Revolution for Democracy

It is difficult to monitor, analyze and read events that are still in progress, that are still interacting and that are constantly changing on the ground. Monitoring, analyzing, reading and understanding a phenomenon and all its surrounding factors is a process that needs the phenomenon to draw to a close. It requires acquiring an understanding of all the phenomenon’s dynamics and an ability to read the script of events that unfolded from the moment it started to its conclusion.

With that said, and from the outset, we must all first recognize that the youth movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Algeria are indeed revolutions for democracy in all senses of the term; and, that these revolutions have surprised everyone: old and new oppositions, ruling parties and governments on a local, regional and international scale. Indeed, these revolutions have even taken the revolutionaries by surprise, despite the fact that they were the ones who mobilized these movements by calling for peaceful protests and demanding political, economic and social reform. Moreover, as the numbers of protestors grew and the interaction amongst diverse segments of the Arab population increased, the ceiling of demands was raised to the point that two leaders have been ousted from power thus far, with the demands for these leaders to leave power being immediate – now, and not tomorrow.

In Tunisia, the popular protests went on for 23 days and ended with not only the fall from power of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, but his fleeing the country and seeking refuge in Jeddah. In Egypt, the capital Cairo and particularly the capital’s Liberation Square, as well as all of Egypt’s other major cities would witness similar protests that would last 18 days and also force President Hosni Mubarak from power. Mubarak’s subsequent disappearance to a place unknown represented the symbolic declaration that his regime had finally fallen.

Indeed, the fall of the Egyptian and Tunisian regimes was not just the outcome of the protest by a young Tunisian man, who burnt himself alive after his humiliating treatment at a municipal center; and, it was not just the outcome of young men and women communicating with each other via the internet and through Facebook and Twitter; it is rather the outcome of the fact that the peoples of these two countries – each within the context of their own circumstances and conditions – have been harboring a profound sense of injustice and oppression caused by their dictators over very long periods of rule, and have been suffering abject poverty resulting from poor governance and from the rampant corruption of these countries’ ruling classes.

Certainly, these popular revolutions are democratic. They are revolutions for democracy never before known to the Arab world – not in the revolutions that swept through the region in the 1950s and 1960s, and not in Arab political thought, which deferred the issue of democracy...
from its political “revolutionary” dictionary for one reason or another. These revolutions have once again posed the question of democracy, which has been absented from Arab political thought and from the different Arab ruling systems for more than six decades.

Indeed, over these past six decades, Arab political thought failed to develop and nurture a true democratic renaissance that is far from being superficially attached to revolutionary coups and to oppressive, totalitarian regimes. Thus, and according to this line of thinking, it is necessary to delve into the causes for the absence of democracy in Arab political thought during this period that witnessed the fall of monarchies and the establishment of states in the Arab region.

Arabs, today, are living a state of intellectual displacement and dispersal and cultural disequilibrium and dependency.

Provenance and Contemporaneity

Despite the profundity of the Arab and Islamic civilization when compared to other civilizations, Arabs, today, are living a state of intellectual displacement and dispersal and cultural disequilibrium and dependency. What is even more dangerous are the closed horizons that stand before the immediate development of an intellectual and cultural paradigm that is “Arab” and that will transport the Arab peoples and nations from a totalitarian state to a democratic one.

The Arab condition, today, is the problematic outcome of an interlock between the past and the present; an outcome summarized by the antilogy of “provenance and contemporaneity”. This antilogy results, amongst other factors, from the fact that the Arab past is better than its present; and, that this “Arab” past rose forth from religious foundations and from within conditions and determinants that are difficult to reproduce in today’s world. Indeed, one could say that the Arab countries are the only states in the world which have not had the opportunity to think freely, and in a manner that would allow them to set up suitable and appropriate political and economic regimes. Indeed, the Arab countries and their peoples are torn between multiple polarities: the past and the present – where the voices of the dead are louder than the voices of the living; the religious and the worldly; the sacred and the secular; the ideals of regional nationalism and pan-Arab nationalism. What is more, today, these polarities are reflected in tensions between tribalism, sectarianism and nationalism; and, so on.

If one were to open the book of (our intellectual) politics, one would find that this book is composed of three parts, with each part broken down into other smaller parts. One part of this “book” is Islamic, or attributed to Islam: the Caliphate, the Imamate, the principle of Divine Governance, and the tradition of the Salaf al-Saleh - all this, without any consensus, even amongst and within Islamic groups, movements and regimes, on what are the foundations, systems or provisions for Islamic rule and governance exactly. The second part is drawn from the West, and is a distorted mixture of liberal, capitalist, nationalist, feudal and democratic thought. Certainly, all the thought that has been known to the West has a distorted image in our “Arab” thinking. Finally, the other third of this “book” draws from the socialist paradigm: socialism, communism, revolution, anarchism, nihilism and atheism. Meanwhile, nothing in our prevailing Arab political thought expresses our “Arab” essence or our identity as Arab peoples. It is a political thought that only reflects the state of our inability to innovate and create something particular and unique to us. And, it has reached the point that we have become societies without identity.

To be sure, a crisis of legitimacy was born to the Arab states of the post-independence era. These states came from outside the natural
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Marxist thought. Instead, they were forced into existence as states that intrusively obtruded and injected colonialist considerations and interests.

Consequently, the entire Arab region became a breeding ground for ideas and theories that tried to frame societies and communities, which had no previous experience in self-governance or self-rule. Indeed, many of these Arab states experienced liberation movements against colonialism and against domestic elements loyal to the colonialists, with all that these movements entailed of a revolutionary intellect. Hence, the political thought of that period of liberation was characterized by a revolutionary paradigm that was the outcome of a mixture of nationalist, socialist and religious ideas and thinking that did not make the lines of distinction clear between any of these schools of thought.

For example, the rise of the Nasserite period was linked with the Muslim Brotherhood. But, ties to the Muslim Brotherhood were then cut for the benefit of nationalist thinking; and, later, nationalist thinking was transformed into or merged with socialist thinking. The regimes and movements that emerged in the likes of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Sudan would also be the outcome of a mix between nationalist and socialist ideologies, which employed religion in one manner or another. Even the monarchies of Morocco and Jordan witnessed the rise of political movements motivated by nationalism, socialism and Islam. However, these monarchical regimes were quick to take a hostile stand against all these ideologically motivated movements – movements that, in turn, set their targets on deposing these regimes, as they were perceived to be the antithesis of a liberated and free people.

Revolutions for National Liberation and Democracy Postponed

Liberation ideologies and notions of freedom and unity dominated modern Arab political movements, all of which were characterized by some form of revolutionary or nationalist ideals. The idea of revolution and the rise of the republic captured the minds of the masses. The goal of bringing down monarchies in the region gained a head start over all other objectives, as monarchical regimes were perceived to be the main obstacle before the path of liberation and progress. Arab revolutionary thinkers did not wager on the possibility that these monarchies could actually experience any success in the fields of progress, development and human rights – despite the fact that these regimes were already familiar with and experienced pronounced constitutional and parliamentary conditions.

The revolutionaries came to prioritize and focus all their attention on the revolution and on the republican system, basing their wager on the idea that the “Nahda” (renaissance) of Arab nationalism, progress and liberation could never be achieved except at the hands of revolutionary regimes and by revolutionary, socialist and nationalist leaders. The obsession with overthrowing regimes overcame and outweighed any focus on establishing democracy. This condition prevailed for many, long years while the Arab peoples waited for their hopes and aspirations to be realized by republican and revolutionary regimes. They never thought, for one day, or paid any heed to that which was taking place inside regimes that were neither republics nor revolutionary. And, they never paid heed to other paths
towards progress and liberation that were not paths of revolution or paths commanded by revolutionary or socialist thought.

The problem of, or the sin committed by, Arab political thought, which was so eager for progress and freedom, was that it placed freedom, progress and development in conflict and at odds with democracy – in other words, it was either revolution or democracy. In the Arab political thought that prevailed, the path of revolution contradicted the demands and requisites of democracy; at best, the democratic process was something to be deferred until regimes were overthrown, and political and social emancipation and economic development were achieved.

Indeed, after the “revolutions”, the majority of revolutionary Arab regimes worked to immediately disband existing political parties and obstructed any course leading to democracy, transforming their revolutionary leaders into new sovereigns with new ideologies. Meanwhile, the people were transformed into new subjects at the mercy of these new sovereigns, and revolution and democracy became two hostile poles instead of one paving the path before the other.

This revolutionary thinking, with its nationalist and socialist attributes, dismissed the possibility that the demands of the masses and the interests of the states could be achieved by any means other than “revolution” and military coups. In turn, this thinking further alleged that, that which could not be achieved by revolution would not be achieved through democracy and reform. What these thinkers also did not recognize was that if Arab monarchies were bad, they were not bad just because of the monarchical system, but rather because the monarch, his entourage and his policies were bad – just as the republican system was not, in and of itself, necessarily good. Indeed, the monarchical system did not represent an obstacle before progress and modernization in Great Britain, other European states and Japan.

Undoubtedly, some Arab thinkers and intellects were aware of the dangers of revolutions that possessed nothing but the name “revolution”. They warned of new totalitarian ideologies wrapped in the guise of glittering, attractive ideologies. However, this alternative thinking was unable to crystallize into a unified intellectual project, as these thinkers came from different schools of thought and walks of life. At the same time, the glamour of revolutionary and socialist slogans captivated the minds of the masses, inducing them into a state of obstinate apathy, ignoring any proposition that suspected the claims of those who conducted the coups and of those who called for revolutions.

On another front, the alternative regimes – or the Arab monarchies and traditional regimes – did not encourage any claims to their defense. These regimes were truly regressive. They aligned themselves with colonialism, drove the masses into ignorance and consistently violated the human rights of their peoples.

But, more importantly, democracy and the culture of democracy remained totally absented from, or, at best, maintained a very weak presence in Arab political thought and culture.

**A Continuous State of Revolution**

The previous discussion is not an attempt to profane the revolution and the revolutionaries. It is also not an attempt to place the entire burden of a whole period on revolutionary and nationalist Arab thought. Undoubtedly, there were positive steps taken by regimes that defined themselves as revolutionary and progressive. The problem remained that those who advocated revolution dealt with “revolution” as if it were an ongoing, continuous state. They did not differentiate between revolution as
an instrument and an approach to overthrow corrupt regimes, and the transformative stage that must follow a revolution, which requires a certain system of thought, practices and processes that are not necessarily the same as those required to prepare for a revolution or to carry out a revolution.

Revolution is a stage; a stage that is marked by a high level of violence, exhausting populations and grassroots efforts. It is an exceptional condition that achieves a specific purpose, which is fundamentally to overthrow and change the status quo with which the people are no longer satisfied. The objective of a revolution is to employ the state of popular discontent and hatred, and the poverty and oppression suffered by the people to effect change and put an end to the sources of hardship – or, in other words, overthrow those whom the revolutionary leaders consider to be the source of this suffering. Revolution works with the emotions of the masses more than it does their minds. But, the masses cannot continue in a state of continuous revolution.

Accordingly, revolution must pass through two stages: destruction and construction. The destruction period of a revolution is the easy part. And, all our previous Arab revolutions have succeeded in this aspect, because it is an easy process the scope of which is limited to a military coup, the assassination of a king or a leader – after which the revolution is declared a success. Indeed, what we in our Arab societies called revolutions were, in reality and in the majority of the time, coups or military conspiracies and not revolutions, because the people were not even aware that a revolution had taken place until after the coup and the old regime was brought down, and immediately replaced by another. Where the people are hungry, poor, humiliated and deprived, not much effort is required to convince them to throw themselves into the throes of revolution. They are already in a state of continuous revolution, despite themselves and even against themselves.

How delusional and pretentious are those who attribute to themselves the mark of intelligence, genius and sage leadership merely because they were able to lead their people in a “revolution”, such as the likes of the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, who continues to slaughter and murder his people because they dared to take to the streets in protest, demanding regime change and his fall from power. This “leader” refuses to step down because, according to his understanding, he is not formally the president of a state but the leader of an eternal revolution. Those who have claimed the virtues of leading “revolutions” have proven to be the most demagogical of leaders, and the most capable of manipulating the emotions of the poverty-stricken, oppressed masses.

But, what happens after the chaos and after the coup alleged to be a revolution? What happens after the destruction? Who will build the new?

The revolutions in the Arab world succeeded in their first stage, in their process of destruction. The cost of this process may have been no more than that of taking over the state television and radio station or a bullet in the head of the corrupt leader – the right-wing, reactionary agent of colonialism and the source of the nation’s doom… etc. Then, a fervent speech, or what the leader of the revolution likes to call the “first declaration”, is given to the masses in which the revolution is claimed a success. But, what happens then?

Many of the Arab revolutionary regimes and movements have only gone to the extent of finishing off the old regimes; and then, sit upon its ruins, chanting the slogans of the revolution – believing that these slogans will satiate the people’s hunger and relieve them of their poverty. They believe the problems of the

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people will be resolved by merely deposing the previous regimes, and replacing these regimes by the new revolutionary leaders. What of the economy, the debt, education and technology? Will society be developed and modernized by revolutionary slogans? Will poverty, ignorance and debt be eradicated by the blessings of the revolutionaries and their invocations? Will Israel and the United States be defeated by mass demonstrations mobilized in condemnation of Zionism and imperialism?

Destruction is a simple process. It can be carried out by an obscure officer in the army. However, it is the building process that is fundamental, because it requires different men and women, a different mentality and different methodologies.

The Question of Identity
During the period of previous revolutions, the question or problem of identity emerged from within the struggles that took place between pan-nationalist, universalist, nationalist and religious identities. Clearly, movements such as the Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir offered different visions for identity; however, their political presence was limited. The universalist identity was also unclear; and, in many cases, was marked by the illusions or dreams of those active in communist parties. Indeed, many Arab communists tried to find a solution to reconcile communism with religion; some even used religious verses in their speeches, which often began with the religious introduction of, “In the name of God…”

In all cases, the direct and indirect confrontation with colonialism and with the ruling regimes prevailed and overshadowed efforts that should have been made on the important question and matter of identity. More often than not, any thought given to the matter of identity, or any thinker who openly deliberated the question of national identity was determined as being an enemy of unity and emancipation and sometimes even as an agent of colonialism.

In another comparison, during the time when these slogans of Arab unity and pan-national identity were being chanted and raised, the revolutionary and pan-nationalist regimes were actually reinforcing local regionalisms – intentionally or unintentionally – by centralizing the nation-state, strengthening the one-party system, expanding the state’s security apparatus, tightening border controls and security, and preventing any freedom of thought; and, so on. What was even more dangerous was that these regimes and movements revived, reinforced and manipulated sectarian, ethnic and tribal identities – identities that existed before the nation-state and before nationalities were established – so that fears and preoccupations about national unity become more important and took precedence over pan-nationalist unity or identity.

Obstacles to Democracy in Arab Political Thought
Many are the causes for the floundering of Arab political thought in the matter of resolving the problems of the Arab nation, whether these problems were represented in questions of identity and affiliation, development issues or in facing challenges from abroad. However, of the most important of these causes is the absence of democracy in the agendas and discourse of both pan-nationalist and revolutionary movements and parties, as well as amongst regimes and the mass culture. The causes for the absence of democracy in Arab political thought can be traced back to the following:

First is the absence of an Arab model for democratic governance that can be referred to and used as a source of inspiration. This absence affects the present as it affected the past, despite attempts by some to create a
commonality between the notion of the Islamic shura\(^7\) and democracy. Moreover, the image of ideal governance inherited from the Arab Islamic heritage has been that of the “benign dictator” (literally, “the just tyrant or autocrat”) despite the fact that certain Arab countries experienced constitutional and parliamentary conditions prior to independence.

**Second** is the absence of enlightened democratic thinkers specifically in positions of influence in political decision-making processes, or in positions where they can influence decision-makers that are able to develop an evolved vision or project that can create linkages between the world of democratic ideas and the unique socio-cultural character and needs of Arab Islamic societies and communities. Even the contributions of Arab Renaissance (Nahda) thinkers, at the turn of the 20th century, such as Mohammad Abdo, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, Boulos Salameh, Taha Hussein and others like them, were not exploited or employed in a serious manner, nor were their ideas built upon or developed. These ideas were fertile and rich in a manner that could have, at that time, formed the nucleus of a culturally Arab democratic project; instead, they encountered opposition from a spectrum of political currents such as the nationalists, secularists, religious movements and the revolutionaries.

**Third** is, in more general terms, the absence of a democratic, intellectual elite that can act as a catalyst and lead the way towards democratic transformations in society. Some Arab intellectual elite orbit within the circles of authority and amongst the sultans of authority, while others orbit within the circles of those who have fallen out of favor with the authorities or who have distanced themselves from authority - whether or not these intellects come from a democratic school of thought, a militant revolutionary school, or a religiously Jihadist school (where in either of the latter two cases, change is advocated by other than democratic means anyway).

**Fourth** is the absence of a democratic culture. Democracy is not just a matter of institutions but it is also a culture. In the Arab world, democratic institutions were established before democratic thinking – unlike the Western experience where modern thinking paved the way for the renaissance and the enlightenment which led to the establishment of democratic systems. It is here that we find the contrast between the prevailing mass culture, which is either religiously fundamental or militarily revolutionary or autocratic and dictatorial, on the one hand, and a democratic culture, on the other.

**Fifth**, international polarities have politically and ideologically emerged in a manner that democracy has become perceived to be the property of Western imperialism.

**Sixth**, the linkages made with the precedent set and prevailing belief that democracy was – and still is – the top-down brainchild of a bourgeois elite coming from a rich minority and from the minority of intellectuals with a Western education. Thus, in light of the unpleasant relationship between the Arab popular masses and the Arab elite, the masses have been cautious and, from the beginning, have reacted guardedly to the notion of democracy and the advocates of democracy.

**Seventh** is the fact that everything has been linked to the Palestinian cause and the Zionist threat so that regimes, as well as political parties,
have been able to present the immediate and direct threat as not being poverty, human rights violations, illiteracy and the absence of democracy but rather Zionism and the Zionist threat. Accordingly, this pretext has required all efforts to be united and focused on “unity” and on the liberation of Palestine. Indeed, in the name of Palestine, rights and freedoms have been seized, prisons have proliferated, free men and women have been persecuted, the masses have been made more ignorant, and the poor have become poorer and the rich richer – with the outcome that neither Palestine has been liberated nor democracy achieved.

Eighth is the fact that the question of identity has been subjected to conflicting polarities, and especially so when it comes to pan-nationalist, Islamic, universalist and nationalist identities. Moreover, there have been no serious efforts made to reconcile these identities by way of identifying priorities so that a transition can be made from one circle of identity to another without creating friction and conflict.

Ninth is related to the fact that revolutionary and pan-nationalist Arab regimes actually produced that which was the exact opposite of its ideology and rhetoric. Where these regimes spoke of Arab unity and the Arab nation, the logic and realities of those who governed these regimes was not only to reinforce a grim regionalism (iqlimiya) but also tribalism and even sectarian lines. The concepts of nation and of nationalism were transformed into a barrier that limited any unionist or pan-nationalist orientations.

Tenth, in a reaction to the imagined threat posed by the revolutionary regimes, traditional regimes have withdrawn into themselves and produced an identity unique to them, which employs and exploits religion, tradition and historical legacies. Thus, the Arab regimes have become divided between regimes that portend religious legitimacy (such as Saudi Arabia), and those that herald a revolutionary legitimacy (for example, Syria). Meanwhile, in reality, they all lack these alleged legitimacies as long as their people are absented from the centers of decision-making and are not free to choose those who govern them.

Conclusion

Concluding on the above, for all the long years that have unfolded after independence, and until the end of the 20th century, the Arab political mind did not succeed in developing an ideology or a school of thought that can be rightly called “Arab political thought” which has specific, unique and defined attributes and characteristics. Thus, it did not succeed in bringing into line and harmonizing between that which it claimed and that which was taking place in reality and on the ground. Later, globalization and the ideology of globalization entered the scene to pose yet another serious threat to the challenge of democratization and development, which the Arabs have also failed to confront.

In the context of the current revolutions in which the Arab masses have insisted on their demands for democracy and freedom, numerous questions have emerged regarding the future of Arab political thought, and whether or not it will be able to successfully develop a democratic project which is far from the hegemony, tyranny and empty pretensions and claims that have accompanied these Arab regimes over previous decades. This is particularly the case because these revolutions have not come about by way of coups or by the military, but rather by oppressed, frightened Arab masses and populations that were able to break the barrier of silence and say: “We only want democracy!”

But, will this experience succeed? We stand before a transitional period where, if the revolting

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masses succeed in improving the systems of governance, the possibility then exists that we will witness a renaissance (nahda), a rebirth and renewal in Arab political thought founded on democratic pillars and peaceful, systemic transfers of power.

Translation from Arabic by Mona Abu Rayyan.

Endnotes

1 The word “provenance” is used here to represent the Arabic word and concept of “asalah”. Originally, the term emerged in relation to Islamic thought to describe the concept of preserving and maintaining the essence of the “original” Islamic da’wa of the patristic period of early Islam. In contrast, the word “contemporaneity” is used here to represent the Arabic word “mu’asarah”, which stands for the notion of bringing Islamic da’wa in line with the conditions of contemporary life. In more general terms, the antilogy of “asalah” and “mu’asarah” expresses the conflict between reconciling the past with the present, and the conflict between remaining true to the “origin” and adapting to the “contemporary”. [Editor’s note]

2 “Regional nationalism” or “individual nationalism” (qutriyeh) represents that line of political thinking which emerged as part of pan-Arab nationalism, but which bases its vision for Arab unity on the concept of “aqtar” or “minara”. According to Lisan Al-Arab, one of the most renowned references for the Arabic language, “aqtar” is a “side” or “area”. The advocates of this political line of thinking acknowledged that the regions of the Arab world differed in their characteristics and hence, propagated a form of governance that would divide the Arab world into different “aqtar” (plural of “aqtar”) while maintaining overall political Arab unity amongst these “aqtar”. More precisely, this stream of pan-Arab nationalism promoted ambitions for a Greater Syria, and was predominantly advocated by the Syrian and Iraqi Baathist regimes. In contrast, traditional pan-Arab nationalism (qawmiyeh) calls for one united Arab nation whose territory stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arab/Persian Gulf. [Editor’s note]

3 "Divine Governance and Sovereignty" is the principle called “al-Hakimiya” in Islam, or the rule of law by which God brought forth to men, i.e. Islamic Sharia or law. It is a principle used by certain fundamental Islamic political schools of thought to disavow contemporary regimes, constitutions and (civil) statutory laws and legislation as blasphemous. [Translator’s note]

4 Al-Salaf Al-Saleh: The Righteous (or Pious) Predecessors (or Tabi’in) and then the followers of the Tabi’in. These were praised by the Prophet Muhammad as follows, “The best of people is my generation, then those who come after them, then those who come after them” [Bukhari and al-Muslim]. According to Salafists today, the term Salaf can also apply “to the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama’ah, who came after the first three "blessed" generations, and who followed the way of the “Righteous Predecessors” in their belief and practices”. [Reference: http://www.qisas.org/articles/salafiytext.html] [Translator’s note]

5 Gamal Abdel Nasser was the second President of Egypt from 1956 until his death in 1970. Along with Muhammad Naguib, the first President, he led the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 which overthrew the monarchy of Egypt and Sudan, and heralded a new period of modernization and socialism in Egypt together with an advancement of pan-Arab nationalism, including a short-lived union with Syria. For more on the Nasserite Era see: A. Sadi, “‘Arab Socialism’ and the Nasserite National Movement”, from the International Socialist Review, Vol.24 No.2; Spring, 1963, pp.48-51

Transcribed & marked up by Einde O’Callaghan for ETOL.

6 Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) is a radical Islamic movement that seeks ‘implementation of pure Islamic doctrine’ and the creation of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia. The group’s aim is to resume the Islamic way of life and to convey the Islamic da’wa to the world. The ultimate goal of this secretive sectarian group is to unite the entire umma, or Islamic world community, into a single caliphate. The aim is to bring the Muslims back to living an Islamic way of life in ‘Dar al-Islam’ (the land where the rules of Islam are being implemented, as opposed to the non-Islamic world) and in an Islamic society such that all life’s affairs in society are administered according to the rules of the Sharia (Islamic law). [Reference: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hizb-ut-tahrir.htm] [Translator’s note]

7 The word shura provides the title of the 42nd chapter of the Qur’an, in which believers are exhorted to conduct their affairs “by mutual consultation” [Reference: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/542358/shura] [Translator’s note]. With a Shura Council (Arabic for “Consultative Council”) representing, in early Islamic history, the board of electors that was constituted by the second caliph (head of the Muslim community), Omar I (634–644), to elect his successor. Thereafter, in Muslim states, shura variously designated a council of state, or advisers to the sovereign, a parliament (in modern times), and—in certain Arab states—a court of law with jurisdiction over claims made by citizens and public officials against the government. [Translator’s note]