generations.

“The ulama responded negatively to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s criticism. They launched a serious campaign to discredit him, including false portrayals of his doctrines and teachings in order to protect their own positions of power. This negative campaign of defamation survived the test of time and found its way into historical record. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s own writings and teachings did not.

177 The Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt is typical of the reformist movements in the 19th Century. For example, the movement was initially created as a response to increased influence by the West in Egypt. Despite being a self-professed, non-violent movement, the Muslim Brotherhood did take part in the struggle against the British occupation of Egypt.
Thus, the defamation campaign of the ulama marked the beginning of the distortion of Wahhabi teachings and impressions of the same. Based on his writings and information recorded by his followers immediately after his death, it can be concluded that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was intensely religious. He was a strong advocate of applying religious belief in both personal and public life. He was a precise man who said what he intended to do and not a word more. He was a master of words and a strong debater. He enjoyed teaching others and believed that all Muslims are equal regardless of their race or ethnicity. He believed that women had a balance of rights with men in Islam. He was neither a pacifist nor a warmonger. He believed that there were times when violence was necessary. However, he valued life immensely. He was not a supporter of violence and believed that life is to be preserved and celebrated. As is typical of most reformers of the 18th century, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab moved around the Arabian Peninsula spreading his teachings, a main component of which was the notion that all Muslims, men and women, should read the Qur’an and Hadith as well as the writings of as many scholars as possible. He maintained that it was the responsibility of each person to come to their conclusions about the faith. This inherently made him unpopular with the ulama of various communities as it meant that understanding the religion and its teachings was no longer an area of monopoly for them. “Their major fear that the ulama had with respect to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s teachings was that they would become not only less powerful but also potentially irrelevant. ... Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s insistence that every Muslim, both male and female, personally read and study the Quran and Hadith served not only to

179 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, 17.
undercut the authority of the ulama but in many cases to bypass them altogether.‖¹⁸⁰

Moreover, his explicit belief in the separation of the role of the Imam and the leader in a community, coupled with his unwillingness to issue fatwas supporting jihad when it was not in line with the guidelines set in the religion, would ultimately put him in confrontation with the political leaders whose protection he sought.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab began his da’wa or preaching of Tawhid (the oneness of God) activities in Najd amid confrontation with the religious community. He traveled around the Arabian Peninsula and to other Muslim countries to study with other reformists of his time and to preach his reformist ideas. Being perceived as a threat to the status quo, he was repeatedly asked to leave. However, it was not until his father’s death in 1740 that there was an attempt on his life. It was then that he found his first political patron, Uthman Ibn Hamid ibn Muammar, a local tribal leader.¹⁸¹

“ʻIbn Abd al-Wahhab began to teach Ibn Muammar about the principle of tawhid. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Muammar then struck a deal. In exchange for Ibn Muammar’s support for his religious teachings, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab agreed to support the ruler’s political ambitions to expand his rule over Najd and possibly beyond. Ibn Muammar agreed, and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab embarked on a broad public preaching campaign.”¹⁸²

While Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would be allowed to preach Tawhid, he was expected to provide Ibn Muammar with the religious backing for his political agenda. This alliance was particularly significant because it would serve as the initial model upon which modern Saudi Arabia would be built – a political entity that is rooted in a religious ideology, Wahhabism.

¹⁸¹ DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, 23.
¹⁸² DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, 23.
It is also during this time that three main events took place that reflected the nature of *Wahhabism* and its strong emphasis on the oneness of God. It was the same three events that would later form the perceived radicalism of *Wahhabism*. The first of these events was the decision by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to cut down a sacred tree, which the people of al-Uyaynah perceived as sacred and hung prayers on. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab perceived this as a violation of the Islamic belief that there are no intermediaries between God and worshippers. The second was his decision to destroy the tomb stone of Zayd Ibn al-Khattab, the brother of the second Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab also viewed the fact that the people saw this tomb as being blessed as a violation of the principles of *Tawhid*. The third decision was the stoning of an adulteress, who had come to him and confessed her actions announcing that she had no intention of stopping. Although he had engaged in dialogue with her several times to explain to her that her actions were forbidden under Islam as well as to clarify the punishment for these actions. He also asked about her mental health and her financial circumstances twice and found that she was sane and was not being forced into such actions by anyone or for financial need. She had, however, continued in her actions publicly. It was after dialogue failed that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab finally decided to stone her.\(^{183}\)

These three events were particularly important because they would form the grounds upon which the other religious *ulama* in the area and beyond argued that the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab were radical and violent. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was himself aware of the accusations being leveled against him, and spent much of his life countering these charges of radicalism both verbally and in his writings. DeLong-Bas

argued that the reason the *ulama* had sought to discredit Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had to do with the fact that their position within their community was solely dependent on the fact that they had exclusive knowledge of the religion.

“It would be [...] accurate to refer to the *ulama* as a social class [as opposed to] an official body or institution. The authority of the *ulama* rested in the recognized scope of their scholarship, their ability to attract adherents to their teachings, and the number of students who study with them. Thus, an authoritative ‘*alim* owes his authority to his popularity, while a ‘*alim* who lacks popular acclaim likewise lacks authority. Clearly, therefore, the *ulama* of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s day had a vested interest in preventing the community from changing its allegiance from adherence to its own teachings to adherence to his. Given this vested and personal interest in seeing Ibn Abd al-Wahhab disgraced, defamed, and rejected, it is not surprising that the most lasting negative impressions, rumors, and polemics we have about Wahhabis and their teachings come from the ulama.”

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The confrontations between the *ulama* and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, coupled with the fear among the other political leaders surrounding Ibn Muammar, led these political leaders to threaten to withhold paying taxes to Ibn Muammar for his protection. This brought his partnership with Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to an end.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab moved to *Dira‘iya*, today part of the Saudi capital of Riyadh, with the purpose of seeking out a more powerful political patron. He set his eyes on Mohamed Ibn Saud. In 1744, he formed an alliance with Ibn Saud whereby he would be allowed to preach his message of *Tawhid* while providing a religious backing for Ibn Saud’s ambitious plans to unite the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula into a Kingdom. The agreement was that Ibn Saud would be the *amir* or political leader, while Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would be the *Imam* or the religious leader.

“The tension between the two was also apparent in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s careful delineation of the parameters to be followed by each in their roles as political leader and religious leader. According to this vision, the *amir* was responsible

for political, military and economic matters, and the imam for religious issues. Only the imam could declare jihad as holy war and this only when the motivating factor was faith alone. Jihad was not intended to serve as a means of acquiring power, wealth or glory. This did not preclude the amir from engaging in military activities that he believed were necessary or expedient. What it did do was to limit the religious legitimation of those military activities. Because only the imam could declare a jihad as holy war, the amir could not automatically claim that any and all military activities were being carried out in the name of jihad. Thus, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was able to restrict the declaration of jihad to cases that he believed fit the religious criteria.”

Despite the tension between Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Saud, the partnership between them lasted for almost three decades. During this period, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab used the time to engage in a letter writing campaign to other leaders throughout the Arabian Peninsula telling them about his message of Tawhid. Some leaders responded positively mostly because of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s alliance with Ibn Saud. There were even people who migrated to Dira’iya to be near Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, including his previous patron Uthman Ibn Hamid ibn Muammar. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself had never encouraged people to migrate to Dira’iya out of the belief that his message was one that is not limited to a town or even the Arabian Peninsula.

In 1767, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s patron, Mohamed Ibn al-Saud died and his son, Abd al-Aziz, took over as amir. The partnership between the Al Saud family and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab continued but was drawing to an end as it became clear to the latter that the purpose of the patronage offered by the Al Saud family had little to do with religious faith and more to do with military campaigns and the desire to rule the Arabian Peninsula. In 1773, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab ended his partnership with the Abd al-Aziz al Saudi and withdrew from public life. He died in 1791 or 1792.

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185 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, 35.
“Abd Al Aziz [Al Saud] proceeded to expand his vision beyond the confines of Najd into the rest of Arabia, Iraq, and Syria. His actions made it clear that the Al Saud family had as its ultimate goal the expansion of its territory and power, with or without religious legitimation. In fact, Saudi-Wahhabi power reached its height between 1792 and 1814, long after Ibn Abd al-Wahhab withdrew from public life.”\(^{186}\)

The first Saudi state emerged following the conquest of Riyadh by the Al Saud family. The new ruling family exerted control over the towns and areas of the Peninsula they conquered by disguising it as part of the call to Tawhid, the Wahhabi ideology. “Under the guise of spreading the Wahhabi message, the Saudi leadership subjugated most of the amirs in Najd. Those amirs were allowed to remain in their settlements as long as they paid zakat to the Saudi leader, a token of their submission to his authority.”\(^{187}\) The first Saudi state lasted until 1818 when the forces of Al Saud were defeated by the Ottoman sultan Mohamed Ali Pasha along with his forces that included Egyptians, who became concerned after the Al Saud family overtook Mecca and Medina, Islam’s holiest cities.\(^{188}\)

In 1824, the Al Saud dynasty once again seized much of the Peninsula through a series of tribal wars. It is worth noting that, while the second Saudi state was still built on a combination of military prowess and Wahhabi religious fervor, the latter was not as central to the political rhetoric as it was during the creation of the first Saudi state. It is also worth noting that by the rise of the second state, the distinction between the role of the amir and the imam, as clearly outlined by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab during the rise of Wahhabism, was less clear. Instead, the amir also began to function as the supreme

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\(^{188}\) Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. 100
imam. From this point on, the Al Saud family would enjoy a special status under the Saudi political system. This would even continue into the modern Saudi state and even until today. This second Saudi state lasted until 1891 when the army of Abd al-Rahman Ibn Faisal Ibn Turki Al Saud was defeated by the army of the Al Rasheed dynasty from Ha’il.

“Riyadh remained under the authority of the Ha’il amirs until 1902 when Abdul Rahman’s son Abdul Aziz, known as Ibn Saud, returned from exile in Kuwait, killed the Rashidi governor and declared himself amir of Riyadh: a third and final revival of Saudi rule began to take shape. This revival marks the beginning of the third Saudi state in the twentieth century.”

Following the fall of Riyadh, Abdul Aziz Al Saud engaged in a series of wars for two decades in order to establish his rule over the Arabian Peninsula. He secured his boarders with neighboring countries by entering into a series of treaties with the Ottomans and the British. In May 1914, Ibn Saud entered into the Ottoman-Saudi Convention, an agreement which gave him and his descendents control over Najd. In December of 1915, he also signed the Anglo-Saudi Treaty with the British government, which recognized the sovereignty of Ibn Saud as the ruler of most of the Arabian Peninsula. It also committed the British to giving aid to Ibn Saud should his territory come under attack. They also gave him a monthly stipend of 5,000 Sterling Pounds. In return, Ibn Saud agreed not to interfere in the affairs of any of the other states in which the British were involved including Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar.

192 Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 41.
193 Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 42.
The arrangement remained in place until 1924, when the British began to withhold Ibn Saud’s stipend. It was at this point that he laid siege to the town of Ta’if near Mecca, which surrendered after three days of attacks. He then managed to invade Mecca followed by the major port of Jeddah, which surrendered after a year-long siege between January and December of 1925. The city of Medina, the only remaining large city surrendered to Ibn Saud without a fight immediately after.\textsuperscript{194} In the period between 1926 and 1932, Ibn Saud solidified his grip on the Arabian Peninsula through a series of agreements with powerful tribes, the British who were mostly concerned with preserving their position in neighboring states in the Gulf area and Jordan, and quashing of small tribal unrests or co-opting potentially challenging tribes. In 1932, Ibn Saud declared the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{195}

3.2 The Modern Saudi State & Islamism:

Although the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia came about through a series of wars, the ability of King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud to rule the kingdom was based on Wahhabi Islam.\textsuperscript{196} Much like his ancestors in the 1700s, the new king ruled Saudi Arabia by using religion as a way to solidify his rule. He capitalized on the existence of the Mutawwa’, a segment within the community that for all intents and purposes functioned as religious police. This religious police has its roots in Najd, and its members consider themselves the ones entrusted with ensuring that all members of the community abide the rule of Wahhabi Islam and apply the strict interpretation of religion in both the public and

\textsuperscript{194} Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 45-46.
\textsuperscript{195} Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{196} Champion, The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform, 27.
private spheres. Ibn Saud capitalized on the existence of the *mutawwa’* to ensure the loyalty of the public.

“The *mutawwa’* of Najd initiated whole communities in the art of obedience and submission. Although this submission was meant to be to a higher authority, that of God, in practice they implied that without submission to the political authority of Ibn Saud, the faith and deeds of Muslims would be threatened.”

This is a very important aspect of maintaining order and political control in Saudi society until today. While Arab societies where rule is based on the republic system, certain aspects of democratic rule are used as a façade for legitimization. This is evident in the creation of several, but weak, political parties; the holding of regular, but rigged, elections, etc. Such tools are used for the maintenance of the political system’s status quo. This is the case in many countries such as Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Algeria. In the case of Kingdoms in the region, the ruling families seek ways to secure the legitimacy of their rule. For example, in the case of Jordan, the ruling family derives its legitimacy from the belief that the family is descended from the house of Prophet Mohamed. In case of the Saudi royal family, the legitimacy of family rule is derived from the notion that they are the protectors of Islam and its holy sites. In essence, they rule through the will of God.

When modern Saudi Arabia was created in 1932, the country had little in terms of resources through which to establish a modern country. In fact, it “was one of the poorest, most desolate places in the world. The only source of income for the newly created states

was the stream of pilgrims who visit Mecca and Medina every year for Hajj. The country had little to offer its citizens and it would not be before the 1950s that the first oil boom would take place in Saudi Arabia. Suddenly, King Faisal would embark on a building- and spending spree. While American companies had already started to take advantage of the newly discovered money by taking on building projects, King Faisal pressured them to teach the locals. Among those who took on some of these projects was Mohamed bin Laden, a Yemeni immigrant, who would later become one of the biggest contractors in Saudi Arabia. He was also the father of none other than Osama bin Laden. It is important to note Mohamed bin Laden would be given Saudi citizenship, something that is very uncommon in the Kingdom and would remain very close to the royal family as did several of his sons.

Like many other regimes in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia’s system evolved on the base of the cooption of some segments within society and the isolation of others. Many governments in the Middle East chose to co-opt the economic elite who control much of the business sectors in the various countries. The logic being that the economic elites have sufficient power because of their economic independence. Therefore, it is in the regimes’ best interest to find common ground with these groups in order for them to share an agenda.

“The private-sector bourgeoisie has entered into a pact with the state which has impeded progress toward democracy. The tacit understanding has been that the bourgeoisie would renounce any overt political role and that it would follow the broad economic directives of the state in exchange for which it would be allowed

199 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 73.
200 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 74-75.
201 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11.
to make significant profit. The state would keep labor docile through a combination of welfare benefits and political repression.\textsuperscript{202}

Therefore, it was not much of a surprise that the Saudi ruling family co-opted bin Laden, not so much because of his financial independence but because of the potential benefit co-opting someone with skill could mean and also to have a contractor who is completely loyal to the royal family as opposed to depending on a foreign contractor to embark on the elaborate construction projects the government was hoping to implement. This was replicated with several other promising members of the business community.

The king also co-opted other members of the royal family in order to ensure that no one threatened the succession to the throne. This was done mostly through access to the wealth that was generated for the Saudi state by the discovery of oil. It is at this point that the lavish lifestyle that is generally associated with the Saudi royal family began to emerge.\textsuperscript{203}

Similarly, the Saudi ruling family depended on the continued support of religious class for its legitimacy. In the 1960s, King Faisal would fully bring them under the employment of the state.\textsuperscript{204} Although they continued to function as a tool for maintaining social control, bringing them under the employment of the state meant that the nature of the relationship changed into a more symbiotic one, as opposed to one where the government needed the \textit{ulama} for legitimization. Under this arrangement, the \textit{ulama} lost the independence they had since the creation of the kingdom. Instead, their continued

\textsuperscript{203} Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{204} Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 100-101.
financial survival became dependent on the continuation of the thriving of the Saudi royal family.

The relationship between the religious community and the Saudi ruling family remained stable for the first decade after the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, this did not mean that there was no resistance to the changes that were being introduced to the country. This resistance began to appear in the 1960s when King Faisal, who was the second of King Abdel Aziz’s sons to ascend to the throne, introduced several rapid changes to Saudi Arabia in an effort to drive the social development of the country forward. Unlike his older brother King Saud who went on a spending spree building palaces for himself and members of the royal family, King Faisal had taken the decision to spend the country’s money on Saudi society. He had created an education system for boys in the 1950s when he was still Crown Prince. He also introduced female education in the 1960s, an initiative that would dismay many within the religious community. He invited international and American firms to build major projects in the country. In 1965, he introduced public television, the consequence of which was a bloody confrontation with religious zealots. In fact, his own nephew was killed in the confrontation. “Faisal was such a powerful king that he was able to force these changes on his society at a stunning pace.” However, the consequence of this rapid modernization and the resistance by the conservatives within the community was deadly. King Faisal was assassinated by his nephew, the brother of the nephew that died in the confrontations over the creation of the national television system, in 1975.

205 Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 86.
This was the first serious confrontation with religious conservatives and the government of modern Saudi Arabia. But it was just an indication of what was to come. In 1979, a deadly confrontation between a fringe Islamist group would and the government would take place in Mecca. On November 20, 1979, the final day of Hajj, the grand mosque in Mecca was seized by a band of insurgents claiming to be led by the Mahdi, which translates into the one who is selected to lead. Some 50 thousand Muslims had gathered in the mosque that houses the Ka’aba for dawn prayers. The members of the group had locked the doors of the mosque and positioned snipers at the top level of the mosque. The leaders of the group took the microphone and stated that they were there to topple the Saudi ruling family and establish a theocracy in Saudi Arabia.²⁰⁷

“Inside the mosque were four or five hundred insurgents, including women and children. [...] In the weeks leading up to the hajj, they had stolen automatic weapons from the armory of the [Saudi] National Guard and smuggled them into the compound on biers on which the dead were commonly brought for ritual washing. The rebels had hidden their arms and supplies within the hundreds of tiny underground chambers beneath the courtyard that were used as hermitages for pilgrims on retreat.”²⁰⁸

The group was led by two men, Mohamed Abdullah al-Qahtani and Juhayman al-Oteibi, the first claiming to be the Mahdi while the other was the actual preacher who convinced people to follow him. “The concept of the Mahdi is a controversial one, especially in Wahhabi Islam, since this messiah is not mentioned in the Quran. Tradition says that the Mahdi will be a descendent of the prophet and will carry his name (Mohamed bin Abdullah).”²⁰⁹ It was al-Oteibi who convinced al-Qahtani that he was the Mahdi when they met in prison. After their release, al-Oteibi began to preach that the end

²⁰⁷ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 102.
²⁰⁸ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 104.
²⁰⁹ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 102.
of the world was near and began to recruit members from the School of Theology in the University of Medina. He also attracted followers from the Saudi National Guard.\footnote{Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 102.}

Until this point in modern Saudi Arabia, there had never been such a serious confrontation with an opposition group in the Kingdom. In contrast to republics like Egypt, for example, the fact that power in Saudi Arabia rested with a royal family meant that the transition of power would always go from one member of the Al Saud family to the next. There was no parliament in the kingdom and the presence of strict monitoring of all aspects of life, be it public or private, courtesy of Wahhabi thought, meant that the Royal family’s rule was largely unchecked and, more importantly, unchallenged. The fact that the ruling family had fully co-opted the religious community by bringing them under the full employment of the state meant that the only group that could potentially challenge the decisions of the ruling would be too weak to cause any real threat to the status quo. But it was exactly the fact that the royal family had used religion as a justification of its rule that made the message of al-Oteibi and al-Qahtani very relevant. Much like the argument made by Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, they argued that the regime was in essence making the people recognize the supremacy of the ruler as equivalent to that of God, which was a clear violation of the theories of \textit{Tawhid}.\footnote{Pascal Menoret. “Fighting for the Holy Mosque: the 1979 Mecca Insurgency,” in \textit{Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Places}, ed. C. Christine Fair & Sumit Ganguly (New York, Oxford University Press, 2008), 125.}

Inside the mosque, al-Oteibi used the sound system to publicize the demands of his group. The Saudi Arabia they wanted to create would be a modern recreation of the Islamic state during the lifetime of Prophet Mohamed and the four Caliphs.
“Oteibi insisted on the adoption of Islamic, non-Western values and the rupture of diplomatic relations with Western countries, thus rolling back the changes that had opened the society to modernity. [...] The royal family would be thrown out of power, and there would be a full accounting of the money that they had taken from the Saudi people. Not only the king but also the ulema who countenanced his rule would be denounced as sinful and unjust. Oil exports to the United States would be cut off, and all foreign civilians and military experts would be expelled from the Arabian Peninsula.”

According to Pascal Menoret’s article “Fighting for the Holy Mosque: the 1979 Mecca Insurgency”, one of the major arguments put forth by al-Qahtani and al-Oteibi is that the ruling family of Saudi Arabia not only had parted with the teachings of Islam but that they had also failed to secure the love and best interest of the people of Saudi Arabia. This is one of the major aspects of their doctrine that had attracted many young theologians to the movement.

“[...] The main sin of the Al Saud family had been ‘to take the allegiance of the people, not by the hand and the heart, freely and by choice, but by force and constraint. While the allegiance to the Al Saud family was thought to be the cornerstone of the state-society relationship, it had little religious value because it was imposed upon the Saudi people and not freely chosen by them in a public oath of allegiance.’

Dealing with the standoff was a serious challenge for the security apparatus. Islam had strictly forbidden bloodshed at the Ka’aba. While the hostage takers had released some of the pilgrims, there were still several thousand hostages inside the mosque. Sending troops into the mosque required the approval of the religious community. It is not certain how or even if the head of the ulama, Abdul Aziz Bin Baz, would grant

\[215\] It is worth noting that some sources state that members of the group claim that the pilgrims were allowed to leave the mosque. However, this is hard to verify since the surviving members of the group were executed by the Saudi government after the incident ended.
permission especially since al-Oteibi was his student. The permission was granted, although the Saudi government never publicly stated in exchange for what.

Every attempt by the Saudi National Guard to storm the mosque led to deaths as snipers positioned at the upper level of the mosque used their superior position to their advantage. According to Lawrence Right in his book *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, the Saudi authorities changed the strategy and began to work on gaining control of the upper level of the mosque. It would take four days before they could achieve that goal. In the gun battle that followed, the group’s Mahdi, al-Qahtani, was killed. Following the battle, the group members took their hostages into the underground tunnels. It would take more than two weeks for the Saudi Government to decide to drill holes into the tunnels and drop grenades. This action killed both hostages and group members but it also drove them out into the open space around the Ka’aba where members were killed by snipers. It was worth noting that al-Oteibi survived the siege and would beg for the king’s forgiveness after his arrest.

As Daryl Champion points out in his book *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, the crisis of 1979 highlighted the resentment that had built up beneath the surface among members of Saudi society, those who were not benefiting from the rentier nature of the Kingdom’s economic structure. “This incident highlighted [...] less desirable aspects of rentier status which had become entrenched in the Saudi political economy and which occurred in the context of the

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217 Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*.
219 Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*. 110
informal and opaque political-economic system based on kinship, *wasta* and other forms of personal relations [...].”\(^{220}\)

Much like the way the Egyptian government handled those involved in the Sadat assassination plot, the Saudi government had to make a decision on how to handle the punishment of those who were involved in the group. This was particularly important since the attacks not only pitted Muslims against Muslims in the religion’s holiest site, but it also presented a very public and deadly threat to the authority of the government. However, unlike the Egyptian government, the punishment did not drag on for years; it was swift, severe and very public.

“The government divided Oteibi and sixty-two of his disciples among eight different cities where, on January 9, 1980, they were [publicly] beheaded. It was the largest execution in Saudi Arabian history. The Saudi government admitted that 127 of its men had been killed in the uprising and 461 injured. About a dozen worshippers were killed, along with 117 rebels. Unofficial accounts, however, put the number of the dead at more than 4,000. [...] The kingdom was traumatized.”\(^{221}\)

3.3 The Saudi Government & the Rise of Al Qaeda:

The siege of Mecca was a clear indicator that, while on the surface, the Al Saud family was seemingly in control, there were pockets of resistance to the lavish lifestyle the family enjoyed. More importantly, the conservative current in the Kingdom was on the rise; their particular objection was to the involvement of the Kingdom with the West and the threat this posed to the adoption of Western values, which many in Saudi Arabia saw as a direct contradiction to the teachings of Islam.

“The Great Mosque incident indicated that regime and elite excesses did not go unnoticed even during the initial years of the oil boom, the era of plenty. It also demonstrated that minority elements of the Saudi population were prepared to

press home their dissatisfaction by drastic action. Accusation of regime favoritism and corruption did not end with the execution of the Mecca rebels; similar and even more extensive and detailed criticisms have been prominent [since with] calls for political reform."

However, a change on the international political scene seemed to function as a temporary distraction for the extremist current in the Kingdom. On December 25, 1979, the armies of the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, a Muslim country that the majority of people in the Arab World were unlikely to have ever heard of before. Suddenly, members of the religious community began to argue that it is the role of every Muslim to support the fighters in Afghanistan. At this point, the resistance movement in Afghanistan was spearheaded by Afghani warlords who, despite their collapsed government and their almost non-existent resources, had vowed to expel the Soviet armies from their country. Not only Saudi nationals, but nationals of most Arab countries headed to Afghanistan throughout the 1980s to take part in jihad against the non-believers who were infringing on the soil of a Muslim country.

Those who headed to Afghanistan included individual volunteers who were simply motivated by religion and other members of Islamist movements who had a long history in their own countries including several who would later play a fundamental part in the shaping of the character of Al Qaeda. These included Ayman Al Zawahiri and Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman of Egypt, both of whom went to Afghanistan because they saw it as an opportunity to implement their own ideas of jihad away from the watchful

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eyes of the Egyptian Secret Police;\textsuperscript{225} Palestine’s Abdallah Azzam, who would later head the logistics office that handled the needs of the Arab fighters in Afghanistan,\textsuperscript{226} and later Osama bin Laden. The significance of the Afghanistan War to the rise of Al Qaeda will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The Saudi government saw an opportunity to export its internal political problem with Islamists to Afghanistan, an opportunity that was taken by several other Arab countries.

“Soon Jeddah became a transit station for young men who were answering Sheikh Abdullah’s [Abdullah Azzam] call to join the caravan of the Afghan jihad. … Fugitives from Algeria and Egypt slipped into the country and were provided with false papers by Saudi intelligence.”\textsuperscript{227}

The Saudi government encouraged these young men to travel to Afghanistan as this served to illustrate their religiousiosity as they were supporting the fight of Muslims against non-Muslims. The government subsidized the price of air tickets to Pakistan and the Royal family donated money and hard equipment to the cause. However, the actual reason behind the government’s support of the movement had less to do with religion and more to do with politics.

“[The Saudi government] believed the Soviet Union’s ultimate target was to control the Strait of Hormuz at the base of the Gulf, where Oman reaches toward Iran like a fishhook for an open mouth. From there, the soviets could control the supply route for the supertankers that ferried the petroleum from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and Iran. Whoever commanded the strait had a knife at the throat of the world’s oil supply.”\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{225} Al-Zayyat, \textit{The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man}, 10.
\textsuperscript{227} Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 111.
\textsuperscript{228} Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 114.
This was neither in the interests of the Saudi Arabia nor in that of the United States. The two countries reached the agreement that they would both fund the Mujahidin in Afghanistan. For every dollar the US contributed, the Saudi government would contribute the same. This money would be delivered to the Mujahidin through Pakistan. They each started by contributing some USD 75,000 until this amount reached billions of dollars within the span of a decade.\textsuperscript{229}

For much of the 1980s, the Saudi government had managed to maintain stability domestically. Its problem with Islamists, which erupted in the 1979 siege of Mecca, had been exported to Afghanistan. Much like the Egyptian government, there was little consideration for what would happen to these fighters once the war in Afghanistan was over. There was acknowledgement within the Saudi government that the Afghan and Arab Mujahidin were very unlikely to succeed at ending the Soviet occupation of the country. There was an even stronger conviction that few of these fighters would actually survive and return to their native countries.

Although many among the Arab Afghans, as the Arabs fighting in Afghanistan became known as, believed that they had faced the Soviet Union, a superpower, and actually defeated it, it was actually the Afghan warlords who actually managed to defeat the Soviet armies.\textsuperscript{230} Osama bin Laden was among those Arab Afghans who had actually come to see himself and those under his command as the warriors of Islam who had driven the non-believers out of a Muslim land. This belief, however, would become a very important component in shaping the ideology of Al Qaeda. On February 15, 1989,

\textsuperscript{229} Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 115.
all soviet soldiers had withdrawn from Afghanistan. The Soviets had lost about 15,000 lives. It is estimated that between one and two million Afghans died in the war almost 90 percent of them civilians. A third of the population now lived in refugee camps.\textsuperscript{231}

Those Saudis who returned to the Kingdom, including Osama bin Laden, were seen as heroes by others in the country. The government, however, did not exactly see them the same way. The returnees were questioned by the government and released within a few days. Osama bin Laden, who had earned a good reputation among the fighters while in Afghanistan and among the Saudi population, found himself in an unusual position. The public viewed him as a religious leader and the close ties his family enjoyed with the Royal Family gave him direct access to the decision makers. His time as one of the key people during this war allowed him to also build a reputation outside the Kingdom and meet key people within the Islamist movements throughout the world as well as key decision makers from around the world.\textsuperscript{232}

It was not until the early 1990s that the Saudi government began to see changes emerge within Saudi society, changes that directly attacked the Royal Family and their authority instigated by the religious community and the \textit{Muttawi’een}. Although they had been co-opted by the government since the 1960s, during the 1980s, the government created the Institution for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which gained a lot of power within society. The supposed victorious return of the Arab Mujahidin had served as an illustration that those who fight for the victory of the religion are victorious.

\textsuperscript{231} Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 157.
\textsuperscript{232} Bergen, \textit{Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden}, 64-65.
The amount of control the Muttawi’een gained within the community in the 1980s generally manifested itself in pressure over members of society. But by the early 1990s, a shift in their pattern of behavior began to appear as members of the religious community began to directly attack the Royal Family particularly during Friday prayer sermons. One sermon in particular drew the attention of Saudi Arabia’s head of intelligence, Prince Turki Al Saud. This sermon attacked female-run charities in the kingdom, including several run by female members of the Royal family referring to them as women of ill repute. The sheikh who delivered the sermon apologized, but this was a clear challenge to the balance of power that had served as the backbone on which the modern kingdom was created.\textsuperscript{233} The balance of power was slowly shifting more in the favor of the religious community against the ruling family.

It was during this same period that Osama bin Laden, perhaps the biggest threat to the stability of Saudi Arabia, emerged as something of a nuisance. After what he believed to be his success as the leader of the Saudi Arab Mujahidin, bin Laden believed that he could actually become a weapon in the hands of the government to fight those who threatened Saudi Arabia. He had approached the government of Saudi Arabia twice to allow him and his fighters to take on the intermittent problems caused by Yemini communist rebels along the borders with Kingdom. However, the Saudi government turned down his offer both times, confiscating his passport to ensure that he did not act of his own accord.\textsuperscript{234} He later warned the government publicly that Iraq’s president Saddam Hussein was a threat to the security of Saudi Arabia. He once again, leveraged his

\textsuperscript{233} Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 168-169.
\textsuperscript{234} Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 173-176.
contacts with the government to request that they allow him and other Arab Mujahidin to quell Saddam’s threat. But at the time, the Saudi government had no reason to believe that Saddam was a serious threat to the Saudi security.\textsuperscript{235} As bin Laden is quoted in Peter Bergen’s book \textit{Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden} as saying:

“A year before [Saddam] Hussein entered Kuwait, […] I said many times in my speeches at the mosques a warning that Saddam will enter the Gulf. No one believed me. I distributed many tapes in Saudi Arabia. It was after it happened that they started believing me and believed my analysis of the situation.”\textsuperscript{236}

A year later, following the invasion of Kuwait, bin Laden once again approached officials in Saudi Arabia offering to use his fighters who had gained experience in Afghanistan to defend the borders of Saudi Arabia, but was once again turned down. The Saudi government’s decision to ask the United States for help was what ultimately turned bin Laden against it. It was no secret that bin Laden had strong objections to the presence of foreigners on Saudi soil. In this sense, he was in line with the objections voiced by many within the religious Saudi establishment. Although the initial promise by the US Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney, was that the US soldiers would withdraw as soon as the threat posed by the Iraqi army to the region was removed or whenever the King of Saudi Arabia requested their departure, the general Saudi public was not convinced. As an estimated half a million US troops descended on Saudi soil, the general public began to openly request reforms that varied from the liberal demanding that women be allowed to drive to liberalization of the press, to the religious conservatives requesting that the

\textsuperscript{235} Bergen, \textit{Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden}, 81-82.
\textsuperscript{236} Bergen, \textit{Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden}, 84.
power of the Royal Family be curtailed. Suddenly the Saudi government was facing the biggest challenge to its power since the 1979 incident at the Grand Mosque in Mecca.²³⁷

“A few months later, the religious establishment fired back with its own vehement ‘Letter of Demands.’ It was an open bid for Islamic control of the Kingdom, containing a barely disguised attack on the predominance of the royal family. The four hundred religious scholars, judges, and professors who signed the letter called for strict conformity with the Sharia throughout society, including a ban on the payment of interest, the creation of an Islamic army through universal military training, and ‘purifying’ the media in order to better serve Islam.”²³⁸

Bin Laden’s sermons got more critical of the government. He began to characterize the US army presence on Saudi soil as an invasion and likened it to the presence of Soviet troops on Afghan soil. He would later liken it to the presence of Israeli troops on Palestinian soil. To him, they were all crusaders infringing on Muslim lands and only Muslim warriors should eliminate them. When the Gulf War, which started on January 16, 1991, ended, American troops did not withdraw from Saudi Arabia, and the government did not ask them to. This gave credence to bin Laden’s warnings about the continued presence of American troops in the kingdom, which was paid for by the Saudi government too.

He also tried to retrieve his passport, which had been confiscated by the Saudi government in an attempt to curb his travels which were seen by many other governments as a form of interference and incitement of antigovernment sentiment on their soil. If he would not be allowed to implement his jihad agenda out of Saudi Arabia, then he would implement it elsewhere. His plan was to head to Sudan, where a military coup had taken place in 1989 replacing the civilian government bringing to power Brigadier Omar al

Bashir. The spiritual leader behind the military coup was Hassan al Turabi, the leader of Sudan’s National Islamic Front. Al Turabi sought to create a modern Islamist state that would eventually expand beyond the borders of the country to encompass the Arab and eventually the entire Muslim world. To bin Laden, this was the ideal place for him to regroup his fighters and begin to implement his vision of warriors for jihad, where his loyal followers would put their own personal agendas aside and fight for the greatness of Islam against the infringement of non-believers, whoever and wherever they may be.

To bin Laden, Sudan was particularly important because it served as a location to regroup particularly since the country needed him to invest in its almost non-existent economy. The significance of Sudan to the rise of Al Qaeda will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

As the main investor in Sudan, bin Laden enjoyed a lot of freedom. He got involved in several economic ventures that were not particularly economically sound. But they served as a great cover for his militant activities. By 1992, Bin Laden made the move to Khartoum where he was contracted with building an airport in Sudan Port. He bought a farm, which would serve as the meeting point for radicals within Sudan as well as from other countries around the world.

“Indigenous Salafist movements were arising spontaneously across the Arab world and parts of the Africa and Asia. These movements were largely

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240 Bergen, *Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, 86
241 It is important to note that while bin Laden’s vision of an Islamic society and that of Hassan al Turabi were very different, Sudan gave bin Laden an environment in which to group the member of Al Qaeda within the confines of a sovereign state that neither fully supported nor did it prevent him from implementing his plans.
Much to bin Laden’s delight, this gave him the opportunity to turn his farm in Khartoum into a meeting point for many of the fighter who were with him in Afghanistan as well as new members of other groups. The exchange of ideas and the large number of individuals who subscribed to ideas of radical Islam would later become the recruiting ground for Al Qaeda.

Bin Laden continued to vocally criticize the Saudi government for the continued presence of US troops on Saudi soil. Now that he was no longer on Saudi soil, this criticism became even more vocal. Moreover, he used the presence of US troops in Somalia, a Muslim country, as part of his argument that the US was seeking to expand its control and occupation of Muslim lands. Bin Laden began sending individuals who he characterized as his own fighters to Somalia to provide support to the Islamist fighters there. He also began to meddle in the affairs of other Arab countries including Egypt, Yemen and Algeria. As his meddling in the affairs of other countries increased, the various governments began to exert pressure on Saudi Arabia’s government to control bin Laden’s actions. Although the Saudi government warned bin Laden several times to stop activities in other Arab countries, he seemed to ignore the warnings.

“King Fahd was beside himself with this continuing display of disloyalty. Algeria and Yemen were furiously pressing the Saudis to put a stop to the man they saw as a source of insurgencies in their countries. It was Egypt, however, that finally forced the Kingdom to choose between its prodigal son and the continued good relations with a powerful ally. The Egyptians were fed up with the violence spilling out of Sudan and protested again and again that bin Laden was behind it. Finally on March 5, 1994, Fahd personally decided to revoke bin Laden’s Saudi citizenship. […] To be expelled from the country was to be banished from

these intricate relationships that are so much a part of every Saudi’s identity. Citizenship is a closely guarded property, rarely awarded to foreigners [...]. Immediately after the king canceled bin Laden’s citizenship, Bakr bin Laden, the eldest brother, publicly condemned Osama, turning the family’s back to him.  

This meant that whatever restraint he had maintained in his criticism of the Saudi government was simply gone. Soon after the revocation of his citizenship, bin Laden instructed his followers to send hundreds of faxes in which he condemned the Saudi Royal Family, its behavior, and its rule as un-Islamic. In the letter, bin Laden indicted “the Saudi regime, criticizing it of a wide variety of things. These included its use of man-made laws that are not part of Sharia, Islamic law; the indebtedness of the nation; rising unemployment; the lavishness of the palaces build for the royal family; and the estimated $60 billion the government spend on the Gulf War in addition to the vast expenditure it had made on its own inefficient military. The communiqué concludes by demanding the resignation of King Fahd." He also published an open letter to the head of the clergy in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh bin Baz, condemning his fatwas claiming that they were based on the whim and will of the Saudi Royal Family as opposed to sound religious grounds.

Following the letters, the Saudi government instructed the bin Laden family to cut off Osama bin Laden’s financial stipend and his shares in the family business which netted around USD 7 million. Suddenly Osama bin Laden had no citizenship and, for the first time in his life, no financial support, which thus far had been the advantage that attracted so many Islamists to him. His business ventures in Sudan were not exactly built on sound economics and were in fact making more losses than profits.

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245 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 221-222.
246 Bergen, Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden, 96.
In the yeas that followed, bin Laden became more and more radical not only in his thoughts but also in his activities. It is believed that at this point, bin Laden’s thoughts turned to the creation of Al Qaeda. But it would take several more years before he would formally create the alliance that would form the basis for the base. The process through which Al Qaeda was created will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, the fact that the government had revoked bin Laden’s citizenship did not necessarily make him any less of a headache for the Saudi regime. Rather than just being a peripheral character within Saudi society causing limited amounts of trouble. The fact that he no longer had a citizenship and that the Saudi government caused his family to cut off all ties with him only made bin Laden more radical and more vocal about his radical ideas. He openly discussed the fact that the Saudi Royal Family was no longer ruling within the confines of the teachings of Islam and was thus no longer considered Muslim and should be fought by the true believers. Not only did he share these thoughts with other radicals in Sudan, but also with members of the media, many of whom traveled to Khartoum to interview him.

Two major incidents took place on Saudi soil, both of which were attributed to members of bin Laden’s jihad group or individuals who subscribe to his teachings. The first was the bombing of the National Guard building in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on November 13, 1995. The second was the bombing of the Khobar Towers, the housing complex for US troops in Dhahran.247 At this point, bin Laden and his advisors were still debating what would Islam’s position be on attacks that result in civilian deaths. However, in both cases the targets were military.

On 13 November, 1995, a car bomb went off outside the National Guard building, a joint Saudi-US facility in Riyadh. The bomb, the first of its kind in the country’s history, killed five Americans and two Indians. In April of the following year, Saudi television broadcast the confessions of the alleged perpetrators. [...] One of the bombers said he was influenced by the writings of bin Laden and Egypt’s Islamist groups. [...] Three of the four bombers had fought in the Afghan holy war [...].

The Khobar Towers bombing, which took place on June 25, 1996, was carried out in a very similar way with a car bomb going off outside the building that houses the members of the US 4404th Airlift Wing. Nineteen soldiers were killed and hundreds were injured in the blast. Both these attacks marked the first violence of Saudi soil since the 1979 incidents in the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Following the second attack, the Saudi government blamed Iran. However, weeks later, it arrested some six hundred Arab Afghans, which suggested that they also blamed individuals either directly affiliated with bin Laden or those who subscribed to his teachings. Despite these attacks, the situation in Saudi Arabia remained quiet for almost a decade before attacks against civilians reappeared.

While the events of September 11, 2001 are believed to have involved Saudi nationals, no attacks were carried out on Saudi soil until 2003. It can be argued that this was because it was in the period between 1996 and 2001, Al Qaeda was taking shape. It was also likely that bin Laden and other leaders within Al Qaeda did not want to attract too much attention to themselves or their main plan to attack the US.

Following the attacks of September 11, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States as well as the West in general was put to the test. While Saudi Arabia

was still one of the world’s largest sources of oil, it was also the country of Osama bin Laden, the head of the organization believed to be behind 9/11. Saudi Arabia was among the first countries to publicly denounce the attacks on the US. It also clearly pointed out that bin Laden’s citizenship had been revoked years earlier.

The Saudi government was seemingly clear from any of the events of 9/11 but this didn’t mean that it would not bear some of the consequences. Beginning in early 2003, a disturbing series of events began to emerge in Saudi Arabia. On May 12, 2003, three car bombs exploded in a residential compound in Riyadh, killing 21 people and wounding more than 200.250 Following the attack, the US State Department ordered all US non-essential personnel and their families to leave Saudi Arabia. This attack was the first in a series of attacks against US and European nationals that plagued the Kingdom in the period between 2003 and 2006. During this time period, more than sixty attacks shook the kingdom resulting in the death of hundreds of nationals and expatriates. The modes of these attacks ranged from car bombings to shooting of expatriates in residential compounds to setting up of fake check points at which foreigners were shot dead.251

Like many other terrorism attacks that took place in the years following 9/11, the attacks were blamed on Al Qaeda, although there was never an exact way through which this could be verified. It can be argued, however, that many of these attacks were carried out by individuals inspired by the rhetoric of Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. What they did clearly indicate was that the Saudi Government no longer had a firm control on violent fringe religious groups as it did prior to 9/11. Not only had the government lost its

251 Mohamedou, Understanding Al Qaeda: The Transformation of War, 112-116.
position as the sole authority on religion in Kingdom, its intelligence as well as religious apparatus had failed to contain the growing dissident movement in the country. The balance between the ruling family and the religious groups within the community had shifted in favor of the religious community.
4. THE MAKING OF AL QAEDA

While Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted the dealings of the Egyptian and Saudi Arabian governments with their respective Islamist movements, this chapter highlights how the movements of both countries converged to create Al Qaeda. It is worth noting that there were movements from other countries involved in the development of the ideology and the mode of operation of Al Qaeda. The reason Egypt and Saudi Arabia are particularly important is due to the fact that the main ideology of the entity is based on the thoughts, teachings and experiences of Saudi Arabia’s Osama bin Laden and Egypt’s Ayman Al Zawahiri.

Another major importance of this chapter is that it analyses the shift that these Islamist movements have adopted to continue to survive. If the Egyptian and Saudi governments had isolated these movements from the legitimate political system, these movements were forced to identify alternative routes to implement their political agendas. Unlike other Islamic movements in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia that continued to try to work within the legitimate political systems and the confines placed on them by the governments of these countries – such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the ulama and mutawi’een in Saudi Arabia – these movements adopted another mode of operation attempting to bring change from the outside as opposed to bringing it from within the system.

This section of the study traces the evolution of the thought process of the two main individuals, their followers and the shift in their thought process that led, not only to the creation of Al Qaeda, but to the events of 9/11. The journey of these individuals started in Egypt and Saudi Arabia but it also ran its course through several countries.
including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen, Algeria, and Somalia before meandering back to Afghanistan again. The purpose of the chapter is not to trace every event that these individuals experienced in these countries but to highlight the impact this journey had on the manner in which Al Qaeda came into being along with its mode of operation that culminated with the events of 9/11. It is also important to understand, that the purpose is not solely limited to understanding the rise of Al Qaeda and its ideology as well as its mode of operation, but to see it as the transformation of Islamist violent movements from domestic movements aimed at overthrowing domestic governments to a movement that targets those who help these governments remain in power. This is most commonly known as the ‘near enemy’ versus the ‘far enemy’. Another major point is that this is not about Al Qaeda per se or those behind it, this is about the creation of violent transnational Islamist thought with violent modes of operation which have now become part of the public conscience.

4.1 Afghanistan: The First Meeting Ground:

Islamist movements have a long history in the Arab world and Islamic countries worldwide. For much of the 20th Century, these movements were localized, emerging as domestic movements aimed at introducing changes to the political systems of the countries where they first emerged. The Afghan-Soviet War of the 1980s was the first step in the transformation of Islamist violent movements from domestic movements working within the confines of a particular country into a movement that seeks to implement its goals through international avenues. This is mostly due to the timing and the nature of the Afghan war.
The War in Afghanistan was fairly straight forward – one of the two superpowers directly invaded an insignificant country on the world arena. The sole significance of Afghanistan was the fact that it was a Muslim country. As noted earlier in the study, few Muslims, particularly in the Arab world, had heard of the country prior to the invasion. However, what it did represent was a clear and cut case for jihad according to the most classical interpretations of the faith for militant Muslims as well as non-militant Muslims alike. According to Natana J. DeLong-Bas in her book “Wahhabi Islam: From Revival to Global Jihad”252, this interpretation of jihad is one that is agreed upon by all schools of Islamic teachings, militant and non-militant.

“Defense of Islam as a faith necessarily carried over to defense of a way of life and the society that made that way of life possible. Thus, the defense of the Muslim community was not to be determined by geographical location, ethnicity or national interests but by whether a society supporting God’s sovereignty and law was under physical or ideological attack.”253

Based on the above, defending Afghanistan against the Soviet Union’s invasion became the responsibility of every Muslim be that through literally picking up arms against the invaders or through participating in fundraising efforts for the Afghan fighters. For Arab governments dealing with Islamist movements, violent or non-violent, this war was an opportunity to export their problem to another country in hopes of ending domestic Islamist movements. This was done through simplification of the requirements for fighters to travel to Afghanistan either by adopting the Egyptian government’s mode of operation by turning a blind eye as some of the country’s most well-known Islamist militants traveled to Afghanistan or by adopting the heavy involvement of the Saudi

252 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad.
253 DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, 262.
government by reducing ticket prices to Pakistan, the stopping point of fighters on their way to Afghanistan, or by donating money to the fighters.\textsuperscript{254} In line with isolation and cooption tactics, typically adopted by authoritarian regimes, the governments of the region saw allowing their fighters to go to Afghanistan as another form of isolating them from the domestic political system.

The political agendas of the governments of countries aside, Afghanistan served as the first meeting point for militants from all over the Muslim world, each with his own political and religious agenda as well as his own mode of operation. It is in this melting point that the ideology of Al Qaeda was born. It was in Afghanistan that Osama bin Laden, who had initially been involved with the establishment, funding and management of a logistics office for the Arab mujahidin, who would later be known as the Arab Afghan,\textsuperscript{255} would meet the leaders of other Islamist movements and get instruction in radical Islamist thought and violent modes of operation. These included Ayman Al Zawahiri, the leader of Egypt’s Islamic Jihad, and Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the leader of Egypt’s Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah, two prominent Islamist thinkers who were strong supporters of the jihadi ideology calling for Muslims to fight secularization in the Islamic world through violence against the state. He also met a large number of individuals who subscribed to the takfir ideology, which typically declares society and its leaders as non-believers. This ideology originated in Egypt in the 1970s through the group Al Takfir wal Hijra, the Excommunication and Withdrawal. Subsequently, it becomes the responsibility of the members of the group to declare jihad against society

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 100-115.
\item Mohamedou, \textit{Understanding Al Qaeda: the Transformation of War}, 46.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
and its leaders in order to re-establish the Islamic *Ummah* or nation. Their mode of operation strongly resembles that adopted by the Al Qaeda a decade later, whereby sleeper cells would be created in various locations to facilitate the indoctrination of members and the planning of attacks.\(^{256}\)

This mixing of ideologies that bin Laden was exposed to in Afghanistan would later become a cornerstone of the ideology of Al Qaeda.\(^{257}\) Since bin Laden had lacked the strong understanding of Islamic jurisprudence to create his own vision of what the true ideology of the nature of the struggle of Islam should be in order to recreate the Islamic *Ummah*, he tended to alternate between the various schools of thought that he was introduced to in Afghanistan.

This was not exclusive to bin Laden. Ayman Al Zawahiri’s thought was also impacted by the plethora of ideologies that he was being exposed to in Afghanistan. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, Al Zawahiri has never shied away from the use of violence in order to achieve his goal of establishing an Islamic state in Egypt, however, he did not believe in the use of violence against the random masses. He had long believed that the regime in Egypt, his primary target, should be removed with minimal violence. However, the fact that this mode of operation, one that he and several others in Egypt had adopted more than a decade earlier, had yielded no political changes in Egypt, coupled with the fact that he was mingling heavily with the members of other groups who strongly subscribed to the *takfir* school of thought, impacted Al Zawahiri greatly.

“Until he arrived in Peshawar, Zawahiri had never endorsed wholesale murder. He had always approached political change like a surgeon: A speedy and precise

\(^{256}\) Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 142.

\(^{257}\) Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 139-164.
coup d’etat was his lifelong ideal. But while he was working in the Red Crescent hospital with [individuals who subscribed to the takfir ideology], the moral bonds that separated political resistance from terrorism became more elastic. [...] Each step of his life was in the service of fulfilling his goal of installing an Islamic government in Egypt as bloodlessly as possible. But the takfiri doctrine had shaken him. The takfiris convinced themselves that salvation for all of humanity lay on the other side of moral territory that had always been the certain province of the damned. They would shoulder the risks of their eternal souls by assuming the divine authority of deciding who was a real Muslim and who was not, who should live and who should die.”

Afghanistan became a meeting point of ideologies that only served to introduce fighters to newer and, in many cases, more radical ideologies. The conflict also served as an opportunity for individual movements to recruit and train members away from the influence of their domestic governments. For example, Montasser al-Zayyyat pointed out in his book, “The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man”259, that Al Zawahiri saw moving to Afghanistan as an opportunity to regroup his own movement in order to re-initiate fighting against the Egyptian government.

“Afghanistan was to Zawahiri the only way out of the dilemma in which he found himself after the discovery of his cell in Egypt in 1981. It was also easier for him to recruit and train cadre in Afghanistan, away from the watchful eyes of the authorities who were in constant pursuit. Also, it was to his benefit to escape the intellectual openness in Egypt, where his approach could be questioned. In an open society like Egypt, the media critiques not only those in power, but also those within the different factions of the Islamic movement itself. Afghan society, on the other hand, is very closed because of the war against the Soviets. [...] He also had more resources there for the attacks on the Egyptian government that he intended to coordinate by sending cadres from Afghanistan. Thus he could use his presence in Afghanistan to implement such operations inside Egypt.”260

Moreover, the War in Afghanistan was also the first combat experience for many of the individuals who would later become members of Al Qaeda. The primitive status of the country and the impact of the Soviet invasion left the country completely devastated.

258 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 143-144.
The fact that the fighting against the invasion was controlled by local warlords who were brutal and fighting Soviet tanks and armors with next to nothing gave the setting a form of romanticism to the conflict that was new to the Arab mujahidin.

The lack of experience and youth of many of the Arab volunteers was a challenge not only for them but also for the Afghan warlords. This lack of experience often translated into uncalculated and sometimes deadly moves by the young fighters in conflict. It also translated into their inability to carry out instructions by the warlord under whose protection they were fighting. Too often, the Arab mujahidin were marginalized. On the other hand, the warlords were fully aware that their willingness to take on Arab mujahidin translated into funding from many prominent Arabs who were sending money in support of the Afghan fighters.²⁶¹

According to Peter L. Bergen in his book “Holy War, Inc.”²⁶², the number of Arab fighters in Afghanistan at the time of the war was roughly 25,000. This is compared to a range of 175,000 to 250,000 Afghan fighters in any given year. But the “Afghan commanders in the field understood the importance of Arab funding. […] These numbers demonstrate that the Afghan Arabs’ contribution to the war against the Soviets was insignificant from a military point of view. The war was won primarily with the blood of Afghans and secondarily with the treasure of the United States and Saudi Arabia […].”²⁶³ However, the Arab mujahidin, including bin Laden, have always believed that they were the ones who defeated the Soviet armies.

²⁶¹ Bergen, Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden, 58-61.
²⁶² Bergen, Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden.
²⁶³ Bergen, Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden, 60.
Just like Afghanistan served as a melting pot for ideologies it was also a place where internal conflict between the different factions, both Afghan and Arab, was common. As the different warlords were competing for financial support, so too were the other Islamist groups who took part in the Afghanistan conflict. For example, there was inter-fighting between Ayman Al Zawahiri and the followers of the Egyptian Jihad Group, and Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and the followers of Egypt’s Al Gama’ah al Islamiyah. There was also conflict between those subscribing to the takfir ideology and those subscribing to use of non-violent modes of operation to achieve the goals of creating the Islamist Ummah. At the center of much of this conflict was bin Laden, who lacked a firm ideology of his own, but more importantly, had access to the funding both from the Saudi government, as well as his own wealth.  

The Afghan-Soviet War also resulted in the displacement of many of the fighters who were unable to return to their own countries. For those who did return, adjusting to normal life was difficult due to the fact that many were ostracized by members of their communities and the governments who viewed them as radical and potential threats. This created a sense of isolation for many of the Arab Afghans pushing them to maintain ties with the only individuals who actually understood them because they had shared with them the conflict of war and the sense of isolation that followed.

It is due to the combination of the above mentioned factors – the splintering of ideologies, the participation in large-scale combat, the perception of victory against a superpower, and being ostracized by their communities – that the Arab mujahidin became

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more dangerous after the end of the War in Afghanistan in 1989 than they were prior to their departure. The problem was that no one – not the governments of the Arab and Muslim world, not the international political community, and not even the intelligence community – seemed to be aware of exactly how dangerous they are. According to Al-Zayyat, the fact that the Arab mujahidin and the leaders of the Arab Islamist movements could not agree on an ideology while in Afghanistan or after the end of the war ensured that these groups would continue to splinter making them infinitely more dangerous and difficult.265

The birth of Al Qaeda came from a combination of the sense of victory over the one of the two superpowers and the conviction that those individuals who fought in Afghanistan could form a type of taskforce, for lack of a better analogy, that could help bring Islamist rule to the Muslim world. Although at this point, Al Qaeda, as we know it today, had not yet taken form nor had it been given its name, steps towards forming this entity were beginning to take form. It was at this point, however, that bin Laden and Al Zawahiri had formed a connection, not a full-fledged partnership.

“Zawahiri wanted money and contacts, which bin Laden had in abundance. Bin Laden, an idealist given to causes, sought direction; Zawahiri, a seasoned propagandist, supplied it. They were not friends but allies. Each believed he could use the other, and each was pulled in a direction he never intended to go. The Egyptian had little interest in Afghanistan except as a staging arena for the revolution in his own country. He planned to use the Afghan jihad as an opportunity to rebuild his shattered organization. In bin Laden, he found a wealthy, charismatic, and pliable sponsor. The young Saudi was a devout Salafist but not much of a political thinker. Until he met Zawahiri, he had never voiced opposition to his own government or other repressive Arab regimes. His main interest was in expelling the infidel invader from a Muslim land [in reference to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the presences of non-Muslim civilians in Saudi Arabia], but he also nursed an ill-formed longing to punish America and

265 Ahmed Fekry & Sara Nimis, Preface to Al-Zayyat: The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, XV.
the West for what he believed were crimes against Islam. The dynamic of the two men’s relationship made Zawahiri and bin Laden into people they would never have been individually; moreover, the organization they would create, al-Qaeda, would be a vector of these two forces, one Egyptian and one Saudi. Each would have to compromise in order to accommodate the goals of the other; as a result, al-Qaeda would take a unique path, that of global jihad.”

Since many of the Arab mujahidin could not return to their countries of origin, some remained in Afghanistan, while others remained in Pakistan. Ayman Al Zawahiri was among those who did not return to Egypt. During this time, bin Laden and Al Zawahiri were recruiting young members to train. It was not entirely clear what they were training for, but bin Laden and Al Zawahiri each had a purpose for ensuring that a steady supply of trained recruits continues. For bin Laden, he was envisioning creating a contingent of trained warriors whose sole goal was to defend Islam wherever it was under attack. For Al Zawahiri, the goal was to create a cadre of recruits who would help implement his plans to overthrow the Egyptian government.

“New recruits filled out forms in triplicate, signed their oath of loyalty to bin Laden, and swore themselves to secrecy. In return, single members earned about $1000 a month in salary; married members received $1500. Everyone got a round-trip ticket home each year and a month vacation. There was a health-care plan and – for those who changed their mind – a buyout option: they received $2400 and went on their way. From the beginning, al-Qaeda presented itself as an attractive employment opportunity for men whose education and careers had been curtailed by jihad. The leaders of al-Qaeda developed a constitution and by-laws, which described the utopian goals of the organization in clear terms: “To establish the truth, get rid of evil and establish an Islamic nation.” [...] the group would be led by a commander who was impartial, resolute, trustworthy, patient and just; he should have at least seven years of jihad experience and preferably a college degree. Among his duties were appointing a council of advisors to meet each month, establishing a budget, and deciding on a yearly plan of action. One can appreciate the ambition of al-Qaeda by looking at its bureaucratic structure, which included committees devoted to military affairs, politics, information, administration, security and surveillance. The military committee had subsections dedicated to training, operations, research and nuclear weapons.”

266 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 146.
267 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 162-163
But Al Zawahiri had not yet formally joined bin Laden’s organization. He simply used the facilities offered by bin Laden to train his newly recruited cadre. Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia after the war in an attempt to work with the Saudi government to use his trained fighters to defend Saudi Arabia’s boarders to and to give support to other Muslim fighters in the Arab world. However, when his attempts were rejected by the Saudi government, he relocated to Sudan where an Islamist government came to power through a military coup. He had been invited to come and invest in Sudan and by 1992, bin Laden moved with his family to Khartoum. He would soon be followed by several members of other radical movements as well as those who had pledged allegiance to him.

4.2 Moving to Sudan: Laying the Foundation

Although the War in Afghanistan ended in 1989, the Arab mujahidin remained in the country for several years following the war, many of them getting caught up in a tug of war that unfolded between the warlords who were fighting to fill the power vacuum that was created by the end of the Soviet occupation. In the meantime, the appointed interim president of the mujahidin, Sibghatullah Mujadadi, who took over power in Afghanistan after the end of the war, requested that the Arab Afghan leave the country by 1992.

“Mujadadi sent messages to the international community, especially Pakistan and Arab countries, that he did not want Arab Afghans to stay in the country after their mission had been accomplished. This was a political gesture that was meant to placate some Arab countries such as Egypt and Algeria, who were concerned that their citizens would use Afghanistan as a launch pad for attacks on their home countries. Egypt had already started taking security measures against the Arab Afghans by trying them before military countries in absentia and issuing harsh
When bin Laden made the move to Khartoum, he saw it as an opportunity to live under a truly Islamic community, this despite the fact that he didn’t really agree with many of the perspectives of the new Islamic government in Sudan. Being the largest investor in the Sudanese economy, he not only had great freedom of movement within the country but he also enjoyed the protection of the government. According to Montasser al-Zayyat, Sudan and Yemen served as a home for many of the former Arab mujahidin who were not permitted to return to their countries but were no longer welcome in Afghanistan. Bin Laden’s political clout in Sudan allowed him to host other Islamists in the country. Yemen, on the other hand, was a suitable hiding place for many of the mujahidin, because they were offered protection by the various tribes in Yemen. Also the fact that Yemen was in a state of civil war at the time, made it easy for the mujahidin to hide. Al-Zayyat notes that, while Ayman Al Zawahiri himself joined bin Laden in Sudan, the members of his group, the Egyptian Jihad, were in Yemen. It is worth noting that it would not be until the end of the 1990s that Al Zawahiri would formally declare his allegiance with bin Laden. Instead, he was hoping that bin Laden would become his patron while allowing him to implement his lifelong goal of overthrowing the Egyptian government. In essence, Al Zawahiri had not, thus far, changed his target but he was changing his mode of operation.

The 1990s were particularly important in the shaping of the character of Al Qaeda. While recruits among the Arab mujahidin, who fought in Afghanistan, were put on the payroll of Osama bin Laden, training camps, funded by him, also trained members of other groups. These trained members included several members of both the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah. These members then carried out attacks in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Starting in 1992, Al Zawahiri’s followers began implementing attacks on Egyptian soil. During the period between 1992 and 1997, the Egyptian Jihad began to implement attacks against officials, thinkers, citizens (particularly Christians), and tourists. The most important aspect of these attacks was the clear targeting of civilians, a marked shift in his ideology when compared to his beliefs prior to the war in Afghanistan. As a direct result of these attacks, the popularity of his ideology and his group were severely declining. Also, the Egyptian government was cracking down on everyone subscribing to Islamist ideologies with brutality.

While the governments of Arab countries were aware of the potential instability the militants can cause, especially while they were in Sudan, the international community was oblivious to these threats. Even those countries that did believe that Islamist movements could become a potential problem, their intelligence communities were convinced that these problems would only impact the Arab world alone. This was largely due to the fact that few within the international community actually specialized in Islamist movements and even fewer of them spoke Arabic. Moreover, they were completely unable to comprehend the notion that they were trained enough to carry out attacks outside the region.
But on February 26, 1993, they were all taken by surprise when one of the followers of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the founder of Egypt’s Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyah, planned and executed an attack on the World Trade Center in New York. The attack was carried out by Abdel Basit Mahmoud Abdul Karim, also known as Ramzi Youssef, who parked an explosive-laden car in the parking lot of the Tower. The explosion killed six and injured more than 1,000. The attack was the first real plot by Islamist on American soil. Following that incident, there were a series of other attacks that were planned on international soil, some of which were implemented.

“... Zawahiri [was] facing a dispiriting choice: whether to maintain the independence of his bootstrap organization that was already struggling financially or to formally join forces with bin Laden. When they had met a decade before, Zawahiri was by far the more powerful figure; he had an organization behind him and a clear objective: to overthrow the government of Egypt. But now bin Laden, who had always had the advantage of money, also had his own organization, one that was much more ambitious than al-Jihad. In the same way that he ran multiple businesses under a single corporate tent, bin Laden sought to merge all Islamic terrorist groups into one multinational consortium, with common training and economies of scale and departments devoted to everything from personnel to policymaking. The protégé had begun to outstrip his mentor, and both men knew this. Zawahiri also faced the prospect of being overshadowed by the blind sheikh [Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman] and the activities of the Islamic Group. Despite the fact that Zawahiri had assembled a capable and dedicated cadre, many of them well-educated, skilled operatives [...] al-Jihad had not undertaken a single successful operation. Meanwhile, the blind sheikh’s followers had undertaken an unparalleled rampage of murder and pillage. In order to weaken the government and prod the masses into rebellion, they chose to attack tourism, the tent pole of the Egyptian economy, because it opened the country to Western corruption. The Islamic Group initiated a war on Egypt’s security forces by announcing the goal of killing a policeman every day. They also targeted foreigners, Christians, and particularly intellectuals, beginning with the shooting death in 1992 of Farag Foda, a secular columnist who had suggested in his final article that the Islamists were motivated less by politics than sexual frustration.”

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272 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 208-209.
Bin Laden also began to take advantage of the fact that the individuals joining his training camps came from many countries. He encouraged them to target what he perceived as Islam’s greater enemy, the West, as opposed to limiting their activities to attacks against their own governments. He also began to support Islamist movements throughout the region against secularist governments and movements, which he perceived as extensions of the values of the West that were being imposed on the Islamic world. This was driven from his belief that the governments of the Muslim world should not only fully apply Shari’a but they should also reject everything that was secular.

“By returning the rule of Shari’a, radical Islam could draw the line against the encroaching West. Even the values that America advertised as being universally desirable – democracy, transparency, the rule of law, human rights, the separation of religion from governance – were discredited in the eyes of the jihadis because they were Western and therefore modern. Al Qaeda’s duty was to awaken the Islamic nation to the threat posed by the secular, modernizing West. In order to do that, bin Laden told his men, al-Qaeda would drag the United states into a war with Islam – ‘a large-scale front which it cannot control’.”

At this point, two main tracks were adopted by bin Laden and his new organization: the first was the provision of clandestine support for Islamist movements that were fighting secular governments in the region; the second was the planning and execution of several attacks against the interests of the West. These two tracks achieved his goals in several ways. For one thing, he empowered radical Islamist movements around the Arab world to recruit more members, attack citizens and governments thus creating headaches for their respective governments. The second goal he achieved was attacking interests of Western governments on Arab soil and vice versa, thus facilitating the straining of relations between the West and the East. The third goal he achieved was

273 Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 196.
the varying of targets and modes of operations of the attacks in such a way that would continue to prevent intelligence apparatuses from connecting the attacks to him or his organization long enough until his organization and its goals were completely formed, putting them at a disadvantage.

The attacks on the interests of the West in Arab countries varied in nature. Inevitably, they started small and became bolder and more deadly with time. In 1992, bin Laden operatives attacked two hotels in Aden, Yemen, where around 100 US servicemen were stationed while participating in a humanitarian mission in Somalia, Operation Restore Hope. “The bombs went off outside Aden’s poshest hotels, the Mövenpick and the Goldmohur, killing an Austrian tourist and a hotel worker, but no Americans. […] Within days of the hotel bombings, the Pentagon announced that it would no longer use Yemen as a support base for its Somalia operation.”

Bin Laden sent operatives to several countries including Somalia, where the US had been involved in a humanitarian mission in 1993. These operatives trained guerilla groups there. He would later claim responsibility for shooting down an American UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter. The bodies of the pilots would later be paraded through the streets of Mogadishu. This prompted the US to withdraw from the mission in Somalia altogether.

He also sent his operatives to train an Islamist group in Algeria. Following the Algerian elections of 1992 during which the Islamist Front Party – Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) – was expected to win the elections but were prevented from ascending to

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274 Bergen, *Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, 188.
power. This prompted a splinter group, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), to adopt violence. Bin Laden sent his operatives to provide training and ideological support for the group during which the members of the group were told that they should attack civilians because their goal should not just be ascending to power but should be enforcing God’s law. This necessitates their use of violence, not only against the government but also against all civilians who are preventing the rule of God from being implemented. Bin Laden donated USD 40,000 to FIS to implement attacks in Algeria.\(^{276}\)

“For the next five years they [GIA] began drenching the country in blood. The progression followed a predictable takfir path. The Islamists began by killing non-Muslims, concentrating on priests and nuns, diplomats, intellectuals, feminists, doctors, and businessmen. [...] The religious madness culminated in a declaration that condemned the entire population of Algeria. [...] Bin Laden’s forty thousand dollars had already helped to create a catastrophe. More than a hundred thousand people would die in the Algerian civil war.”\(^{277}\)

By the mid 1990s, bin Laden and his operatives had been involved in several Islamist conflicts throughout the globe. Operatives of his group had become involved in Somalia, Yemen and Algeria. There were also several attacks carried out by members of groups trained in bin Laden’s training camps against several countries including Egypt and Saudi Arabia as well as several other attacks on interests of the Arab and Western governments in several countries. The number of these attacks would only intensify during the second half of the 1990s. This is due to several factors including the experience that bin Laden associated operatives gained during the first half of the 1990s; the formation of a clear ideology for the organization and last, but most certainly not

least, the formal joining of Al Zawahiri and the Egyptian Jihad Group to the organization bin Laden was creating.

On June 26, 1995, Egypt’s Islamic Jihad Group, which was created by Ayman Al Zawahiri and now affiliated with, but not part of, Osama bin Laden’s organization, attempted to assassinate Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak while on an official visit to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The plan was for two cars to intercept the motorcade of the president as he made his way from the airport. A third car was also on the highway in case the first two missed. Mubarak escaped unharmed but two of his bodyguards were killed. He made the decision not to continue with the visit and to return immediately to the airport.278 Later that same year, the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, was bombed on November 19, leaving sixteen people dead.279

A few years later, a bigger attack would be executed by members of bin Laden’s group that would directly target the United States. On August 7, 1998, bombs went off in the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Darussalam, Tanzania killing 250 and injuring more than 1,600.280

4.3 Afghanistan: the Promised Land of Jihad

The attacks marked a shift in the mode of operation from previous attacks by Islamist groups. The use of suicide bombings, the exact timing of the attacks, and the

direct targeting of civilians illustrated a remarkable shift, although few if any, intelligence agencies could decipher it clearly. There had been two major changes that had occurred between the assassination attempt on Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and the attack on the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan on the one hand, and the attacks on the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, on the other hand. The first change came in the formal creation of the International Islamic Front for Jihad on the Jews and Crusaders, the organization created by bin Laden to take up his ultimate goal of creating an army of believers who would fight on behalf of Islam, wherever it came under attack from the West. Although the skeletal structure of the organization had been laid as early as the late 1980s, it was not until August 23, 1996, that a public declaration of the organization had been issued by Osama bin Laden known as the ‘Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places’ whereby he blamed the United States for the woes of the Muslim world and accused it of occupying Muslim lands including Saudi Arabia’s Mecca and Medina in reference to their continued presence in Saudi Arabia. He also blamed them for supporting Israel, which he accused of occupying Palestine, and particularly Jerusalem. Because of the fact that they were occupying three of Islam’s holiest sites and he argued that they were responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians and children in Muslim countries, particularly in Palestine and Iraq, it was the duty of all true Muslims to declare jihad against the US.281

According to Lawrence Wright’s “The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11”\textsuperscript{282}, the declaration bin Laden issued may have seemed ludicrous to readers in the West, however, it can be seen as an indication of what bin Laden was thinking. “The stance of the primitive was appealingly potent, especially to people who had been let down by modernity; however, the mind that understood such symbolism, and how it could be manipulated, was sophisticated and modern in the extreme.”\textsuperscript{283} Wright argues that part of the reason for bin Laden’s full radicalization was the revocation of his Saudi citizenship in 1995 and the instructions from the Saudi government to his family to cut him off financially. Moreover, in 1996, the Sudanese government, in an attempt to get Sudan removed from the US list of countries that support terrorism, expelled many known Islamists who had relocated to Khartoum in the early 1990s. Among those expelled were Ayman Al Zawahiri and the members of the Egyptian Jihad.\textsuperscript{284} Bin Laden moved to Afghanistan again on May 18, 1996. Afghanistan was an almost ideal location from which the new phase of jihad should be launched. At the time, the majority of country had come under the control of the Taliban, a radical Islamist movement that sought to create a puritan Islamist state. The environment was one where radical Islamist ideology could flourish. Moreover, the lack of rule of law made it easier to train radicals and demonize the West along with secular leaders in the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{285}

The second major change that took place between 1995 and 1998 was Ayman Al Zawahiri’s decision to formally join bin Laden’s International Islamic Front for Jihad on

\textsuperscript{282} Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11.
\textsuperscript{283} Wright, The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 266.
\textsuperscript{284} Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, 64-70.
the Jews and Crusaders. This was due to several reasons, the most important of which were the lack of financial support for al Al Zawahiri’s organization and the dwindling support for his organization, especially within Egypt. The failed attempt on the life of the Egyptian president in 1995, the Luxor Massacre of November 17, 1997 carried out by members of the Al Gama’ah Al Islamiyyah, during which 58 tourists and four Egyptians were killed had left Al Zawahiri with no public support within Egypt. Moreover, the decision by all Islamist groups in Egypt to declare a ceasefire with the Egyptian government in November 1997, one that he opposed, infuriated him but left him with few followers. But according to Montasser al-Zayyat, there were even deeper issues that led Al Zawahiri to change his approach:

“1. All the armed operations that targeted top-ranking government officials were foiled. [...] 2. The number of arrests of group members was increasing. Several administrative errors led to the arrest of members inside Egypt. The numerous foiled operations were another factor that led to more arrests, especially of dormant members who were not on the watch list of the [Egyptian] security authority. [...] 3. There was a general deterioration in the group in the period between 1993 and 1995, partly because of the lack of financial resources for the group to finance its activities and the living expenses of its leaders and members, especially the ones in Yemen and Sudan. Zawahiri did not have the money to pay the salaries to the leaders of the group. [...] 4. Another reason that led to this change in Zawahiri’s philosophy was the extradition of a number of leading figures from outside Egypt. [...] 5. One of the biggest blows that affected the group and Zawahiri deeply was the arrest of Ahmed Salama Mabruk, one of Zawahiri’s most prominent aides. [...] 6. Internal divisions were another important factor. [...] The breaking away of some members was a main factor leading to the weakening of the group. [...] 7. Osama bin Laden was an important factor in the changing of Zawahiri’s approach. Zawahiri managed to introduce drastic changes to Osama bin Laden’s philosophy after they met in Afghanistan in the middle of 1986 [...]. Zawahiri convinced bin Laden of his jihadi approach, turning him from a fundamentalist preacher whose main concern was relief work, into a jihadi fighter clashing with despots and American troops in the Arab world. [...] Not only did Zawahiri influence bin Laden, the latter impacted the philosophy of Zawahiri and of Islamic Jihad. [...]

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8. Zawahiri was impacted by Gama’a al Islamiyya’s initiative to stop all armed operations inside and outside Egypt. He opposed the idea of nonviolent Islamic activism [...]”

In February 1998, Al Zawahiri formally announced that he would join bin Laden’s group, International Islamic Front for Jihad on the Jews and Crusaders also known as Al Qaeda.287

This decision ushered in remarkable changes for bin Laden’s organization. For one thing, Al Zawahiri brought to the table the experience he had gained as a result of decades of clandestine planning that bin Laden had not gained in his brief time as a mujahid. Al Zawahiri had great experience in the structuring of political cells ensuring that each operated separately and in complete darkness of the goals of other cells affiliated with the organization.288 He was also a master of creating sleeper cells that he managed remotely, although his model would have to be altered to suit the difference between working in a single country versus working on a global scale.289

While Osama bin Laden has always been described as a captivating speaker, a characteristic that al Zawahiri lacked, he did have strong religious training and education. He was also very capable of drafting religious statements and declarations with eloquence. In fact, soon after joining bin Laden’s organization, he drafted a formal

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286 Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, 64-70.
287 Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, 64.
289 The best illustration of Al Zawahiri’s ability to create sleeper cells and train secret operatives who acted on an international scale is his training of Mohamed Ali, an operative who would later identify the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania as potential targets for attack. According to Wright, Ali was one of Al Zawahiri’s best and oldest operatives who managed to infiltrate the US intelligence apparatus in Germany, enter the US and join the US army legally under the false pretense of providing cultural and sensitivity training for the military. He helped Al Zawahiri tour mosques in the US to incite hatred and anger against the US and fundraise for Al Jihad. He would later scour African countries for a suitable US target and would later identify Kenya and Tanzania as those presenting the easiest access while at the same time resulting in great loss of life.
declaration intended to bring all the various Islamist jihadi movements under one umbrella.

“It would turn the movement away from regional conflicts and toward a global Islamic jihad against America. The language was measured and concise, in comparison with bin Laden’s declaration of war two years before. Zawahiri cited three grievances against the Americans. First, the continuing presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia seven years after the end of the Gulf war. [...] Second, America’s intention to destroy Iraq, as evidence by the death of what he said was more than a million civilians. Third, the American goal of propping up Israel by incapacitating the Arab states, whose weakness and disunion are Israel’s only guarantee of survival. All this amounted to a ‘war on God, his messenger, and the Muslims.’ Therefore, the members of the coalition were issuing a fatwa: ‘The ruling to kill Americans and their allies – civilian and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.’”

It is this declaration that paved the way for the US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania that would take place later the same year. The bombings would mark a shift in the targets of Al Qaeda expanding it to include everything that is Western, in general, and American, in particular. The phrasing of the above mentioned declaration gave Al Qaeda its transnational character. Islamic Jihad would no longer be limited to attacking targets in the countries from which the attackers originated. Instead, individuals from one country would target the interests of a second on the soil of a third thus creating a truly globalized terrorist organization.

Although members of Al Qaeda had rejected secularism and everything it had represented in the political arena, they had not rejected modernity. This is most clearly illustrated in an article by Wall Street Journal journalist Alan Cullison that appeared in The Atlantic Monthly entitled “Inside Al Qaeda’s Hard Drive.” Cullison had access to

computers seized in Kabul, Afghanistan that he believed belonged to an Al Qaeda operative. He describes the contents of the computer as ones that resemble those of any employee working for a multinational corporation including everything from memos pertaining to jihad, to leave requests.

“What emerged was an astonishing inside look at the day-to-day world of al-Qaeda, as managed by its top strategic planners—among them bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, Atef, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, and Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, all of whom were intimately involved in the planning of 9/11, and some of whom (bin Laden and al-Zawahiri) are still at large. The documents included budgets, training manuals for recruits, and scouting reports for international attacks, and they shed light on everything from personnel matters and petty bureaucratic snipping to theological discussions and debates about the merits of suicide operations. There were also video files, photographs, scanned documents, and Web pages, many of which, it became clear, were part of the group’s increasingly sophisticated efforts to conduct a global Internet-based publicity and recruitment effort.”

The ability to use all tools at their disposal to achieve goals is very much reminiscent of opposition groups functioning outside the legal systems in many authoritarian countries. Instead, this group was functioning outside the bounds of any one particular political system yet due to the use of secret sleeper cells positioned in countries throughout the world, it was capable of implementing a large variety of attacks in various countries. While they were still excluded from the legitimate political world, like many other Islamist movement in the Arab world, their goal was no longer as simple as ending a particular political system in one particular country. Their goal was to go face-to-face with the US in a non-linear battle that only they knew the rules to, thus leaving everyone else at a disadvantage. To achieve that goal, they adopted a model similar to that of


293 Mohamedou, Understanding Al Qaeda: the Transformation of War, 24-26.
multinational corporations, where there are overall objectives, strategies, evaluation, etc. by the headquarters but every subsidiary also has its own goals to achieve.

In March 1997, bin Laden gave an interview to CNN during which he described the conflict between the Muslim world and the US. During the interview, he listed a variety of reasons that included the continued presence of US troops on Saudi soil, the continued support of Israel and their involvement in the death of civilians in Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon. “For this and other acts of aggression and injustice, we have declared jihad against the US, because in our religion, it is our duty to make jihad so that God’s word is the one exalted to the heights and so that we drive the Americans away from all Muslim countries”\textsuperscript{294}, bin Laden told CNN. He added that although they would not directly target civilians, particularly in Saudi Arabia, they should also leave the Kingdom. “[…] Even though American civilians are not targeted in our plan, they must leave. We do not guarantee their safety”\textsuperscript{295}, bin Laden continued.

\textit{“This was the first time that bin Laden had told members of the Western press that American civilians might be casualties in his holy war. A year later, he would tell ABC News that he made no distinction between American military and civilian targets, despite the fact that the Koran itself is explicit about the protections offered to civilians.”}\textsuperscript{296}

The next attack by Al Qaeda would take place two years later. On October 12, 2000, a US warship, the USS Cole was bombed while refueling in the port of Aden, Yemen. The bombers used a small boat to get near the berthed destroyer, waved at the crew and then detonated the bombs. The attack left 17 servicemen dead, injured 39 others

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\textsuperscript{294} Bergen, \textit{Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden}, 20.  
\textsuperscript{296} Bergen, \textit{Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden}, 21. 
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and left a forty-by-sixty foot hole in the hull of the warship. This attack was the first indication that the capability of Al Qaeda was truly deadly. This attack would be the last major attack before 9/11. According to Bergen, the attack seemed to have taken the US government by surprise; this despite the fact that Yemen had been the center of terrorist attacks for almost a decade, yet they had all seemingly been linked to domestic conflicts within Yemen, as opposed to issues pertaining to the US or their conflict with the US.

More importantly, it seemed that those behind the attack on the USS Cole remained a mystery. It was not until June 2001, that Al Qaeda was named as the suspect behind the attack after bin Laden spoke about it on an Al Qaeda recruitment video tape.

In the period between the attack on the USS Cole and the attacks of 9/11, little if anything was heard about Al Qaeda. It is worth mentioning that this is particularly true of the public, who was seemingly unaware of the existence of bin Laden, Al Zawahiri and Al Qaeda. Understanding this lack of information is essential in understanding the social and political impact of 9/11 and the emergence of Al Qaeda as the archrival of the US.

4.4 The Aftermath of 9/11:

The attacks of 9/11 had a serious impact on the Islamic world and its relationship with the West, in general, and the United States, in particular. As hysterical fear of Islamist terrorism gripped the world, it is needless to say that countless books and articles have been written analyzing Islam, bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Al Qaeda, Islamism and violent Islamist movements, etc. In an effort to save face, the United States declared the War on Terrorism, an all encompassing war against terrorism, in actuality, Islamist

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movements, to prevent future attacks on US soil. The US also declared war on Afghanistan in an effort to find and arrest bin Laden and Al Zawahiri as well as bring an end to Al Qaeda. On October 7, 2001, the United States and the United Kingdom initiated a war that they had characterized as essential to eliminate Al Qaeda. The war continues until today.

The problem with the plan to eliminate Al Qaeda is that it is built around the assumption that the organization is a physical entity that can be destroyed and that the key to its survival is the elimination of bin Laden and Al Zawahiri. However, what many fail to see is that the nature of the Al Qaeda is such that it is built more around a concept as opposed to a physical entity or particular players. The fact that the organization is built around the abstract idea of jihad against a target like the US in order to bring change not just to its foreign policy but to the political structures of other countries makes defeating it via military campaigns difficult. The fact that Al Qaeda has its own goal of defeating the US in a non-linear confrontation does not bring to an end the goals that organizations functioning under its umbrella have. One of the main distinguishing characteristics of Al Qaeda is that it doubles as an umbrella under which other domestic Islamist movements function. These organizations implement the goals of Al Qaeda by attacking US interests but they continue to function on their own to implement attacks within their own countries to implement their initial goals of overthrowing their domestic governments. This is clearly illustrated by several attacks that took place throughout the 2000s.

299 BBC Staff, “US Launches Strikes Against Taleban,” BBC Online Archives, 7 October, 2001 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/7/newsid_2519000/2519353.stm>. 152
including the attacks in Bali, Indonesia on October 12, 2002 which left 202 dead\textsuperscript{300}; Madrid, Spain on March 11, 2004, when 10 bombs exploded on four passenger trains killing 191 and leaving 1800 injured\textsuperscript{301}; London, United Kingdom on July 7, 2005 when bombs were detonated on the London underground killing 52 and injuring more than 200\textsuperscript{302}; a second explosion in Bali, Indonesia in October 2, 2005 when bombs exploded in a tourist-packed area killing 26 and injuring more than 50\textsuperscript{303}; Amman, Jordan on November 9, 2005 when bombs were detonated almost simultaneously killing 57 and injuring 110 civilians\textsuperscript{304}; Mumbai, India on November 27, 2008 when attacks were carried out in several locations throughout the city simultaneously leaving 101 dead and injuring more than 287\textsuperscript{305}; and most recently the attacks in Moscow, Russia when on March 29, 2010 when two bombs went off on the underground killing 38 and injuring more than 60\textsuperscript{306}.

Almost all of these attacks were linked to Al Qaeda while at the same time being linked to local organizations within the countries in which the attacks took place. This illustrates several points. First, they demonstrate how much of an impact Al Qaeda’s ideology has had on the modes of operation of Islamist movements around the world.

\textsuperscript{300} BBC Staff, “Bali Death Toll Set at 202,” \textit{BBC Online Archives}, 19 February, 2003 \texttt{<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2778923.stm>}.  
\textsuperscript{301} BBC Staff, “Timeline: Madrid Investigation,” \textit{BBC Online Archives}, 28 April, 2004 \texttt{<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3597885.stm>}.  
\textsuperscript{302} BBC Staff, “London Rocked by Terror Attack,” \textit{BBC Online Archives}, 7 July, 2005 \texttt{<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4659093.stm>}.  
\textsuperscript{303} BBC Staff, “Bali Bomb Attacks Claim 26 Lives,” \textit{BBC Online Archives}, 2 October, 2005 \texttt{<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4300274.stm>}.  
\textsuperscript{305} BBC Staff, “Mumbai Rocked by Deadly Attacks,” \textit{BBC Online Archives}, 27 November, 2008 \texttt{<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7751160.stm>}.  
\textsuperscript{306} BBC Staff, “Moscow Metro Hit by Deadly Suicide Bombing,” \textit{BBC Archives}, 29 March, 2010 \texttt{<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8592190.stm>}.  

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They are no longer attempting political assassinations or attacks against military and officials. Instead, the main target is attacking the masses and causing as much loss of life as possible, which is reminiscent of Al Qaeda’s ideology. The goal is not to topple governments but to terrorize the public and object to the Western way of life and everything it stands for. The second point is that it is never truly possible to discern which attacks are carried out by Al Qaeda under Osama bin Laden’s directive and which separate attacks of traditional Islamist movements seeking to bring Islamic governments to power. This is a particular challenge when it comes to analyzing the changes in the ideology and mode of operation of Islamist movements. The third, and perhaps most important point, this illustrates that the concept that brought about Al Qaeda is now part of the public conscience and is no longer linked to a single political system or group. It has become a transnationalist ideology and mode of operation that is now as much a part of the global public and political conscience as other social and political concepts such as environmentalism and nationalism.
5. CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review included in the various sections of this thesis, the rise of transnational violent Islamist movements can be directly linked to the co-option and isolation these movements were subjected to by the authoritarian governments in the Arab world. This continued co-option and isolation prevented these actors from accessing the legitimate political systems with any real degree to implement tangible changes, which in turn, helped in their radicalization, causing the transformation of some from domestic violent movements aiming to overthrow the secular authoritarian governments in the region into transnational violent ones seeking to bring about change through global jihad against the West, in general, and the United States, in particular. This was largely due to their belief that it was the West’s continued support of authoritarianism in the region that was keeping these governments in place and preventing the re-creation of the Islamic *Ummah*.\(^\text{307}\) Egypt and Saudi Arabia and their dealings with their respective Islamist movements illustrate the tools of isolation adopted by these governments in an attempt to bring an end to radical Islamist movements that threaten their ability to maintain control over power.

It also illustrates how these movements were forced out of the system and, in an attempt to ensure the survival of their ideology and the implementation of their goals, transformed their core beliefs and modes of operation in order to find a new channel through which they can facilitate the recreation of the Islamic *Ummah*. The continued isolation of Islamist movements, coupled with the persistence of these movements to

\[^{307}\text{Al-Zayyat, The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man, 63-64.}\]
implement their goals created the rise of a violent transnational Islamist movement, Al Qaeda, which at the moment is classified as the most dangerous of Islamist movements. This is largely due to the fact that it functions outside the borders of any particular country, targets civilians in its attacks, and seeks to bring about change in certain countries from outside these political systems as opposed to from within.

In the theoretical framework of the study, the general characteristics of authoritarian rule were outlined with particular emphasis on the importance of cooption and isolation tactics as it pertains to the control of opposition groups. Authoritarian systems are personalist in nature with great emphasis placed on the interpersonal connections of those in power with other groups or bodies within society. These interpersonal connections are used to help fulfill the biggest priority for authoritarian systems which is, maintaining the status quo within the political system. This generally translates into attempts by the authoritarian government to co-opt those individuals or groups that could represent a threat to maintaining the status quo. To achieve this, authoritarian governments take steps to co-opt the opposition by giving them a stake in the system by offering them a position in government for example, or allowing them limited access to certain aspects of political life. The idea being, if an opposition group has a stake in the system, maintaining the status quo becomes in its own best interest. Should cooption fail authoritarian governments then take steps to isolate these movements from the system. This could be done in a variety of ways including declaring

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308 Bill & Springborg, Politics in the Middle East, 64-65.
the movement illegal, curtail their access to public platforms and even imprisoning as well as murdering key players within that opposition group.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia are classical examples for how governments in the region employ cooption and isolation tactics in a futile attempt to bring an end to radical Islamist movements in their domestic politics. Despite the fact that Egypt is a republic and Saudi Arabia is a kingdom, and the fact that each has a very different system of rule, the regimes of both countries adopted a combination of cooption and isolation tactics in order to bring radical Islamist movements under the control of the state. These tactics have ranged from allowing some groups to continue to function on the fringes of the political system, despite the fact that they lack a specific legal status – for example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the mutawee’en in Saudi Arabia – to jailing and exiling the leaders and members of groups that resisted the co-option tactics of these governments.

The third main component of this study is the rise of Al Qaeda as the example of violent transnational movements that seek to implement the goal of recreating the Islamic Ummah through the declaration of global jihad not against the authoritarian governments of the Arab world but against international actors that tolerate their existence and support them. While Islamist movements in the Arab world have existed since before the Second World War, their failure in bringing about serious changes within the political systems of the region both through political dialogue or through violence at the domestic level, led those behind Al Qaeda, namely Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al Zawahiri, to believe
that the only way to bring about change was through violent confrontation with the West, in general, and the US, in particular, in order to return Islam to its glory years.309

The study clearly illustrates how co-option and isolation of opposition groups from the legitimate political system under authoritarian rule is linked to the rise of transnational Islamist movements such as Al Qaeda. Because of the cooption and isolation attempts by authoritarian governments in the region one can argue that, as part of their own survival tactics, Islamist movements placed under severe pressure from the authoritarian governments in the region had no option but to find an alternative route through which they can bring about the change necessary in order to realize their goal of creating Islamic states in the Arab world. The real challenge is that the current parameters, as defined by authoritarian theory, do not provide the tools that can sufficiently analyze and predict the pattern of behavior of these movements once they are no longer tied specifically to one political system.

As Anderson argues, it is important to understand the system in which an opposition group functions in order to understand the opposition group itself. This is largely due to the fact that the opposition groups often define themselves in relation to the ideology or group they oppose. This is no different when it comes to Islamist movements in the Arab world for much of their modern history.310 As long as they are classified as domestic opposition movements and as long as their goals are limited within the bounds of that system, then defining their goals and the mode of operation that they will use to

achieve these goals is dependent on the state in which they function. However, once these movements become transnational and their goals are no longer defined in relation to a specific state, then gaining an understanding of their nature becomes more difficult. While authoritarian theory can help analyze and predict the patterns of behavior of Islamist actors as long as they restrict their actions within the boundaries of the state, it can not provide sufficient analysis and, more importantly, the mode of operation of these groups once they adopt transnationalist patterns of behavior.

The rise of a dominant transnational Islamist entity, that seeks to implement its goals through the use of violence becomes a challenge if political scientists attempt to use authoritarian theory to analyze it or predict its patterns of behavior. In essence, the rise of Al Qaeda represents a challenge for authoritarian theory in its current form. As a non-state actor, unlike previous Islamist movements, Al Qaeda equates itself with a full-fledged government because it seeks to declare war, not only against states in the Arab world, but around the world, a right that was previously exclusively in the hands of governments. Moreover, if a non-state actor, whose activities are not confined to the borders of a specific state and whose enemy is not one specific state, group or ideology, then dealing with this actor becomes a much bigger challenge. The fact that this non-state actor is no longer functioning within the confines of a specific state is a victory for the actor because it make it more difficult to pursue, and it puts states in a precarious position. Under this arrangement, Al Qaeda wins the members of groups that previously restricted their actions within the confines of a specific state. On the other hand, the

state, for example Egypt or Saudi Arabia, is no longer capable of pursuing these actors with the same level of aggression they previously used when theses violent Islamist movements were functioning domestically. This gives Al Qaeda the upper hand.

The theory of authoritarian rule and the tools applied by these systems to deal with opposition movements, in general, and Islamist movements in particular, failed to predict the possibility that such continued co-option and isolation could lead these groups to function transnationally. If the authoritarian systems prioritize their own survival, the movements that were born within these systems are also likely to prioritize their own survival. Therefore, if they are unable to function within the confines of a given society, these movements are likely to seek alternative routes.

That is, if Islamist groups that have been subjected to co-option and isolated from the legitimate political systems of their countries of origin have managed to find ways to survive outside of the confines of these systems, they are likely to be able to do so quietly successfully outside the confines of these countries’ boarders. This is particularly true since Islamist movements perceive that they have already had one successful venture with their joint resources: the first War of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Whether or not it is factual that the Soviet armies that invaded Afghanistan were defeated by volunteers from all over the Muslim world – Arab Mujahidin – is actually irrelevant. The fact is, they believed it to be true.\textsuperscript{312} For individuals who believe that they are fighting for a divine cause, any semblance of success can have a very strong effect. With a combination of faith and experience, many of the Arab Mujahidin went back to their countries more

\textsuperscript{312} Wright, \textit{The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11}, 165.
committed to their cause than before. And when they were faced with the same challenges and in many cases, government repression, they resorted to a more deadly form of violence, one that included violence against civilians.

The general assumption under authoritarian theory is that opposition groups would remain on the fringes of the legitimate system of a given country, for example the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, or they would manage to overthrow the government in a military coup or a revolution, such as the military coup carried out by Brigadier Omar Al Bashir and Sudan’s National Islamic Front, or that the government would crush the opposition groups, such as the case with the *Al Hijra wal Takfir Groups* of Egypt. The theory never allowed for the possibility that the opposition group would evolve to work completely outside the confines of the system. In the case of violent Islamist groups of the Arab world, these smaller fringe groups relocated to other countries where they could consolidate their ideology and modes of operation and shifted their goals from overthrowing domestic governments and their targets of violence from government officials to citizens.\(^{313}\) In essence, they moved to one country to plan attacks against a second, to bring about change in a third.

Violent Islamist movements adopted a more globalized model with the creation of Al Qaeda, a move few working on the development of political science theory had foreshadowed despite the fact that globalization was impacting every other aspect of the world including economics, media and even access to information. In response to the rampant impact of globalization, theories in various disciplines were developed to deal

\(^{313}\) Mohamedou, *Understanding Al Qaeda: The Transformation of War*, 81.
with the impact of this phenomenon. For example, theories, models, and frameworks were developed to explain the impact and predict the patterns of behavior of globalization on economics and business to explain activities that transcend the boarders of countries. These theories and models explained the impact of modern technology, telecommunications, and information technology infrastructure on business and manufacturing and how best to utilize them to minimize effort and maximize success. Political theorists need to acknowledge that, while authoritarian theory does explain how cooption and isolation can impact opposition groups within a given state, it does not offer explanations for transnational non-state actors. This is particularly needed when it comes to analyzing Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups as well as in trying to predict its future patterns of behavior.

Even now, when there is ample information to illustrate that Al Qaeda has adapted its own deadly version of globalization, little effort has been made to develop authoritarian theories to explain and predict its pattern of behavior. Therefore, political theory needs to evolve to deal with the rise of transnationalist movements and specifically transnational Islamist movements. This is particularly important at the moment because, while Al Qaeda might be the only transnational Islamist movement that the general public is aware of, that it is not to say that others – violent or non-violent – will not follow suit.

Because few, if any, expected the rise of an Islamist movement similar to Al Qaeda – a movement that transcends national boarders, mixes ideologies including salafi, jihadi and takfiri, and views targeting civilians as fair – dealing with the entity following
the attacks of 9/11 presented its own challenge. Unlike previous Islamist movements that set their targets and confined their activities to a single-state, Al Qaeda views itself as an all encompassing entity that does not seek to limit itself to one country or state. Instead, it markets itself as the entity in charge of defending Islam against those who threaten it no matter where. The structure adopted by the entity also differs from that of domestic Islamist movement. Although Al Qaeda has a leadership council, specific goals or targets, a payroll, and a committee to set policies, it is structured as an umbrella that includes various Islamist movements around the world under it. This structure poses a challenge when it comes to analyzing it, predicting its patterns of behavior and dealing with the entity or attempting to bring an end to it.\(^\text{314}\)

Unlike groups functioning solitarily within the confines of a state, co-opting or isolating Al Qaeda is difficult since its structure places it everywhere and nowhere at the same time. That is why Al Qaeda has been an elusive target for some of the world’s biggest military powers for almost a decade. The attempts to seek out and kill bin Laden and Al Zawahiri and the continued military campaign in Afghanistan have yielded few, if any, real results in combating Al Qaeda. This is mostly because declaring war on Al Qaeda resembles declaring war on a phantom. As Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou states in his Understanding Al Qaeda: The Transformation of War: \(^\text{315}\)

“The ‘war against terrorism’ was in effect lost the moment it was decreed. As of now, with traditional allies alienated and those who followed fast retreating and Al Qaeda’s tactical victories piling up, the United States is unambiguously

\(^{314}\) Mohammadou, Understanding Al Qaeda: the Transformation of War, 80-82.

\(^{315}\) Mohammadou, Understanding Al Qaeda: the Transformation of War.
In essence, Al Qaeda is more of a concept as opposed to a physical entity. The groups that currently function under the umbrella of Al Qaeda have little in common except for the fact that they subscribe to radical Islamist thought and aim to bring about changes through global Jihad. This in itself means that the ideology that makes up the backbone of Al Qaeda – the attacking of the far enemy, meaning the West, as a more effective way to bring about change in the Muslim world than attacking the near enemy, meaning the governments of the countries from where these movements originated – has already spread among the various Islamist movements. These movements are now thinking locally while acting globally. As a result, killing bin Laden and Al Zawahiri is unlikely to bring the ideology to an end. Violent radical transnational Islamist thoughts are now part of the public conscience. Even if Al Qaeda ends, the concepts it has established and the model it offered to its members as well as to the general public is likely to continue to exist.

This type of ideology cannot be defeated through military confrontation alone, no matter how many bombs the United States and NATO drop on Afghanistan or how many Muslim countries they invade. Almost ten years into this military confrontation, there is little if any evidence that Al Qaeda has been weakened sufficiently to declare its threats benign. In fact, the number of attacks attributed to Al Qaeda during the 2000s is much higher than those of the 1990s. More importantly, the death of bin Laden and Al Zawahiri will only serve to turn them into martyrs. Others will rise from within the ranks to replace

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them. It is worth noting, that Al Qaeda has a promotion system for its members and affiliates. Moreover Sayyid Qutb, the Godfather of radical Islamist thought, became more of a threat in his death than he ever was during his life.\textsuperscript{317} Instead, this new version of radical Islamist thought needs to be dealt with in several ways, some on the international level and others on the domestic level.

On the international level, developing a theoretical framework to explain Al Qaeda is still essential. If political theory failed to predict the rise of transnational Islamist movements, it should not fail to predict their pattern of behavior. Among the first steps to developing the above, it is also essential for political analysts to stop dealing with Islamist thought as an issue of pertaining to the faith and its rituals. Instead, they need to view it as a political system. Although it might be one that is unlikely to succeed in the world today, viewing Islam as a political system will help foster a better understanding for what it is Al Qaeda and its member groups are after. At the moment, there is great resistance to seeing Islam as a political model despite the fact that the religion facilitates the selection of a leader; the creation of a \textit{shura} or consultative council; includes a judicial system with a legal code, and a financial system with taxation and trade. Despite how they differ from the models applied around the world today, simply accepting this will help in the development of a theoretical framework through which understanding the goals of transnational Islamist movements, like Al Qaeda, are seeking to implement. This will help generate more plausible explanations or predictions of patterns of behavior.

\textsuperscript{317} Al-Zayyat, \textit{The Road to Al Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden’s Right-Hand Man}, 25.
By the same token, there is also the need to distinguish between the religion and political movements inspired by it. When it comes to Al Qaeda, there tends to be little effort to identify whether Al Qaeda’s goal are to bring about political change or religious glory. The two are entirely different. While bin Laden’s rhetoric often refers to both the political and the religious goal interchangeably, analysts should make an effort to distinguish differences between the two. The religious rhetoric makes his message appeal to potential recruits, preys on the emotions of young Muslims who are often frustrated by the lackluster performances of their countries and their religion in the world today, and finally if masks his greater goal of bringing about change to the region. This last goal is of particularly importance because it would not be as easy to attract youth to this message if the current political systems in the region did not exclude them due to limited resources and the personalist nature of authoritarian systems where who you are and who you know are often more important that personal achievements or ambitions.318 Political analysts on the other, who have for decades managed to make the distinction between religion and politics when it came to domestic Islamist movements, have to make the same effort when dealing with transnationalist Islamist movements. This would prevent them from getting bogged down with trying to decipher the religion and instead allow them to focus on the politics.

The development of a theoretical framework dealing with Islamist religious movements would allow political analysts, counterterrorism specialists and the international intelligence communities to distinguish between the attacks committed by

Al Qaeda directly and those committed by other Islamist groups. There needs to be a distinction between those attacks carried out directly by Al Qaeda, those carried out by Islamist movements associated with Al Qaeda and those carried out by groups that have no association to Al Qaeda at all. However following 9/11, attacks are continually attributed to Al Qaeda, even without much direct evidence on which to build this association. Too often, a simple video or audio tape released by Al Qaeda applauding a terror attack is sufficient to attribute it to Al Qaeda.

For example, were the London bombings of 2005 carried out by Al Qaeda operative or were they carried out by young Muslim British citizens who were simply isolated from the social and economic structures of that country or young Muslims sympathetic to the cause? Another example, were the attacks in Mumbai, India, the result of an Al Qaeda attack or were they more the result of the continuing confrontation between Pakistan and India? This is a possibility in light of the fact that those who allegedly carried out the attack were Pakistani nationals. Answering these types of questions is essential in order to prevent turning Al Qaeda from an elusive enemy into a bigger than life enemy. Al Qaeda declaring support for an attack is different from taking credit for its. An Islamist entity declaring that it was inspired by the actions of Al Qaeda is different from actually being a part of it. Factors such as the background of the individuals behind the attack, whether or not they received training in an Al Qaeda camp, the actual mode of operation and target of the attack should all be taken into account to develop a profile for these attacks. Those attacks that do not fit within the profile must be separated. That should not prevent their classification as Islamist violence; however, they should be attributed to the right group. Every time Al Qaeda is blamed by the
international community for an attack, especially one that leads to heavy loss of life, its credibility within fringe groups increases. It also breeds fear in the hearts of the general public and brings about the perception that governments feel vulnerable. This vulnerability is precisely what entities like Al Qaeda thrive on especially since they are seeing their attacks on civilians in the West in particular as being justice for the number of lives lost in Muslim world particularly as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq.\textsuperscript{319}

It is also important to reduce the attraction of the ideology on young Muslims. While this is largely to be dealt with on the domestic front, the international community at large can play a role as well. Demonizing Islam and Muslims by the West, particularly the Western media, is only fanning hatred of the West by Muslims and fear of Muslims by the West. Since September 11, 2001 and until today, the West’s overarching fear of Islam has only further alienated Muslims thus giving more credence to bin Laden’s rants about how much the West hates Islam. Prior to 9/11, Islam remained almost entirely out of the international public eye. However it has become one of the most covered subjects by everything from the media to books to articles, etc. The problem is the characterization of Islam has generally been more to demonize it than to truly analyze or explain it. Moreover, everything from racial profiling at airports, which has become a not-so-discreet practice in many western countries,\textsuperscript{320} to debates about whether or not the face cover donned by some Muslim women in Europe should banned from public

\textsuperscript{319} Mohamedou, \textit{Understanding Al Qaeda: the Transformation of War}, 10.
places,\textsuperscript{321} etc. only backfire, angering religious moderates into becoming more radical. Over the past 10 years, there have been more attempts by the West to marginalize Islam and Muslims rather than to include them. This isolation has only served to illustrate that the West hates Islam and is waging a campaign against it. The issue at hand should be radicalism and not the religion, a monumental distinction that few in the West seem to grasp or vocalize.

On the domestic level, the governments of the Arab countries where many of these movements first originated must accept that the rise of Al Qaeda, and all other transnational Islamist movements that may appear in the future, has as much to do with first’s repressive policies towards opposition groups as it does with latter’s hatred for the West. The brutality with which these authoritarian governments clamp down on individuals subscribing to Islamist thought has created a type of vendetta with these regimes. It is also essential for Arab governments to understand that, just because the direct target is no longer removing secular regimes from power and has been replaced by attacking the West and the US in particular, Al Qaeda is as much their problem as it is that of the international community.\textsuperscript{322} Ideally speaking, authoritarian governments should work on further including opposition groups into their domestic political systems. This is to be achieved by loosening their grip on opposition groups providing them with avenues to participate within the legitimate political system. It is also important for these governments to facilitate and even encourage the development of a healthy civil society.

\textsuperscript{321} BBC Staff, “Sarkozy says burka ‘not welcome’ in Fance,” \emph{BBC Online Archives}, 14 January, 2010 \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8458831.stm}.

\textsuperscript{322} Mohamedou, \emph{Understanding Al Qaeda: the Transformation of War}, 66-72.
including political parties in order to encourage the general public to participate in the political system as a whole. Part of the reason that young people, particularly the disenfranchised, turn to religious groups has to do with their overall marginalization from the political system. Increasing the options through which people can participate in the system will reduce their isolation and reduce the likelihood that they would turn to religious radical movements.

As particularly pertaining to Islamist movements, the Arab and Muslim governments should take steps to include members of non-violent movements into the legitimate political system by creating dialogue and introducing a culture of inclusion as opposed to one of exclusion. Allowing non-violent Islamist movements some access to the political system would prevent the radicalization of their members. This is in line with what the Egyptian government has done with the Muslim Brotherhood, for example. However, governments that do adopt this particular technique must accept that the involvement of these movements will eventually change the nature of the system as a whole. It is counterproductive for government to approach opposition groups with promises of inclusion that change radically at the first hint of change within the system. For example, in the case of the Egyptian government and the Muslim Brotherhood, the government allows members of the group to stand elections as independents. However, the moment the Muslim Brotherhood is seen as gaining too much access to the system, the government switches modes of operation from inclusion to exclusion often preventing the general public from accessing voting stations for

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example to prevent the elections of members of opposition groups. Because the priority of authoritarian systems tends to be the survival of the regime, the majority of authoritarian regimes embark on political reforms only to change their minds at the first sign that these reforms might lead to serious changes within the system. What they do fail to realize is that the systems of the region must change in order for the stability of countries in the region to remain viable. Contrary to their perception, governments in the region need to come to the realization that in order for them to remain in control of the systems, they need to initiate the change themselves.

It is important to note that this is not a suggestion that authoritarian governments must adopt full democratic systems over night or even at all. It does, however, suggest that even authoritarian systems must undergo change and evolution in order to find ways to deal with the rising demand from change, be that from secular movements or Islamist ones. The idea that the only solution to Islamism is the introduction of a full democratic system is one that is unlikely to manifest itself within the timeframe during which this change is needed. Implementing a full democratic system requires major social change and by nature, Arab societies are resistant to change. There is also a need for the balance between religion and secularity in order for democracy to be introduced within conservative Arab society, many of which have not yet embarked on the debate needed in order to identify whether or not democracy is in line with or contrary to Islam. Therefore suggesting that the only real way to deal with Islamism is for the creation of full

democracies in the Arab world only goes to show the limited grasp of the nature of Arab societies.

There is also a real need for sharing of information pertaining to violent Islamist movements and a real distinction between these and non-violent ones. In the hysteria of fear that resulted from 9/11, governments in the region and even in the West had gotten into the habit of declaring any opposition movement as a form of terrorism, which now, 10 years after the attacks of 9/11 have contributed to their loss of credibility among the general public.
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