

The AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood

Making and Unmaking an Islamist Alliance
in the Middle East and Europe

Jan-Markus Vömel

Austrian Fund for the Documentation of
Religiously Motivated Political Extremism
(Documentation Centre Political Islam)

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Executive Summary

Key Findings

- Turkish and Egyptian Islamisms hailed from different traditions but sought ties and collaboration at different junctures. Both viewed each other as like-minded sister-organizations and as local expressions of a wider global Islamic resurgence worthy of sympathy and support.
- Due to waves of migration from Turkey and the Arab world, both Islamist traditions also found themselves in Europe, where they could more freely network among each other.
- During the Arab Spring, Qatar, the Turkish government, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, along with Brotherhood-inspired factions in other countries, forged a consequential alliance.
- The transnational politics of this pro-revolutionary camp pitted this populist-Islamist alliance against a counter-revolutionary camp around the Gulf monarchies, which was later joined by post-coup Egypt.
- Following initial successes, the revolutionary camp encountered a series of setbacks, ultimately losing its strongholds in various countries. Subsequently, Turkey assumed a pivotal role as a sanctuary for exiled movements, hosting cadres and media outlets.
- As the prospects of a return to power for the Brotherhood-affiliated movement became increasingly slim, Turkey gradually retreated, embarking on a course of rapprochement with the counter-revolutionary regimes. This phase persists to the present day.

- Turkey has adopted a stance of providing more discreet support for its former allies while avoiding to alienate its partners in the region of the counter-revolutionary camp.
- Concurrently, European networks comprising Turkish-origin and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups persisted in their endeavors. Nevertheless, the predominant endeavors of the populist-Islamist alliance were concentrated in the Middle East, with no substantial shift towards enhanced collaboration or merger observed in Europe.

Outlook and Future Issues

- Turkish rapprochement with counter-revolutionary Middle Eastern regimes is anticipated to persist, notwithstanding occasional local diversions.
- Following the *Hamas* attack on Israel in October 2023, Turkey became a more overt benefactor and patron of *Hamas*, extending these networks of support to Europe.
- The sudden collapse of the Assad regime in late 2024 led to a growing Turkish influence in post-Assad Syria, though Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups appear marginalized and largely superseded by other Islamist factions.
- Despite the apparent failure of Turkish policies in the Arab Spring, the Turkish-Qatari alliance continues to exert influence on Middle Eastern politics.
- In the case of mounting pressure from the counter-revolutionary camp, it is possible that exiled structures of the Muslim Brotherhood in Turkey may attempt to relocate their operations to Europe. However, such a development is not yet evident.
- Turkish influencing operations and media outreach disseminate pro-*Hamas* and other Islamist narratives to diaspora communities in Europe.

Introduction

Turkish Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood represent two of the most important and impactful Islamist traditions in the Western part of the Muslim world and in the European diaspora.¹ The Brotherhood established an extensive network of organizations in most Arab countries as well as in Western nations and its foundational thinkers contributed to global Islamism's intellectual backbone. Turkish political Islam with the *Milli Görüş* movement as its main proponent had less ideological outreach but likewise expanded to Europe via labor migration. As the European presence of the Brotherhood is concentrated on the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, the *Milli Görüş* followed Turkish labor migration to Germany, Austria, the Benelux states and parts of France. A later offshoot—today's governing party AKP—provided the most successful model of integration within a secularist system to Islamists all over the Muslim world. In earlier stages, both traditions developed mostly independently from one another with only occasional contact. Later, they began to engage with each other on friendly, brotherly terms, with both parties increasingly aware of common goals and interests over the course of the 1970s. At the same time, state repression against the main bodies on both ends nevertheless served to impede the development of more stable and broader relationships. Only in Europe were the two traditions able to bond

¹ Islamism is defined here as a comprehensive ideology designating Islam as a holistic system comprising politics, economy, culture, as well as social and private life. In this view, Islam contains not only spiritual elements, but rather it represents a divinely ordained worldly system, which is flawless and superior to all man-made systems. Islamist movements aim for the resurrection of the Muslim world in political, military, and economic terms and rely on a guiding concept of unity between all Muslims in the global *ummah*. To reach these goals, Islamists seek to revive an imagined pristine Islam purged of all contaminating elements. They therefore seek to stamp out deviations from the pure creed in Islamic cultures themselves as well as outside influences like Westernization, secularization, liberal democracy and so on.

On terminology and the wider debates see, among many more, Andrew F. March (2015): "Political Islam: Theory", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18, pp. 103–123; Mehdi Mozaffari (2007): "What is Islamism? History and Definition of a Concept", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8/1, pp. 17–33.

and cooperate freely. Without the circles of repression of the home regions, Europe proved to be a fertile ground for such networking.

This changed fundamentally with the electoral triumph of the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party), a *Milli Görüş*-breakaway, in 2002. For the first time in Turkish republican history, a party with an Islamist background formed a lasting government, therein embarking on its path of domination of Turkish politics for the next two decades. With the AKP's hold on power established more firmly after the 2007 elections, it began to make more confident advances towards different sections of the Muslim Brotherhood. Finally, the European activists' groundwork could develop into direct cooperation between the two gravitational centers of Islamist activity and their organizations. When the revolutions and upheavals of the Arab Spring carried Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties in Egypt and Tunisia into government and boosted them elsewhere, a long-awaited historical moment for the formerly marginalized parties seemed to have arrived. This opened doors to cooperation between several Brotherhood sections and Turkey based on shared interests and common foundational ideas, ultimately overriding diverging strategic goals and hegemonic struggles. The alliance also encouraged the European sections of both Islamist traditions to engage in open networking.

Within a short period of time, a system of alliances emerged in Middle Eastern politics that pitted a group of populist-Islamist actors (the Muslim Brotherhood sections aspiring to lead governments in their countries, supported by Turkey and Qatar) against status-quo regimes in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that were feeling threatened by the popular upheavals. The ensuing rivalry between these two alliances shaped fault lines in Middle Eastern politics from the early 2010s until the present day. After the Egyptian military coup of 2013 and the electoral defeat in Tunisia, Turkey provided a safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood. In recent years, diverging interests came to the fore again as the pragmatist realization of the Brotherhood's slim chances of returning to power set in, prompting the AKP government to gradually bow out of the Muslim Brotherhood alliance without fully abandoning

it. Meanwhile, a weakened Muslim Brotherhood attempts to hold its ground after suffering subsequent setbacks in all relevant Middle Eastern countries.

This research paper aims to provide a background to understanding the processes involved in forming the alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Turkish Islamist traditions. How do both traditions differ from each other, and where do points of contact emerge? What are the historical trajectories of the two traditions up to the present? How did these trajectories play out in their respective home countries and wider sphere of influence? With regard to Europe, the paper traces cooperation in a setting that allowed much freer communication and networking than the movements' home regions. What connections were established in Europe and how did they impact later contact between the respective home regions? What outlook and what goals led the two traditions to form a transnational alliance and what triggered the subsequent disentanglement? Why was the Arab Spring such a crucial moment in this alliance and what happened after the Middle Eastern revolutions failed?

Outlining the historical trajectories and ideologies in Europe and the Middle East of the Muslim Brotherhood and Turkish Islamism, the first section of this research paper explains the background behind the collaboration and the later alliance. The second section then describes the emergence of the alliance, its dynamics, and the different positions on both sides, as well as on the issue of Turkish guardianship of the Muslim Brotherhood in exile after its cataclysmic crushing and expatriation from Egypt, its country of origin. Finally, a concluding chapter connects the paper's main analytical threads and discusses future perspectives: How likely is a deepened alliance of Turkish and Brotherhood-affiliated organizations in Europe? Is there a possible scenario where the exiled and expunged Muslim Brotherhood will be forced to abandon their current main base in Turkey and move their operations to Europe altogether?



Ideological and historical background of the Turkish-Brotherhood alliance

The formation of political Islam in Egypt and the Arab world

Unlike both popular and academic opinion on the history of Islamist movements, the realms of the Ottoman Empire that later became republican Turkey played a crucial role in the early formation of Islamist thought. Figures like Said Halim Pasha (1864–1921), Mehmet Akif Ersoy (1873–1936), Mustafa Sabri (1869–1954), or Eşref Edip Fergan (1882–1971) established the intellectual backbone of the Islamist current that struggled to gain political leverage. Whereas this current was ultimately sidelined in the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihâd ve Terakkî Cem'iyeti*, also called “İttihadists”), the predominant political organization of the late Ottoman era, by the more secular-leaning wing, it was Said Halim Pasha’s thought that formulated the basic idea of Islam as a perfect and all-encompassing system, a later cornerstone of the Islamist worldview.² During the upheavals of the final Ottoman years and the formation of the republic under the auspices of secular-oriented leaders, the Islamists lost the little influence they had and were driven into exile as soon as the Kemalists had tightened their hold on power in the mid-1920s. With the small Islamist print sector also thoroughly suppressed, the Islamist tradition was cut off in Turkey for several decades to come.³

The remainder of the Turkish Islamist thinkers found themselves in Egypt. Here, a youthful Egyptian primary school teacher by the name of Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949) assembled the first cells of the Muslim Brotherhood

² Ahmet Şeyhun (2014): *Islamist Thinkers in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic*, Leiden / Boston: Brill, pp. 147–164; Michelangelo Guida (2007): “The Life and Political Ideas of Grand Vezir Said Halim Pasha”, *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 18, pp. 101–118; Syed Tanvir Wasti (2008): “Said Halim Pasha – Philosopher Prince”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44/1, pp. 85–104.

³ Ryan Gingeras (2019): *Eternal Dawn: Turkey in the Age of Atatürk*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 304–318.

(*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*), officially established in 1928.⁴ The early Muslim Brotherhood built on an ideological amalgam that included influences from Salafist thinkers such as Rashid Rida and activist, reformist Sufism (as opposed to a Sufism that was perceived as ritualistic, withdrawn, and steeped in superstitions about the power of Sheiks).⁵ Little direct transfer of ideas seems to have taken place from the Turkish to the Egyptian Islamists, but some Turkish exiles frequented the circles of like-minded Egyptians.⁶ As a charismatic orator and versatile organizer focused on cadre-building, al-Banna went on to form a large organization with a complex web of sub-segments addressing various aspects of the Islamist agenda—including a women’s section⁷ and an armed wing,⁸ to which a large apparatus providing social services was later added.⁹ At this early stage in the development of the group, he was also the main ideologue. The budding group’s main goals and ideological precepts were pan-Islamic unity, Islamization of society and culture, establishing an Islamic state and political order, and *Ikhwanism* (a “code of identity” based on norms, values, and behaviors in everyday life).¹⁰ After two decades at the helm of the ever-expanding organization, the group’s growing influence and assertiveness

⁴ Gudrun Krämer (2014): *Hasan al-Banna*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications; Khalil al-Anani (2016): *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity, and Politics*, Oxford / New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 50–66.

⁵ Brynjar Lia (1998): *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement, 1928–1942*, Reading: Ithaca Press, pp. 114–117.

⁶ Andrew Hammond (2002): *Late Ottoman Origins of Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 26–76 and 240–269.

⁷ Erika Biagini (2020): “Islamist Women’s Feminist Subjectivities in (R)evolution: The Egyptian Muslim Sisterhood in the Aftermath of the Arab Uprisings”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 22/3, pp. 382–402.

⁸ Ahmed Abou El Zafar (2002): “The Special Apparatus (al-Nizām al-Khāṣṣ): The Rise of Nationalist Militancy in the Ranks of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood”, *Religions*, 13/1, pp. 1–18.

⁹ Steven Brooke (2019): *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*, Ithaca / London: Cornell University Press; Marie Vannetzel (2020): *The Muslim Brothers in Society: Everyday Politics, Social Action, and Islamism in Mubarak’s Egypt*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.

¹⁰ On this term see al-Anani: *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood*, pp. 99–134; on ideology see Barbara Zollner (2009): *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*, London / New York: Routledge; Joas Wagemakers (2006): *The Muslim Brotherhood: Ideology, History, Descendants*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 31–71.

led to tensions between the authorities on the one side and the Brotherhood with its violent offshoot, the so called Special Apparatus (*al-Niẓām al-Khāṣṣ*), on the other, culminating in the assassinations of Egyptian prime minister Mahmud al-Nukrashi Pasha (1888–1948) and al-Banna in 1949. Reportedly, al-Banna himself was instrumental in the founding of a military wing, which the group dismantled only in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹¹

In the 1950s, Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) emerged as the group's second major ideological arbiter, albeit with a disputed status within the Brotherhood and its various factions. Qutb's philosophy directly challenged the status-quo political systems of Egypt and the Muslim world and called for a more fundamental realignment towards an Islamic worldview.¹² He therein served as an intellectual signpost for those factions that were pursuing a more confrontational and revolutionary line within the Brotherhood, whilst he was rejected by those that were opting for gradualist and accommodationist strategies.¹³

With the Cold War re-alignment of transnational politics, the 1950s turned into a watershed period in the history of global Islamism. Cold War alliance mechanisms and the United States' influence drew Turkey and conservative Arab monarchies into a camp against states led by Soviet-leaning nationalists mostly hailing from the ranks of the army, such as Egypt and Syria. Turkey had opted for integration with the Western alliance early on in the global conflict with the aim of countering Soviet designs of expanding its sphere of influence, while the monarchies naturally felt threatened by pan-Arab nationalism and

¹¹ Omar Ashour (2008): *A World Without Jihad? The Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamist Movements*, PhD Dissertation, McGill University, pp. 63; 79–83.

¹² John Calvert (2013): *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press; Sayed Khatab (2006): *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah*, London / New York: Taylor & Francis; James Toth (2013): *Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.

¹³ Abdelrahman Ayyash, Amr El Afifi, and Noha Ezzat (2023): *Broken Bonds: The Existential Crisis of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, 2013–22*, [New York]: The Century Foundation, pp. 36–38; Carrie Rosefsky Wickham (2015): *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement*, Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 28–29; Victor J. Willi (2021): *The Fourth Ordeal: A History of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 1968–2018*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 104–110.

the Soviet impact in the Middle East, which paved the way towards the creation of socialist republics. Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood moved into the focus of this camp as a controllable asset. Such groups had clear anti-communist credentials and were supposed to be countering its influence, especially among the youth, and ultimately served as the largest, most organized formations working in opposition to the nationalist military leaders.

Muslim Brotherhood-inspired parties, moreover, emerged in most countries of the Arab world, often via personal links and migration among Arab countries. In the early decades of the movement's history, students at Egyptian universities returning to Syria carried the ideas of al-Banna to their home country and established the first cells of a fast-growing movement in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁴ Similar to the situation in Egypt, tensions with the state grew with secular-nationalist pan-Arabist military brass in power. However, the Syrian Brotherhood was able to maintain enough organizational prowess that a splinter group managed to stage a revolt against the regime in the city of Hama in 1982.¹⁵ Turkish intelligence developed contacts with the group to weaponize it against the Assad regime, which in turn weaponized the Kurdish PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, Kurdistan Workers Party) against Turkey. Turkish Islamists at the time were not in favor of the uprising, which may have been precipitated by their general stance of obedience towards the state and its authority, but also by other political concerns.¹⁶ Direct contacts between Turkish Islamists and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood activists were sparse. After the failed Hama-rising, harsh repression forced different factions of the movement underground, which then only reemerged with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war (2011–present).

¹⁴ Raphaël Lefèvre (2013): *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press; Naomí Ramírez Díaz (2018a): *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria: The Democratic Option of Islamism*, London / New York: Routledge; Dara Conduit (2019): *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵ Brynjar Lia (2016): "The Islamist Uprising in Syria, 1976–82: The History and Legacy of a Failed Revolt", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43/4, S. 541–559.

¹⁶ Behlül Özkan (2019): "Relations between Turkey and Syria in the 1980's and 1990's: Political Islam, Muslim Brotherhood and Intelligence Wars", *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 16/62, pp. 5–25.

A latecomer was the Palestinian *Hamas*, despite the first branches of the Brotherhood in Palestinian cities dating back to the 1930s and 1940s. These branches were established via early contacts between al-Banna and Palestinian Muslim leader Mohammed Amin al-Husseini (1897–1974), the later Mufti of Jerusalem. Brotherhood volunteers participated in the 1948 war against the nascent state of Israel. During the following decades, however, the Palestinian Brotherhood remained a marginal force.¹⁷ Due to the dominance of secular and Marxist ideologies during the formative period of Palestinian nationalism, *Hamas*—founded in 1987 by Palestinian Brotherhood members—only came to the forefront after the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (1929–2004). Thereafter they emerged as the force more fundamentally and violently opposed to Israel than Arafat’s *al-Fatah* (a reverse acronym of *Ḥarakat at-Taḥrīr al-Waṭanī al-Filasṭīnī*, Palestinian National Liberation Movement) and gained control over the Gaza Strip in 2007. In its 1988 foundational document, the so-called “Covenant”, *Hamas* referred to itself as the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. The document further stated establishing an Islamic state in place of Israel and the Palestinian territories as an overarching goal. Rejecting the negotiations conducted by the secular nationalist *Fatah*, they called for continued violent struggle against Israel.¹⁸ Based on the 2017 *Hamas Charta*, some analysts held that *Hamas* seemed to be moving towards accepting a Palestinian state with the 1967 borders, pursuing a legitimizing strategy without recognizing Israel.¹⁹ The October 2023 attacks against Israeli civilians and military installations bordering Gaza,

¹⁷ Ziad Abu-Amr (1994): *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1–22.

¹⁸ Jeroen Gunning (2007): *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence*, London: Hurst; Hillel Frisch (2010): “Hamas: The Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood”, in: Barry Rubin (ed.): *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, London / New York: Palgrave Macmillan, S. 89–102.

¹⁹ Nathan Thrall (2018): “Can Hamas be Part of the Solution?”, in: Jamie Stern-Weiner (ed.): *Moment of Truth: Tackling Israel–Palestine’s Toughest Questions*, New York: OR Books, S. 175–202.

however, have led *Hamas* to yet another, much more existential confrontation with Israel.²⁰

As a splinter organization from the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, the *Palestinian Islamic Jihad* (PIJ) formed in 1981 inspired by Iranian-style revolutionary Islamism. *Palestinian Islamic Jihad* prided itself on being the most radical and uncompromising Palestinian organization, conducting a series of terror attacks in Israel and collaborating with *Hamas* in the October 2023 attacks on Southern Israel.²¹

In Iraq, the Muslim Brotherhood established a country section early on as well. Continued bans and pressure by dominant Arab nationalist forces ultimately hampered its development. After the U.S. invasion of 2003 had led to the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime, the Brotherhood party, the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP, *Ḥizb al-Islāmī al-ʿIrāqī*), became a key political representative of the country's Sunni demographic. However, in terms of influence, it was also restricted by this limitation to one-third of the population.²² The Jordanian Brotherhood also emerged during the 1940s and later went on to found the *Islamic Action Front* (IAF, *Ḡabhat al-ʿAmal al-Islāmī*). Here, the organization sought less confrontational ways and accommodative relations with the monarchy.²³

Meanwhile, in North Africa and the Maghreb, the most influential Muslim Brotherhood-inspired party is the Tunisian *Ennahda* (*Ḥarakatu n-Nahḍah*, Renaissance Movement), founded in the early 1980s. Founder, leading

²⁰ Ben Hubbard and Maria Abi-Habib (08.11.2023): "Behind Hamas's Bloody Gambit to Create a 'Permanent' State of War", *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/08/world/middleeast/hamas-israel-gaza-war.html> [25.07.2024].

²¹ Erik Skare (2021): *A History of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Faith, Awareness and Revolution in the Middle East*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.

²² Basim al-Azami (2002): "The Muslim Brotherhood: Genesis and Development," in Faleh Abdul-Jabar (ed.): *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq*, London: Saqi Books, pp. 162–176.

²³ Joas Wagemakers (2020): *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.

intellectual and movement head, Rached Ghannouchi (b. 1941), had come into contact with Islamist ideas and Brotherhood circles as a student in Damascus.²⁴ During decades of persecution by the Tunisian single-party regime, *Ennahda* fused some liberal democratic ideas with political Islam—without, however, ever fully renouncing the latter. In Algeria, the Brotherhood-inspired movement goes back to the 1950s before forming a party in the early 1990s. This party, the *Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix* (MSP, Movement of Society for Peace), stayed neutral in the civil war between the state and the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS, Islamic Salvation Front), Algeria's dominant Islamist movement. Morocco's Muslim Brotherhood formation can be traced back to the 1960s but, like the Algerian neighbors, formed a relevant party only in the 1990s.²⁵ At the height of its success, the *Parti de la justice et du développement* (PJD, Justice and Development Party) governed between 2011 and 2021 but lost its position in a crushing electoral defeat afterwards.²⁶

In the vicinity of Egypt, a Sudanese branch of the Brotherhood formed during the 1940s and turned into the Brotherhood section with the most aggressive push for state power under the leadership of Hassan al-Turabi (1932–2016).²⁷ Brotherhood members in the military and security forces carried out a coup in 1989, installing a military-Islamist regime that would rule the country for two decades before being ousted in a popular upheaval in 2018/19.²⁸ Unable to

²⁴ Azzam Tamimi (2001): *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat Within Islamism*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press; Anne Wolf (2017): *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁵ Amel Boubekeur (2007): *Political Islam in Algeria*, Centre for European Policy Studies, CEPS Working Document, 268, <https://www.ceps.eu/download/publication/?id=5631&pdf=1502.pdf> [25.07.2024].

²⁶ Wagemakers: The Muslim Brotherhood, pp. 127–133.

²⁷ Willow J. Berridge (2017): *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017; Abdullahi A. Gallab (2018): *Hasan al-Turabi, the Last of the Islamists: The Man and His Times 1932–2016*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield; Robert O. Collins / J. Millard Burr (2003): *Revolutionary Sudan: Hasan Al-Turabi and the Islamist State, 1989–2000*, Leiden: Brill.

²⁸ Mohammed Zahid and Michael Medley (2006): “Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Sudan”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 33/110, S. 693–708; Wagemakers: The Muslim Brotherhood, pp. 121–126.

withstand harsh persecution by the Gaddafi regime (1969–2011), the Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1947, was historically the most marginal force. Only after the civil war of 2011 and the ensuing fall of the regime did the *Parti de la justice et de la construction* (PJC, Justice and Construction Party) emerge as a major player in the throes of the battles over the new Libya and its political order.²⁹

On the Arabian Peninsula, Brotherhood affiliates exist in Yemen, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Yemeni Brothers aligned with a broader Islamist and tribal coalition in the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (*al-Tajammuʿ al-Yamanī li-l-Isłāh*, also called the *al-Islah* movement).³⁰ Saudi Arabian relations with Brotherhood organizations historically moved between strategic alliances and bitter rivalries internationally and a tense, suspicious handling locally, ultimately leading to a ban within the kingdom. Saudi Arabia became a transfer hub for international Brotherhood activities in the 1950s but also kept a watchful eye on Brotherhood influence in its internal affairs. A broader influence of Islamist thought—also transported via Brotherhood exiles—still led to the formation of the *Sahwa* movement (*al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmīyya*, Islamic Awakening), which was not tied to transnational Brotherhood networks.³¹ A similar trajectory led to an all-out ban developed in the United Arab Emirates.³² Smaller country sections in Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain were more fortunate, especially in the

²⁹ Mary Fitzgerald (2015): “Finding Their Place: Libya’s Islamists During and After the Revolution”, in: Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (eds.): *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 177–204.

³⁰ Atle Mesøy and Stig Jarle Hansen (2009): *The Muslim Brotherhood in the Wider Horn of Africa*, Oslo: Norsk institutt for by- og regionforskning; Jillian Schwedler (2004): “The Islah Party in Yemen: Political Opportunities and Coalition Building in a Transitional Polity”, in: Quintan Wiktorowicz (ed.): *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, S. 205–228.

³¹ Stéphane Lacroix (2011): *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, pp. 37–80.

³² Courtney Freer (2017): “Rentier Islamism in the Absence of Elections: The Political Role of Muslim Brotherhood Affiliates in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 49/3, pp. 479–500; Courtney Freer (2018): *Rentier Islamism: The influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gulf Monarchies*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.

social sphere, but were ultimately also hindered by the curtailment of civil society and grassroots politics in the rentier monarchies.³³

The different sections were loosely tied to each other by genealogy, general inspiration, or brotherly sympathies. They, however, acted independently from one another and followed different trajectories in their respective countries. While the Egyptian mother-movement faced cycles of repression and relative tolerance, the Syrian Brotherhood disintegrated into several splinter groups and worked itself into the ground in confrontation with the state and the army. Jordanian and Moroccan Brotherhood sections ventured on more accommodationist paths while sections on the Arabian Peninsula were hindered in their basic development by the nature of the political regimes they were active in and, at times, by the social and religious structure of the population. With the major exception of *Hamas*, the Syrian Brotherhood's uprising in Hama in the 1980s, and the active years of the Egyptian Secret Apparatus between the 1940s and the late 1960s, the Brotherhood sections refrained from violence, concentrating instead on social activism and later forming political parties.

As the conflict between pan-Arab Nasserism and the Muslim Brotherhood escalated in Egypt, repression came to a first peak with torture, prison sentences, and executions—most prominently that of Sayyid Qutb in 1966. Turkish Islamists who likened their struggles to that of their Egyptian companions saw Qutb as a martyr for their cause. Despite state interventions against Islamist activities in Turkey being milder in nature and occurring only sporadically, Islamists built their identity on a narrative of global victimhood. However, when translations of Qutb's work appeared in Turkish, sympathies

³³ Ibid.; Courtney Freer (06.03.2019): "Challenges to Sunni Islamism in Bahrain Since 2011", *Carnegie Middle East Center*, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/03/06/challenges-to-sunni-islamism-in-bahrain-since-2011-pub-78510> [08.01.2024]; Ali A. Alkandari (2023): *The Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait, 1941–1991*, London / New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

quickly grew cold and turned into harsh outright rejection.³⁴ This was likely due to gatekeeping attitudes on what should be considered the sole true interpretation of Islam. Another factor was a general friction between Turkish Islamism orienting itself toward Ottoman traditions and traditional Sufism on the one side and Salafi-leaning interpretations, which represented an ahistorical Islam, rejecting historically grown, traditional forms, ultimately creating different wholesale versions of a reformed, cleansed form of Islam on the other side. Although Qutb's thought was not as anti-Sufi as later Islamists referencing him, he not only largely ignored Sufism in his writings but also voiced some negative sentiments about passive ritualism and generally postulated views that did not jive well with Sufism.³⁵ Turkish readers might have shown a sensibility toward these axiomatic differences. Qutb was nevertheless widely read in Turkey and later found adepts in smaller activist circles outside of the *Milli Görüş* when the Turkish Islamist scene diversified in the 1970s and after translations into Turkish appeared from the 1960s onwards.³⁶

The rise of political Islam in Turkey and its ties to the Muslim Brotherhood

During the 1950s, Islamism re-emerged in Turkey. Guided by Sheikhs of the *İskenderpaşa Cemaati*, a Naqshbandi Sufi community, a small group of young university students built an initial circle that later formed the backbone of

³⁴ Jan-Markus Vömel (2022): "Global Intellectual Transfers and the Making of Turkish High Islamism, c. 1960–1995", in: Deniz Kuru and Hazal Papuççular (eds.): *The Turkish Connection: Global Intellectual Histories of the Late Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey*, Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 247–269.

³⁵ Itzhak Weismann (2011): "Modernity from Within: Islamic Fundamentalism and Sufism", *Der Islam*, 86/1, pp. 142–170; Youssef M. Choueiri (1990): *Islamic Fundamentalism. The Story of Islamist Movements*, New York: Continuum, pp. 126–127.

³⁶ Alberto Fabio Ambrosio (2015): "Mapping Modern Turkish Sufism and Anti-Sufism", in: Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.): *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 59–70.

mainstream Islamism in Turkey.³⁷ Two main ideologues, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–1983) and Nurettin Topçu (1909–1975)—who came from the same milieu—, assembled a following and spread their views via magazines, books, and conferences.³⁸ Eşref Edip Fergan, the youngest of the exiles and the only one to return to Turkey, restarted the late Ottoman *Sebilürreşâd* magazine (“The True Path”). Organizations such as the Society for the Dissemination of Knowledge (*İlim Yayma Cemiyeti*) and the Associations for the Struggle Against Communism (*Komünizm ile Mücadele Dernekleri*) then became the first organizational hotbeds, as Islamists were able to gain some legitimacy in the rampant anti-communist atmosphere of the era and the tentative opening of the secularist order after the end of one-party rule.³⁹

Figures like the leading activist of the Egyptian Brotherhood Said Ramadan (1926–1995) acted as go-betweens for the anti-communist camp. These go-betweens spun different links into a wider network. Via Ramadan’s transnational organizing efforts, the first substantial contacts between Egyptian and Turkish Islamist circles since the 1920s materialized. Starting in 1950, Ramadan came to Turkey on several occasions, speaking to journalists and networking with members of Turkish Islamic groups.⁴⁰ As an outcome of

³⁷ Emin Yaşar Demirci (2008): *Modernisation, Religion, and Politics in Turkey. The Case of the İskenderpaşa Community*, Istanbul: Isis Press; M. Hakan Yavuz (2003): *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 133–150.

³⁸ Burhanettin Duran and Cemil Aydın (2013): “Competing Occidentalisms of Modern Islamist Thought: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu on Christianity, the West and Modernity”, *Muslim World*, 103/4, pp. 479–500; Michelangelo Guida (2017): “Nurettin Topçu and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek: Stories of ‘Conversion’ and Activism in Republican Turkey”, *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 34, pp. 98–117; Michelangelo Guida (2013): “Nurettin Topçu: The ‘Reinvention’ of Islamism in Republican Turkey”, *Alternatives*, 12/2, pp. 15–29; Michelangelo Guida (2012), “Founders of Islamism in Republican Turkey: Kısakürek and Topçu in: Mohammed A. Bamyeh (ed.): *The Social Role of Intellectuals in the Middle East: Liberalism, Modernity and Political Discourse*, London: I. B. Tauris, pp. 111–132.; Vömel: Global Intellectual Transfers.

³⁹ Gavin D. Brockett (2011): *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity*, Austin: University of Texas Press; İlker Aytürk (2014): “Nationalism and Islam in Cold War Turkey, 1944–69”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 50/5, pp. 693–719.

⁴⁰ Behlül Özkan (2019b): “Cold War Era Relations between West Germany and Turkish Political Islam: From an Anti-Communist Alliance to a Domestic Security Issue”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 19/1, pp. 31–54.

these connections, the number of Turkish students at Al-Azhar University who often developed contacts in Muslim Brotherhood circles rose steadily during the first decades of the Cold War.⁴¹ In 1962, Saudi Arabia created the *Rābiṭat al-‘Ālam al-Islāmī* (Muslim World League), an organization dedicated to networking and gaining influence for Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabian interpretations of Islam. On the Turkish side, figures like Salih Özcan (1929–2015) acted in a similar capacity as go-betweens for these efforts.⁴² The success of this broad networking endeavor was less due to a powerful Muslim Brotherhood, but rather due to the combination of U.S., European, and conservative Middle Eastern strategic interests of which the Muslim Brotherhood was just one part of the picture. With secular-oriented states in Turkey as well as in the Arab republics, this constituted a field of sub-state actors that represented only one set of political forces out of many outside of the Gulf region.

During the 1970s, previously marginal Islamist currents grew into serious contenders for power in the global upsurge of Islamist politics continuing over the next few decades. Against this backdrop, transnational organizing intensified. Turkish Islamism grew out of its small milieu in the vicinity of Sufi brotherhoods towards more effective political organizations within the *Milli Görüş* movement (mostly translated as “National View”, but indented as something closer to “The (Religious) Community’s View”). Out of this movement, a series of parties that participated in governing coalitions in the 1970s and the 1990s emerged. The ideology of the *Milli Görüş* featured a strong emphasis on industrialization and on Islam as a tool to instill social discipline and coherence. It was more open to nationalism than other versions of Islamist ideology and saw Turkey as the natural leader of the Muslim world. This ideological outlook came about in inner-Turkish developments and was designed by Turkish intellectuals with little impact outside of Turkey. Turkish Islamism thus developed

⁴¹ Evidence of this, personal narratives, and details on the students’ networks with Brotherhood figures can be found in the memoir of Turkish Azhar-student Ali Ulvi Kurucu (1940s) and the published recollections on Ali Yakup Cenkçiler (mid-1930s till late 1950s): M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ (2007): *Üstad Ali Ulvi Kurucu - Hatıralar*, 5 Vols., İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları; Necdet Yılmaz (2005): *Ali Yakup Cenkçiler Hatıra Kitabı*, İstanbul: Darulhadis.

⁴² Ahmed Özer (2011): *Bediüzzaman’ın hariciye vekili Seyyid Salih Özcan*, İstanbul: Işık Yayınları.

as a unique disparate tradition. Its long-term strategy was to achieve gradual transformation of Turkey from a secular into an Islamic republic via participation in elections. This outlook was non-violent and non-revolutionary. It resulted in a precarious position within the Turkish political system with one foot inside legitimate politics and one foot outside of it. The *Milli Görüş* participated in governing coalitions during the late 1970s and—now at the height of its success—in 1996/97 but nevertheless saw its party organization banned several times. To this, it responded by founding replacement parties, putting a revolving set of people not yet banned or scrutinized by the state apparatus in charge, and moving into grassroots organizing that was less vulnerable to organizational bans. Over three decades starting in the 1970s, the *Milli Görüş* was able to establish itself not only as a party but also as a broad social movement with its own media, business associations, organic intellectual life, and more.⁴³

Between Necmettin Erbakan (1926–2011), the leader of the movement, and the Muslim Brotherhood, the occasional contacts of previous decades moved closer to real cooperation. Erbakan had been the unchallenged leader and key political operator from the *Milli Görüş*'s foundation up to his death.⁴⁴ Kamal al-Helbawy (1939–2023), secretary of the Saudi-based World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), and Mahdi Akef (1928–2017), a key international organizer and later general guide of the Brotherhood, kindled relations with Erbakan in the second half of the 1970s. As two movements with brotherly ties and a self-perceived common mission, the two reached an agreement of non-interference in each other's spheres. Both sides also agreed to found WAMY youth camps in Konya, a key city of the *Milli Görüş*-movement, and in Cyprus, where a *Da'wah* (Islamic proselytizing) center was designed to counter

⁴³ Yavuz: *Islamic Political Identity*, pp. 207–239; Heiko Heinisch, Hüseyin Çiçek and Jan-Markus Vömel (2023): *Die Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş: Geschichte, Ideologie, Organisation und gegenwärtige Situation*, Studie 04, Vienna: Österreichischer Fonds zur Dokumentation von religiös motiviertem politischen Extremismus (Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam), pp. 15–71.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–59.

the entrenched secularism on the island after the Turkish invasion of 1974.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the two movements disagreed on overall strategy. While the Turks favored a path of gradual change via participation in legal party politics, the Egyptians practiced political restraint as they extended their outreach as a social grassroots movement.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the international scene changed in the late 1970s, upsetting the Cold War alliance and facilitating the rise of Islamist movements and their cooperation across borders. King Faisal bin Abdulaziz (1906–1975), the main architect of the Saudi anticommunist and anti-pan-Arabist Islamizing effort, had fallen victim to an assassin in 1975.⁴⁷ For the conservative Gulf monarchies, emboldened by their new international leverage demonstrated during the 1973 oil crisis, the threat of socialist pan-Arab nationalism had already faded after the death of Nasser and the failure of all attempts to put it into practice. Revolutionary Islamism suddenly appeared as a new force in the region with eruptions such as the Iranian Revolution and the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, suspicion against the Muslim Brotherhood had already grown as one of the inspirational roots behind the *Sahwa* movement in Saudi Arabia, which rose as an alternative to government-sponsored Wahhabism, and thus served to undermine a pillar of regime legitimacy in the kingdom. In this way, the secular nationalist and socialist pan-Arabist challenge to the Middle Eastern status-quo order was replaced with a revolutionary pan-Islamist specter. Although only minority factions in the Brotherhood espoused a revolutionary ideology and exiled activists often heeded regime demands to lay low, tensions ultimately simmered over and

⁴⁵ Willi: *Forth Ordeal*, p. 258; Lorenzo Vidino (2019): *The Closed Circle: Joining and Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood in the West*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Hammond: *Late Ottoman Origins*, pp. 257–258.

⁴⁷ Abdullah M. Sindi (2019): “King Faisal and Pan-Islamism”, in Willard A. Beling (ed.): *King Faisal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia*, London / New York: Routledge, pp. 184–201.

⁴⁸ David Menashri (ed. 2019): *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, New York / London: Routledge; Arang Keshavarzian and Ali Mirsepassi (eds. 2021): *Global 1979: Geographies and Histories of the Iranian Revolution*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press; Cole M. Bunzel (2023): “Toward the Seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca: The Writings and Ideology of Juhaymān al-‘Utaybī and the Ikhwān”, *Die Welt des Islams*, 63/4, pp. 383–417.

the common project evaporated. The fallout between Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood concluded when the Brotherhood sided with the Iraqi regime in its expansionist campaign leading to Saudi invitation of US troops in the Gulf War, a move which also led the Kuwaiti section of the movement to sever all ties with the main body in Egypt.⁴⁹ Saudi-Brotherhood interests continued to converge only regarding the Islah-party in Yemen and *Da'wah*-efforts in Europe, resulting in financing for Brotherhood infrastructure there.⁵⁰

Domestic conditions, moreover, also turned against Islamists in both countries. While the two movements were on track towards closer collaboration in the second half of the 1970s, further advances in this direction were cut short by the Turkish military coup of 1980 and the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat (1918–1981) who had been pursuing a more lenient stance towards the Brotherhood. Under the regime of Hosni Mubarak (1928–2020), an air force general assuming power after the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat in 1981, direct connections dissipated.⁵¹ Little is known about the Turkish state and its intelligence agencies' interactions with the Muslim Brotherhood. Engagements seem to have been on a transactional ad hoc-basis, such as its clandestine support for the Syrian Brotherhood against the regime of Hafez al-Assad (1930–2000) who had, in turn, allowed the Kurdish rebel group PKK to operate against Turkey from Syrian soil during the 1980s and 1990s.⁵²

The 1990s were a fateful period for Turkish Islamism. During this decade, the current *Milli Görüş* party, the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party), reached its zenith of social, cultural, and political influence. However, it was subsequently forced to relinquish these achievements, which led to a breakaway faction founding

⁴⁹ Stéphane Lacroix (2017): "Saudi Arabia's Muslim Brotherhood Predicament", The Project on Middle East Political Science, *POMEPS Briefings*, 31 (= *The Qatar Crisis*), pp. 51–53, https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/POMEPS_GCC_Qatar-Crisis.pdf [25.07.2024].; James Piscatori (1991): "Religion and Realpolitik: Islamic Responses to the Gulf War", *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, pp. 17–39.

⁵⁰ Edwin Bakker and Roel Meijer (eds. 2012): *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, London: Hurst, p. 8.

⁵¹ Willi: *The Forth Ordeal*, pp. 258–259.

⁵² Özkan: *Relations between Turkey and Syria*.

the reformist AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party) in 2001. Effectively taking over structures established in the decade before, a well-known leadership took this breakaway party immediately into government in its first election. The AKP remains in power until today. Through solid campaigning and a steady expansion of its grassroots organization, *Milli Görüş* had developed into a mass movement during the 1990s, ultimately mounting the most effective political machine in Turkish history. While other parties were mostly top-heavy, elite-oriented constructions, the *Milli Görüş*-movement invested heavily in its social underpinnings in order to circumvent looming party bans and institutional obstruction on the part of statist status-quo forces. A series of political successes carried *Refah* politicians like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the city halls of Istanbul, Ankara, and other major cities in 1994. *Milli Görüş*-leader Necmettin Erbakan then crowned the rise of the movement with his ascendancy to the prime ministry of Turkey in mid-1996. Before long, an engineered campaign of establishment forces removed the *Refah* politicians, including Erbakan, from their posts and had the party banned in early 1998. This grave interruption of what the *Milli Görüş* leadership saw as key historical momentum on the march towards a more Islamic republican order led to a fundamental conflict about leadership and strategy within the movement. After the younger, reformist cadres failed to sideline Erbakan and secure control over the party, they formed their own party with the AKP. The basic strategy of this new formation was to cojoin the insecure Islamist position with that of fully legitimate republican conservatism. At a moment with other center-right forces in crisis, this move brought the AKP an instant triumph in the first election it participated in, ushering in a two-decade dominance in Turkish politics.⁵³ Fearing inspiration toward breakaways from its ranks, the Brotherhood in Egypt opposed the AKP and kept up its contacts with the traditionalist wing around Erbakan.⁵⁴ This wing's new party, the *Saadet Partisi* (Felicity Party), also founded in 2001, however,

⁵³ Mustafa Şen (2010) "Transformation of Turkish Islamism and the Rise of the Justice and Development Party", *Turkish Studies*, 11/1, pp. 59–84; William Hale and Ergun Özbudun (2009): *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP*, London / New York: Routledge, 2009.

⁵⁴ Willi: *The Forth Ordeal*, p. 259.

was soon marginalized at the ballot box and would remain in this position for decades of AKP rule until today—only recently the *Yeniden Refah Partisi* (New Welfare Party), a new formation claiming the heritage of the *Milli Görüş*-tradition under the leadership of Erbakan’s son could score more significant successes. In the shadow of this experience, the Egyptian Brotherhood viewed the political model of the AKP with its breakaway of younger, reformist cadres abandoning Islamist orthodoxies as a threat with the potential to fundamentally undermine its organization.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the Egyptian Brotherhood went through another repressive phase. Hosni Mubarak’s regime had initially continued Anwar al-Sadat’s relatively lax policy towards the Brotherhood, which had allowed it to rebuild networks, broaden social movement activities, and expand on university campuses. In the 1990s, several crackdowns on different sections of the Brotherhood’s social presence and the regime’s increasing monopolization of power limited its political ambitions again. This situation restricted Brotherhood activities to low-level neighborhood activism and welfare programs, thus moving into areas where the state was not present and expanding its following by less confrontational means. At the same time, alternatives to the Brotherhood emerged in Egypt, ending its exclusive position as the quintessential politico-religious movement of the country. From television preachers to Salafists and violent Jihadist groups, a diverse set of actors and groups now populated the scene. The Brotherhood nevertheless managed to broaden its social base and venture into the economic sphere with movement-affiliated businessmen. The figure of the pious businessman was embodied by its most successful example, Khairat el-Shater (b. 1950), who quickly rose through the ranks to become a key figure in the Egyptian Brotherhood of the 1990s and 2000s. Just like the *Milli Görüş* movement in Turkey, the Brotherhood successfully positioned itself as a broad social coalition across classes by accommodating ambitious middle classes as well as a pious bourgeoisie while also

⁵⁵ Abdelrahman Ayyash (2020): “The Turkish Future of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood”, *The Century Foundation*, <https://tcf.org/content/report/turkish-future-egypts-muslim-brotherhood/> [25.07.2024].

catering to the urban poor. In so doing, the Brotherhood formed a separate socio-cultural substratum of Egyptian society as such.⁵⁶

Increased networking was the natural outcome of two movements seeing each other as brotherly actors in global solidarity behind a common cause in different parts of the Muslim world. Such connections were enabled by brokers of transnational Islamism such as Said Ramadan and Kamal el-Helbawy for the Brotherhood, or Salih Özcan for the Turkish side. A similar case was the Pakistani *Jamā'at-e Islāmī*, which also had its distinct genealogy and its own trajectory outside of the Arab sphere.⁵⁷ Networking between the fraternal organizations was, moreover, facilitated by the Cold War struggles in the Middle East in which political Islam profited from its anti-communist credentials and opposition to secular-nationalist leaders who tended towards the Soviet camp. However, different actors adopted different policies over time and the Cold War setting does not account for the strength of local Islamist organizational efforts and the actors' agency, which undergirded the global Islamist upsurge at the time as well. After the 1980s, Saudi Arabia dropped out as a sponsor of transnational Brotherhood activities in the Muslim world altogether and Western sympathies quickly died down as well.

Europe: networking and bonding free of regime pressure

Europe provided an entirely new setting for the internationalization of Islamist currents. Turkish Islamism had developed in a very self-contained fashion in Turkey and only began to take in foreign influences in the second half of the 1970s. The Muslim Brotherhood had started their networking at an earlier date. After the 1952 coup of the Free Officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970) in Egypt, continued repression drove parts of the Brotherhood underground and other parts to exile in Saudi Arabia—establishing the first links of the Brotherhood's international network. The European setting

⁵⁶ Willi: *The Forth Ordeal*, pp. 100–178.

⁵⁷ Jasmine K. Gani (2023): "Anti-Colonial Connectivity between Islamicate Movements in the Middle East and South Asia: The Muslim Brotherhood and Jamati Islam", *Postcolonial Studies*, 26/1, pp. 55–76.

allowed free organizing and networking in a much more relaxed setting than had been possible inside and in between the home countries and under the watchful eyes of security services.

The key figure in this organizational effort was the already mentioned Said Ramadan, son-in-law of al-Banna. Ramadan toured Muslim countries and Europe, establishing contacts with like-minded figures and setting up network centers such as mosques in Munich and Geneva that served as hubs for European operations.⁵⁸ From these initial centers, the Brotherhood expanded to all Western European countries. The networks in Austria centered around Graz and activists there who founded students' organizations, associations, and companies. The Egyptian and Syrian Brotherhood sections dominated the diaspora scene, but others participated as well. The organizational mastermind of this effort was veteran Muslim Brother Youssef Nada (1931–2024), running his company and Brotherhood networking from the Swiss-Italian border.⁵⁹

With more Brotherhood members driven into exile during this era, international organizing took on greater importance. In addition to the Arab world and various Brotherhood-affiliated groups there, Europe became a nucleus of activities. Earlier decades had seen loose organizational efforts and an ebb and flow of emigration following waves of repression. The first modest networks in different European nations also catered to students from the Arab world. Over time, the importance of giving permanence and structure to efforts in Europe ultimately sank in. During the 1980s and 1990s, spurred by new waves

⁵⁸ Daniel Rickenbacher (2020): "The Beginnings of Political Islam in Switzerland: Said Ramadan's Muslim Brotherhood Mosque in Geneva and the Swiss Authorities", *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 11/2, pp. 179–202; Özkan: Cold war era relations between West Germany and Turkish political Islam, pp. 31–54; Guido Steinberg (19.01.2015): "Germany and the Muslim Brotherhood", *Al-Mesbar Studies & Research Center*, pp. 86–100, <https://mesbar.org/germany-muslim-brotherhood/> [25.07.2024].; Ian Johnson (2011): *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood*, New York: Mariner Books; Stefan Meining (2011): *Eine Moschee in Deutschland: Nazis, Geheimdienste und der Aufstieg des politischen Islam im Westen*, Munich: C.H. Beck.

⁵⁹ Lorenzo Vidino (2017): *The Muslim Brotherhood in Austria*, [Washington, D. C.]: The George Washington University, Program on Extremism / [Vienna]: University of Vienna, pp. 15–19.

of repression in Egypt and most other countries with Brotherhood-affiliated groups, incoming migrants provided the personal backbone. In the following years, national associations, schools, and several dedicated bodies were set up. Most important among organizations often counted as belonging to the wider Brotherhood-sphere are the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), the Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines (IESH) as a higher learning institution also serving to train imams and teachers, the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO), the European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW), and the umbrella organization Council of European Muslims, also widely known under its former designation Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE). In order to manage such organizational efforts and coordinate more closely with the various country sections in the Arab world, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood founded the so-called International Organization (*al-Tanzīm al-Dawlī*).⁶⁰ This organization, headed by Ibrahim Munir (1937–2022), set up camp in London, making Great Britain a center of transnational Brotherhood activities. The impact of this umbrella organization, however, remained limited since the Egyptian section insisted on maintaining its influence.⁶¹

Little is known about direct relations between the Islamist movements of the Arab world and Turkey between the 1980s and the 2000s. In Europe however,—far from the reach of Arab regimes and Turkish authorities—networking and collaboration flourished. The European section of the *Milli Görüş* movement and Brotherhood-affiliated organizations established a close rapport in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Yusuf Zeynel Abidin (1939–1986), an Iraqi Turkmen physician, was an ideal candidate for leading the European *Milli Görüş*-section because of his connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and knowledge of

⁶⁰ Willi: *The Fourth Ordeal*, pp. 43–45.

⁶¹ Brigitte Maréchal (2008): *The Muslim Brothers in Europe: Roots and Discourse*, Leiden: Brill; Martyn Frampton (2018): *The Muslim Brotherhood and the West: A History of Enmity and Engagement*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; Lorenzo Vidino (2010): *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press; David Rich (2010): “The Very Model of a British Muslim Brotherhood”, in: Barry Rubin (ed.): *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, London / New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 117–136.

Arabic, German, and Turkish.⁶² Personal contacts in Europe, mainly Germany, led to prominent intermarriages between families of *Milli Görüş* and Muslim Brotherhood functionaries. The marriage between Sabiha Erbakan (b. 1970), a niece of the movement's leader, and the Brotherhood figure Ibrahim El-Zayat (b. 1968) thus symbolized the ties in personal relations.⁶³ El-Zayat later became chairman of the *Europäische Moscheebau- und Unterstützungsgemeinschaft e.V.* (EMUG, European Association for Mosque Construction and Support)—an incorporated society founded to hold and manage all the real estate property of the European *Milli Görüş* after a radical splinter group led by Cemaleddin Kaplan (1926–1995) aiming for an Islamic revolution in Turkey after the Iranian model had rid *Milli Görüş* of a significant part of its facilities.⁶⁴ El-Zayat was therefore in a position of high responsibility and confidence.⁶⁵

⁶² Hasan Damar (2008): *Efendilikten Köleliğe. Avrupa'da Milli Görüş Hareketi*, vol. 1, Istanbul: Gonca Yayınevi, pp. 117.

⁶³ Vidino: *Brotherhood in the West*, p. 46.

⁶⁴ Heinisch, Çiçek, Vömel: *Die Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş*, pp. 106–107.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–117.



The making and unmaking of the Turkish-Brotherhood alliance

Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood during the Arab Spring

In the first decade of the new millennium, the AKP firmly entrenched its rule. When the party also reached for the presidency after forming its second government with a solid parliamentary majority, it survived a warning shot by the Turkish general staff calling for loyalty to the principles of laicist republicanism and narrowly avoided a supreme court decision to outlaw the party and ban its cadres from politics in 2008. At the height of its electoral success, the party increased its share of the popular vote from the initial 34.28 percent in 2002 to 49.83 percent in 2011. In the following years, the AKP successively removed the old secular-republican bureaucrats, judges, and generals from key state institutions. During this first phase, the AKP projected a liberal-conservative, reformist image based on its discourse of “conservative democracy” (*muhafazakâr demokrasi*). It had little difficulty framing the laicist old guard and the main opposition as undemocratic reactionaries sticking to a political model ignoring vast parts of the conservative-Islamic population. This coincided not only with Western hopes for a liberal Islam in the post-9/11 era but also with the various sections of the Muslim Brotherhood searching for viable models of successful regime transformation. As it turned out later, the so-called “Turkish model” had little applicability in the Arab world with its different regimes and historical trajectories. Furthermore, the AKP soon dismantled its own model as it went down an authoritarian path towards a personalized one-man regime. In the context of the early 2000s, however, it was still perceived as a beacon of democratic Islam’s potential. In its turn towards the Muslim world, Turkish foreign policy attempted to capitalize on these perceptions, carving out a new regional role for itself.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Cihan Tuğal (2016): *The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism*, London: Verso Books.

After several consecutive electoral victories, the Turkish administration felt confident about engineering a volte-face in Turkish policy towards the region, which had traditionally been more cautious and moderate. Turkey thus quickly abandoned its previously friendly stances with the status-quo regimes of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt or Bashar al-Assad in Syria and manifestly took sides in the emerging friend-and-foe scheme of Middle Eastern politics. In this new scenario, Turkey did not hesitate to extend practical support to the Brotherhood-affiliated formations. This included financial support and the training of cadres in workshops led by AKP strategists.⁶⁷ The lack of intellectual and practical experience of the Brotherhood-inspired formations made such forms of support crucial.

Then, in the early 2010s, when a series of popular protests and uprisings shook the regimes of the Arab world, its moment seemed to have arrived. Initial protests against regime repression, arbitrariness, social injustice, and corruption in Tunisia took about a month to force autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1936–2019) into exile in December 2010 and January 2011. After a phase of democratic transition, the country's first free elections were held later that year. Massive popular protests in Egypt and Yemen directly followed those in Tunisia in January 2011. Egyptians toppled the government of Hosni Mubarak and held free elections in summer, while protestors in Yemen brought about the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh (1942–2017) in 2012. The protests spilled over to Libya and Syria in February and March, where people demanded an end to their country's sclerotic regimes. The violent pushbacks of the regimes in these two countries led to protracted civil wars that became the playing field for regional and international actors vying for hegemonic positions. During the same period in early 2011, Morocco, Kuwait, Lebanon, Bahrain, Oman, and Jordan also saw fundamental challenges, leading to concessions and reforms on the part of the status-quo regimes. Sudan, Iraq,

⁶⁷ Jana J. Jabbour (2022): "After a Divorce, a Frosty Entente: Turkey's Rapprochement with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia: Strategic Necessity and Transactional Partnership in a Shifting World Order", *Ifri – French Institute of International Relations*, Notes de l'Ifri, p. 9, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2jabbour_turkey_sa_uae_mai2022.pdf [25.07.2024].

and Algeria witnessed large-scale protests as well, albeit with less direct consequences.⁶⁸

The Arab Spring brought Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups into key positions in many countries and advanced their role in others. In all countries, the mass protests had begun as spontaneous youth movements, but the Brotherhood sections ended up in advantageous positions after a while, often having had a head start as the most organized and coherent opposition factions under the former regimes. Tunisian elections in 2011 resulted in Rached Ghannouchi's *Ennahda* in the leading position poised to form the first elected government.⁶⁹ In Syria, the Brotherhood tried to gain a role as a major player within the ranks of the armed factions and the national council in exile. It succeeded only with the latter while remaining less influential on the ground. Still, the Brotherhood would have been a contender for national leadership had the revolution actually succeeded in toppling the Assad regime in its early phase.⁷⁰ In Yemen, *al-Islah* joined the alliance ousting Ali Abdullah Saleh and eventually participated in the post-revolutionary governing coalition of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (b. 1945).⁷¹ Meanwhile, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party (PJD) channeled the popular energies into an electoral triumph in 2011, leading it to its first term at the helm of the country. In Jordan, the Brotherhood party took a more confrontational approach to the monarchy than it had previously done, boycotting elections in 2010 and 2013. It did not manage, however, to gather momentum from the regional Brotherhood upsurge and the popular protests, which the monarchy managed to

⁶⁸ For useful overviews on the different countries see: John Davis (ed. 2016): *The Arab Spring and Arab Thaw: Unfinished Revolutions and the Quest for Democracy*, London / New York: Taylor & Francis.

⁶⁹ Beverley Milton-Edwards (2015): *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Arab Spring and its Future Face*, London / New York: Routledge, pp. 111–136.

⁷⁰ Naomí Ramírez Díaz (2018b): “Unblurring Ambiguities: Assessing the Impact of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the Syrian Revolution”, in Raymond Hinnebusch and Omar Imady (eds.): *The Syrian Uprising*, London / New York: Routledge, pp. 207–222.; Naomí Ramírez (2014): “The Strategy & Goals of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Syrian Revolution”, *Syria Studies*, 6/3, pp. 37–61.

⁷¹ Milton-Edwards: *Muslim Brotherhood*, pp. 137–160.

quell and appease.⁷² After the fall of the Gaddafi regime, the Libyan Brothers established a party for the first time that emerged as the most impactful Islamist force in the country. It quickly solidified its influence and proceeded to participate in governing coalitions.⁷³

Most consequentially, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood rose to power shortly after the fall of the Mubarak regime in 2011/12. The mass protests one year earlier had caught the Egyptian Brotherhood by surprise, and it struggled to find an adequate, inventive response to events on the ground and the overall rapidly changing political scene. While youth activists from the universities soon pushed to the fore of the protests, the elderly leadership was hesitant and ill-equipped to play a decisive role. After the Tunisian revolution, the Brotherhood in Egypt tried to engage in a reform process with the regime rather than calling for or organizing protests itself.⁷⁴ In this configuration, the official Brotherhood trailed behind the turn of events rather than actively shaping them. As soon as the Mubarak regime yielded under pressure from the streets and announced a transitional period under a caretaker government, however, the dynamics of the protest phase ended, and a race to form effective parties and field candidates for the presidential election commenced. The Muslim Brotherhood quickly established the Freedom and Justice Party (*Ḥizb al-Ḥurrīya wa-l-ʿAdāla*). It came in first in the national ballots in late 2011 and early 2012 with 37.5 percent. As will be shown further down, *Ennahda* in Tunisia fared similarly. This result encouraged the Brotherhood to field its own candidate for the presidential elections in the summer of 2012—some commentators even suggested that Turkish influence went as far as to persuade the Egyptian Brotherhood to run its own candidate after they were initially hesitant to do so.⁷⁵ The Brotherhood had originally pledged not

⁷² Ibid., pp. 86–110.

⁷³ Fitzgerald: *Libya's Islamists*, pp. 177–204

⁷⁴ Jennifer Wilmot (2015): “A Commitment to Politics: The Trajectory of the Muslim Brotherhood during Egypt’s 2011–13 Political Opening”, *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 8/3, pp. 379–397 and p. 384.

⁷⁵ Salim Çevik (06.08.2021): “Erdogan’s Endgame with Egypt,” *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, <https://www.thecaireview.com/globalforum/erdogans-endgame-with-egypt> [25.07.2024].

to field a candidate of its own and Khairat el-Shater—one of the most powerful Brotherhood figures—resigned from the movement to be able to run. After his nomination failed due to an intervention of the armed forces, engineering professor and longtime Brotherhood activist, Mohammed Morsi (1951–2019), took the helm. During the campaign, the Brotherhood was able to utilize its broad social networks in support of their candidate like no other political formation. In a fragmented political scene with few established norms and institutions, five candidates gained larger percentages of the vote. Of these candidates, Morsi reached 24.78 percent, followed by Ahmed Shafik (b. 1941), the last prime minister of the Mubarak regime, with only one percent less. In the runoff, Morsi secured a narrow lead over his opponent and was sworn in as president on June 30, 2012.⁷⁶

However fleeting, this was a historical moment during which a Middle East governed by populist Islamic parties actually seemed possible. For the Turkish administration, this appeared like a golden opportunity. It would emerge as the most entrenched, experienced, and weighty administration, leading a group of countries sharing a similar outlook, strategic goals, and ideological foundations. As *primus inter pares* of such a block, Turkey itself would amplify its own reach and move into a key position as regional arbiter. This aspiration was deeply engrained in the Turkish leadership's worldview and biographical background, having been shaped by Islamist views on foreign policy and on how to engage with the wider world for decades. Turkish Islamists had long lambasted secularist and conservative-republican parties for supposedly being servile to the West and its political schemes. Instead of being an appendix to the Western alliance, the Islamists argued, Turkey would do better rallying an alliance of Islamic countries behind it. Turkey would thus break free of its subordinate status and become a preeminent power itself.⁷⁷ Thinking along these lines was especially evident in the writings of Ahmet

⁷⁶ Willli: Forth Ordeal, pp. 230–304; Wickham: Muslim Brotherhood Evolution, pp. 154–195; 247–288.

⁷⁷ Alessio Calabrò (2018): *Neo-Pan-Islamism in Turkey: Foreign Policy Discourse of Turkey's Islamist Thinkers and Parties (1970s–1990s)*, PhD Dissertation, Rome: Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli.

Davutoğlu (b. 1959), then foreign minister and a core architect of Turkish regional policies. Davutoğlu had been a longtime foreign policy thinker in Islamist circles, expounding on the gist of his thought in the 2001 book *Strategic Depth: Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy* (“Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu”).⁷⁸ This work drew little attention until Davutoğlu came into a position to implement the core ideas of his program. Meanwhile, Turkish foreign policy was seeking for a new strategic orientation after hopes for a closer association with the EU diminished. Davutoğlu’s perspective was rooted in geopolitical thought, emphasizing civilizational blocks. Turkey’s interests would be best served by orienting itself towards former Ottoman realms and the Islamic world with the ultimate goal of creating an Islamic union under Turkish leadership, Davutoğlu held. Reconnecting with much more fundamental civilizational, religious, and sentimental solidarities—so the thinking went—would open up a completely new kind of politics. Such efforts would transcend the nation-state and its limitations toward an international order cast in a civilizational form. While the AKP’s foreign policy during the first years of its rule was oriented towards a range of various goals, pushing towards EU membership and committed to multilateralism, older ideological orientations re-materialized in light of earlier projects failing, along with the AKP’s increasingly entrenched hold over all aspects of Turkish policymaking.⁷⁹

Such perspectives had little regard for the applicability of the Turkish experience in settings other than the Turkish context and showed little awareness of Arab (un-)willingness to subordinate under Turkish grand designs. The so-called “Turkish Model” nevertheless had its own intricate history in the Arab world. Apart from Turkish projections and wishful thinking, Turkish

⁷⁸ Ahmet Davutoğlu (2001): *Stratejik Derinlik. Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, partly also in Ahmet Davutoğlu (1994): *Alternative Paradigms: Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*, Lanham / London: University Press of America; on Davutoğlu’s work see Behlül Özkan (2014): “Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism”, *Survival*, 56/4, pp. 119–140; Matthew S. Cohen (2016): “Ahmet Davutoğlu’s Academic and Professional Articles: Understanding the World View of Turkey’s former Prime Minister”, *Turkish Studies*, 17/4, pp. 527–543.

⁷⁹ Aaron Stein (2015): *Turkey’s New Foreign Policy: Davutoglu, the AKP and the Pursuit of Regional Order*, London / New York: Routledge.

popularity was at a height at the turn of the decade. This went well beyond the Islamist factions. Many envied a democratically elected leadership that could strike a credibly self-confident tone while also successfully managing the economy—things that Arabs could reasonably wish to have themselves. Turkish grandstanding against Israel such as in the *Mavi Marmara* incident of May 2010, only solidified such admiration. For Islamist factions then, more specifically, the example of how an up-and-coming Islamic party could appease or quell opposition by establishment forces was pivotal. This golden age of Turkey's image in the Arab world was based on soft power and—to a lesser degree—economic cooperation. Turkish engagements with its Arab neighbors under the maxim of “zero problems with neighbors” could serve to appease Arab worries about Turkish neo-imperialism. It lasted as long as Turkey could present itself as a successful role model of democratization playing a positive role in the region without interfering in the internal affairs of Arab states too drastically. The Turkish reaction to the Arab Spring and its own authoritarian hardening shattered this universal appeal and ushered in a new phase of more limited interest and alliance politics. Instead of projecting a role model image into the region via soft power, Turkey would now become a partial actor leaving its imprint in the region via hard power interventions, ultimately building alliances with actors furthering its agenda, supplying weapons to factions in civil wars, and generally taking sides in the struggle over shaping a new Middle East.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, in the emerging Arab Spring axis, Qatar joined forces with Turkey and Muslim Brotherhood affiliates as the third pivotal member. Adopting a similar interventionist stance in Middle Eastern politics, Qatari rulers abandoned their earlier, much more modest position as a broker in Middle Eastern politics. Like Turkey, Qatar felt encouraged by earlier soft power success and economic security. Despite being a smaller player in Middle Eastern politics,

⁸⁰ Tuğal: Turkish Model; Jean-Loup Samaan (2013): “The rise and fall of the ‘Turkish Model’ in the Arab World”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 12/3, pp. 61–69; Engin Yüksel (2019): *Strategies of Turkish Proxy Warfare in Northern Syria*, Clingendael – Netherlands Institute of International Relations, *CRU Report*, <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/strategies-of-turkish-proxy-warfare-in-northern-syria.pdf> [25.07.2024].

Qatar derived such self-confidence from the accomplishments of the Qatari *Al Jazeera* network and its large following among Arab audiences all over the region, the vast network of its investment authority and the influence it yielded, as well as rentier revenues generated by natural deposits in Qatar, along with the economic security and independence from neighbors that it brought. For his part, Qatari Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani (b. 1952), ruling between 1995 and 2013, for some time sought ways to alleviate pressure from the surrounding larger monarchies and to emerge from the Saudi shadow. His successor, Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani (b. 1980), continued this fundamental outlook of Qatari politics. These father-son regents thus created a single exceptional force among the conservative Arab monarchies that otherwise fought hard to retain the status quo, pushing back against the outcomes of the Arab Spring.⁸¹

On the other side of Middle Eastern alliance politics emerging with the Arab Spring stood a loose alliance of “hawks” and “moderates”. The hawks, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, adopted an interventionist, counter-revolutionary agenda, and aggressively prosecuted the Muslim Brotherhood when within reach, declaring it a terrorist organization. The moderates like Jordan more or less tacitly condoned the hawks’ actions and lent their support to them but at the same time balanced internal compromise with their local Brotherhood affiliates. This group, just like the Turkish-Qatari axis, used the political opening that the Arab Spring constituted to expand its regional influence and emerge as an arbiter tilting balances in volatile settings towards their favored actors, thereby creating a block aligned with its vision of the Middle East. Israel and the U.S. administration under Donald Trump joined the ranks of the counterrevolutionary states, without becoming fully engaged actors as such.⁸²

⁸¹ Birol Başkan (2016): *Turkey and Qatar in the Tangled Geopolitics of the Middle East*, London / New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (2014): *Qatar and the Arab Spring*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 67–98.

⁸² May Darwich (2017): “Creating the Enemy, Constructing the Threat: The Diffusion of Repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East”, *Democratization*, 24/7, pp. 1289–1306.

Despite the Brotherhood's brusque reaction to Turkish prime minister Erdoğan's comments on the advantages of a secular order made on a state visit to Egypt in 2011, soon afterwards, a lasting partnership was indeed forged.⁸³ Despite ideological differences, the two sides quickly found common cause in the goal of a transformed Middle East albeit with different ideas on who was going to lead it. Such differences could have surfaced as open conflicts had the transformative phase been more lasting and successful. But for the time being, as the transformation was ongoing, common interest brought the two sides together. The Brotherhood sections, especially that of Egypt, sought to profit from Turkey's regional position and its broad experience with electoral politics, political communication, and governance. For their part, the Egyptian Brotherhood left their fear of the AKP model behind, as they concluded that it would not need a younger breakaway in order to emulate the model, but could do so itself without risking a split like in Turkey. This was facilitated by the Brotherhood suddenly being thrown into electoral politics without the historical experience or the requisite time for such a transformation. In this context, casting oneself in the Turkish mold and therein pointing to the political and economic success it projected as well as to retaining Islamic piety seemed to be a viable campaigning option.⁸⁴

Having reached the vestiges of power after Morsi's electoral triumph, the Brotherhood often appeared out of its depth. After the election, the government botched one crisis after the next and often handled setbacks without political savvy or much appreciable will to compromise with potential allies. Analysts of the movement have ascribed this inaptitude for acting dynamically in a fluid situation to the years of structural stagnation under repressive regimes.⁸⁵ Having a disconnected, elderly leadership socialized into the rigid, hierarchical structures tailored for underground activism likely served as another factor contributing to ham-handed approaches during the Brotherhood's stay

⁸³ Ayyash, El Afifi, Ezzat: *Broken Bonds*, p. 83

⁸⁴ Ayyash: *Turkish Future*.

⁸⁵ Willi: *Forth Ordeal*, pp. 230–287; Eric Trager (2016): *Arab Fall: How the Muslim Brotherhood Won and Lost Egypt in 891 Days*, Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press.

in power. When power fell into its hands, the Muslim Brotherhood remained stuck in the ways of a half-clandestine cadre organization. Ideological stances fueled the Brotherhood's impasse as well. Brotherhood rule clearly exhibited the imprint of the paternalistic, majoritarian understanding of democracy it had adopted at earlier stages.⁸⁶ In practice, this meant that structural impediments added up to their failure to reach out to other sections of the population and build a consensus for the post-revolutionary order and against military intervention. Brotherhood leadership favored maximalist aims alienating other actors over consensus-building based on common interests. They also gravely underestimated the open hostility of the military-bureaucratic complex. Behind this lay more complex issues than just the secular–Islamist cleavage. The Brotherhood's ascendancy also encroached on vested interests and clientelist networks in the hierarchies of civil bureaucracy, military, and business that the Brotherhood threatened with its own parallel structures. Over decades, the Egyptian military had established its socioeconomic base far beyond the military-industrial complex. Entrenched Brotherhood rule would have threatened the military's reach. This also directly concerned processes of elite formation and elite recruitment dependent on the control of state resources and hiring—a vastly overblown sector in Egypt on which many livelihoods depended.⁸⁷

Among the different Muslim Brotherhood-inspired political formations striving to make an impact in the post-Arab Spring settings of their respective countries, the Egyptian one was aligned the closest with Turkey. In other countries, different scenarios emerged. After the Egyptian Brotherhood, the party with the most viable option for power was the Tunisian *Ennahda* under Rached Ghannouchi. This formation had taken a different route as the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired formation that engaged most broadly with

⁸⁶ Sebnem Gumuscu (2023): *Democracy or Authoritarianism: Islamist Governments in Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press; Mohammad Affan (2022): *Secularism Confronts Islamism: Divergent Paths of Transitional Negotiations in Egypt and Tunisia*, London / New York: Routledge.

⁸⁷ Trager: Arab Fall; Sara Tonsy (2021): *The Egyptian Army and the Muslim Brotherhood: Contemporary Political Power Dynamics*, London / New York: Routledge.

liberal democratic, non-majoritarian stances during the 2000s and before the Tunisian revolution. Staying true to this path, *Ennahda* sought consensual approaches after coming in as the leading transitional force in the first democratic election. Most notably, *Ennahda* demonstrated these stances by reaching out to other sections of the population—a feat that has in no way been attempted either by the AKP or by the Egyptian Brotherhood but that was also prefigured by its strategic positioning within the Tunisian context where no force could reach power on its own. *Ennahda* ended up struggling not to alienate its secularist partners while also appeasing more radical Islamist elements, which made critics doubt the sincerity of its liberal stance. Overall, *Ennahda* acted as a pragmatist political actor in ways that defy categorization as “liberal” or “Islamist”.⁸⁸

After the elections of 2011, *Ennahda* formed the so-called Troika coalition with two secularist center-left forces. It never achieved a similar dominance over political processes which the AKP was able to get hold of, empowered by the Turkish voting system. Tunisia’s first democratic constitution, signed in 2014, was liberal-democratic in nature rather than Islamist. Much earlier than the Egyptian Brotherhood, *Ennahda* had begun to look at Turkey and the AKP rather than their Egyptian counterparts as role models combining democratization, piousness, and economic success. After the revolution, intense back-and-forth visits between the Turkish and Tunisian parties occurred and both sides became invested in each other’s continued success and influence in regional affairs.⁸⁹

When the wave of protests caught on in Syria, the Syrian Brotherhood leadership was hesitant just like their Egyptian counterparts. But shortly afterwards,

⁸⁸ Wolf: Political Islam in Tunisia, pp. 129–162; David Siddhartha Patel (08.07.2022): “Ennahda: Before and After the Coup in Tunisia. A Conversation with Andrew F. March”, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, *Crown Conversations*, <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/crown-conversations/cc-14.html> [25.07.2024]; Monica Marks (2017a): “Tunisia”, in: Shadi Hamid and William McCants (eds.): *Rethinking Political Islam*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press (2017), pp. 32–53.

⁸⁹ Monika Marks (2017b): “Tunisia’s Islamists and the ‘Turkish Model’”, *Journal of Democracy*, 28/1, pp. 102–115.

the revolutionary events in Tunisia and Egypt awakened the Syrian Brotherhood to the possibilities of the new age as well. After clashes between regime forces and protestors turned violent and different factions formed military wings, the Brotherhood established armed formations too. However, more radical Islamist factions often proved to be more successful, and the Brotherhood was only one player among the plethora of groups on the ground. It was indeed leading, however, as a well-organized political force and thus could realistically hope to be among the principal actors of a postbellum settlement. In the military situation during the first phase of the conflict, imminent collapse of the regime seemed within reach. During this phase, Turkey began its push for regime change in the neighboring country and became heavily invested in arming and supporting rebel factions as well as providing a hub for leading oppositional cadres, among them the Brotherhood-leaning Syrian National Council.⁹⁰ When this body failed to align a unified oppositional stance, a new platform, the Syrian National Coalition was created against the wishes of the Brotherhood. Here, Brotherhood delegates were present too, but saw their influence sidelined.⁹¹ Recognizing this situation, Turkey put its weight behind a broader set of actors in the opposition rather than just with the Brotherhood. At the same time, Turkey began to host the most active and impactful part of the opposition and a growing number of refugees.⁹²

In Libya, the situation quickly became even more intricate. After armed rebel groups managed to oust Gaddafi and his regime, a volatile situation emerged with diverse factions vying for power. Without having played a decisive role on the battlefield, the Libyan Brotherhood came in as the largest Islamist party in the first democratic elections, but significantly trailed behind the liberal nationalist block. A colorful array of parties and independent candidates

⁹⁰ Thomas Pierret (2021): “Turkey and the Syrian Insurgency: From Facilitator to Overlord”, in Bayram Balci and Nicolas Monceau (eds.): *Turkey, Russia and Iran in the Middle East: Establishing a New Regional Order*, London / New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 59–77.

⁹¹ Yehuda U. Blanda (2017): “The Role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Syrian Civil War”, *Middle East Policy*, 24/3, pp. 48–69.

⁹² Francesco D’Alema (2017): “The Evolution of Turkey’s Syria Policy”, Istituto Affari Internazionali, *IAI Working Papers*, 17, pp. 2–17; Pierret (2021): *Turkey and the Syrian Insurgency*.

competed in the first election of 2012 while a surfeit of militias—nationalist, regional, tribal, or Islamist of various shades—exerted their influence on the ground. By building alliances, the Brotherhood was able to expand its influence in parliament. Nonetheless, the Brotherhood’s Justice and Construction Party (*Ḥizb al-ʿAdāla wa-l-Bināʾ*) failed to muster sufficient support to elect its candidate for prime minister. Instead, political expediency forced the Libyan Brotherhood to support the candidate of the liberal nationalist block, Ali Zeidan (b. 1950), whose cabinet it joined with six ministers. Fragile conditions troubled the new order with a party system lacking solid roots in Libyan society, fluctuating coalitions, and militias directly challenging the state and its institutions or even physically threatening the political elite. Volatile years followed.⁹³ The Turkish position only slowly grew from a restrained stance protecting lucrative building contracts under the Gaddafi regime into an interventionist one as the instability in the country opened doors to all kinds of foreign influence and alliance schemes. This proved to be even more consequential after the immediate post-Arab Spring period when Turkey and Qatar threw in their weight behind one camp in the ensuing civil war; the Gulf monarchies and Russia behind the other. Turkish support ranged from arms supplies to active political lobbying. Qatar also provided financial backing and was rumored to provide training to Islamist factions in Libya.⁹⁴

A symbolic height of the AKP alliance with Brotherhood sections was the invitation of *Hamās* leader Khaled Mashaal to the December 2014 party congress. Mashaal’s presence at the convention stirred up controversy. In his speech to Erdoğan, Davutoğlu, and a hall full of delegates, Mashaal stressed the historical friendship between Turks and Arabs and voiced hope that “just as your people protected Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa and Palestine for centuries in the past, I am hopeful that we will free Palestine and Jerusalem again in the future.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Fitzgerald: *Libya’s Islamists*, pp. 177–204.

⁹⁴ Md. Muddassir Quamar (2020): “Turkey and the Regional Flashpoint in Libya”, *Strategic Analysis*, 44/6, pp. 597–602; Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (2014): “Qatar and the Arab Spring. Policy Drivers and Regional Implications”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

⁹⁵ NTV (27.12.2014): “Halid Meşal AK Parti Konya Kongresi’nde konuştu”, *NTV*, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/mesal-akp-konya-kongresinde-konustu,AJ2tsk1iIEiBcsWMLM-CpQ> [25.07.2024].

In Morocco, yet another trajectory unfolded. The country's Muslim Brotherhood had historically positioned itself well with the monarchy that held constitutionally enshrined sway over the country's political system. Under pressure from the street during the Arab Spring, the monarchy attempted a tentative opening up of the political system towards constitutional monarchic elements while retaining key privileges. In the elections of November 2011—the first to be conducted after the reforms—the Brotherhood's Justice and Development Party came in first with 22 percent, leaving the second largest party, a pro-monarchical group by the name of *Istiqlal* (*Ḥizb al-Istiqlāl*, Independence Party), behind with 15 percent. Like many of the Brotherhood's parties, even the name called to mind the Turkish role model and *Ḥizb al-Istiqlāl* had send officials to Turkey even before the Arab Spring. The party could double down on its success in the next election in 2016, now scoring 31.6 percent. But in opening up actual sovereign space in the country's politics, even these consecutive years in power meant little in a system that still reserved crucial fields of policymaking as a prerogative for the palace.⁹⁶

Qatari rulers had their network *Al Jazeera* pushing Brotherhood figures and narratives to such an extent that *Al Jazeera* was identified with the position of the Turkish-Qatari-Brotherhood axis in Middle Eastern politics.⁹⁷ *Al Jazeera* was at the height of its influence across the region during the Arab Spring when national media landscapes were still dominated by regime outlets. Its coverage of the Tunisian, and the Egyptian revolution was closer to the pulse of the street and gained a wide audience along the way. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (1926–2022), a cleric and former Brotherhood figure with a massive outreach, hosted a weekly show on the channel in which he imparted religious advice on everyday behavior, called “Sharia and Life” (*al-Sharī'a wa-l-Ḥayāh*) from 1996 until 2013. The program evolved into the single most influential authoritative source for religious guidance in the Arab world and turned al-Qaradawi himself

⁹⁶ Shadi Hamid (31.01.2023): “The End of the Moroccan ‘Model’: How Islamists Lost Despite Winning”, *Brookings Institute Commentary*, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2023/01/31/the-end-of-the-moroccan-model-how-islamists-lost-despite-winning/> [25.07.2023].

⁹⁷ Başkan: Turkey and Qatar, pp. 57–60 and 111–113.

into a global brand of his own right. As the Arab Spring protests unfolded, al-Qaradawi returned to his native Egypt for the first time in decades and hosted an installment of the show live from Cairo's Tahrir Square.⁹⁸

The Turkish-Qatari-Brotherhood alliance looked to a promising future. The internal dynamics of the alliance, however, revealed an unequal relationship, with Turkey having much greater leverage over the emerging governments and the Qataris in possession of the rentier income for bankrolling movements across the Middle East and Europe. These unequal terms prompted some Brotherhood formations to keep a relative distance in the first place, such as the Tunisian *Ennahda*, while others were entirely reduced to junior partners of Turkish politics in the period that followed, such as the Egyptian Brotherhood. Shortly afterwards, Turkish-Qatari Brotherhood designs came to a crashing halt and all actors involved were forced to reconsider their strategic orientations.

The Post-Arab Spring: The Muslim Brotherhood dismantled

Actors within the Turkish-Qatari-Brotherhood axis had hoped for a post-revolutionary Middle East in which Muslim Brotherhood-aligned parties could dominate national politics like the AKP in Turkey and which would then form an alliance determining the region's political and strategic trajectory. These hopes soon proved to be lopsided. Counter-revolutionary actors on the inside and outside began to organize more forcefully and an aligned front soon began its efforts at rolling back the outcomes of popular pressure and the reforms undertaken. The Brotherhood parties themselves struggled massively with the challenges of governing, keeping opponents in check, forming alliances with non-Islamist actors, and developing mid and long-term strategies in the transformation processes of their countries.

⁹⁸ Sam Cherribi (2017): *Fridays of Rage: Al Jazeera, the Arab Spring, and Political Islam*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 125–153.

The most drastic turn of events occurred in Egypt. Compared to the Tunisian *Ennahda*, the Egyptian Brotherhood acted in a much less agile and conciliatory manner. In summer 2013, barely one year after his election, mass demonstrations against President Mohammed Morsi set in. After the government failed to meet the protestors' demands, the army leadership around Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (b. 1954)—a general promoted to the rank of commander-in-chief and installed as defense minister by Morsi himself—used the instability and the lack of consensus-building as a pretext for overthrowing Morsi's government. A previously unseen and increasingly violent campaign of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood ensued, culminating in the massacre of Brotherhood supporters at Rābi'a al-Adawīya Square in Cairo.⁹⁹ Many analysts speculated on why the Brotherhood acted so paralyzed even when signs of an imminent coup were mounting and why they were so utterly unprepared for its potential fallout. A cumbersome apparatus, geriatric leadership, and internal mechanisms geared towards hierarchy and obedience instead of upward mobility and decision-making close to grassroots activists, all contributed to the failure. With Egypt joining the counter-revolutionary camp, a Saudi-Egyptian axis emerged instead of the envisioned Turkish-Egyptian axis resulting in a grave fallout between Egypt and Turkey. Turkey now became home to Brotherhood members fleeing prison, torture, and extra-judicial killings in Egypt. Smaller numbers sought refuge in Great Britain, Malaysia, and other places.¹⁰⁰

In Sudan, the only country that had Brotherhood participation in government before the Arab Spring, popular protests in 2019 brought down the military-Brotherhood alliance. This government had been installed by the officer and later president, Omar al-Bashir (b. 1944), ultimately lasting three decades, during which time, it undertook an authoritarian Islamization process from above. Early on, al-Bashir had allied himself with Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood leader, Hassan al-Turabi (1932–2016), who served as the

⁹⁹ Trager: Arab Fall, pp. 175–188.

¹⁰⁰ Michele Dunne and Amr Hamzawy (2019): "Egypt's Political Exiles: Going Anywhere but Home", *Working Paper*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

intellectual backbone of the Islamizing efforts in the country. The two later fell out; al-Turabi's influence declined while being out of government and he developed more liberal ideas. Other Sudanese Islamists, however, remained in the governing alliance. This only ended with the anti-regime protests of 2019, which triggered a military intervention toppling al-Bashir. The transitional government quickly moved to purge all remnants of the military-Islamist regime.¹⁰¹ Turkey had been on good terms with Omar al-Bashir, who granted a lease of the strategically important Suakin Island on the Red Sea coast to Turkey. After the revolution, the fate of this project—which would have allowed Turkey to further enlarge its foothold in the region together with its bases in Qatar and Somalia—is unclear.¹⁰²

In Syria, the revolution soon got stuck in a protracted civil war that drew international support for the regime as well. Only, in this case, this situation wasn't precipitated by the conservative rentier monarchies but, rather, by Russia and Iran. Given the specific nature of the Syrian situation with cleavages on Sunni versus non-Sunni sectarian lines and pro-Western versus anti-Western orientations, things quickly got more complicated and a wedge opened up to exploitation by various actors. Without decisive intervention by Western powers that lacked a faction on the ground which they wholeheartedly supported, the opposition soon lost its military edge and the regime eked out a stalemate. Over years of conflict, it ultimately won the upper hand, subsequently retaking key opposition strongholds. After the rise of the Jihadist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) between 2013 and 2015, an international coalition fought back its territorial hold over large swaths of eastern Syria and northwestern Iraq around 2014, 2015, and 2016, and as a result, a window of opportunity opened up for Kurdish forces to significantly enlarge their autonomous statelet in northern Syria. This drew the ire of Turkey, which abandoned its own peace process with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

¹⁰¹ Khalid M. Medani (2023): *Revolutionary Sudan: The Challenges of Democracy After Autocracy*, London: C. Hurst.

¹⁰² Jihad Mashamoun (20.07.2022): "Turkey and Sudan: An Enduring Relationship?", *Middle East Institute*, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-and-sudan-enduring-relationship> [25.07.2024].

and fought bloody battles over the Kurdish cities in Turkey in which armed PKK youth groups contested state control. Three military incursions into Syria created Turkish enclaves on formerly ISIS or Kurdish-held territory along the Turkish border. In addition, Turkey established observation posts in the opposition-held region of Idlib. With these moves, Turkey managed both to roll back Kurdish territorial entrenchment and to directly intervene on behalf of the Islamist militias it supported—among which, the Muslim Brotherhood did not play a significant role. As of 2023, these were the last opposition territories in Syria—which fully depended on continuing Turkish support and opposition to the Assad regime.¹⁰³ Qatari efforts in Syria—diplomatic, military, and financial—did not have the expected ground impact.¹⁰⁴

This situation fundamentally changed in late 2024 with the sudden collapse of the Assad regime, surprising international observers and even the Turkish government. The collapse upset the tacit agreement that kept Kurdish forces in check and had the Turkish government in a strong negotiating position with the regime. With the regime's collapse, the most influential armed factions are the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant (*Hai'at Taḥrīr aš-Šām*), the Turkish-influenced coalition Syrian National Army (*al-Jayš al-Waṭani as-Sūrī*), and the Kurdish-led coalition Syrian Democratic Forces. Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups are smaller and rank far below in their influence. At the time of writing, the national consensus of the post-civil-war Syria is still in the making. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the Syrian Brotherhood will regain a crucial position in civilian affairs after normalization of the country's political affairs.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ On this complex see Christopher Phillips (2018): *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, New Haven: Yale University Press; Nikolaos Van Dam (2017): *Destroying a Nation: The Civil War in Syria*, London: I.B. Tauris; Charles R. Lister (2015): *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press; Yüksel: *Proxy Warfare*.

¹⁰⁴ Ulrichsen: Qatar and the Arab Spring.

¹⁰⁵ Salim Çevik (20.12.2024): "Turkey and the Transition to a Post-Assad Regime in Syria", *Arab Center DC*, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/turkey-and-the-transition-to-a-post-assad-regime-in-syria/> [20.12.2024] ; Galip Dalay (13.12.2024): "How Post-Assad Syria Could Unleash a New Regional Order", *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/12/13/syria-assad-regional-order-turkey-gulf/> [18.12.2024].

In Tunisia, *Ennahda* suffered from successively worsening election results. From the initial 37.04 percent in the first democratic elections of 2011, the party dropped to 27.79 percent in 2014, coming in second behind the secularist *Nidaa Tounes* party (*Nidā' Tūnis*, Call for Tunisia), and to 19.63 percent in 2019, nearly halving its first result. After the transition to democracy, Tunisia's politics had been a fluid space with crisis-prone coalition governments and a colorful array of parties, none of which could govern alone or assert any form of dominance. This contributed to a promising climate of constructive dialogue between different sociopolitical formations, mainly between the secularist and the Islamist camp. The country's first elected president was the secularist veteran politician and *Nidaa Tounes*-founder Beji Caid Essebsi (1926–2019). *Ennahda*, under the impression of events in Egypt, decided not to field its own candidate. After Essebsi's death, elections in 2019 resulted in a clear victory for Kais Saied (b. 1958) who proceeded to orchestrate a full-fledged authoritarian backslide. In 2021, he suspended parliament, eliminated judicial independence, and arrested scores of opponents. Among those arrested were leading cadres of *Ennahda* and key figures of the transitional period.¹⁰⁶ After Erdoğan's comments on the suspension of parliament had led to a small crisis between the countries in 2019, Turkish reactions to Saied's full power grab in 2021 were very restrained. By that time Turkey, too, had come to realize that most of its partners in the region had disappeared and did not want to create yet another spat.¹⁰⁷ Qatari-Tunisian relations had blossomed after the revolution and Tunisia adopted a pro-Qatari stance in the country's conflicts with the other Gulf monarchies. Similar to the pragmatism in Turkish-Tunisian relations, the expanding trade and development assistance from Qatar to Tunisia survived Saied's sidelining of the *Ennahda*.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Pelin Ayan Musil and Salim Çevik (2023): "Regime trajectories of Tunisia and Turkey: a comparative analysis", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, pp. 1–19.

¹⁰⁷ Mohamed Ali Ltifi (13.04.2022): "Erdogan's Statements Shake Tunisian-Turkish ties", *Al-Monitor*, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/04/erdogans-statements-shake-tunisian-turkish-ties> [25.07.2024].

¹⁰⁸ Sebastian Sons (2023): "Gulf engagement in Tunisia: Past endeavor or future prospect?", *Report*, The Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/tunisia-gulf-engagment-future/> [25.07.2024].

Meanwhile, for their part, Morocco's Muslim Brothers had a rather unspectacular tenure in office. Constitutional restraints under the still overbearing monarchy ensured that the Brotherhood's Justice and Development Party (PJD) had little to show for a whole decade in office. Especially the palace's normalization efforts with Israel—encouraged by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates who undertook similar steps at the time—tore the Brotherhood between staying in government and the wishes of its rank-and-file membership and voters. Similar constraints were set on the religious discourse of the Brotherhood and any critique of the monarchical system. These dilemmas resulted in tension on the options of becoming either an incapable cog in the system or losing their influence in government altogether and going back to the opposition. The 2021 elections abruptly settled this question by obliterating the Justice and Development Party at the ballot box.¹⁰⁹ During the tenure of the PJD, Morocco navigated the political schism in the Middle East without exposing itself on one side. The country improved trade with both Turkey and Qatar but also continued its traditionally cordial relations with the Gulf monarchies.¹¹⁰

In this way, Brotherhood partners of the Turkish-Qatari alliance either were eliminated one by one or lost their political influence. Only in Libya did the Brotherhood retain some chances at a crucial role in designing the country's future.¹¹¹ Yet here, too, they faced steep challenges. In countries where armed conflict shaped the later post-revolutionary scenario, such as Syria and Libya, opposing actors mutually increased their involvement. As the Turkish-Qatari side supported its favored local forces to a certain degree, the Saudi, Egyptian, and Russian actors in Libya or the Iranian-Russian alliance in Syria tried to outrival that level of support and vice-versa. This spiraling dynamic resulted in an uneasy equilibrium. In this situation, no side was able to gain

¹⁰⁹ Hamid: Moroccan "Model".

¹¹⁰ Youssef Cherif (22.06.2020): "The Maghreb: A Battle Ground for the Intra-Sunni Cold War", *Focus*, European Institute of the Mediterranean, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-maghreb-a-battle-ground-for-the-intra-sunni-cold-war/> [20.12.2024].

¹¹¹ Haala Hweio (2020): "The Muslim Brotherhood: Libya as the Last Resort for the Continued Existence of the Global Movement", *Middle East Law and Governance*, 13/1, pp.5–21.

the upper hand at first. Later, however, the Turkish-Qatari camp and its local allies slowly lost ground.

The reasons for this failure were manifold. Arguably, the Turkish government was often too narrow in its choice of allies or else assumed that populist political Islam/Islamism with nationalist undertones would display a similar pull in Arab countries as it did in Turkey. Projecting the Turkish model in this way did not, however, match well with the various realities, cleavages, and entrenched sociopolitical forces on the ground in the Arab world. Especially the resolve and resistance of the military-security apparatus and vested interests enmeshed with it, as well as the pushback of conservative regional actors, were all severely underestimated. Turkish hopes for a transnational Muslim Brotherhood ascendancy also fell short of expectations since the various Brotherhood parties—except in the Tunisian case—only had an initial advantage in organizational structure but revealed crucial weaknesses in mid and long-term strategy. Turkish designs for gaining a hegemonic position in the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider Muslim World also triggered a fierce and unified backlash mainly by the Gulf monarchies—except of course Qatar—and by Egypt under President al-Sisi. Overall, Turkish policies after the Arab Spring fell victim to overblown ideologically motivated projections and expectations as well as their grave miscalculations regarding the potential of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups and the tenacity of deep-seated forces.

Turkey, then, took a political gamble that appeared well worth taking substantial risks at the time but backfired in the end. The confrontation with regional actors that stood on the opposing side of the Arab Spring scenario resulted in a tit-for-tat with these actors that came with a hefty price for Turkey as well. Full diplomatic ties with Egypt and Israel were severed, while relationships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates grew tense. Erdoğan's government fell out with Saudi Arabia over the Egyptian coup and support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey then exposed the murder of influential Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi (1958–2018) in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. In return, Saudi Arabia voiced support for recognition of the Armenian genocide and conducted military exercises with Greece

and Egypt in the eastern Mediterranean.¹¹² Similar tensions occurred with the United Arab Emirates, which adopted harsh measures against Turkey, including support for Kurdish forces in Syria, blaming Turkey for the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and also signaling recognition of the Armenian genocide. The Turkish side accused the Emirates of abetting the coup attempt in 2016 by supporters of the Gülen movement, an erstwhile partner of the AKP that had systematically infiltrated the state apparatus before the two fell out over which partner will ultimately dominate the other.¹¹³ In 2020, the Emirates gave refuge to Turkish far-right mafia patron and whistleblower Sedat Peker who launched a series of videos revealing scandals within the ruling AKP and affiliated networks from a base in Dubai.¹¹⁴ The Egyptian administration also played the Armenian genocide card, blocked Turkish container shipping via Egyptian ports, publicly discussed a proposal for granting asylum to Fethullah Gülen (1941–2024) in retribution for sheltering Muslim Brotherhood exiles in Turkey, and increased its military posturing in the eastern Mediterranean.¹¹⁵

For Qatar, its offensive in Middle Eastern politics had no less grave consequences. The peninsula emirate had been encouraged by steady rentier incomes and earlier soft power successes, mainly with its TV network, *Al Jazeera*, and with the Qatar Foundation, to adopt an interventionist stance in regional politics punching far beyond its weight. Arguably, Qatar overestimated its ground impact and its leverage against the larger monarchies of the

¹¹² Steven A. Cook (2022): “Why Turkey is Resetting Relations with Saudi Arabia”, Council on Foreign Relations, *CFR In Brief*, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/why-turkey-resetting-relations-saudi-arabia> [25.07.2024].

¹¹³ Mustafa Şen (2007): “A Background for Understanding the Gülen Community”, in: Monika Wohlrab-Sahar and Levent Tezcan (Eds.), *Konfliktfeld Islam in Europa*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 327–346; M. Hakan Yavuz and Bayram Balci (eds., 2018): *Turkey’s July 15th Coup: What Happened and Why*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

¹¹⁴ Galip Dalay (2022): *Turkey-UAE Relations: Economic Cooperation against the Backdrop of Geopolitical Incompatibility*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, *SWP Comment*, 1/2022, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2022C01_Turkey-UAERelations.pdf [25.07.2024].

¹¹⁵ Gamal Essam El-Din (26.07.2016): “Egypt MPs call on parliament to recognise Armenian genocide”, *Ahram Online*, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/235117/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-MPs-call-on-parliament-to-%E2%80%8Erecognise-Armenia.aspx> [11.10.2024].

region. In 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain started a full embargo on Qatar, cutting off diplomatic ties, closing their countries' airspace, banning all trade, and blocking the *Al Jazeera* network. The neighboring states only dropped the blockade when the election of President Biden convinced them that U.S. support would wane. Despite the inconclusive outcome where Qatar managed to stay afloat with imports from Iran and Turkey, the episode showed how Turkey and Qatar were tied with their foes in regional structures and could potentially be outweighed by them.¹¹⁶

A final, major factor contributing to fading Turkish influence was determined entirely by conditions within Turkey itself. As Turkey itself underwent an authoritarian decline from a project that could claim Islamic-democratic credentials into an Islamic-nationalist personalized regime, it could hardly claim to be providing a model for others. Turkey's soft power in the Middle East was at its height when it contained a democratizing promise, and declined when that promise disappeared. Its discourse meant less to other regions of the Muslim world than they did a decade ago and its impact was now more limited to Islamic conservatives or loyalists of political Islam in the populations of different countries. This also exposed how specifically Turkish its discourse and outlooks were. In a longer historical trajectory, the AKP's Islamic nationalism connected to traditions on the Turkish right with deeper roots than Islamism.

With the failure of the Arab Spring designs, Turkey had to substitute them with the next-best options in their determination to project regional hegemony into the eastern Mediterranean: an increased military presence with bases in strategically placed locations; military interventions in Syria; arms shipments to Libya; and developing a homegrown defense industry with its key drone sector whose products are then sold to strategic partners. The latter proved especially consequential in the 2020 Karabagh War between Armenia and

¹¹⁶ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (2020): *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.

Azerbaijan. With soft-power approaches based on the appeal of the Turkish model failing, Turkey fell back on hard-power interventions.

Apart from these interventions, Turkey was seen withdrawing from its Arab Spring-period positions and moving towards a pragmatist rapprochement with the states it had alienated. The shift was also indicated by Ahmet Davutoğlu—as aforementioned, one of the main architects of Turkey’s Arab Spring politics and foreign minister—being driven out of office by other factions within the regime. This rapprochement included relatively uncomplicated steps with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel, but also more protracted negotiations with Egypt and tentative signals towards Syria. In the latter case, however, reconciliation remained a distant possibility due to the Turkish presence in Northern Syria and its deep involvement with Syrian opposition militias-turned proxies. Only the regime’s collapse rendered any hints at reconciliation superfluous and put Turkey in a highly influential position in the new Syria. Turkish-Iranian relations had always remained non-confrontational despite supporting opposing sides in Syria. This new pragmatism was facilitated by a realization that the Turkish favorites in the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups had forfeited their chances of having a say in their respective countries for the foreseeable future and that antagonizing the status-quo forces in the region head-on was not in Turkey’s interest. In the mid to long-term, self-interest thus prevailed over solidarity with the former partners.¹¹⁷

The Muslim Brotherhood’s diasporization: Turkish tutelage and the alliance abandoned

The harsh persecution of the Egyptian Brotherhood, with sweeping arrests from leadership to rank and file members after the military coup of 2013, forced many members of the movement to flee abroad. Meanwhile, among the neighboring states, only Sudan was a viable destination, from which place

¹¹⁷ For a useful current overview see Dalia Ghanem (ed. 2024): *Türkiye’s Cards in the World. Raising the Stakes*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, *Chaillot Paper*, 182, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_182_0.pdf [25.07.2024].

Turkish authorities welcomed Brotherhood members with open arms. Other destinations included Qatar, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom, where international operations of the Brotherhood had already been based. The largest contingent, however, settled in Istanbul which, together with London, formed a center of Muslim Brotherhood exile activities. It is likely that organizational and propagandistic efforts from Turkish soil were financially supported by Turkey and Qatar.¹¹⁸ As the most effectful undertaking, Brotherhood TV stations *Mekameleen*, *Rabea*, and *Watan* started broadcasting from Istanbul and internal meetings, coordination efforts, etc. took place there as well. In 2020, the number of Brotherhood exiles in Turkey was estimated at around 8.000 and up to 20.000 when including family members.¹¹⁹ Easy access to Turkish citizenship was granted to a portion of the exiles. Binding ties to Turkey thus deepened significantly after 2013.

On the Turkish side, the AKP became invested in the Muslim Brotherhood alliance and legitimized the movement towards the wider public with heavily emotional appeals. The fate of the Egyptian movement was presented as a metaphor for the Turkish history of military coups, therein conjuring up the victimhood narratives that figured prominently in the AKP's Islamist tradition and in fact Islamist tradition in general. Showing solidarity with the victimized, upright, and piously Islamic side was thus framed as a moral and political obligation. Most notably, Erdoğan cried publicly in an interview while reading the farewell letter of a young woman killed in the massacre at Rābi'a al-ʿAdawīya Square in Cairo. In response to the military coup, the AKP adopted the *Rābi'a* hand gesture into its bylaws (four fingers spread and the thumb bent in, using the semblance of the Arabic word "fourth" to hint at the events at the similarly named square and the martyrdom of Brotherhood supporters there), and held a symbolic funeral for ex-president Mohammed

¹¹⁸ An Egyptian researcher mentions the sum of "\$1,700,000 per month" for the Turkish bureau. Waleed Abdul Rahman (12.10.2021): "Concerns Mount as Tensions Rise among Muslim Brotherhood Leaders" *Asharq Al-Awsat*, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3241126/concerns-mount-tensions-rise-among-muslim-brotherhood-leaders> [25.07.2024].

¹¹⁹ Ayyash: Turkish Future.

Morsi in Istanbul.¹²⁰ President Erdoğan was often seen flashing the *Rābī'a* sign in the following years.

For the Muslim Brotherhood, Istanbul became a second gravitational center next to London. After the coup and the reprisals in Egypt, transnational organizing had become the main organizational mainstay of the movement, which only contributed to the overall importance of such centers. The desperate situation at home, moreover, aggravated internal conflicts over strategy, methods, and leadership. When Turkish-Egyptian reconciliation efforts began around 2020, the tensions bubbled over into open conflict about the latter point of contention—leadership. Mahmoud Hussein (b. 1947), a leading figure of the Istanbul camp controlling movement media and finances, openly challenged Ibrahim Munir (1937–2022), the supreme guide of the Brotherhood at the time and leading figure of the London camp. Munir then decided to dismiss Hussein and five other key figures—all residing in Istanbul—from the movement.¹²¹ The Istanbul camp around Hussein denied any validity of the ruling but grew increasingly isolated in movement circles. Another faction based in Istanbul comprised of younger activists severely criticized both camps for feuding and failing those in prisons at home. After the death of Munir in late 2022, the movement chose Salah Abdulhaq (b. 1945), a movement veteran not involved in the feud, as the new supreme guide.¹²² The split revealed multiple crises of the movement after the crushing defeat it suffered in Egypt.¹²³

¹²⁰ BirGün (20.05.2017): “‘Rabia’ işareti AKP tüzüğüne de girdi!”, *BirGün*, <https://www.birgun.net/haber/rabia-isareti-akp-tuzugune-de-girdi-160439> [25.07.2024].

¹²¹ Mahmoud Hussein, the Brotherhood’s former secretary-general; Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, chairman of the Association of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Expatriates; Hammam Ali Youssef, chairman of the Brotherhood’s office in Turkey, and three members of the Brotherhood’s Shura Council, Medhat Al-Haddad, Mamdouh Mabrouk, and Ragab Al-Banna: Gamal Essam El-Din (24.10.2021): “The Two-Headed Muslim Brotherhood”, *Ahram Online*, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1201/434197/AlAhram-Weekly/Egypt/The-twoheaded-Muslim-Brotherhood.aspx> [25.07.2024]; Abdul Rahman (2021): Concerns Mount as Tensions Rise.

¹²² Middle East Monitor (21.02.2023): “Egypt Muslim Brotherhood Elects Salah Abdel-Haq as Acting Supreme Guide to Succeed Ibrahim Mounir”, *Middle East Monitor*, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230221-egypt-muslim-brotherhood-elects-salah-abdel-haq-acting-supreme-guide-to-succeed-ibrahim-mounir/> [25.07.2024].

¹²³ Ayyash, El Afifi, Ezzat: Broken Bonds, pp. 99–115.

The isolation of the Istanbul camp around Hussein was also exacerbated by its dependency on Turkish tutelage. When the Turkish leadership turned towards rapprochement with the counter-revolutionary camp, the Brotherhood's position in Istanbul seemed less tenable than the London one. In a gesture towards the al-Sisi regime, Turkish authorities issued a gag order on the Brotherhood TV channels in Istanbul, telling them to avoid harsh criticism of the Egyptian government—criticism that was deeply engrained in their very *raison d'être*. Consequently, *Mekameleen TV* moved its operations to multiple locations in Europe and the U.S.¹²⁴ In some cases, the Turkish government even agreed to deportations of wanted Brotherhood members to Egypt, where they faced incarceration or the death penalty.¹²⁵ Qatar followed suit with similar steps.¹²⁶ Following a visit of president Erdoğan to Egypt in early 2024, authorities revoked Hussein's Turkish citizenship together with that of fifty other Brotherhood functionaries.¹²⁷ Ten years after the coup, the movement's general position and especially that of the Istanbul faction is thus very precarious.

¹²⁴ Al-Monitor (02.04.2021): "Is Turkey Going to Crack Down Muslim Brotherhood Aligned TV in Gesture to Egypt?", *Al-Monitor*, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/turkey-going-crack-down-muslim-brotherhood-aligned-tv-gesture-egypt> [25.07.2024]; Mustafa Abu Sneineh and Khaled Shalaby (04.06.2022): "Egyptian Opposition Channel Relaunches 'Without Headquarters' after Leaving Turkey", *Middle East Eye*, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-mekameleen-opposition-channel-relaunch-after-closing-offices-turkey> [25.07.2024].

¹²⁵ Waleed Abdul Rahman (18.03.2019): "Turkey's List of Deportation Angers Muslim Brotherhood", *Asharq Al-Awsat*, <https://english.aawsat.com//home/article/1639146/turkey%e2%80%99s-list-deportation-angers-muslim-brotherhood> [25.07.2024].

¹²⁶ Omran Salman (03.02.2021): "Will Qatar's Relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood Change after Gulf Reconciliation?", Washington Institute, *Fikra Forum*, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/will-qatars-relationship-muslim-brotherhood-change-after-gulf-reconciliation> [25.07.2024].

¹²⁷ Saeed Abdulrazek (20.02.2024): "Türkiye Revokes Citizenship of Muslim Brotherhood Leader", *Ashark Al-Awsat*, <https://english.aawsat.com/world/4865866-t%C3%BCrkiye-revokes-citizenship-muslim-brotherhood-leader> [25.07.2024].

Europe: The alliance in the diaspora networks

The post-Arab Spring alliance between Turkey, Qatar, and the Muslim Brotherhood also had an impact in Europe. The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*)—a government body monopolizing religious practice attached to the Turkish presidency, and the *Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği* (DITIB, Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) as its European extension—occasionally cooperated with European Brotherhood institutions. The DITIB, originally founded to counter non-state Islamic organizations in Europe but ideologically converging with them during AKP-rule, manages the largest Turkish-rooted Islamic organization in Europe on behalf of the *Diyanet* and the Turkish state.¹²⁸ With Ekrem Keleş, head of *Diyanet*’s High Board of Religious Affairs, a high-profile bureaucrat was sent as a delegate to the Brotherhood’s European Fatwa Council, while the European IGMG (*Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş*) also sent a high profile theologist to the council with Mustafa Mullaoglu who is also the mufti of the Islamic Religious Community of Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*, IGGÖ).¹²⁹ Drawing criticism in the German press, Muslim Brotherhood representatives participated in the DITIB’s “Meeting of European Muslims” in 2019.¹³⁰ The meeting decided on the formation of a secretariat with Turkey’s *Diyanet*, the mother organization of DITIB, that would organize regular meetings every two years.¹³¹ The fate of

¹²⁸ Theresa Beilschmidt (2015): *Gelebter Islam: Eine empirische Studie zu DITIB-Moscheegemeinden in Deutschland*, Bielefeld: transcript; Hüseyin Çiçek and Kemal Bozay (2022): *Die DITIB in Deutschland. Religion und Politik im Namen des türkischen Staates*, Berlin: AJC Ramer Institute, <https://ajcgermany.org/de/media/137> [25.07.2024]; İnci Öykü Yener-Roderburg and Erman Örsan Yetiş (2024): “Building Party Support Abroad: Turkish Diaspora Organisations in Germany and the UK”, *Politics and Governance*, 12.

¹²⁹ Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (22.02.2024): “Erste Sitzung des theologischen Beratungsrates”, IGGÖ, <https://www.derislam.at/2024/02/22/erste-sitzung-des-theologischen-beratungsrates/> [25.07.2024].

¹³⁰ Deutsche Welle (09.01.2019): “DİTİB’e Müslüman Kardeşler konusunda eleştiriler artıyor“, DW, <https://www.dw.com/tr/di%C3%87ti%C3%87be-m%C3%BCsl%C3%BCman-karde%C5%9Fler-konusunda-ele%C5%9Ftiriler-art%C4%B1yor/a-47005747> [25.07.2024].

¹³¹ DITIB (04.01.2019): “Pressemeldung: Das II. Treffen der europäischen Muslime wurde mit Verlesung der Abschlusserklärung beendet“, DITIB, <https://www.ditib.de/detail1.php?id=660&lang=de> [25.07.2024].

this initiative is unclear, however, as no further meetings appear to have taken place. It does not appear that these contacts have led to a more substantial cooperation between the DITIB (alongside the Austrian DITIB-branch, the ATIB Union) and organizations with links to the Brotherhood. According to Muslim Brotherhood expert Vidino, the *Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations* (FEMYSO), an organization often criticized for its interactions with individuals belonging to Brotherhood networks, the *Muslimische Jugend Österreichs* in Austria, as well as the IGMG-youth maintained contacts.¹³² Several persons in the current FEMYSO leadership hail from the IGMG-youth wing.¹³³ In addition to such personal links, both camps share perspectives such as a negative image of Western societies, a strong narrative of Muslim victimhood, and a generalized, instrumentalized Islamophobia discourse. However, there are little indications that the contacts will lead to a deeper ideological convergence.

Arguably more consequential were the Qatari efforts to systematically finance the operations of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups on European soil. French and German investigative journalists revealed the wide-ranging scheme of Qatari financing of mosques, schools, Islamic associations, and missionary activities. This extended not only to Muslim Brotherhood but also to smaller Salafist groups. On the Qatari side, the Sheikh Eid Foundation and the Qatar Foundation are the key institutions behind the financing efforts. The scheme covered all European countries but especially those with larger Arab Muslim populations and recent refugee influx—central Europe and the United Kingdom. These populations appeared to be up for grabs in the Qatari ploy for influence since they were not already organized in large federations such as the Turkish Muslims of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the Benelux-states or the Maghrebi Muslims of France. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia conducted similar influence operations in Europe with massive financing for mosque construction and Salafi activities, finding themselves in competition with Qatar and Turkey for influence over Europe's Muslim

¹³² Vidino: The Muslim Brotherhood in Austria, pp. 31–34.

¹³³ Heinisch, Çiçek, Vömel: Die Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş, pp. 118–119.

communities. Particularly with Turkey's focus on Turkish organizations and communities in Europe, and the absence of other state-level supporters, Qatar has been able to exert even more influence over the Brotherhood.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Investigative journalists have worked extensively on this subject: Georges Malbrunot and Christian Chesnot (2019): *Qatar Papers: Comment l'émirat finance l'islam de France et d'Europe*, Neuilly-sur-Seine: Éditions Michel Lafon; Sascha Adamek (2017): *Scharia-Kapitalismus: Den Kampf gegen unsere Freiheit finanzieren wir selbst*, Berlin: Econ Verlag; Das Erste (20.09.2022): „Geld-Macht-Katar“, *Report München*, <https://www.daserste.de/information/politik-welt-geschehen/report-muenchen/videos/report-muenchen-geld-macht-katar-folge-1-video100.html> [25.07.2024]; Jérôme Sesquin (2019): *Millionen für Europas Islam*, ARTE-France, https://programm.ard.de/TV/arte/katar--millionen-f-r-europas-islam/eid_287242017741449.

Conclusion and Outlook

On the whole, the *Milli Görüş* movement, later largely replaced by the AKP, and the Muslim Brotherhood—representing the mainstream of political Islam in their respective countries—hailed from different traditions and genealogies. Contrary to a belief held by some, the *Milli Görüş*'s foundation was not somehow instigated by the Muslim Brotherhood, nor did it form a section of the Brotherhood in Turkey. The impact of Egyptian Islamist thought was not fundamental for the *Milli Görüş* either, since it had been a distinct and stable formation before relevant translations of Arab Islamist thought even arrived in Turkey. Nevertheless, various points of contact occurred, and networks with varying degrees of proximity and interaction emerged over time.

With the almost complete and crushing failure of Brotherhood aspirations in Egypt and other countries of engagement in the wake of the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood today continues its existence as a transnational movement. It does so with an organizational mainstay in Europe and a more precarious base in Turkey and Qatar, its closest allies during the Arab Spring. With the marginalization of the Brotherhood, the confrontation at the core of Middle Eastern politics eased. Today, the Brotherhood is no longer perceived as a viable threat by its foes. Its activist core in exile is plagued by fundamental challenges. Failing to provide significant help for the incarcerated at home constitutes a legitimacy problem for the movement among the remaining loyalists at home. Failing to engage with youthful members and their activist approach constitutes a generational challenge within the movement.¹³⁵ It is likely that other actors will come to dominate the political Islamic scene in the countries in question. The Brotherhood today is at the weakest and most existentially challenging point of its history, spanning almost one hundred years. Different factions will likely fight over various ideas on how to reinvent the Brotherhood and how to find a way to stay relevant.

¹³⁵ For this reading see Ayyash, El Afifi, Ezzat: *Broken Bonds*, pp. 47–146.

With Turkish President Erdoğan avoiding electoral defeat in 2023, the authoritarian consolidation in Turkey persists. Where still deemed useful, the Turkish government will hold on to its Brotherhood allies, but the scenarios in which that is the case are becoming fewer. The AKP's political Islam has already transformed into a form of Islamic nationalism that is also highly pragmatist in forging and abandoning alliances. In the country itself, nationalist sentiment has little regard for alliances with movements in the Arab world and even less regard for its overall impact on Turkey. Hence, in national politics, the Turkish side could abandon its Arab Spring politics without repercussions. It appeared likely that it would continue to do so in the Syrian and Libyan cases once settlements are in sight that would have rendered further involvement too costly or politically untenable. However, the most recent shifts in Middle Eastern politics pitted Turkey in a favorable position in Syria as the most influential foreign power of the post-civil war order. While falling back to normal national interest politics, Turkey will still try to fashion itself as a country leading the Muslim world that simultaneously deals with Russia, China, and the West. Turkey will continue to pursue its interest aggressively and project its brand of Islamic nationalism and identity narratives into Europe, posing obstacles toward the integration of Turkish Muslims into the respective societies of the continent.

If further rapprochement between the Turkish-Qatari side and the counter-revolutionary camp around Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt, hinges on a full renunciation of the Brotherhood, the remainder of the activists and leadership cadres could also find their way to Europe. As a result, the movement and the question of how to deal with an increased foothold in Europe might become a growing concern for European governments, policy-makers, researchers, those drafting integration policies, and other concerned bodies and individuals. In Europe, however, the Brotherhood lacks the popular support base it was built upon in countries of the Middle East. Turkey might as well continue a low level of support or at least continue to provide a homebase for the activists settled in the country. But, as most recent events have shown, this support is contingent on further developments between Turkey and the counter-revolutionary countries. Not even those Brotherhood

cadres who have received Turkish citizenship are in a fully secure position as the Turkish government is revoking citizenship as easily as it granted it.

In the aftermath of the October 7 2023 attacks on Israel, Turkey emerged as a key patron of *Hamas*. While it is unlikely that this relationship will upset the general pattern of pragmatic reconciliation with the regimes of the Arab world, at the time of writing, it is the foremost remaining Turkish alliance with a Muslim Brotherhood-heritage organization. With the goodwill of the government, Turkey hosts exiled *Hamas* cadres and fundraising operations crucially involve Turkish companies. These activities also implicate Europe. The U.S. Department of the Treasury stated in October 2024 that “*Hamas* considers Europe to be a key source of fundraising and has maintained representation across the continent for many years in part to raise funds through sham charities.”¹³⁶ It further detailed financial operations via Italy, Germany, and Austria as instrumental to the flow of funds from Europe to *Hamas*.¹³⁷

As for Europe, the Turkish-Brotherhood alliance in Middle Eastern politics did not seem to have significantly broadened links and common efforts of related organizations in Europe on the whole. Personal connections and links that had been established before continued unimpeded. Turkish organizations have a much more substantial organizational presence in continental Europe and aim to dominate the sphere of organized Islam in regions with significant Turkish migration. One could speculate that, for this reason, they do not gain significant advantages by aligning more closely with Brotherhood-organizations—which would also put them in the spotlight with European governments and security services that have the Brotherhood on their radar but are relatively lax in regard to Turkish organizations. Extended partnerships in Europe between Turkish Islamic organizations (DITIB, IGMG, ATIB) and the Muslim Brotherhood therefore seem unlikely. With the marginalization of the Brotherhood structures in Middle Eastern countries, Brotherhood alliances

¹³⁶ U.S. Department of the Treasury (07.10.2024): “Treasury Targets Significant International Hamas Fundraising Network”, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2632> [15.12.2024].

¹³⁷ Ibid.

might appear even more unattractive for the Turkish side. Nevertheless, Turkish influence operations through the media, pro-government individuals, or religious organizations will remain a serious challenge for European countries with Turkish immigrant populations, regardless of the Muslim Brotherhood's strength.

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