Pursuing a Freedom Agenda Amidst Rising Global Islamism

Lisa Curtis, Charlotte Florance, Walter Lohman, and James Phillips

The Heritage Foundation

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Contributors

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Abstract:
The rapidly changing political landscapes in several important Muslim-majority countries are challenging U.S. policymakers to develop coherent and consistent policy approaches that simultaneously strengthen liberal democratic development, help to counter terrorist movements, and support American strategic interests. Given the different national contexts and stages along the democratic development spectrum on which each country finds itself, there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for the U.S. to pursue. There are, however, certain guiding principles to which the U.S. can adhere in order to encourage peace, stability, and democratic freedoms. As Islamism increasingly influences the political landscapes throughout Muslim communities, the U.S. must develop a coherent set of policy principles to address the new challenges and use aid and other diplomatic tools to promote democratic ideals and practices in these transitioning states. The outcomes of the current political machinations in Muslim-majority polities will determine the future security and stability of much of the world, as well as the scope of international terrorism trends over the coming decades.

The rapidly changing political landscapes in several important Muslim-majority countries are challenging U.S. policymakers to develop coherent and consistent policy approaches that simultaneously bolster liberal democratic development, help counter terrorist movements, and support American strategic interests. Given the different national contexts and stages along the democratic development spectrum on which each country finds itself, there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for the U.S. to pursue. There are, however, certain guiding principles to which the U.S. can adhere in order to encourage peace, stability, and democratic freedoms.

One of the most salient, consistent features across these political environments is the rise of Islam-based political parties. Such parties fill a political need and thus have a role to play in the democratic evolution of their respective countries. The ideological underpinnings and anti-democratic practices of the hard-line Islamist[1] elements among them, however, pose serious risks to U.S. foreign policy objectives. The U.S. requires a long-term strategy to manage this challenge. Countering the illiberal agendas of Islamist parties is vital to protecting American core national security interests. Islamists often pursue policies that undermine individual freedoms and lead to discrimination, repression, and violence against religious minority groups and women. Their lenient policies toward terrorist groups also undercut U.S. counterterrorism measures and encourage a permissive environment for extremists to plot, plan, and train for international terrorist attacks. Coun-

tering Islamism requires a thoughtful and clear-eyed approach that recognizes that Islamist leaders often employ short-term tactics that may fall in line with democratic processes, while maintaining a long-term strategy that seeks to weaken democracy.

This *Special Report* seeks to explain what is happening in five key Muslim-majority countries that are important to U.S. national security, have active and influential Islamist political parties, and some level of a functioning democratic process: Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Tunisia. In each of these five countries, the authors have examined issues such as the role of Islamist political parties in the politics and governance of the country, the factors that influence the popularity of the Islamist parties, the role of sharia (Islamic law) in governance and society, the status of religious minorities, and terrorism trends.

The Islamist parties in Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh currently stand for democracy in a formal sense, that is, they support free elections, but they generally oppose democratic values such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and gender equality.

In order to understand the roots of Islamism, this report offers a brief introduction to historical Islamic political movements and intellectual figures that have influenced the development of modern Islamist parties.

Finally, the report provides a list of recommendations for U.S. policymakers as they grapple with developing effective policy responses to the changing political dynamics and rise of Islamist parties. U.S. policies should be tailored to the circumstances of each individual country, and the U.S. should apply specific tools where they are most likely to have impact and best serve U.S. interests. The tools for refuting Islamism include public diplomacy that counters extremist, anti-Western ideologies; targeted aid programs that support a vibrant civil society, help build democracy at the grass roots, and encourage economic freedom and private-sector-led economic growth; consistent messaging that supports the democratic process and condemns terrorism in

all its forms; well-informed diplomacy that addresses the religious debates and ideological currents in the country; and policies that prioritize empowerment of women and religious minorities.

The U.S. should not promote democracy in a vacuum or without regard for the broader strategic context. It can, however, implement a freedom agenda in countries of critical strategic interest to the U.S. and in which it can have the greatest impact.

Islamism and Democracy

President Barack Obama stated that the policy of the United States will be "to promote reform across the region [greater Middle East] and to support transitions to democracy."[2] But with the increasing involvement of Islamist parties, promoting reform and democracy has become an ever-more complicated endeavor. Islamism is not a monolithic phenomenon, and Islamist politics are increasingly defined throughout the region by a widening spectrum of political thought and practices.[3]

The rise of Islamist parties over the past few years has occurred in the context of democracy movements throughout the Middle East, especially in Egypt and Tunisia. This has raised questions about U.S. democracy promotion and whether it has helped fuel instability. This report argues that U.S. democracy promotion activities are more important than ever and will ultimately assist these nations in developing into stable, democratic societies. This will be a long-term endeavor, and will require U.S. policymakers to exercise patience as they consistently promote the basic building blocks of democracy, including regular elections, political party development, protection of minority rights and religious freedom, a constitution that enshrines division of powers and an independent judiciary, and a free media.

The political struggles taking place in the Middle East represent reactions to autocratic rule as well as divisions within society about the role that Islam should play in shaping laws and state institutions.[4] Public polling reveals wide divisions among Muslim-majority countries on the issue of the role of religion in governance. A 2012 poll by the Pew Research Center demonstrates that while 82 percent of Pakistanis and 60 percent of Egyptians prefer their laws to strictly follow the teachings of the Koran, only 22 percent of Tunisians and 17 percent of Turks support the same.[5]

Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) in Pakistan

and Bangladesh have participated in the democratic processes of their respective countries even as they support an all-encompassing role for Islam in society and politics, and strive for a governing system based solely on sharia. These Islamist parties currently stand for democracy in a formal sense, that is, they support free elections, but they generally oppose democratic values such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and gender equality.

Other political parties, such as the ruling Pakistan Muslim League/Nawaz Party (PML/N) and the National Mandate Party (PAN) in Indonesia, emphasize Muslim identity but strongly value the democratic process and nature of the state. These Muslim democratic parties may use language and symbols that appeal to a religious constituency, but they are firmly committed to the democratic system and are generally more open to cooperating with the West than are Islamist parties.

Somewhere between the Islamist parties that publicly support broad enforcement of sharia and the Muslim identity parties lie parties like Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). The PKS does not publicly call for state enforcement of sharia beyond areas such as family law customarily covered in Muslim-majority countries, but its roots are in the Muslim Brotherhood, and it often takes a conspiratorial view of both religious minorities and heterodox Muslims, leaving many Indonesians to question the party's longer-term political goals.

One of the fundamental questions with which analysts continue to grapple is whether participation in electoral politics leads Islamist parties to moderate their agendas and develop a greater commitment to democratic principles related to constitutionalism, equality, and pluralism. A look at the Muslim Brotherhood's one-year stint in power in Egypt from 2012 to 2013, and the tenure of a coalition of Islamist parties in Pakistan's northwest province, which lasted from 2002 to 2007, shows a mixed record.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated its lack of commitment to a democratic agenda when, after taking power in June 2012, Muslim Brotherhood leader and former Prime Minister Mohamed Morsi restricted freedom of the press, cracked down on pro-democracy civil society and nongovernmental organizations, and pushed through adoption of a controversial Islamist-leaning constitution that called for sharia to be the main source of legislation.

When a coalition of religious parties in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province came to power in 2002, the grouping immediately instituted several draconian policies and passed a bill seeking to declare sharia law in the province. As time passed, the coalition tempered some of its hardline positions and its leaders became targets of Pakistani militants opposed to the democratic process.

The Egyptian military's ouster of Morsi in July 2013 and its harsh crackdown on Brotherhood supporters has further undermined democratic development in Egypt. Human rights organizations say that nearly 1,150 protesters were killed by the military in the four months after it took control of the country, and that President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi may be guilty of crimes against humanity for authorizing the deadly crackdown on Islamist demonstrations. Far more Egyptians have been killed and jailed after Morsi's overthrow than during his administration.

Of the Middle Eastern countries that have experienced political upheaval in the past three and a half years, Tunisia seems to have had the most success in transitioning to democratic rule. Following the political uprising in January 2011 that led to the overthrow of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia entered into a national dialogue involving the major political parties. In January, the Constituent Assembly adopted a new constitution, and parliamentary elections were held in October. Presidential elections will be held at the end of November.

Europe-based Islamic scholar Olivier Roy argues that Islam and democracy cannot survive without the other in Muslim-majority countries. Roy holds that the only way that Islamists will be able to gain and hold power is through elections and that political transitions occurring throughout the region are transforming the Islamists as much as they are transforming the politics of the countries in which they are operating.[6] Others point to the non-democratic agendas of Islamist parties—as exemplified by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt—noting that they adhere to a "one man, one vote, one time" policy. Once elected to power, it is argued, they will seek to undermine and manipulate the democratic process to ensure they stay in power. From this perspective, it was not surprising that rather than reaching out to broader sections of society, the Muslim Brotherhood government became increasingly autocratic.

Islamism and Terrorism

Islamist parties have generally demonstrated lenience toward anti-Western terrorist groups, which contributes to U.S. officials' concern about their rising political influence. When Ennahda held power in Tunisia from 2011 to 2014, thousands of Islamist extremists were released from jail, including Abu Iyad, who fought with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Once released, Iyad formed Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST), a Salafist organization adhering to al-Qaeda's ideology. It is widely believed that AST instigated clashes outside the U.S. embassy and at the American school in Tunis on September 14, 2012, following controversy over a private film about Mohammed.[7] AST was banned in Tunisia in August 2013 after the organization was directly linked to two high-profile political assassinations. Former Egyptian Prime Minister Morsi also released scores of terrorists from jail and called on the U.S. to release Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, who orchestrated the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center. Similarly, in Indonesia, PKS was among the most ardent supporters of Abu Bakar Baasyir, a founder of al-Qaeda affiliate Jemah Islamiyah.

Background on Islamist Movements. Islamist parties are part of the political landscape around the world. In addition to the countries that this report surveys, Arab nations Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, as well as most of the Central Asian nations and Muslim-majority countries in South East Asia, have active Islamist parties. These parties have been founded on the idea of creating the ideal Islamic government, but each has varying positions on how to attain it.

Modern Islamism's roots can be traced to the search for an alternative Islamic system following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century and as a reaction against Western imperialism and colonialism in the first half of the 20th century. Several major geopolitical events, including the Iranian revolution in 1979, the mujahideen war against the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s, the OPEC oil boom after 1973 that suddenly filled the coffers of states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States and their aftermath, and the Arab Spring, have contributed to the evolution of Islamist parties.

Three intellectuals, Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), Sayyid Abu ʻAla al-Maududi (1903–1979), and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), played crucial roles in providing the ideological foundations for the major Islamist political parties that exist today. Al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt while Maududi created the Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia. The Muslim Brotherhood was first established as a social movement and grew quickly in the 1930s and 1940s, eventually taking on a political role.[8]

Hassan al-Banna grew up in a religious family north of Cairo, and as a young adult became increasingly concerned about what he viewed as a trend toward secularization in Egypt. He began to lecture at local mosques, preaching about the evils of colonialism and calling on his followers to reject Western influence. In 1928, he founded the Muslim Brotherhood to carry this message forward and to advocate a greater role for Islam in public life.[9] Al-Banna initially envisioned the Brotherhood as a social organization that would contribute to transforming society through the daily religious practices of its members. As time passed, however, he became increasingly critical of the Egyptian government's adoption of the Western liberal model of governance. By the late 1930s, al-Banna had established a violent wing of the party and made direct calls on the government to Islamize society. In 1948, a member of the Brotherhood assassinated Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi.

Islamist parties are part of the political landscape around the world.

The Muslim Brotherhood also made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate military leader Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954, which prompted the regime to jail hundreds of Brotherhood members and barred them from government. The 1960s marked the most militant period for the Brotherhood, during which time Sayyid Qutb was the main ideologue of the organization. The Brotherhood renounced violence in the early 1970s under relentless pressure from the Egyptian government, but Qutb's ideas influenced several other violent Islamist movements and groups, including al-Qaeda and its affiliate organizations. Qutb supported the practice of *takfir*—judging whether other Muslims are upholding the true tenets of Islam, and if not, declaring them *kafirs* (infidels), to be punished by death.

Maududi came of age as British colonial rule was ending on the Indian subcontinent and an Indian national identity was developing. A witness to communal Hindu–Muslim tensions, Maududi believed the only way Muslims could safeguard their political interests was to return to a pure and unadulterated Islam. He denounced nationalism and secular politics and held that the Islamic state was a panacea for all the problems facing Muslims. Maududi supported the idea of the state taking on the role of Islamizing society, while al-Banna viewed society as the main instigator of the development of the Islamic state.[10] Maududi wanted to ensure that Muslims could implement their vision of the perfect society without being influenced by other religions.

The other major Islamist movement in South Asia is the Deobandi movement. This movement originated in 1866 in the city of Deoband in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh with the establishment of the Dar ul-Ulum madrassa (religious school), still the largest operating Deobandi madrassa. Deobandism was a reformist movement that developed in reaction to British colonialism and from the belief among Muslim theologians that British influence on the Indian subcontinent was corrupting the religion of Islam. The Deobandis solidified a puritanical perspective toward Islam for South Asian Muslims, much as the Wahhabis have done in present-day Saudi Arabia.[11]

The Deobandis gained considerable strength during the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s when madrassas mushroomed in Pakistan, partially to accommodate the three million Afghan refugees that fled there. The Taliban leaders who made their debut in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 1994 came mostly from these Deobandi madrassas.[12] The Jamaat ul-Islam is a Deobandi political party in Pakistan that draws support from rural voters, mostly among Pashtuns in the northwestern part of the country.

Salafists purport to follow the teachings of the Koran and Mohammed as understood and practiced by the earliest followers of Islam, the "Companions of the Prophet."[13] The Salafists eschew scholarly Islamic tradition and are hostile to Sufism (mystical Islam). In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood competes with the Salafism-based political party, Al-Nour. The Al-Nour Party distanced itself from the Morsi government starting in early 2013 and ultimately supported Morsi's ouster by the Egyptian military in July 2013. Al-Qaeda's ideology is based on Salafism.

Country Case Studies

Egypt. Egypt, which gave birth in 1928 to the Muslim Brotherhood, the first modern Islamist political movement, decisively rejected the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013. Egyptians staged the largest political demonstrations in Egypt's history on June 30, 2013, calling for Morsi to step down. When he refused, the army ousted him on July 3, 2013. Although the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party emerged from the 2012 elections as Egypt's most popular political party, it squandered its popular support due to a year of ineffective, exclusionary, and increasingly authoritarian misrule.

The Muslim Brotherhood failed to evolve from its roots as a conspiratorial revolutionary group to a genuinely democratic organization. Its extremely secretive and insular leadership excluded non-members from its opaque political decision making and it lost touch with Egypt's citizens, who increasingly resented its heavy-handed efforts to impose its Islamist agenda.

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The Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, who narrowly won the 2012 presidential election, quickly dropped any pretense of consensual politics and sought to ram through a new Islamist-designed constitution and maximize his own power and that of his Freedom and Justice Party. After Egypt's judiciary dissolved parliament because one-third of its members won their seats illegitimately, Morsi granted himself unprecedented powers unchecked by judicial oversight. When challenged, he ignored, marginalized, and demonized opposition political parties, which he linked to foreign conspiracies.

Morsi's drive to consolidate his own power provoked a mushrooming opposition coalition that denounced him as a "new pharaoh" who betrayed the original goals of the 2011 revolution. The opposition Tamarod ("Rebel") movement collected more

than 15 million signatures for a petition calling for early elections and spearheaded the largest political demonstrations in Egypt's history, which called for Morsi to step down from power. Even the Al-Nour Party, a Salafist party which won the second-largest number of seats in parliament, resented Morsi's high-handed efforts to monopolize political power and joined non-Islamist opposition parties in pushing for early elections.

On July 3, 2013, Egyptian Defense Minister General Abdel Fattah el-Sissi announced that Morsi, who had "failed to meet the demands of the people," was relieved of his duties and that the Islamist-written constitution was suspended. Egypt's army ousted President Morsi, just as it removed Hosni Mubarak in 2011, to prevent growing civil disorder from undermining the power of the state and its own privileges within the state. The intervention was widely applauded by opposition political parties and the overwhelming majority of the millions of protesters who demanded that Morsi step down.[14]

The tactics employed by the Egyptian military to quash the Islamists have been strongly criticized by international human rights organizations. It is estimated that around 1,150 civilians were killed by the Egyptian security forces in a span of four months. Human Rights Watch stated that Egyptian forces killed at least 817 protesters during the August 2013 forced closure of the protest camp at Rabaa, equating the event with China's Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989.

International groups also criticized the May 2014 presidential elections for lack of fairness and for taking place in a repressive political environment.[15] Abdel Fattah el-Sissi ran against one other opponent, who garnered 3 percent of the vote. Many Egyptians viewed the electoral process as a formality in which el-Sissi sought to enhance the legitimacy of his rule. El-Sissi has not yet announced dates for parliamentary polls that are expected to be held before the end of the year.

The Obama Administration initially embraced Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood–dominated government and was surprised by the popularity of the military coup against the Morsi government. The Administration calculated that the practical responsibilities of governing would dilute the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet once in office, Morsi relentlessly expanded his own power in a winner-take-all manner while neglecting Egypt's fester-

ing economic problems. The Administration muted its criticism of Morsi's power grabs and remained largely on the sidelines during el-Sissi's coup against Morsi.

The polarized political situation in Egypt has flummoxed U.S. policymakers, and most Egyptians have little faith that Washington can play a positive role in helping their country transition to democratic rule. While there are many liberal Egyptians supportive of democracy, their ability to organize politically has been stifled and, with no other political option, they generally prefer military over Islamist rule.

Egypt's transition to democracy, like that of many other countries affected by the Arab Spring protests, will be extremely difficult and will take much longer than was hoped at the outset of the 2011 revolution. Washington needs to recognize that Egypt is much closer to becoming a failed state or an economic basket case than it is to becoming a democracy.

Tunisia. Following the relatively peaceful uprising that ousted President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in early 2011, Tunisians embarked on the long process of transitioning to representative government. In January 2014, three years after the uprising and following a series of compromises, Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly (NCA) peacefully and decisively ratified a constitution that lays the foundation for a functioning democracy in the birthplace of the Arab Spring. Tunisia, with its remarkable political turnaround, epitomized by the near-unanimous ratification of the constitution and the inauguration of an interim nonpartisan technocratic government, has so far been the most successful of the Arab Spring countries in its transition to democratic rule. The first full parliamentary election under the new constitution was held on October 26, 2014. The election included more than 1,300 candidate lists and was considered free and fair by the international community. Despite fears that terrorists might disrupt the historic event, no violence occurred. Presidential elections are slated for the end of November, with a presidential runoff election scheduled to be held in late December if required.

Over the past three and a half years, Tunisia has been through a series of challenges and setbacks, which have led many in Washington to question whether Tunisia could make a smooth democratic transition and potentially offer a test case for democratic transitions in North Africa and the Middle

East. The opening of the political system in Tunisia created space for the viability of all political parties, including Islamist parties. Most notably, the Ennahda Party—which has close ties to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood—held the largest number of seats in the National Constituent Assembly (the body elected in 2011 and charged with creating a new constitution).

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The Ennahda-led government faced many obstacles, including a deteriorating security situation, a series of high-profile assassinations of liberal opposition leaders, a poor economic turnaround, and a stalled constitution-making process. External regional events, including the turmoil in neighboring Libya, as well as the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, helped change the political calculus of Ennahda's leadership, and encouraged the group to start a dialogue with the secularists. Given the growing discontent among Tunisians, the Ennahda party, fearing that it could face a fate similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, decided to pursue a more moderate path. In light of the ongoing regional political dynamics, the National Dialogue process was conceived by political and union leaders (including the Ennahda-led government) to create a path forward out of the political gridlock that plagued the NCA.

Ennahda claims to be the "most progressive Islamic party in the region."[16] Ennahda does not seek to develop an explicitly Islamic state, like the Salafist group Ansar al-Sharia-Tunisia (AST), a group that the Ennahda-led government banned in August 2013.[17] Ennahda, sensitive to Western perceptions, refers publicly to the party as "Islamic," but many of its members still call themselves "Islamists." Despite attempts to tone down the religious orientation of the party, supporters often refer to Ennahda as "God's party."

The constitutional drafting process further highlighted the schisms in Tunisian society about the role that religion should and should not play in Tunisian law and politics. The drafting and passing of the constitution was the culmination of hard-fought political battles between Islamists primarily comprised of Ennahda, and the minority secularists represented by the Congress Party for the Republic and the Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties (Ettakatol), which sought to exclude sharia from the constitutional law, limit the influence of religious groups on the constitution, protect women's rights, and maintain Tunisia as a secular state.[18]

The political dynamic in the country has changed markedly in recent months following a year of turmoil evidenced by the assassinations of political opposition leaders Chokri Belaid in February 2013 and Mohammed Brahmi in May 2013. These events led many Tunisians to question whether they had been better off under Ben Ali's rule. Yet Tunisia persevered and charted a way out of the political gridlock through the National Dialogue, which renewed and reinvigorated the constitutional drafting process. The success of the political breakthrough in early 2014 created an atmosphere of relative peace and stability, but as the parliamentary elections drew nearer, terrorist groups became more active. In July, AST attacked army checkpoints in the Chaambi Mountains, killing 15 soldiers; it was the largest attack on the Tunisian Army in 50 years.

The positive political turnaround was due in large part to a robust and active Tunisian civil society that was integral to demanding a tone of moderation in the new constitution through constant demonstrations and protests. Secular opposition parties and civil society groups throughout the process remained committed to protecting equal rights and defending freedom of expression. Women's rights activists affiliated with secular and nongovernmental groups were highly vocal during the constitutional drafting process, often accusing Ennahda of obstructing rights for women that had been secure since Tunisia's independence. The new constitution recognizes democratic freedoms and a separation of powers while including general references to Tunisia's Islamic and Arab identity.

Ennahda, following the passage of the new constitution, stepped down in favor of a neutral technocratic government that will govern until a new government is formed following the parliamentary

election on October 26 and the presidential election slated for November 23. The agreement and the adoption of the new constitution marked a significant breakthrough for Tunisia, renewing the hope for a functioning democracy in a tumultuous region.

Ennahda failed to secure a majority number of seats in the country's new 217-member parliament, but with the second largest number of seats, Ennahda will continue to play a pivotal role in Tunisia's transition to democratic governance, whether in a coalition government or in formal opposition. The largest secular party, Nidda Tounes (Tunisia's Call) won the largest number of seats in the new parliament. Nidda Tounes' electoral success is credited with tapping into ordinary Tunisians' fears of growing economic instability and the rise of terrorism following Ben-Ali's ouster.[19] According to reports, both parties have agreed to wait until after the presidential election in November (a possible run-off is scheduled for late December) to form an official government and allow the president to appoint a prime minister.[20]

Despite the country's political turnaround, the Tunisian economy remains fragile. In the past two years, Tunisia recorded modest economic expansion with gross domestic product growing by approximately 3.2 percent. However, the average growth rate was too weak to create needed jobs—particularly for the youth—or to address regional development disparities in the country.

The economic system, in general, remains strictly controlled by the state. This overbearing regulatory framework, exacerbated by poor access to credit and high financing costs, stifles economic activity and hurts the development of a job-creating private sector.[21] The success of the recent political process will be unsustainable if ordinary Tunisians cannot put bread on the table for their families and send their children to school. Reforming the heavily controlled economic system will require further dialogue and will be one of the toughest tasks for the next government. The new government, whether a broad coalition between Ennahda and Nidda Tounes or a Nidda Tounes–led coalition with the smaller secular parties, will need to embrace economic reform and a vision of an open economy and be able to communicate that vision to average Tunisians.

The country's security situation remains volatile and susceptible to extremist groups, both internal and external, and roughly 3,000 Tunisians are currently fighting in Syria.[22] The complete breakdown of the Libyan state has added stress to the delicate security situation along the Tunisian–Libyan border, including a large influx of Libyan refugees. Reports also indicate that AST's youth wing is trying to infiltrate the country's security forces and that AST may still have links to leadership circles in Ennahda, dating back to the days spent in prison together in the 1980s.[23] Political parties competing in the upcoming elections, Islamist or secular, will have to prove they can govern democratically, can deal with the complicated regional security situation, and turn the Tunisian economy around.

Pakistan. Islamist political parties exercise significant influence within society and through the courts and help shape the political debate, foreign policy, and the development of legislation in Pakistan. Moreover, throughout Pakistan's history, its military and intelligence services have created and cultivated ties with violent Islamist groups to achieve regional strategic objectives. The U.S. war in Afghanistan after 9/11, and Pakistan's role in fighting terrorism in recent years, have severely complicated the Islamist militant landscape in Pakistan. The emergence in 2007 of the Tehrik-e-Taliban (Pakistani Taliban—TTP), a violent indigenous movement based in Pakistan's tribal border areas that seeks to overturn the Pakistani state and has conducted scores of terrorists attacks throughout the country, poses questions about Pakistan's future stability.

While Islamist political parties are unlikely to take power in the near future, they will continue to influence the country's legal framework and political discourse in ways that restrict personal freedoms, subordinate women and minorities, and enhance the role of clergy within the country's democratic institutions. While societal attitudes will also shape Islamist trends in Pakistan, it can be argued that the military's posture and attitude toward violent Islamists will also be an important factor determining the future orientation of the country, that is, whether it remains on a democratic path or takes a decisively Islamist turn.

The strategic environment in South Asia over the past 30 years, and the Pakistani response to these regional challenges, has influenced Islamist trends in society and heightened religion-inspired violence. The war against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the Islamization policies of former Pakistani military dictator General Zia ul-Haq during the

same period, strengthened Islamist political forces and puritanical sects like the Deobandis. The Jami-at Ulema-e-Islam/Fazlur Rehman (JUI/F) party is the most powerful Deobandi party in Pakistan, with strong roots in northwestern Pakistan and a network of madrassas throughout the country. During the 1980s and 1990s the Saudis provided significant funding for Deobandi madrassas, thus strengthening the influence of their religious leaders.

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The Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest and oldest Islamist political party in Pakistan, draws most of its support from middle-class urban Pakistanis. It has generally performed only marginally at the polls, capturing about 5 percent of the vote in most elections held during the past two decades. The party's influence on Pakistani politics and society outweighs its electoral performance, though, primarily because of its effectiveness in mobilizing street power, its ability to influence court cases, and its adeptness at using Pakistan's Islamic identity to pressure military and democratic governments alike to adopt aspects of its Islamist agenda.

In the 2002 elections, the JI formed an alliance with JUI/F and four other religious political parties, called the Muttahid Majlie-e-Amal (United Council of Action—MMA), and the coalition garnered over 11 percent of the national vote. The MMA grabbed enough votes in the northwest province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to form the government, marking the first time the Islamists were charged with running a provincial government. The MMA government immediately banned movie posters, music on public transport systems, and the public display of musical instruments, and passed a bill seeking to declare sharia law in the province.[24] As time passed, the

MMA tempered some of its positions, such as backing off its demand to close U.S. bases in Pakistan and conducting an outreach campaign to minority groups.[25] By the end of their term in office in late 2007, MMA leaders became targets of the Pakistani Taliban because of their participation in the democratic process, and began to privately express fears about the anti-state agenda of the TTP.[26]

In contrast to their showing in the 2002 elections, Pakistan's Islamist political parties performed poorly in the country's February 2008 and May 2013 elections. The JI boycotted the 2008 election and the JUI/F won only seven seats (2 percent of the national vote). In the 2013 polls, JUI/F won 10 seats, and the JI only three seats in the National Assembly.

The emergence of former cricket star Imran Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), in the 2013 elections has also had a significant impact on political discourse in Pakistan. Khan's platform focuses on religion and national pride and appeals to the growing young and educated urban middle class. The PTI won 28 of 272 seats in the National Assembly and rules a coalition of parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. PTI officially supports Pakistan as a modern Islamic welfare state, but holds strongly anti-Western views and seeks to appease Islamist extremist groups, including the TTP. Another religious anti-government leader, Tahir-ul-Qadri, who heads the Pakistan Awami Tehrik (PAT) or "People's Movement," joined Imran Khan in leading anti-government protests in Islamabad in late August, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Three wars and several military crises with India have also bolstered the influence of religious extremists, with the backing of the Pakistani state. During the 1990s, the JI focused its agenda on supporting Kashmiri militants, while the JUI/F turned most of its attention to supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan. More recently, both the JUI/F and JI have rallied their political supporters against U.S. policies in the region, taking advantage of high levels of anti-American sentiment fueled by the post-9/11 American and NATO military presence in Afghanistan and U.S. pressure on Pakistan to tackle terrorists on its own soil.

Throughout Pakistan's troubled political history, both military leaders and democratic politicians have contributed to the Islamization of society and political discourse. The army leadership has

proved itself adept at using religion and the Islamist political parties to stifle political opposition. During the 2002 elections, then-President Pervez Musharraf pursued steps, such as campaign restrictions and candidate selection policies, which favored the Islamist parties over the democratic opposition, thus helping religious parties garner their greatest percentage of votes ever and catapulting the Islamist coalition to power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Pakistani army's support for militancy as an instrument of foreign policy has eroded religious tolerance and created strong links between the Islamist political parties and militant groups.

The democratic parties, during their tenures, have also sought to co-opt the religious parties in various ways and use religion to consolidate their power base. Pakistan's first elected Prime Minister, Zulfiqar Ali Butto, passed a resolution in 1974 declaring Ahmadis—members of a Muslim sect—to be non-Muslim.[27] The legislation barred Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims, calling their places of worship mosques, performing the Muslim call to prayer, and using the traditional Islamic greeting in public. In 1998, when he was serving his second stint as Prime Minister, Sharif proposed legislation that would base all Pakistani laws on the Koran and Sunnah (teachings and practices of Mohammed), making Pakistan into what he called a "true Islamic welfare state." If passed, it would have nullified the existing civil code and made Sharif the Amir-ul-Momineen (Commander of the Faithful) with absolute power. The motion failed.

Military dictator Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's pro-Islamist policies and zealous support for the mujahideen in Afghanistan during the 1980s have contributed to the religious intolerance and extremist ideologies seen in Pakistan today, which threaten the country's future as a stable, democratic country. Zia introduced legislation that fostered an atmosphere of religious intolerance and led to discrimination against religious minorities. In 1984, he passed an ordinance amending the Pakistani penal code, which made it a crime punishable by up to three

years in prison for any Ahmadi to pose as a Muslim or propagate his or her religion as Islam. Two years later, Zia introduced further restrictions on Ahmadis and non-Muslims by introducing anti-blasphemy laws, which stated that any person found to have disrespected the prophet Mohammed or the Koran would face death or life imprisonment.

The Pakistan military's continued reliance on religious militants to achieve strategic objectives vis-à-vis Afghanistan and India also has been damaging to the democratic character of Pakistan—and contributed significantly to the country's current instability. The Pakistani army's support for militancy as an instrument of foreign policy has eroded religious tolerance and created strong links between the Islamist political parties and militant groups. Moreover, Pakistan's promotion of religious militancy has started to backfire on the state as it has contributed to the rise of the Pakistani Taliban, which is using violence to instill fear among the Pakistani population and to undermine the writ of the state. Until Pakistan's military and leaders from all political parties unite against the TTP and take concerted action to defeat the group, Pakistan's future will be at risk.

Bangladesh. For the past 20 years, the U.S. has touted Bangladesh as an example of a large Muslim country with a functioning democratic system. Recently held national elections that lacked opposition participation and were marked by unusually low voter turnout, however, were a setback for the country's democratic development and could portend more violence and instability.

The January 5 national election brought back to power the secular-leaning Awami League government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. During her previous term in office (December 2008–January 2014), Sheikh Hasina was proactive in cracking down on radical Islamists and emphasizing the secular principles of the country's founding. The Hasina government successfully dismantled one of the deadliest groups, the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which carried out several attacks in 2005 and 2006.[28] The law enforcement and intelligence agencies have also acted aggressively against extremists, leading to arrests and disruptions of terrorist plots.

The government recently canceled the Jamaat-e-Islami's registration as a political party and pushed the courts to sentence to death several JI leaders for human rights atrocities committed during the 1971

war for Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan. While the JI has contributed to the street violence over the past year, and has targeted minority groups, Sheikh Hasina's harsh crackdown on the group could backfire. Previously inactive Islamist groups throughout the country could start to view themselves as under mortal threat from the government and decide to band together around a violent agenda that could destabilize the country. With their backs increasingly up against the wall and with no opportunity to play a role in the political process, they may calculate they have little to lose by attacking the government.

The Hasina government established the International Crimes Tribunal II (ICT-2) in 2010 to prosecute those accused of committing human rights atrocities during the 1971 war. It is widely alleged that the Pakistani army and its collaborators, including members of the JI, killed some three million Bangladeshis and raped hundreds of thousands of women during the war.

The tribunal has so far tried 10 JI leaders and two members of the opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP). In February and March of last year, violent protests over the death sentence for a senior JI leader killed nearly 150. Hefazat-e-Islam (Protectors of Islam), a coalition of radical Islamist organizations that run madrassas throughout the country, marched on Dhaka in May 2013 to protest the death sentences. Hefazat-e-Islam issued a 13-point charter calling for banning the mixing of women and men, instituting a harsh new blasphemy law, declaring the minority Ahmadis non-Muslims, and making Islamic education mandatory at the primary and secondary level.

The government carried out the first execution of someone convicted by the tribunal when it hanged Islamist politician Abdul Qader Mollah on December 12, 2013. The tribunal had convicted Mollah on five counts of crimes against humanity. The execution provoked rioting among Islamists and led to the death of at least five Bangladeshis in a 24-hour period.

There is popular support among Bangladeshis for holding the ICT-2 trials and for addressing the traumatic events around the 1971 war. But the severely flawed procedural framework of the trials and the absence of any meaningful outreach for national reconciliation have made the process extremely divisive and exposed dangerous fault lines in Bangladeshi society. The international human rights community has raised questions about the impar-tiality of the tribunal's proceedings and whether Sheikh Hasina is using the tribunal as a tool against political opponents.[29] Supporters of Hasina say the ICT-2 is prosecuting the most violent war criminals in the country's history.

In August 2013, a Bangladeshi high court ruled that the JI should not be allowed to participate in national elections on grounds that its charter does not recognize parliament as the sole institution to pass laws, and because it bars non-Muslims and women from leading the party. The Supreme Court refused to issue a stay on the high court's ruling, and the election commission cancelled JI's party registration.

Jamaat-e-Islami has been responsible for numerous attacks against religious minority communities in Bangladesh. Most recently, in the run-up to the January 5 election, Islamists torched hundreds of Hindu homes, injuring scores.

JI has a small support base mostly in rural areas. It won between 4 percent and 5 percent of the vote in the 2008 elections. The JI's youth organization has branches nationwide and is an effective recruitment arm for the political party, but has a reputation for militancy and provoking violent clashes with opposing groups. When the BNP ruled the country from 2001 to 2006, it formed an alliance with the JI, allowing JI members to hold cabinet positions for the first time.

The JI has been responsible for numerous attacks against religious minority communities in Bangladesh. Most recently, in the run-up to the January 5 election, Islamists torched hundreds of Hindu homes, injuring scores. When the JI was part of the governing coalition from 2001 to 2006, Islamists initiated a campaign against the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh and demanded that the government declare them non-Muslims.

The emergence of a new extremist group, Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), which draws inspiration from the global jihadist movement, has raised concern that al-Qaeda is seeking to exploit the increasingly volatile politics in Bangladesh. The existence

of ABT was revealed after the arrests of five Bangladeshi students in the February 2013 murder of secular blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider, who had played a key role in organizing peaceful street protests against the Islamist agenda.[30] ABT members were reportedly influenced by al-Qaeda materials that had been translated into Bengali.[31] Bangladeshi police say the group has been around for several years but has little organizational structure. It operates through small cells of six or seven people and has around 200 members in Dhaka.[32] On August 12, 2013, ABT leader Mufti Jasmuddin Rahmani and 30 of his followers were arrested.

Bangladesh has a robust civil society, a vibrant community of nongovernmental organizations, and the active participation of women in the social and economic spheres, which should help to deny extremists a foothold in the country. One concern is that Sheikh Hasina's increasingly harsh campaign to destroy the JI as a political entity could backfire by prompting the group to unite with other Islamist groups around a violent agenda. Supporters of Sheikh Hasina's agenda against the JI say it will give Bangladeshi secularism a chance to grow roots and create a model of a Muslim-majority state defined more by language and culture than by faith.[33]

Cracking down on violent groups and carrying out due process to bring justice to those who have committed war atrocities is well within the purview of Sheikh Hasina's government. But she must also maintain space for Islamist groups willing to participate in the political process or risk a violent backlash that will undermine the country's democratic foundations.

Indonesia. Parties organized around Islamist goals—principally, government-enforced sharia law—have a long history in Indonesia, going back to the early days of the republic, when they were, in fact, far stronger than today. They were forced into retreat and dispersal during the Suharto years (1967–1998) and have since only managed to command a small share of the electorate.

The limited appeal of Islamist parties is most recently evidenced by their performance in the 2014 elections for the Indonesian House of Representatives. The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), in its Muslim Brotherhood–derived ideology and methods the closest to what many international observers would call "Islamist," maintained its 6 percent to 8 percent share of the 2009 election. The other party

with an Islamist history, by Suharto-era fiat once the sole representative of all Muslim parties (Islamist and non-Islamist), the United Development Party (PPP), maintained a similar small share. The other representative of indigenous Indonesian Islamism, the Crescent Star Party (PBB), at about 1 percent of the vote, failed once again to meet the threshold to be represented in the House of Representatives.

In total, these parties represent roughly the same 15 percent share of the national vote that they did in 1999, down from the 44 percent of similarly positioned parties elected in 1955, Indonesia's only parliamentary election before Suharto's downfall. Other Islam-oriented parties, the National Mandate Party (PAN) and the National Awakening Party (PKB), are not organized around Islamist ideology. But even when including all Islam-themed parties, the share today is a consistent 30 percent of the electorate.[34]

There are two opposing forces responsible for this stability. First is the governing philosophy enshrined in the preamble of Indonesia's constitution—Pancasila. Pancasila is composed of five principles including belief in one supreme (non-sectarian) god. Islamist aspirations and grievances have long revolved around amending this reference with seven Indonesian words: "with the obligation of followers of Islam to adhere to Islamic Law." Having initially secured its inclusion in the constitution prior to its promulgation in 1945, the seven words, known as the Jakarta Charter, were ultimately deleted in the final draft due to concern for Indonesia's territorial integrity. (Although Indonesia is 88 percent Muslim, non-Muslim populations comprise the majority or large minorities in certain regions, especially in the eastern part of the country, and some in the west.)

Islamists have consistently failed in their efforts to revive the Jakarta Charter. In 1959, for example, they failed to secure sufficient votes to revive it during debate over a new constitution. They attempted to make the change on two more occasions since 1998. Today, Indonesia's two main civil society groups—Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiya—which claim a combined 60 million members, support Pancasila as the basis of the state; at least eight of the 10 parties that are representative of incoming members of the House of Representatives and constitute the vast majority of the body's membership, support a Pancasila-based state as well.

Instructing the population in Pancasila ideology and forcing all political parties, originally by government order in 1984, to adopt it, has required politicians with Islamist goals to accommodate the non-sectarian nature of the state.[35] Those compromises have divided Islamist interests and evolved over time. They remain evident in political platforms, in some cases becoming central to party identity. Prime examples of such parties are the modernist PAN and the traditionalist PKB—both Islam-based Pancasila parties. That voters have the option of choosing these major non-Islamist Islam-based parties contributes to stability. Those opposed to Pancasila on politico-religious grounds and supportive of government-enforced sharia have been unable to coalesce around a single party. During the Suharto era, uncompromising Islamists were arrested, or went underground, into mosques and onto college campuses. Since 1998, if not involved in the stagnant group of Islamist parties like PKS, the Islamists have been shunted off into extremist circles that reject the political system altogether.

Although Islamist parties in Indonesia have reached a limit in their formal political influence, as reflected in their performance in successive elections, the free exercise of religion in Indonesia has decreased.

Second, since the late 1980s, mainstream political forces, even under Suharto's authoritarian rule, have accommodated narrow Islamist aspirations, from giving more authority to Islamic courts[36] to banning Ahmadiyya at the national level and complicating church construction at the local level. Otherwise non-sectarian parties, such as former President Yudhoyono's Democrat Party, and its major coalition partner and former ruling party, Golkar, have been among those forces giving greater positive attention to Islamic politics. Further contributing to the problem, truly extremist groups outside of the electoral system, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir, are permitted to operate openly. The activity of these groups, particularly the violence-prone FPI and the radicalization of the semi-official government fatwah body,

the Indonesian Ulema Council, have contributed to greater Islamization of the political environment. Most politicians, including President Yudhoyono, have declined to confront or contradict these trends.

These factors have contributed to a steady deterioration in religious freedom. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today classifies Indonesia as a "Tier 2" country, meaning that "the violations engaged in or tolerated by the government are particularly severe and that at least one, but not all three, of the elements of the International Religious Freedom Act's 'systematic, ongoing, egregious' standards is met." (Tier 3 is reserved for the worst violators. Indonesia is on the threshold.) USCIRF's 2013 annual report summarizes the situation as follows:

> [R]eligious minorities continue to experience intimidation, discrimination, and violence. The Indonesian government, including the local police, provincial officials and the courts, often tolerates activities of extremist groups, fails to enforce national laws protecting religious minorities, and issues lenient sentences to individuals arrested for engaging in violence. In addition, national laws and provincial decrees have led to serious abuses of the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, including destruction or forced closure of religious venues and imprisonment of individuals accused of blasphemy or "deviant" religious teachings.[37]

Domestic Indonesian watchdog groups, such as the Wahid Institute and Setara Institute, have documented the same trend regarding religious liberty.[38] In sum, although Islamist parties in Indonesia have reached a limit in their formal political influence, as reflected in their performance in successive elections, the free exercise of religion in Indonesia has decreased.

The good news lies in Indonesia's largely successful war on violent Islamist extremists and ultimately successful handling of inter-communal violence bordering on civil war in eastern parts of the country between 1999 and 2003. The bad news is that peaceful Islamists, both inside and outside the political system, continue to hold their own in pursuit of similar goals. Although they exercise a limited degree of formal power (the PKS and PPP held seats in the Yudhoyono government), they contin-

ue to affect societal trends. Arresting these trends requires political leadership free of obligations to Islamist forces and committed to calling Indonesians to their tradition of tolerance and protection of religious liberty enshrined in their constitution.

U.S. Policy Recommendations

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy to meet the challenges posed by changing political dynamics and rising Islamism in countries throughout the Muslim world. There are some lessons, however, to glean from observing the unfolding situations in countries such as those studied in this report.

> U.S. officials need to recognize that Islamist parties can use elections to gain power and then roll back democratic systems and practices once they are in control, which is what transpired in Egypt under the Morsi regime.

The U.S. has stayed largely on the sidelines as political change has swept through the Middle East and North Africa over the past three and a half years. With the increasing influence of Islamist parties, the U.S. cannot afford to be a bystander and risk countries backsliding on their commitment to democracy.

The Obama Administration initially distanced itself from the Bush Administration's policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East. This raised concern that the Administration was reversing the decades-old bipartisan policy of promoting and defending democracy as a core component of U.S. foreign policy. President Obama has more recently affirmed that the U.S. will continue to stand up for democracy throughout the world. Still, the Administration needs to redouble its commitment to championing the concepts of individual liberty and freedom. This is especially important in countries where Islamist parties pose a threat to democratic principles of equality, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and commitment to non-violence.

U.S. officials must accept that Islamism represents a powerful political ideology that is unlikely to burn out or fade away any time soon. While U.S. policymakers need to take the rise of Islamism seriously

and develop policies to address the worldwide phenomenon, they also should recognize that Islamism is not monolithic. Washington needs to develop policies toward Islamist parties within their own social, political, and cultural contexts.

Based on polling in countries where large majorities of Muslims favor governing systems that include both democratic and Islamic values and practices, it is likely that most Muslim-majority countries will not place the same emphasis on secularism and separation of religion and state as Western countries did during their transitions to democracy. Most Muslim-majority countries currently have legal systems that look both to sharia and secular civil regulations as sources of law.[39] As Dr. John Owen, professor of politics at the University of Virginia, points out in his forthcoming book, *Confronting Political Islam*, liberal democratic development in the West was influenced by both secular and religious concepts, including Catholic conceptions of natural rights and Calvinist ideas of covenant. That said, there remains a fundamental tension between the Islamist belief that divine law trumps human rights and the foundational basis of democracy, which is rule by the people.[40] It is as yet unclear how this tension might be resolved.

U.S. policies should be tailored to the circumstances of each individual country, and the U.S. should apply specific tools where they are most likely to have an effect and can best serve U.S. interests. The U.S. should not promote democracy in a vacuum or without regard for the broader strategic context. It can, however, implement a freedom agenda in countries of critical strategic interest to the U.S. and where Islamism is on the rise. Moving forward, the U.S. should:

- **Support civil society groups and assist them in organizing and networking to strengthen their political voices.** The partial success of Tunisia's transition to democratic rule demonstrates the important role of a robust and active civil society. The U.S. should focus more attention on assistance programs that foster civil society dialogue among local religious, civic, and political leaders about the compatibility of local customs and religious practices with concepts of democracy and religious freedom. Engaging with civil society and local religious leaders on such issues as human rights, political and economic reform, and the role of religion in society will help

to raise awareness about the benefits that democratic systems and practices can provide to all societies. These debates must necessarily include women, heterodox Muslims, religious minorities, and non-believers.

The U.S. State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is the main tool of the U.S. government to support civil society organizations in the region. The Administration allocated nearly $300 million to support democracy and governance programs in the Middle East and North Africa in fiscal year 2014. There has been criticism, however, that the MEPI office—established over a decade ago—has become overly cautious and excessively bureaucratic and has only a limited voice in policy debates.[41] This is unfortunate, given that MEPI's mission has become even more critical in light of recent political changes in the region.

- **Encourage a comprehensive and consensus-based constitutional-development process as part of the transition to democratic rule.** Tunisia's emphasis on developing consensus and taking time to fully debate fundamental governance issues while creating its new constitution was integral to the success of the process. As in Indonesia, constitutional protections, even when imperfectly adhered to, can contribute to democratic stability. Writing a constitution is not merely a formality or technical process but a way to bridge ideological differences among various political parties. While the U.S. does not have a role to play in defining those debates, it can facilitate the process for resolving them. Focusing on the development of a solid constitution endorsing liberal values will strengthen the democratic foundations of the country and guard against the possibility of the process being sabotaged by illiberal forces.

- **Make clear that only parties firmly positioned against violence should be allowed to participate in elections.** The Obama Administration has called for a transparent and inclusive political transition process, but Washington must go further and insist that political parties condemn violence of all forms. Former Egyptian President Morsi's call on the U.S. to release the mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center attack was

outrageous, demonstrating his disregard for the rule of law and a lenient position toward terrorism. A sympathetic attitude toward terrorism of any kind endangers the security not only of Western nations but also that of the home countries to which the international terrorists belong. A case in point is Pakistan, where Islamist parties that have supported militancy in order to undermine Afghanistan and India are now targets of the same groups they once patronized. If Islamist leaders want to participate in electoral politics, they must firmly distance themselves from the violent agenda of terrorists of all stripes. A firm rejection of violence among Islamist parties will help isolate al-Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates.

- **Keep pressure on militaries to stay out of civilian politics.** The militaries in Egypt, Bangladesh, and Pakistan continue to play, to varying degrees, a role in the politics and governance of their countries. While these militaries have on some occasions helped to preserve stability by intervening in the political process on a temporary basis, their role should generally be limited and temporary. In Egypt, Washington must press the military to lay the groundwork for a return to civilian rule as soon as possible. The army needs to put Egypt's house in order as quickly as feasible and then get out of the way. It will inevitably lose more popular support the longer it rules, as it did between Mubarak's fall in February 2011 and Morsi's purge of top army leaders in August 2012.

- **Prioritize economic reforms.** The U.S. should encourage free-market economic reforms and work with international economic institutions to incentivize the transitioning states to cut subsidies, reduce barriers to private and foreign investment, and look to the private sector as an engine of growth. Like many countries in the region, Egypt's deep economic problems stem from decades of socialism, corruption, and a bloated and dysfunctional state bureaucracy that has hindered economic growth. Economic woes have created a huge reservoir of unemployed youth who are vulnerable to the siren call of extremist ideologies. The Tunisian–American Enterprise Fund—a U.S. economic initiative supporting Tunisia's transition, with a particular focus on developing small and medium-size

enterprises in the country—is a good example of how the U.S. could encourage economic freedom and spark entrepreneurship in other important transitioning countries.

- **Prioritize improved rights and economic opportunities for women.** According to recent studies, there has been progress in female education, declines in fertility rates, and improvements in life expectancy in the Middle East, but indicators such as women's economic participation and political empowerment continue to lag. The entry of women into the labor force is a key step in economic and social development, as seen in the case of Bangladesh. Women's rights movements in Morocco and Tunisia also have been credited with the high rates of female labor participation in these countries. The U.S. government can also play an important role in assisting women from different Muslim countries to network with each other and share strategies for addressing common challenges. This could be done through conferences held in the region or through virtual interactions, including video conferencing, facilitated by the U.S. government. The U.S. should collaborate with local organizations to ensure that women have access to education, including Islamic studies taught by non-Islamists; they should also gain an understanding of the basis of the legal and judicial systems in their countries so they can join public discussions about religion, law, and human rights.

- **Discourage governments from shutting down non-violent, law-abiding Islamist parties.** While there should be demands that the Islamist parties adhere to democratic principles and reject the use of violence, Washington should discourage countries from shutting Islamists out of the political process altogether. Individuals should go to jail if they commit violence or break the law, and political parties should be banned if they sanction violence. However, if the Islamists are obeying the law and shun violence, they should be allowed to participate in the political process. The harder the Egyptian military cracks down on the Muslim Brotherhood, the greater the chances might be that the Brotherhood will go underground and engage in violence. There are similar concerns about the Bangladeshi Jamaat-e-Isla-

mi party, which has been targeted by the Sheikh Hasina government through death sentences handed down by a War Crimes Tribunal.

- **Speak with consistency—both privately and publicly—on the importance of democratic principles in countering extremist movements and ideology.** Promoting democracy and liberty around the world has long been a core component of U.S. foreign policy. The Obama Administration must reaffirm the U.S. commitment to supporting democratic ideals and institutions, especially in Muslim-majority countries, because the principles of liberal democratic governance are a powerful antidote to Islamists' message of intolerance, hatred, and repression. Research shows that U.S. rhetorical support for democracy is as important as democracy programming in bringing positive change regarding a country's democratic development.[42]

- **Support the rights of religious minorities at the highest levels of the U.S. government in word and deed.** The mistreatment of religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries is very well documented, both by the U.S. government and private organizations.[43] Violation of minority rights is a harbinger of even more dangerous extremism and a rallying point for non-democratic forces.

- **Avoid assuming that elections alone ensure that a country is on the path to democracy.** In several cases, elections have been manipulated to sustain autocracies or semi-autocracies. When evaluating a country's level of democratization, the U.S. needs to monitor institutions that are responsible for overseeing the electoral process, the structure of the political parties themselves, the level of media freedom, the independence of the judiciary, and checks on executive power. U.S. officials need to recognize that Islamist parties can use elections to gain power and then roll back democratic systems and practices once they are in control, which is what transpired in Egypt under the Morsi regime. One crucial element of maintaining societal freedoms is to ensure that the judicial system remains independent and secular and that no religious entity has the final say on legal questions.

■ **Focus on collaborating with local government agencies to counter extremist ideologies.** While the U.S. provides counterterrorism assistance in the form of military equipment, intelligence sharing, and legal and judicial support, Washington should increase its focus on working with local authorities in engaging the battle of ideas. Al-Qaeda seeks to exploit political uncertainty and win new recruits in countries that are facing political transitions. Without training, resources, and intelligence to counter al-Qaeda messaging campaigns, the local governments will be in a weak position to get a handle on the terrorist threat to their countries. In Tunisia, for example, expanded support for initiatives, such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership—a U.S. interagency program that seeks to improve the counterterrorism capabilities of countries in the Sahel and Maghreb—will be critical in countering both al-Qaeda activities and ideology.

Conclusion

The Obama Administration needs to take a more pro-active approach in dealing with the challenges posed by rising Islamism, particularly in the context of significant political changes occurring in the Middle East and North Africa over the past three years. As Islamism increasingly shapes the political landscapes throughout Muslim communities, the U.S. must develop a coherent set of policy principles to address the new challenges and use aid and other diplomatic tools to promote democratic ideals and practices in these transitioning states. The outcomes of the current political machinations in the region will determine the future security and stability of the region, as well as global terrorism trends over the next decade and beyond.

Endnotes:

1. For purposes of this *Special Report*, the term "Islamist" should be understood as synonymous with "political Islam." More specifically, Islamism, or political Islam, refers to political movements or parties that support comprehensive government enforcement of Islamic law (sharia). Islamist ideology holds that Islam should guide not only social and personal affairs, but determine all day-to-day operations of the government and legal system. Islamists may have links to groups that advocate violence and terrorism; however, Islamist, as defined in this report, refers to groups or individuals that seek to operate through established systems of government or otherwise impact society through peaceful means. Islamism can be seen as distinct from Muslim identity politics, in which parties may emphasize Muslim religious beliefs, values, and tenets as an important aspect of their membership, but do not support the establishment of an Islamic state or across-the-board enforcement of sharia law.

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