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Promoting Constructive Political Participation of New Faith-Based Political Parties in the Arab Region

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Based on the findings and recommendations of the Tunis session[1] on promoting constructive political participation of faith-based political parties and movements in the Arab region, a second session was held in Istanbul on 11-14 March 2013within the NAWAT (North Africa and West Asia in Transformation) program[2]. The Istanbul workshop was implemented by the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva.

The Tunis session demonstrated that there is a growing tendency within the Salafi groups in the Arab world, and not only in the "Arab Spring" countries, towards political participation. However, the Salafi groups who participated in the session acknowledged that they lack the necessary political experience and organizational skills that would be useful to meet the challenges of political life and support their transition from predication to politics. They also acknowledged the diversity within the Salafi movement, which cannot be seen as a single doctrine but rather as a spectrum of thoughts with various sub-schools, including notably the radical violent groups. Participants agreed on the issue that those groups constitute a danger for the political transition in the Arab region. Indeed, radicals' acts might provide ammunition and justification for calls of securitization of public affairs, or even push towards a return to dictatorship. Therefore promoting political participation of Salafi groups who are willing to get into politics is crucial for the success of the democratic transition in the region, knowing that the Salafi groups are keen to play an active role in peace promotion.

It was against this backdrop that the Istanbul workshop was expanded to 12 parties and movements from six different countries, covering the region from Rabat (Morocco) to Sana' (Yemen). It also included independent experts and academics from the Arab region as well as Evangelic and Protestant politicians from the U.S and U.K. Conducted under the Chatham House rules, the workshop aimed at deepening the process of inter-Salafi exchange of experiences[3]. Given the severe polarization between political parties with a religious reference and seculars that resulted from the elections and constitution drafting processes in the Arab region, the workshop aimed at addressing the coalition building's principle as a mechanism to defuse, or at least lessen polarization. This required raising the Salafi groups' awareness towards the challenges of political

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[1] See executive summary here http://cordoue.ch/nawat/constructive-political-participation/item/236-september-2012-meeting

[2] NAWAT focuses on reinforcing the capacity and mechanisms for transforming violent, or potentially violent, political conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East and/or involving Muslims in the West. Its objectives are to develop a collectively shared understanding of what is at stake, who are relevant actors and how to address identified problems, to contribute to enhancing the capacity of relevant conflict transformation actors, to coordinate a network acting as a "mediation space" and to contribute to conflict transformation initiatives that address specific conflicts and enhance citizenship.

[3] This objective became even more relevant after the Tunis workshop given the political context, which saw more and more Salafi parties participate in the elections.

life, as far as political party identity construction, party structures organization, and dealing with the "more distant other"[4].

Discussions at the workshop were thematically structured around six axes: Organizational skills, Salafi coalition building experiences, challenges of political arena and how to address them, and polarization and coalition building. Discussions were enriched by an open dialogue with the non-Salafi participants who shared analyses and ideas, notably on how non-Salafi groups in the region see Salafi political participation. Western participants also shared lessons learned from their parties' political participation and experience of transition, from predication to politics. Following the discussions between Salafi and external participants, small groups country-based brainstorming activities in which participants were asked to ponder the issue of coalition building to defuse polarization were conducted. A similar activity was conducted on the issue of possible peace promotion initiatives in the region.

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[4] The "More distant Other" designates in this report three main categories of political actors and stakeholders which do not belong to the Salafi ideology camp. These are the non-Salafi segments of the population whose votes Salafi political parties seek to capture. Second, non-Salafi political parties (such as the seculars, socialists, liberals and even Islamists i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood), which are political competitors to Salafi groups. Third, the violent groups with Salafi reference that reject political participation.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the success of the first session of the Tunis meeting held on 10-13 September 2012, which brought along 19 Salafi participants representing nine North African (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Libya) "participative"[5] parties and movements, a second expanded session was implemented in Istanbul on 11-14 March, 2013.

Both workshops were implemented within the scope of NAWAT (North Africa and West Asia in Transformation) program of the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, in partnership with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The program focuses on reinforcing the capacity and mechanisms for transforming violent, or potentially violent, political conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East and/or involving Muslims in the West. Its objectives are to develop a collectively shared understanding of what is at stake, who are the relevant actors and how to address identified problems, to contribute to enhancing the capacity of relevant conflict transformation actors, to coordinate a network acting as a "mediation space" and to contribute to conflict transformation initiatives that address specific conflicts and enhance citizenship.

While the Tunis session focused on the fundamental issues of evolving from predication to politics, and the challenges

faced during such processes[6] , the Istanbul session aimed at promoting constructive political participation of political parties with a religious dimension, expanding the project geographically to encompass Mauritania and Yemen. Building on, and consolidating the outcomes of the first session in Tunis, the Istanbul session focused on three main questions. First, the challenges faced by the Salafi parties when entering the political arena. Second, how to develop political strategies and build coalitions, in order to mitigate polarization? Finally, the workshop addressed the Salafi parties' potential role to become actors in peace promotion. The whole process's approach aimed at successfully including "participative" Salafi formations into the political game: by becoming an integral part of the democratic process, political transition in the region will be strengthened while extremist actors will be delegitimized.

The six months following the Tunis meeting were characterized by extreme polarization in the Arab Spring countries, as noticed during the confrontations in November 2012 in Egypt or the assassination of the Tunisian leftist leader Choukri Belaid, in January 2013. Besides, the French-led military intervention in Mali has raised another source of tension in the region. According to the political and social context, the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva considered it relevant and timely to associate accompany the constructive integration of Salafi actors into the new political spheres, and to support their transformation from predication to governance.

This report aims to reflect the exchange of experiences and lessons learned among the

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[5] "Participative" is used in this report to describe Salafi groups and movements that were until the Arab uprisings involved in predication and charity work but unlike the Muslim Brotherhood School, they boycotted political participation on different religious and practical grounds. The "participative" groups reject violence and believe in political participation.

[6] As for example « dealing with the other is considered".

new Salafi political parties and movements in the Arab region. It is structured around three main sections. The first section focuses on the intra-Salafi exchange, reviewing the recent developments since the Tunis session, in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Morocco, and Mauritania. It also discusses Salafi coalition building experiences and the challenges faced when dealing with "the close other", or the "more distant other"[7]. The second one examines the perception of Salafi groups' political participation by non-Salafi actors in the region, and the Western perception of such political participation. Finally, the last one presents the results of small group brainstorming activities on the issues of polarization & coalition building, and potential collaborative peace promotion initiatives.

2. OVERVIEW OF SALAFI POLITICAL PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS EXPERIENCES

The workshop was the first opportunity for leadership of Salafi Parties and groups (representing several parties across the region from Morocco to Yemen), to meet after the Tunis session. It also took place in a context of extreme polarization, notably in Tunisia and Egypt (see below). The Istanbul workshop started with a review of the developments in each country represented at the meeting, in order for the participants to hear firsthand from one another, exchange experiences and share lessons learned as far as each groups' position and behavior vis-à-vis the developments in the region. A summary of these discussions is presented below:

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[7] See footnote 4 above.

TUNISIA

A Tunisian participant reported on the extreme polarization between Islamists and Seculars that dominates Tunisian politics. This situation has been exacerbated following the assassination of the leftist political leader Choukri Belaid, in February 2013, and the arrest of Salafi activists and youth following the American Embassy incidents. As the Tunisian government did not charge or sue those Salafi detainees, some of the Salafi detainees declared hunger strike. As a result, two detainees died driving thereby a wedge within the Islamist camp itself. While some Salafi participants see the West's meddling hand in the Tunisian political scene, others believe that there has been a systematic provocation of the Salafi current by the seculars, as it has been perceived as well during the case of the paintings exhibition, in late 2012. Other forms of perceived provocation such as barring travel to Tunisia Salafi sheikhs invited to participate in cultural activities organized by Salafi groups. This led to the widespread conclusion within the Salafi camp that "the Ennahda-led government is trying to reach consensus with the Seculars by making Salafis its enemy". Unlike Egypt, polarization within the Islamist parties' camp is "a difficult situation" noticed a Tunisian participant. Despite calls from Salafi sheikhs on their followers to observe self-restraint and not responding to provocation, some overzealous Salafi youth could not been controlled.

EGYPT

The last months in Egypt have been characterized by "a state of perplexity of the political leadership", highlighted an Egyptian participant. In the absence of game rules between the government and the opposition

the situation became a state of "political stubbornness". This political behavior exacerbated the economic difficulties of the country, while the government could not provide any solutions "outside the box". Besides, the opposition does not have any other alternative unless being against Islamists or President Morsi. In such context, one of the established Salafi parties believes they have to play a "strategic and influential role", rather than being only a complementary element within the Islamist camp. According to them, it explains why they intervened, offering a crisis exit strategy when the standoff between the government and the opposition reached a head. This mediation initiative was, however, criticized by some of the parties under the Islamist umbrella, the participant concluded. "We are very comfortable with the fact that our political proposals could attract us criticism".

Another Salafi group believes that the political leadership in Egypt faces two challenges: in addition to the economic challenge, it faces the challenges of entering into politics after decades of prediction and charity work. They either have to bring up new innovative ideas or follow the Muslim Brotherhood model. The key lesson learnt from political experience indicates the importance of consensus in periods of political transition regardless of electoral majority in the context of the Egyptian bureaucracy, and the role of the Deep State[8].

"The Brotherhood government seems to have forgotten that the British colonizer had to leave Egypt after a strike by the bureaucracy", stressed one Egyptian participant[9].

This group discussion identified two risks that could result from Islamist's integration into the political arena: first, the call on the army to intervene and second, the potential loss of popular base and reservoir for the Islamists that may follow their rapid and massive withdrawal from predication, charitable fieldwork and militancy in universities.

A third group discussion stressed the role of the Deep State in fueling unrest and the absence of a "clear vision" by the government as what they perceived being the main reasons of the stalled political transition process in Egypt. Nevertheless, they identified Egypt's problem as "a security one rather than an economic one". Within the leadership of this group, the decision was taken to "support the presidency in order to ensure the continuity of legitimacy", while leaving the door open to dialogue with the opposition.

Respecting the people's will and popular legitimacy was reiterated by a fourth Salafi group who also underscored democratic values and freedom. This group identified the

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[8] Contrary to the wide assumption in the Arab world, the term Deep State was coined by the Turkish political elite and is not a product of the Egyptian affairs in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Deep State designates a loose network of a diverse group of influential military and intelligence officers, bureaucratic officials, intellectuals, and businessmen who transcend governments and presidential terms; and who act in concert to preserve what they believe the state's national interest principles. The concept dates back to the 1970s but the latest

manifestation of the term in Turkish affairs is the Ergenekon Case, Serdar Kaya, `The Rise and Fall of the Turkish "Deep State": The Ergenekon Case`, *Insight Turkey*, Vo. 11 7No.4/2009, pp.99-113. In the Arab region, after the 2011 uprisings it came represent influential remnants of the old regimes that lost power and privileges and are accused of creating troubles and hurdles for the transition process.

[9] As emphasized by a participant, "Egypt is founded on the bureaucratic and civil servants apparatus: It is neither sectarian nor tribal"

major risk as the one of returning to dictatorship - should all actors and stakeholders not appreciate lessons of the past. It was therefore stressed that Salafi parties should reach out and listen to other political actors. These principles have guided this Salafi party's political behavior in playing a "balanced" role; putting national interest and public good before partisan gain in order to build trust, explained one Egyptian participant from the group: "Salafi and Islamist parties should work in concert in order to offer a "common vision". Finally, the group warned of the "myth of consensus" and emphasized the necessity to direct efforts towards "co-existence".

YEMEN

All Yemeni participants stressed that the revolution that ousted Ali Abdallah Salah was "incomplete". According to them, the Gulf Initiative has basically driven Yemen "under international tutelage" and the National Dialogue faces internal and external challenges[10]. At the internal level, the non-participation of the southern actor, the symbolic participation of the old regime and of the Howthi group are all factors that undermine the Dialogue, particularly for those actors who work against it on the ground. At the external level, foreign intervention in the name of the "war on terror" and Iran's smuggling of arms inside Yemen jeopardize the success of the National Dialogue's efforts. As a response to such challenge, one participant explained that they support the Dialogue and have taken the initiative to set up mediation committees among all Yemeni Salafi movements, in order to unite them.

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[10] Link to the official website of the National Dialogue Conference: http://www.ndc.ye

LIBYA

The three main challenges faced by the transition in Libya were identified as follows: security, lack of trust between the government and the armed groups / revolutionaries, and the implementation of the political isolation law intended to ban all senior civilian and military cadre of the old regime from political participation in the next ten years. While security has in part to do with the wide-spread and uncontrolled circulation of weapons, mistrust between the armed groups and the government is causing further difficulties in building the state's institutions, especially a national army. Although there is general consensus on political vetting and barring the old regime's cadres from serving in the new state's institutions, there is a profound disagreement regarding the implementation's technicalities of the law's stipulations. The Libyan situation presents a two-fold dilemma for its leadership and opposition: Political isolation is necessary but it may lead to barring three quarters of Libyans from public life, and results in the loss of experienced civil servants and cadres. As a consequence, it might lead to further polarization and unrest. Simultaneously, the persistent existence of armed groups outside the control of the state is a grave impediment to the state sovereignty while dismantling them on the other hand may create a dangerous security issue as there is no national army capable of protecting the country.

MOROCCO

A Moroccan scholar stressed the "acceptable" performance of the Development and Justice Party, pointing out some "gains" such as freedom and reforms that have recently been achieved. Nevertheless, he emphasized existing "discriminatory practices" against

Salafis, which can go as far as their "exclusion". One example of such practices is the authorities' decision to ban a public seminar on the history of Salafism in Morocco. Morocco is witnessing "precarious political stability", and scenarios for the post-PJD government's fall are already underway, said another participant. The Palace and Deep State's propping up of old established political parties which have lost popular support and the delay of local elections are manifestations of such efforts. On the other hand, the Salafi support the PJD government, which is in turn helping the Salafi movement to break free from the pressure exerted on it. There is a current attempt by a Salafi group to set up a political party while opening public debate on the issue of the Salafi detainees, and promoting moderate Salafi thoughts among Salafi youth.

MAURITANIA

Mauritanian politics is plagued by the syndrome of successive coups since its independence in 1960. With the advent of the "Arab Spring" uprisings, the opposition tried to put its weight behind the Brotherhood Tawasul Party in an attempt to trigger a Mauritanian "Arab Spring". This was manifest when one of the biggest businessmen joined the opposition. The war in Mali has now shifted focus and presents a major challenge to both, the state and the Salafi movement, in the sense that the war might attract Salafi youth to violence. Around seven years ago, when the regime faced a similar situation on its border with Algeria, it tried to mitigate the situation by freeing some of the leaders of the Salafi movement while encouraging them to set up a political party. Within the context of the intervention in Mali, the same practice was underway. However, the regime's offer was rejected because of the Salafi movement's non-readiness, among other

reasons. Currently, there is an important debate within the Salafi movement in Mauritania on the desirability of following the Al Nour Party's experience in setting up a political party. In a near future, it is expected that a Salafi party will be founded in Mauritanian by those who are convinced of the necessity of political participation.

3. CHALLENGES FACED WHEN ENTERING POLITICAL LIFE

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

While the above section reflects on the developments across the region and on the Salafi groups' difficulties to keep up with the speed and the scale of challenges faced when entering politics for the first time, the following section describes new challenges. In addition to the difficulties for each party to devise and portray a specific political identity, the section will examine the challenge of acquiring organizational skills and implementing them within the party structures.

As an introduction, it is important to underline the diversity within the Salafi movement itself, as reflected by the exchange among participants. While there is a wide consensus on the absence of clear determination in regard to political Islamic thought and jurisprudence from the Salafi political parties, which emerged after the Arab Spring, some groups insisted on their long time existence in politics[11]. One Moroccan participant argued that even Omar Abd Errahman and Osama Bin Laden believed in political participation but abandoned the idea and embraced Jihadism

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[11] Mostly underground because of the old regimes' policy towards these movements.

because they soon concluded that political action was not worthwhile. However, there is one question on which all participants agreed: Salafi groups need urgent and comprehensive research on establishing the theoretical and conceptual Islamic foundation of their political participation. Participants argued that such evolution would become the cornerstone in their relation with other Salafi groups which reject political participation on the basis of their religious scholars' interpretation of certain Quranic verses.

The lack of a specific political identity or the lack of ability to project one publicly is often the charges or challenges faced by the Salafi groups when entering politics. "How to make one's political identity clear? and how to articulate the party's political identity, while maintaining ties with other movements with whom the party disagrees?" were two questions at the centre of the discussions during the workshop. Participants' inputs reflected their various political experiences in the dynamics of the post-uprising in the different countries, but the common underlying question of the discussions was "where to draw the line between Islam as a religion and politics as a set of shared and agreed rules to achieve a political goal?. There was a consensus among participants on the confusion of roles between the one of a preacher and the one of a politician. According to participants, such confusion affects the party's behavior at both, the internal and external levels. Internally it leads to a confusion of roles or even to a lack of organizational structure within the party, as far as decision making is concerned and its impact on the internal democratic management of the party affairs. Externally, it blurs the party's political identity and its relationship to other movements, because the party's message tends not to be the outcome of a concerted political debate within the

party's structure, but rather of the group's top leadership which often mixes religious preaching with political communication.

Participants also examined the process of articulating a political identity while keeping a relationship with other movements with whom the party disagrees. According to an Egyptian participant the following elements are required: 1- commitment to accept the rules of the political game, even those not in line with the party's convictions, 2- rejection of violence when dealing with the other, 3- respect of elections results, 4- rejection of the monopoly of power, and finally 5- clarification of position towards the others. For one participant, "political acts send a stronger message than words". Therefore, their party decided to offer its two seats in the constitution constituency committee to non-Islamist civil groups; they did so in order to promote youth participation and build trust. The same Egyptian party has taken the initiative to mediate between political parties and the presidency as well as to work on promoting citizenship by mediating between Muslims and Copts. Two Libyan participating groups explained that they established inter-party liaison committees in order to reach consensus on key transitional issues.

Participants have identified another risk: "falling into the trap of an automatic ideological solidarity with political groups from the same ideological camp". The polarization in Egypt over the seculars call for ultra-constitution articles that led all Islamist parties to side with the Muslim Brotherhood government is an example of such automatic ideological solidarity. Peer solidarity might lead to sending the wrong message in the sense that coalitions based only on ideological / religious solidarity might blur the party's specific political identity. "The challenge is therefore to strike

a balance between principles and pragmatism", added a participant.

While internally, Salafi parties should abandon the logic of peer group / sect and embrace that of the nation-state and institutions, they still have to answer to some challenges posed by their entry in politics. Other participants' identified additional challenges at a more fundamental level: deficiency on thought on different foundational issues. For example, Salafi groups' relation to democracy should be examined further. Can they accept the democratic process and its tools while rejecting its fundamental rules? What is the definition of state for Salafis: accepting the society's diversity or imposing their model? How can Islamists develop an economic model based on values but independent from globalization? One participant concluded by saying that there is a huge deficiency as far as Islamic thought on political participation is concerned.

At the structural level, participating Salafi parties presented various guidelines and criteria implemented internally. The Egyptian contribution was the most specific. It comprised the following elements: adoption of the principle of Shura in decision-making, justice within the party, adoption of competence as the criterion for internal party elections or for general elections, and accountability. Promotion of youth to leadership positions within the party while not relying extensively on religious preachers and sheikhs; as candidates for elections were two other measures mentioned by a participant. The necessity to implement the rule of law after decades of absence of institutions was stressed by a Libyan participant who insisted on establishing institutional traditions within the party as their top priority.

4. SALAFI COALITION BUILDING EXPERIENCES

Due to the variety of degrees in political participation among Salafi political parties, coalition building dynamics are diverse in the region. While some parties were elected to parliaments and hold now large chunks of seats, other parties are part of the minority group or have joined coalitions with other non-Salafi faith-based political parties[12]. However, in general, even Salafi movements which are present on the ground but which do not have yet set up political parties, interact with the coalition building process by lending their support to existing Salafi parties or non-Salafi Islamist parties.

During the workshop, the cross-regional exchange of experiences and the country-level review of inter-party coalition projects and lessons learnt enriched the discussions about coalition building processes. On a general basis, discussions on this topic reflected a two-way process: movements which are not organized in political parties offered their constructive insider criticism while observing the practical challenges of coalition building in the light of the experiences of the Salafi political parties represented. Some examples of coalition building processes were also mentioned.

A Tunisian participant discussed two coalition experiences. The first one, included four other parties and did not succeed; and the second one, included three other parties and did not last very long. An invitation to join a third coalition comprised of Islamist parties was rejected, due to a Shia party involvement. In Libya, one party established

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[12] Al Oumma Alwasat Party and Al Rissala Party in Libya, for example, have joined the Loyalty to Martyrs coalition inside the General National Congress.

a coordination committee in order to liaise between political parties that are ideologically close. The aim is to create a counter-balancing force within the next parliament with parties that are relatively farther once the coordination committee members have joined forces and set up a common ground. A Libyan participant explained that his party has formed a voting bloc within the National General Congress. Two participants from different countries related experiences of other Islamist groups, which were involved in coalition projects with leftist or liberal parties, but failed[13]. In Yemen, a representative of a participating party explained that they worked with all Salafi and non-Salafi actors, in order to present the group's "neutral" vision for dialogue that is "neither on the side of the government, nor on the one of the opposition, but on the people's side". He stressed that such group's coalition-building strategy is not ideological and can be made with parties of different political coloration, depending on the national interest.

Reflecting on the lessons learnt from past coalition experiences, participants agreed that for a successful coalition it should be clear from the outset whether it is a partial / tactical one or a strategic venture. The coalition should be structured around a clear identity (name, leader, manifesto), and a parliamentary bloc with a single spokesperson while pushing a unified legislation / voting agenda to ensure the coalition institutionalization and sustainability rather than personalization of it. However, some participants were a bit

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[13] This example led one Egyptian participant to raise the issue of whether holding a coalition with non-Islamist parties is unacceptable in Islam. One participant reacted by stressing the weakness of Political Islam thought on these questions and its negative impact on coalition building processes.

more pessimistic about coalition building processes. "The weak cannot make a coalition" said one of them, while another argued that the new political process that is still at its early stage and the extreme polarization between Islamist and liberals, constitute impediments for the creation of coalitions.

5. HOW TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL LIFE

DEALING WITH THE "CLOSE OTHER"

Salafi groups face manifold challenges when entering political life. Depending on the country, these challenges can range from restrictions when forming political parties to deal with the "close other". The latter could be 1) other Salafi groups which participate politically, 2) Salafis who do not directly participate in the political game, but who constitute an electoral "reservoir", or 3) Salafis who reject political participation.

Following the "Arab Spring", formation of political parties with a Salafi reference has become easier in Libya and Egypt (ten Salafi parties) but it remains not allowed in Morocco. In Mauritania, the situation is not clear. While the Mauritanian government has not yet officially objected to the creation of a Salafi party as it is the case in Morocco, the matter is not as easy as it is in Yemen which saw the creation of its first Salafi party last year, in 2012. In Tunisia, where Islamist parties were banned under Ben Ali's regime, restrictions to form parties were loosened under the Baji Kaid Esebssi's government except for Salafi parties. It was not until the fall of Esebssi's government that Salafi parties were legally registered.

More specifically, participants to the workshop shared a common analysis when

dealing with the "close other". Apart from the legal aspect, political participation has been subject to intense debate within the Salafi school of thought, especially since Abd El Khaleq pioneered the creation of the first Salafi party in Kuwait. This analysis takes place at both levels, internal and external ones. At the internal level, Salafi who are willing to participate in the political game have to deal with opposing opinions within their framework, as many scholars and religious referees / authority scholars question the Islamic soundness of entering politics while satisfying their popular base. At the external level, the division between the Salafi groups who accept political participation and those who reject it, poses an issue to Salafi parties to mobilize not only within their own base, but also within the rest of the population. Indeed, the rejection of political participation by some Salafi groups tends to reflect negatively on all Salafi groups making it difficult for them to expand their electoral bases. In such situation, dialogue with the authority religious scholars who oppose political participation should be undertaken through diverse means[14].

According to a Moroccan scholar, disagreement among Salafis is usual and efforts should therefore focus on drafting a common charter stating a minimal agreement. Two groups presented their work to promote local religious references and their works among Salafis who until the recent political change in the region had access only to religious scholars from far away Arab countries.

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[14] For example, public debates, seminars as well as wide publication and distribution of reference works by established scholars who advocate for political participation are all tools which should be used.

DEALING WITH THE "MORE DISTANT OTHER"

One of the main criticisms made by political analysts and seculars towards Islamists consists in accusing the Islamist parties in general and the Salafi groups in particular of failing in addressing their political discourse to a large audience. Moreover, such criticism also points out the robust confrontational and polarizing aspect of the Salafi discourse when interacting with the "more distant other". Such polarization is not only limited to discourse but also to current's political initiatives or even work of good, which should normally aim at including the population at large and beyond the stronghold constituency. During the workshop, pondering the issue of dealing with the "more distant other" aimed to build bridges with the latter in order to defuse political polarization through cooperation, dialogue, and compromise for the common good.

Three categories can be identified as particularly challenging for the Salafis to reach out: 1) the Non-Salafi population on which the Salafi political parties want to capitalize 2) other political parties–especially the political competitors: such as seculars, liberals, socialists, and even Brotherhood Islamists, and 3) violent groups with Salafi reference.

During the workshop, it was clear that most participants were aware of the main criticism addressed to Political Islam i.e. vague and general discourse, absence of a clear socio-economic program, and a sect-mindset in dealing with people at large rather than adopting the democratic concept of citizenship. Indeed, the identification of solutions such as focusing on a discourse of services and social programs rather than on predication and the need to remain involved

in non-political action through charity actions reflected such awareness[15].

Participants also agreed on the importance of the citizenship's concepts (to varying degrees) and political strategy. One Moroccan participant advised Salafi groups to start first with local and regional assemblies, while another Mauritanian participant stressed that public discourse should focus on the Oumma (nation), including Copts, seculars, etc., and should not be limited to Salafis only. This last point was emphasized by a participant from Yemen who concluded: "this is why our party is called national and not Salafi."

With regard to dealing with other political parties, participants agreed that respecting the rules of the democratic game, and establishing redlines are key conditions for political stability. Dialogue and pragmatism can help build bridges among all political actors. One participant reflected on its party's initiative to work with a secular party in parliament. Another Tunisian party reported that it reached out to retired figures of the old regime, in order to convince them to return to politics and play a role in the transition.

All participants agreed that rejection of political participation by some Salafis is a source of serious concern for Salafi political parties. According to them, the Deep State's and the West's (France in Tunisia and USA in Egypt) bet on exhausting the Islamist governments, would in turn lead to the failure of Islamist political participation and offer the Jihadists an unexpected opportunity. Some of the participants shared their experience (in addition to research,

revisions, and public debates) in dealing with violent groups with a Salafi reference. A Tunisian participant specifically discussed how they approached the referent sheikh of a violent group in order to convince the group to enter politics. Such approach remained unsuccessful and the party then turned to Salafi youth with success. An Egyptian group reported on its mediation attempt in Libya.

In regard to dealing with Jihadists, "there is a strand of Jihadists which is closely observing what Salafi political participation would yield" said one participant. "Accomplishing goals with moral commitment would push the Jihadist current to enter politics", added another participant. One concrete consequence of such approach was the change of position of Salafi detainees following the PJD's efforts in defending the rights of Salafi detainees after the 2003 Marrakech attack and the change of positions by detainees in regard to political participation. «Democracy and power alternation are the hope of the region" for progress, concluded an Egyptian participant.

6. HOW DO NON-SALAFI GROUPS IN THE REGION VIEW SALAFI POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

One of the main objectives of the workshop was to share perceptions and exchange best practices in terms of political participation. Independent political experts and academics from the region and Salafi groups aimed at engaging a debate on 1) the challenges of Salafi participation from the point of view of other parties and trends, 2) the main issues Salafi parties should be aware of 3) building the Salafi awareness on such issues, 4) and finally identify ways of dealing with diverse and complex societal issues.

1) Three external participants from Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco summed the challenges

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[15] It was stressed that service to people as a religious virtue and obligation is also an argument for dealing with the more distant political party.

of the Salafis' persisting confusion of religion and politics in their discourse and political behaviour. According to them, Salafi parties have not yet settled the issue of the nation / nation-state dichotomy in their ideological founding documents and the issue of party identity on a conceptual level. Organisationally, Salafi parties have not, in the majority, institutionalized the relationship between the party's base and its leadership neither the decision-making mechanisms within the party. Furthermore, despite the large popular base of some Salafi parties, especially in Egypt, it is not yet proved that the party followers are convinced by the party's ideological ideals and concepts. This last point was echoed in part, by a participant who stated that the expectations of the Salafi current's base in his country are beyond the party's organizational means. Finally, it was said that dealing with international political powers is one additional challenge faced by Salafis in today's multi-polar world.

2) An external expert from Egypt advised Salafis to focus on large issues rather than on secondary-matters during times of democratic transition, following a bottom-up political upheaval or revolutionary change. He argued that political confrontation on issues such as identity leads to deepening the societal rift, which could ultimately threaten social cohesion and peace. He also added that it could even become detrimental not only to political Islam but also to the Islamic faith itself. "Identity cannot be built by laws and decrees, otherwise it becomes artificial", said the expert.

While the identity issue triggered a heated debate among participants, one Libyan participant responded: "Identity is not built by laws but is safeguarded by constitutional laws and decrees". Another Tunisian participant claimed that "identity is at risk".

"Should we leave it to seculars to define societal identity?", he added.

A Tunisian external expert warned the Salafi participants about the next phase's political battles, which he identified as: first, social justice that is more than food provision and basic living means; and second, security that entails the danger of potential return to a police state. «The Deep State is afoot and democratic transition is a narrow path", he said. Failing to navigate it safely would lead to either the return of dictatorship or descent into civil war. This advice was strongly and consistently echoed by an Egyptian participant who argued that "safeguarding freedoms should be the priority of the transition phase and beyond, in order to bar the road to a return to dictatorship." A Libyan participant echoed the warning by reminding all participants not to forget that the popular uprisings were not carried out by Islamists alone, but by all segments of society. Salafi groups should thus, focus on state-building and not partisan competition during this delicate phase. They should focus on devising mechanisms that ensure freedom for all. Building coalitions for common work with all political actors should be a strategic decision and not a mere democratic act of pragmatism to show tolerance to "the more distant other". An external Moroccan expert offered four avenues to be explored: first, agreement on the fact that the civic state does not negate Islam. Second, elections should guarantee power rotation. Third, recognizing citizenship for women within the cultural framework of Islam, while moving gradually to full citizenship. And finally, building strategic coalitions with the "more distant other".

Finally, the questions of identity, freedom, the status of women and the status of minorities triggered varying positions by Salafi participants. As for example, a Tunisian

participant asked the following question: "should we accept blasphemy of sacred entities in the name of freedom? Instead of imposing pre-conditions on Salafi political participation on issues related to the shape of the state, women, and freedoms, etc, a minimum agreement on redlines should be sought: the refusal of violence", concluded a Moroccan participant.

7. WESTERN PARTICIPANTS VIEW OF SALAFI POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The second round of debate between Salafi groups and external participants took place on the backdrop of presentations by three Western participants from the United States and Northern Ireland. All three participants reflected on their personal as well as political groups' experiences from waging religious discourse to engaging in politics. The presentations focused on the challenges faced personally, or by their parties in participating in politics while trying to retain the identity as Christian-based political parties. The presenters reported practical experiences in pushing legislation in Congress / Parliament, or in building coalitions with rival parties.

Reflecting on how he was elected, a former congressman explained that he adapted his religious discourse and addressed the people's needs, meeting with all groups "even those who rejected religious politicians". Once elected, he found crucial to understand why those who usually reject religious-based party voted for him. He insisted on the importance of permanent contact with the constituency though for example town-hall meetings, telephone calls, and written replies to keep in touch and show willingness to listen.

As it was said earlier for the Salafis, pushing through legislation in Congress is equally

demanding and challenging because it involves working on two fronts at the same time: within the Congressman's own party, where there is need to "reason with extremists of his own party", and at the external level, reaching out to the opposite party, with which cooperation is a key for passing almost any piece of legislation. In practice, it involves "switching discourse within the party from ideology to process". Once that is achieved, efforts should be directed to reaching out to the leader of the opposite party in order to "find a middle ground." If it failed, the former Congressman recommended, working with other congressmen "to push forth agenda by means of personal relationships".

One of the pitfalls of religious politics is to allow "politics to stand in the way of policy", or "to make perfect policy the enemy of good policy" explained the US Congressman. He advised building relationships with the media to counter propaganda and to preserve consistency and commitment to ethics vis-à-vis the people of one's constituency. He concluded by stating that slowly but gradually conservative charity groups started to engage in his constituency "because of the presence of a religious congressman".

A Member of Parliament (MP) from Northern Ireland said that his group's entry into politics was not underpinned by "a religious motivation but because they wanted to contribute to the construction of society by core values". The same issues, which dominate the political and societal debate in the Arab region nowadays, used to dominate current affairs in the West years ago. Some human rights issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage still divide Western societies today, stressed the MP. The challenge is to strike a balance between core values and politics. According to him, coalition building through pragmatism is the

answer. Religious groups which care about the importance of core values and about preserving morality in society should understand that "if they are not in government they cannot preserve core values nor influence policy", added the MP. The MP insisted on that faith parties have to determine the main core values they want to preserve in laws and policy. It is about striking a balance between core values and "allowing a choice for the people." He finally concluded by asking: "what will be your legacy: dogma / faith or social programs and construction of society?" Reflecting on his own political experience, he advised participants to work with local structures on the ground, long-term projects and to build from ground up, addressing party organization, and constructing a party message and discourse that are clear and media articulate and proficient.

8. SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

POLARIZATION AND COALITION BUILDING

Polarization between Islamists and Seculars has been the common feature of the political transition in the Arab region. This topic has been consistently raised by different parties and movements throughout the workshop. There was a strong consensus on the idea that severe polarization might lead to political and social chaos that in turn could lead to a return to dictatorship as said before. Participants conducted brainstorming activities in country-based small groups in order to ponder over coalition building initiatives and extending trust building bridges with secular political parties and movements.

The brainstorming activities reflected on the varying degrees of polarization in the different countries while identifying the political weight of each Salafi group. As an example, the Al Nour Party's mediation initiative between the National Salvation Front and the government was discussed. Participants differed on Al Nour's initiative. While some understood the initiative, others showed more skepticism on the timing. In Egypt, where polarization was identified as the highest in the region, participants reported on a number of ongoing coalition initiatives with secular or non-Islamist partners. One party reported on its initiative to sit down with security officers and experts in order to coordinate efforts to reduce insecurity and violence. Another Egyptian party presented its experience in a 16-member coalition which includes liberal parties and the Muslim Brotherhood. The same party launched the "Egyptian Dream Initiative", which aimed at joint work on economic issues, such as the energy project, with partners from different ideological backgrounds. A third party reported that it was in the process of launching a call for a one year political truce[16].

In Mauritania, where polarization is by far lower than in Egypt, the focus had been on building trust. This effort was conducted through active participation of a Salafi charity in the civil society activities. It included cooperation with town-halls and hospitals in coordinating the distribution of humanitarian aid and the organization of a training workshop for journalists, in collaboration between a Salafi association and the journalists' guild.

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[16] It was interesting to learn that for the Egyptian participants the brainstorming exercise was the first time ever the Salafi parties sat down as a group and brainstormed opportunities of coalition building with secular groups.

In Morocco, a participating scholar reported that he called for a dialogue initiative with seculars but he received very little support. Another participant reported on an ongoing cross-party and cross-ideology coalition building initiative addressing the arbitral detention of Salafi in Morocco.

In Libya, participants stated that polarization was less along ideological lines, but rather on a political basis, as the coalition between Islamist parties and secular party demonstrates on the issue of political vetting. On the contrary, in Tunisia, polarization is very acute and the most publicized form of contact between Islamist and seculars materialize itself in televised debates between representatives of the two camps. An Egyptian participant, however, advised against televised debates, which fuel polarization and division, and recommend adopting dialogue mechanisms, which build trust instead.

9. PEACE PROMOTION

The workshop concluded by conducting small group activities with the aim of brainstorming peace promotion initiatives in the Arab region and the sub-Saharan Sahel. The different Salafi parties and movements demonstrated how cross-region connections could be put at the service of peace promotion. According to participants, peace promotion is deeply embedded in the Salafi doctrine due to their charitable activities or predication efforts.

In regard to the Maghreb region, participants proposed dispatching mediation teams in northern Mali and in various towns on the Tunisian-Algerian and Tunisian-Libyan borders to talk to violent groups. In Egypt where inter-sectarian clashes have become recurrent, it was suggested dispatching mediators from both Al Azhar and the church in order to diffuse tensions. In Yemen, participants argued that one of the factors fueling extremism is the detention of approximately 5,000 prisoners detained without trial for the past five years. Speeding up the trial process in order to charge and sentence the prisoners if found guilty; or release them if innocent, would contribute to peace in Yemen. It was also said that American drone strikes in the south fuel frustration and offer Al Qaeda a fertile terrain for recruitment, as it is the case in the Abyan province.

Overall, participants highlighted the paramount importance of theological academic work in order to debunk the flawed religious concepts used by violent groups to justify armed action and violence. A Libyan participant presented its party's contribution to this academic effort following the attacks on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, and called for the need to find an institution which promotes moderate Islamic thought. A Moroccan scholar presented his efforts while giving a brief presentation of his book on the prohibition of armed attacks and the use of explosives against civilians.

The American participants suggested that despite ideological differences between the Muslim world and the West, there is a common wish for peace promotion in the Arab and Muslim region. Therefore, American-Salafi groups meetings could be held in an Arab country and at a later stage in Washington D.C. (with non-elected figures and in a later stage with elected politicians); in order to ponder over peace promotion.

10.   CONCLUSION

The workshop reached the following conclusions and recommendations in regard to Salafi political participation.

1. The confusion of roles between that of a preacher and that of a politician affects the party's behavior and political identity at the internal level and the external level. Internally, it leads to a confusion of roles or even to a lack of organizational structure within the party. Externally, it blurs the party's political identity and its relationship to other movements.

2. Articulating a specific political identity requires, among other requirements, commitment to accept the rules of the political game; rejection of violence when dealing with the "other"; respect of election results; rejection of the monopoly of power; and finally clarification of party's position towards the other.

3. One of the organizational challenges that Salafi political parties face is that, in the majority, they have not yet institutionalized the relationship between the party's base and its leadership neither the decision-making mechanisms within the party.

4. Participants agreed that in dealing with other political parties, respecting the rules of the political game and establishing redlines are key conditions for political stability.

5. Rejection of political participation by some Salafis is a source of grave concern for Salafi political parties.

6. In order to avoid extreme polarization which could lead to chaos or a return to dictatorship political actors and stakeholders should focus on major issues rather than on secondary matters during times of democratic transition, following a bottom-up political upheaval or revolutionary change.

7. Participants agreed that the Deep State[17] is afoot and democratic transition is a narrow path. Failing to navigate it safely would lead to either a return of dictatorship or descent into civil war.

8. It is important to focus on state-building and not on partisan competition during delicate transition.

9. Building coalitions for common work with all political actors should be a strategic decision and not a mere democratic act of pragmatism to show tolerance to the "more distant other".

10. Pushing through legislation in parliaments or constituent assemblies is equally demanding and challenging. Faith-based parties face the challenge of switching discourse within the party from ideology and general theoretical concepts into practical policy and legislation process. The challenge is to strike balance between core values and politics. Religious groups which care about core values and about preserving morality in society should understand that if they are not in government they cannot preserve core values nor influence policy.

11. New Salafi-political parties should gain political experience by working with local structures on the ground, long-term projects and building from ground up, addressing party organization, and constructing a party message and discourse that are clear, media-articulate and proficient.

12. Salafi parties and movements explained how their and others' cross-region connections could be put at the service of peace promotion. They also highlighted the paramount importance of theological academic work in order to debunk the flawed religious concepts used by violent groups to justify armed action and violence.

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[17] See footnote 8 above.