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The Foreign Policy of Tunisia's Ennahdha: Constancy and Changes

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Several questions suggest themselves when it comes to Islamism, a particularly anxiogenic but relatively ambiguous phenomenon, despite the abundant literature devoted to it. In point of fact, the anti-establishment position taken by some Islamist parties in the Arabo-Islamic area casts doubt on their “dual discourse” oscillating between legalistic endeavors and protesting logic. It stems from the tension between the fundamentals of militant Islam (defense of the Arabo-Muslim identity) and the exigencies of the insertion into politics. This is especially the case with Tunisia's Ennahdha movement, which, since its legalistic turn starting in 1981, seeks to affirm its adoption of the democratic idiom while still maintaining its Islamist identity. After a brief period of calm in its relations to power, as the result of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali ascending to head of state in 1987, the movement would go through a phase of violent repression that saw the imprisonment and exile of a number of its members.

The first free elections in Tunisia's history were held on October 23, 2011 to choose the members of the National Constituent Assembly (ANC), which was tasked with writing a new Tunisian constitution. The Ennahdha party, legalized in March 2011, received 41.1 per cent of the seats in this body (89 out of 2,017),¹ thus passing from the status of pariah party to that of dominant party.²

The movement's coming to power ratcheted up this tension, for the

party no longer limited itself to its relations with “democratic” or “secular” opposition groups but extended it to international relations as if it were the head of a sovereign state.

Analyzing the foreign policy of the Ennahdha movement is of great interest since it is particularly enlightening about the process of adaptation—indeed, normalization—to the logic of power and the practice of a party until then relegated to the sphere of the opposition. One of the aspects of Ennahdha actions that raises the most questions is the equivocal character of its positioning, which would be due to the permanent tension between democratic pretensions and the project of state and societal Islamization. This ambition has registered since its genesis in the anti-globalism in reaction to the West and the identification with the Muslim Umma and no longer with the Tunisianism proclaimed by Bourguiba. During the elections for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in October 2011 and with its accession to power, the debate on reconciling the movement’s democratic reputation reaches its fever pitch. Simultaneously with making an issue out of the religious dimension for electoral mobilization, Ennahdha is anxious to reassure, both inside the country and on the international level, the compatibility between Islamism and democracy.

The question that this chapter intends to answer is how the stance of rejecting acculturation with the colonizing West, which has constituted one of the foundations of Islamist ideology in Tunisia and, in addition, is addressed by the foreign policy adopted by the movement henceforth in power (until the 2014 elections, which saw a switch to Nidaa Tounes and his dear Beji Caïd Essebsi). Did the party try to establish a diplomacy that puts an end “to dependency, alienation, and loss”³ by turning Tunisia toward the East, in this case the Gulf states? It calls for comparing the principles of Ennahdha’s external action, particularly where the West is concerned, and the application of these principles with the previous positions taken by the movement and its members on these questions. Tackling Ennahdha’s foreign policy (its principles and its execution) in light of the positions of Islamists toward the West seems fundamental to us because, more than a constituent principle of its ideology, it represents one of the motivations to adhere to the movement and an organizing element of the militant identity. This chapter thus tries to analyze the ambiguities of this movement’s external action,

precisely as it relates to the West, in light of the evolution of postures relative to the latter. That said, confining ourselves to an analysis of the concordance or lack thereof between the party's ideology as it appears in the official documents and declarations and the foreign policy principles applied today, seems insufficient because it amounts to signaling evolutions or contradictions, if any, without making their sources explicit. Here, the analysis of the militant careers of thirty-three of the party's cadres effected as part of our thesis work⁴ furnishes material for understanding how the movement's foreign policy operationalizes the passage from an oppositional register to a position of power that requires taking into account the reality of foreign relations, on the one hand, and the movement's ideational foundations and their transformation on the other.

We therefore propose to analyze for the first time how the relationship with the West structured the militant imagination of Ennahdha members and how their positions on the problem evolved over time before the movement's legalization in 2011 (1), and then to examine the implementation of the Islamist agenda when in power as reflected in foreign policy so as to shed light on moments of rupture and of continuity with positions previously advocated (2). Finally, we question the changes in Ennahdha relations with the West and its vision of the international system since the presidential and legislative elections in 2014 that led to the departure of the movement of power, at least as the main governmental force, and recent announcement of the movement on the release of political Islam (3).

The Question of Westernization and Relations with the West in Militant Careers: Constructing the Islamist Project in the Alterity

Analysis of the militant careers of Ennahdha cadres clearly brings to light an evolution on both ideological and referential levels. This is particularly true in their relationship to the West, which, as we will see, has gone through more or less sharp transformations at four milestones of their career paths (initiation, formal entry into militancy, the episode of the "great test," and the access to power phase).

The problems of deculturation and imposed Westernization appear as central in militant logic and especially during the first experiments with activism. The alterity with regard to the West and the identification with the

Umma indeed constitute as much motives for engagement as an integral part of the ideology. The analysis of tendencies to join in the Islamist movement reveals the importance of the relationship to the West in the crystallization of perception schemas that fostered drawing closer to political Islam's discourse. In observing family socializing experiences, we found that the first types of anti-Western attitudes are mainly reactions by the militants against the moral "decay" of Tunisian society. Underlying these are rules of behavior and principles inculcated since infancy through the transmission of a political vision that rejects Westernization pursued by Bourguiba for a conception of power based on Arabity and Islamity. These elective affinities between Islamist ideology and the parentally transmitted system of representations and behaviors reside essentially in the diffuse or explicit reference of these values to the Islamic ethic. Decent ways of behaving and dressing, clean language, respect for the sacred, obedience to the father, and respect for one's elders are all norms opposed to the conduct and attitudes not yet dominant but increasingly visible in the Tunisian social sphere.⁵ It is also surely a matter of violation of public morality by the tourists flooding the country subsequent to the development of the tourist sector, as well as behaviors "imported from the West" and adopted by Tunisians, such as drinking alcoholic beverages, gambling, and blasphemy (looked upon as *kaba'ir*⁶). The conservatism cultivated by the middle class and the peasant strata favors adoption of an ethic of rehabilitating the values they were taught (such as modesty, non-mixing, and chastity) but that they experience as greatly devalued in modern post-colonial Tunisia. The indignation that these behaviors often elicited in fathers is frequently echoed and appropriated by the militants. Gradually it transforms itself into a sense of duty, that of upholding the moral order and protecting oneself against deviance, which facilitates their adhesion to the ideology of rupture that the movement extolls.

Ridha Bettayeb,⁷ aged forty-seven, who joined the movement in 1980 and is still a member, held the post of political leader of the movement's engineering school section from 1980 to 1981, and then served as a member of its politburo from 1981 until June 1984:

We felt that the Bourguiba regime had tied Tunisia to a different context, i.e., the West, than it should be, that's to say, the Islamic one, that he had

despotically imposed a way of life through coercion on the Tunisian people, and he rejected the presence of Islam by closing Zitouna University; the religious institutions played no role of any kind and were simply closed, which brought with it a great moral decline of society. My father's job forcing us to move from town to town, I saw that clearly. I was at the high school in Gafsa, and I remember studying a text there in writing class, a verse from the Koran that the professor chanted, so that all the students laughed, that's how bizarre it seemed to them. Each of us in his own way saw this exile that Islam lived in our country.

Coming from conservative families or from Youseffian⁸ ones, the religious and political socialization of the militants interviewed shows the existence of tendencies that are molded or reactivated in the movement, such as: the demand for rehabilitation of the religion (the tendency to religiosity) and a propensity for protesting the political system and particularly the developmentalist and Westernizing model followed by H. Bourguiba (the tendency to protest). During the initial phase corresponding to the training stage of the new Islamist (open circle and cell), the demarcation from society's dominant values is heightened. Identification with the group implies a durable and organized affiliation to the extent that it is realized through the actors' interpersonal relationships, the sharing of norms and values, time spent together, and advocating the same cause. Yet, from the moment that the neophyte transitions to a religious status, the identification with the group also proceeds by opposition to the "pre-Islamic" society as a whole or against specific groups that it consists of, such as the Communists, the Westernized elite, the Sufis, and non-believers.

Ali Laariadh⁹ was born at Ben Guerdane in 1955; he joined the Islamist Movement of Islamic Tendency (MTI) in 1972 and was the prime minister in the troika government:

I felt that I was different from the masses; it is a very immediate feeling, this sense of being different from others, and it leads to a sort of break, influenced by certain texts we had read (S. Qutb), which assert that the Muslim must liberate himself from different ignorances, isolate himself from his environment. This is an intangible isolation: the customary values, attraction to filthy things, admire your close friend's success even if it is

ill-gotten, regionalism and tribalism—you try to cut yourself off from them to rebuild yourself. Gradualism is not beneficial. The movement becomes the member's family while his family now represents *jabiliyya* (ignorance). As the movement's members integrate and strengthen their ties, their relationship with society becomes very difficult. We restored that very extreme orientation consisting of severely judging the society and excommunicating it; we are harsh with our Brothers, our parents.

We felt close (linked), not fearing loss because we were weak and formed a small unit that feared its environment would rob it of its identity. We shut ourselves off because we needed a strength that let us break with the reality that we were living.

The Islamist novice perceives himself as a stranger in his environment. Convinced of his Islamity and knowledge, he comes to anathematize (Bourguiba's) regime that had distorted the revealed message by taking the colonizing and dominant West as a model. The rupture that results is a symbolic one rather than a physical one, based on the idea that "the Muslim is a stranger and his exile grows along with his religious knowledge and his emancipation from cultural alienation." The price of this freeing and the vindication of the Muslim culture's supremacy is a break with the Western model and its values.

Said Ferjani,¹⁰ born in Kairouan in 1955, jointed MTI in the mid-1970s. Returning to Tunis after January 14, he held the post of counselor in one of the ministries. (This interviewee refused to furnish us with a number of details about his social background, referring us to a press account of his militant career.)

In other words, they presented us where everything was mixed up, they told us we were wretched [Muslims], that we are pitiful and that our ideal, our model, ought to be the West. In other words, that when he [the leftist professor] taught Marx to me, it was in dogmatic fashion ... it made an impression on me, being taught Marx this way. As for me, I accuse the elite that taught us, it was the elite's fault. The left was responsible and it abused, it wanted to politicize the teaching in order to gain ground. My idol was Jean-Paul Sartre. When the talk is of freedom, you find Jean-Paul Sartre; when it is about how to aid the weak, the wretched, you encounter Karl

Marx—in the end, that is to say, there is a kind of ... dogmatic content that only wants to show you that but which does not integrate our heritage. Me, I did international studies, which is when I saw that even the West has a problem, for example, when it comes to democracy. It started in Athens, then Rome; after that, it passes directly to France and the United States and other Anglo-Saxon countries, thus London also falls into line. When I realize that and I compare it with the extraordinary meritocracy that prevailed in the Carthaginian Republic,¹¹ I am sorry for the West, for its subjectivity ... it is as if the West said to us “I am wisdom and knowledge” as if there was nothing before and there would be nothing after. This is a dogmatic structuring of research. While what we really need is: these sciences are human efforts, in well-defined periods there were other civilizations, without leaving out any no matter what. At present, it is the West that is weak, there is no talk any longer of its power but the world does not stop there, it transforms itself and all that. This engenders your dealing with everything in your head and in your ideas without an inferiority complex. My sense is that the educational system is in the process of inculcating in us an inferiority complex in relation to the West, as if the West is knowledge, all there is to know, the West is all development, the West is all of history, in other words, we are worth nothing either before or now.

The phase of passage to formal militantism that generally coincides with entering the university seems to reinforce the anti-Western attitudes even more. The principal transformation that takes place in this state is incorporation of the Marxist, hence Western, referential. In confronting the leftist students, the Islamists have been stigmatized as preachers without any militant, political, or even intellectual competence, given that their ideational production is confined to the religious domain. The positioning of the Islamists was a source of discredit in the militant field. The skills acquired during the novitiate phase (religious ethic, cultural capital solely grounded in religious literature) by virtue of this find themselves affected by a negative valuation within the university by leftist militants in particular, therefore bringing with it a feeling of inferiority and exclusion from the terrain that they want to occupy. The religious status, claimed to define the Ennahdha militant by differentiating him from others and constituting his very identity, is transformed into a

handicap to the extent that it fails to procure for him the credibility necessary for setting himself up in a competitive relationship with the leftist students, at the time very powerful. The *nahdhaoui* is then very quickly stigmatized as a religious reactionary and lacking the qualities necessary for making him a true militant. Clashing with the leftist activists, the Islamists therefore were led to appropriate the social justice register for themselves and Communist literature of class warfare. Islamization of the Marxist referential was made possible by theorists like Baqir Essadr and Ali Chari‘ati who came to replace Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, whose writing turned out to skirt reality and lean right, if not to the extreme right.¹² Chari‘ati’s writing introduced to Islamist discourse words close to Communist terminology, enabling it to compete on the same ideological terrain. The ideational evolution as a consequence of the competition with the left in the university thus did not happen at the price of moving away from the Islamist referent.

The attachment to this register remained a distinguishing element in the university militant arena, but the mastery of two cultures, Islamic and Western, constituted itself as a mark of superiority over the left. Said Ferjani:

Our movement was a Cartesian one. It makes room for a spiritual dimension. The idea contained in the letter is the following: these are two lines that we talked about. Listen to me, you representatives of the left, you secularists, we came out of the same schools, we have the same baggage, but we went you one better: what distinguishes us is that we also know and perfectly master the culture of our region, its philosophy, and its history. Therefore, we master both cultures, the two ideological references.

Rejection of the West and of its influence grew, notably with the advent of the Iranian revolution in 1979, which the Islamists interviewed regarded as the concretization of the ideal of Muslim victory over that entity.

Ajmi Lourimi,¹³ born at Chott Meriem of the Sahel in 1961, today is a leading movement cadre, having joined it in the late 1970s:

The Iranian revolution is an extraordinary event. Khomeini is an Islamic symbol that proves that Islam can make a revolution. Religion is allied with the ruling classes in the Marxist discourse, while Khomeini proved that religion is the weapon of the weak, it is a revolt against injustice. He

had given the Muslim the image that he needed to consolidate his position before others. The solution henceforth was there, in real life and was not limited to theories in books. The vision that the young have of Islam is that of an adolescent but highly charged with meaning, for his existence, for challenging the world; he has a vision, a model, it liberates all of humanity, as imam Khomeini put it, "proletarians of all countries, unite!"

This attitude toward Khomeini's Iran calls for special attention. Indeed, the references to the inauguration of the Islamic Republic crop up frequently in the interviews that the militants granted us prior to 2011, thus demonstrating the exemplary nature of the Iranian model yet left uncompromised by the Shiism. This state of things did not keep Ennahdha from showing an accentuated tropism toward the Sunni Gulf that it confirmed when it took power. The diplomatic positions taken by the troika put it systematically in opposition to Iranian interests, including on the Syrian question. It is only during the phase known as the "great ordeal," which designates the repressive episode of 1991, that took a great number of militants to exile in Europe and North America and others to prison, that a certain softening on the question of relations with the West became evident. It is revealed by the use of Western and modern concepts (civil society, peaceful transition of power, political freedoms, and independent judiciary, human rights, and so forth) that signal its distance from the traditional referential corpus.¹⁴

The influence of the militants in exile had a great deal to do with this shift, in particular with regard to how the movement related to the West. Their discovery in Europe or North America of values such as respect for the individual, freedom of expression and thought, and democracy that were non-existent in their native countries would, according to the interviews, reconcile the Islamists with the Western world. Societies and movements in defense of human right, including ones on the left, actually aided the exiled Islamists in obtaining political refugee status, facilitated their social integrations, or also took up the cause of imprisoned militants. In addition, the involvement of the exiled activists in defending their imprisoned peers resulted in appropriating the human rights register.

For the movement's members who remained in Tunisia and were liberated after more than a dozen years of imprisonment, cooperation with the

different political tendencies in Tunisia imposed itself as a way of reentering the political scene, taking into account the movement's weakened state. A change of the referential thus was called for in order to avoid accusations of religious extremism by the government and the legal opposition parties.

It is no longer the West, that imaginary and essentialized entity, that is condemned, but the Westernization of Muslim societies by despotic regimes who exclude them from the political arena. The position of the Islamists around this problematic as a result has become ambivalent, closer to one of suspicion and eclecticism than of rejection and total denunciation. It is exactly this ambivalence that is found in the attempts made by Rached Ghannouchi, the movement's principal theoretician, to include the democratic idiom. His book entitled *Les libertés publiques dans l'État islamique* [Public Freedoms in the Islamic State], published in 1993, indeed bears on this question. However, it was not so much about demonstrating Islam's compatibility with democracy as a concept imported from the West but about proving Islam's essentially democratic character and thus once more affirming the religious referent's autonomy from Western influence.

The Islamist Agenda in External Action: The Ambiguities of “Moderate Islamism”

On taking power following the elections to the National Constituent Assembly in October 2011, the Islamist party stood out for its ability for electoral mobilization unequalled in Tunisian politics and relatively unexpected in view of its weakening during the opposition years. Two factors were decisive in its electoral victory. First, Ennahdha's financial resources allowed it to better cover the Tunisian space. In fact, many Tunisian and foreign politicians suspected the existence of funding by foreign interests, particularly from Qatar. The second factor is its marshaling of the Islamity meme during the electoral campaign, which had added value compared to competing groups.

Governing as part of a coalition, Ennahdha was set on obtaining the foreign affairs portfolio, which was given to Rafik Ben Abdesselem, the son-in-law of Rached Ghanouchi, the movement's president and longtime leader. Despite numerous challenges raised that questioned the MFA's competence, his family ties to R. Ghannouchi, and the Sheraton-gate affair,¹⁵ R. Ben

Abdesselem remained in office until the head of the government, Hamadi Jebali, stepped down in March 2013.

The Ennahdha party's hold on foreign policy resulted in the appearance of a partisan diplomacy taking the place of state diplomacy, the majority of councilors in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs being Ennahdha militants rather than career diplomats. Moreover, during official visits abroad, the minister relied on his network of personal acquaintances and relations of the party in the Gulf countries rather than the posted Tunisian diplomatic personnel. This foreign policy monopoly by the party gives meaning to the approach taken in this chapter of investigating the militant past and the movement's history for interpretive keys to help understand the directions of Tunisian diplomacy under the Ennahdha Government.

The first evidence of rebranding of Ennahdha's anti-Western positions was manifest in the movement's official documents. In the section of Ennahdha's campaign platform of 365 points dedicated to diplomacy, there was no mention of the problem of deculturation. The article stipulating the need for Tunisia to emphasize its autonomy and sovereignty had nothing original to say. If we compare the movement's constituent platform dated June 6, 1981 to the revised statute immediately after the ninth Congress held from July 12–July 15, 2012, we note the omission of the term “Westernization”¹⁶ and the total lack of reference to this issue:

Contribute to asserting a foreign policy based on the country's sovereignty, unity, and independence vis-à-vis any power, to establishing international relations on the basis of mutual respect, cooperation, justice, equality and the right of peoples to decide for themselves and work to support weakened peoples and just causes and foremost among them the Palestinian cause.¹⁷

By comparison, the 1981 text clearly evokes Westernization and calls it into question:

To promote the Islamic character of Tunisia so that it regains its role as the center of Islamic civilization in Africa and puts an end to the state of alienation and aberration. To renew Islamic thought in the light of Islam's origins and the exigencies of progress and its purification of the vestiges of decadent times and Westernizing influences.¹⁸

In practice, the Ennahdha foreign policy is, however, marked by a certain fickleness, for without being squarely hostile to the West, it also no longer subscribes to the Tunisian diplomatic tradition.

The signs of this break with tradition are everywhere. The first strong sign is the Anglicization and Arabization of all of the Ministry's dossiers. This break with the traditionally Francophone¹⁹ and Francophile diplomacy corresponds to an expansion of Ennahdha's foreign policy with Middle Eastern countries. In this, it confirms an Arabo-Muslim grounding for the Tunisian state and its relative detachment from France and Francophony. Although this decision may be linked with the profile and course of the MFA that no longer masters the language of the former protective power, the linguistic rapprochement with the Arab countries at the expense of Francophony is symptomatic of the rejectionist attitude toward what is perceived as diplomatic and cultural interference.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs reproaches France for its intervention both in the affairs of his country and also in lesser-developed countries. He declares on the subject of the military intervention in Mali, "it is our view that the problems in Mali should be solved within Africa. We are opposed across the board to any foreign intervention," before retracting his statement the next day and praising this intervention as necessary. Also, following the declaration by Manuel Valls, the French Minister of the Interior, concerning the assassination of Chokri Belaid,²⁰ the French ambassador in Tunis would be called in by the head of the Tunisian Government. The Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs reacted as follows in explaining this summons: "The declarations of the French interior minister regarding Tunisia are cold-eyed, unfriendly, and harmful to the bilateral relations between the two countries." The version broadcast and publicly espousing of a summoning of the French ambassador, true or not, seemed to be addressed more to domestic public opinion as a way of showing²¹ by this display of power that Tunisia had exited the state of servitude in relation to Western countries.

Ennahdha's reaction in this case in effect nourished a lively conflict with French policies. A pro-Ennahdha group demonstrated in front of the French embassy in Tunis, chanting the famous "get out" at the French ambassador. Accusing the French of interfering in Tunisia is evident among others in the attitudes of nahdhaouist militants and sympathizers. The accusations

hurled at members of the Westernized, secular elite as “France’s orphans” or “Francophone rejects” are revelatory of the association between “deculturation” and that country.

This makes it seem that Ennahdha’s positions vis-à-vis the West are essentially focused on the former colonizer, which is perceived as embodying a Western culture imposed after independence. The MFA’s reactions tend to confirm that Tunisia’s sovereignty has to pass invariably through affirmations of its autonomy with regard to France. But beyond diplomatic discourse, the country remains Tunisia’s primary trade partner, which implies a strong dependency even if setting aside all cultural aspects. Ennahdha thus finds itself in the awkward position between a geopolitical reality and a vision acquired by its militants in the course of their socialization and education in the movement, according to which the alienation of Tunisia from France under H. Bourguiba and Z. Ben Ali is the principal cause of its underdevelopment and decline.

Not seeing the same attitude on Ennahdha’s part toward the United States is explained by the subtle differences in European and American positions toward the Islamists. From the movement’s accession to power, it was regarded as a partner by the Americans on the express condition that it should demonstrate the compatibility between Islam and democracy. American diplomacy showed itself also less nervous than Europe with regard to the Islamists. The latter was anxious to be reassured before implementing cooperative projects that remained in suspense until the impending elections and final drafting of the constitution.²² None of the partnership promises made at Deauville were concretized while the implementation of bilateral cooperation continued by habit despite the problem of respect for human rights under Z. Ben Ali. The United States, on the other hand, continued to support the government even after the torching of their embassy on September 14, 2012.

The second indication of a break was the intensification of bilateral relations with the Gulf countries and principally with Qatar compared to what they were before the revolution of January 14. The final declaration of the first interministerial meeting of the Friends of the Syrian People at Doha was even finalized by the MFA. Diplomatic relations with these countries were not as developed before the revolution because of the editorial criticism leveled by the *al-Jazira* network against the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia.

This shift in Tunisia's diplomacy, Western-oriented by tradition, translates the hold of the Ennahdha party on foreign relations into a model that is more nearly partisan action than state diplomacy. Although routinely denied by the movement, several accusations and documents attest to the provision of financial aid by Qatar to the movement antedating the revolution and during its electoral campaign for the October 2011 elections.²³ In addition, *al-Jazira* was the choice platform for the Ennahdha militants in exile, with the MFA having moreover overseen the research department in the TV network's research center.

In terms of policy in the neighboring region, the movement evinces a desire to revive the Maghreb Arab Union and to revitalize the Arab League but, with Qatar as the exception, foreign relations with the "Brothers" or "friends" of the region seem to lack coherence with respect to its ideology. Bilateral relations with Egypt and Libya, two countries that experienced popular revolutions and the fall of dictatorial regimes, have not evolved at all compared to what they once were. With Saudi Arabia there is not, properly speaking, any rapprochement despite a number of high-level visits nor an accord on extraditing Z. Ben Ali to Tunisia. Tensions even surfaced with the Algerian neighbor following unadroit declarations respecting this country that confirmed that the Arab spring ended up touching it also. Ennahdha was even accused by the National Liberation Front of having supported candidates from the Islamist current in the 2012 Algerian legislative elections.²⁴

Concerning Iran, although it had incarnated victory over the West by its revolution as well as providing a source of inspiration for the nahdhaouian cadres during the 1980s, nothing much changed on the level of diplomatic relations. Ennahdha furnished a substitute model for the Iranian one that was more reassuring for the Western countries and as seen by Tunisian public opinion, which is one of moderate Islam or AKP-style Islamoconservatism. Indeed, during its election campaign, the movement ceaselessly cited the Turkish example as the successful embodiment of the match between Islam and democracy.

In addition, a rapprochement with this country, which is considered a solid partner along with Qatar, on the Syrian question is notable, while with Iran there is a fundamental point of divergence on this issue. Implicitly,

Ennahdha thus positions itself against Iranian interests and certain Shiite groups in the region that support the Bachard al-Assad regime.

In this connection, the decision to break diplomatic relations with Syria without consulting its neighbors constitutes an innovation in Tunisia's foreign policy, which has always followed a moderate line, particularly in the Middle East. Ennahdha's submission to Qatar seems to be at the bottom of this energetic and highly debatable posture with regard to Syria, making it the first state to break diplomatic relations with a member of the Arab League without prior consultations. The support for the "Syrian revolution" highlights the evident will to occupy a pioneering position in the Arabo-Muslim area and to promote a cascade of revolutions in the region that would let Islamist parties assume power. It is equally an opportunity for Ennahdha to mark the transition from a soft diplomacy to a foreign policy intended to be radical and based on the principles of "Muslim solidarity."

A landmark diplomatic action under the Ennahdha Government that seems to line up with its ideology and historical principles regarding foreign policy was the MFA's visit to the Gaza Strip at the head of a Tunisian delegation. This mission confirmed a specific attachment to the Arabo-Muslim identity and its support for the Palestinian cause. In fact, it was one of Ennahdha's foreign relations priorities. It was part of the movement's constitutive platform in 1981, of the revised by-laws after the ninth Congress in 1981 and it was repeated in the latest version of the preamble to the constitution dating from March 2013.

It was a first in the history of Tunisian diplomacy, which had always taken a prudent, moderate position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that a minister of foreign affairs would go to Palestine during an armed conflict and show himself hostile to Israel. It nevertheless remains to specify that the delegations arriving in Gaza in a show of support for the Palestinian people would not have been able to access it without the prior authorization by the Israeli Government.

Despite this audacious *marketing* ploy, normalization of relations with Israel up to that point had not been officially condemned by Ennahdha. Attempts to write penalties into the constitution for normalization of relations with this country were headed for failure and the movement was forced to beat a retreat following European and American objections. In

an interview granted to the American think tank Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) in November 2011, the movement's president was quizzed on the plan to include an article in the new Tunisian constitution criminalizing normalization with the Zionist entity. Rached Ghanouchi denied it, saying, "There is no reason to include an evolving political situation such as the Israeli–Arab countries crisis. The only country that should be named in the constitution is Tunisia." Additionally, he stated that it had only been mentioned in the Republican Accord of the High Instance of Yadh Ben Achour, in that way signaling its exteriority with regard to the movement.

The most striking element in examining specific aspects of the Tunisian Islamist movement in power is the absence of connecting threads, especially with its past. The passage from an oppositional (mobilizing) register to one of wielding power (pragmatism) makes its positions difficult to discern clearly.

Exit from Power and Exit from Political Islam: Which Consequences on Ennahdha Foreign Policy?

In 2014, Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia) won the presidential and legislative elections of which Ennahdha was placed in a subaltern position with sixty-nine seats in the parliament compared with eighty-six for Nidaa Tounes (out of a total of 217 seats).²⁵ A coalition between Ennahdha and Nidaa was set up to avoid political instability due to the lack of a comfortable majority for Nidaa. Participating to the governmental coalition Ennahdha was granted one ministerial position (vocational training and employment) and three secretaries of state within the Habib Essid Government.

A second political crisis solved by the so called National Unity Government headed by the new chief of government Youssef Chahed increased the number of Ennahdha's ministerial positions within the Government. Ennahdha holds today three ministerial positions and three secretaries of State. Ennahdha, however, remains sidelined from foreign policy. This ministerial post was assigned respectively to Taieb Baccouche (from Nidaa Tounes) and Khemais Jhinaoui (a career diplomat). The Minister of Foreign Affairs elaborates and implements the foreign policy of the Government in accordance with the guidelines and options defined by the Head of State.

Two questions come to mind with regard to this new configuration of power: the first one is to know whether Ennahdha, as part of the governing

coalition, continues to have an impact on the Tunisian foreign policy? The second concerns the consequences of the separation between political and religious activities on the movement's vision of the world and especially its relations to the West.

Regarding the first question, it should be noted that the Tunisian foreign policy has had some inflections in comparison with the Tunisian Diplomacy under Ennahdha's Government. The first difference concerns the Syrian issue. Ennahda and former President Moncef Marzouki positioned themselves in favor of the rebels, which led to the breaking of diplomatic ties with Damascus. This decision was qualified as a diplomatic error by the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Khemais Jhinaoui and a consular mission opened in Damascus pending full resumption of diplomatic relations with Syria. Intended to be neutral, the Tunisian position remains vague on the issue, since the resumption of relations with Damascus is conditioned by the establishment of a political solution to the Syrian crisis according to a statement from the Minister.²⁶

Besides, Saudi Arabia, which has seen its influence diminish in favor of Qatar during the government of the Troika, is now rehabilitated by the Tunisian foreign policy. The rapprochement with the Saudis in particular is visible through the proliferation of high-level visits between the two countries and a kind of confused alignment with the Saudi position. The positioning of Tunisia in favor of Saudi Arabia following the severance of diplomatic relations with Iran in January 2016 is indicative of this rapprochement. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had indeed published a press release dated January 3, 2016 in which he "calls for the need to ensure the protection of diplomatic and consular missions, while preserving their sovereignty against these attacks." More recently, the Minister of Religious Affairs who declared that Wahhabism is the source of terrorism was dismissed for "non-respect of government's imperatives and his statements that conflict with the principles of the Tunisian diplomacy."

The other remarkable element in the same vein concerns the classification of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization at the meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior on March 2, 2016 in Tunis. Tunisia, through its Interior Minister Hedi Mahjoub, accepted the declaration of the Council—a position that was immediately rectified by the Minister of Foreign Affairs who

issued a press release stating that it is not a binding decision. Even if Rached Ghanouchi is openly opposed to Hezbollah,²⁷ the displayed and assumed contradiction between two sovereign ministries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior, is less a sign of the influence of the latter in the foreign policy than a strategy that aims to please Riyadh in order to attract Saudi investments in Tunisia, while mitigating the consequences of such a decision: alleviate the anger of national public opinion and not offend the countries of the region.

Regarding the second question, namely the decision of the movement after his tenth Congress²⁸ to separate political action from *da'wa*, it should be noted that it is more a question of specialization than strict separation to the extent that the members of the movement have to specialize either in preaching or in political action. Yet, the consequences of such a decision are far from being negligible on the movements' vision of the international system and more precisely its relations to the West.

The reading that was made of this decision can be divided into two trends: on the one hand, those for whom this is an important advance of Tunisian political Islam toward democratization and secularization and, on the other, those who see a double discourse intended to deceive public opinion and political actors at national and international levels, in other words a kind of *Taqiyya* toward the West. In my view, this shift should be interpreted taking into account the specificities of militant trajectories within the movement without excluding the strictly pragmatic dimension.

Ennahda, since its very beginning, had for its main feature the existence of an initiation phase that is central in the recruitment process—a phase in which religiosity is a central motivation of membership and a major dimension of the identity of the neophyte. It is during this phase that occurs in fact the ideologization process of Islam.

Some would argue that this religious dimension initially aiming at the establishment of the *sharia* and of an Islamic State cannot be evacuated overnight. But the very logic of militant careers within the movement shows that religious motivations behind the entry into militancy are gradually giving way to secular motivations, following “a desecration process.” This desecration occurs under the effect of the initiation process itself, which, at the contrary of Sufi initiation, is based on the development of the militant's Ego and

contributes to the replacement of extra-worldly retribution (the search for extra-worldly salvation and the satisfaction derived from fulfilling the function of *khilafa*—lieutenance—the Creator) by material and symbolic rewards of activism. The different frames of interactions in which the militants evolve after the novitiate period—militancy within the university and the confrontation with the Left, prison, exile and finally, the exercise of power—are all experiences that accelerate, although to different degrees, the secularization process and adaptation of the movement to the political environment.

However, this desecration does not concern all the militants in the same way, taking into account their differentiated dispositions and social and militant trajectories. This is not strictly speaking a confrontation within the movement between militants from the outside seen as “more open” and those more radical from the inside in which the first would have taken over. The opposition is much more complex since it is related to: 1) the militants’ dispositions that determine, since the initiation phase, the specialization into activism by preaching or activism through political action, and 2) activist’s social experiences, including experiences of excellence during their militant careers (revolutionary for some, intellectual or religious for others) that contribute in the desecration of Islamist militancy. The layout of the movement to compromise and therefore moderation is then less the result of the dominance of outside moderates within Ennahda, than the consequence of its operating logic.

The so-called separation, unless it is mere political tactic, is not completely devoid of strategic considerations at different levels: internally and internationally.

Internally, this action seeks to protect Ennahdha from the revolt of its members who are still committed to preaching activity and to the original project, namely the Islamization of society. Besides, while maintaining its presence in the social and religious fields, the movement protects itself from accusations of instrumentalization of Islam for election purposes, since outsourcing these “services” to groups from the party and formed by members who are now somehow detached.

At the international level, and this is the question that specifically concerns us here, a general trend among Islamist movements in the Arab and Muslim region can be observed, which is the rejection of the term “Islamist”

or “political Islam” in favor of a party with an Islamic background. This shift, done at the expense of ideological coherence of these movements, seeks to make Islam soluble in democracy and seems to be encouraged by Western Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations. With this regard, the issue of terrorism makes registration as a political party with a religious reference beneficial for the movement, rather than an ideological party whose objective would ultimately be restoration of the *sharia* and the Islamic State. Tunisian Islamists, anxious not to be excluded from the circles of cooperation, have adopted the themes, and methods of training and debate promoted by international bodies.²⁹

The parallel drawn with the AKP (Justice and Development Party), especially during election campaigns, was to convince the Tunisian electorate of the existence of a moderate Islamist model, able to evolve in a democratic, secular context and to achieve excellent results at the economic level. However, the comparison with the Christian Democrats since the release of political Islam shows Ennahda’s will to blend into a model recognized and accepted by the West.

Under the troika government, Tunisia began to turn toward the East, thus affirming its Arabo-Muslim roots. However, this turnabout, although justified by these two unifying elements, was not without inconsistency. Qatar is at the forefront at the expense of countries that are closer ideologically, like Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood in power, and despite the movement’s organizational and ideological attachment to this other movement since its creation. Ennahdha’s foreign policy also contains elements of its former posture toward the West marked by its attempts to assert equal-to-equal relations with this part of the world. The simultaneous media and strategic imperative of moderate Islam imposed a softening in the positions taken by the movement in this regard, even an abdication of its basic principles, such as normalization with Israel.

The interplay between domestic and foreign policy is not to be left out of explanations for this inconsistency. Are not shows of force toward France, however prudent, or the visit to Gaza, ways of proving to Tunisian public opinion that Tunisia’s foreign policy under Ennahdha is rooted in unyielding values, namely autonomy where the West is concerned and attachment to the Arabo-Muslim identity?

Notes

1. Report of the Instance Supérieure Indépendante des Elections—ISIE, <http://www.isie.tn/Ar/image.php?id=724>, last accessed May 21, 2015.
2. Following the elections, the Ennahdha movement allied itself with two parties of the left: the Democratic Forum for Labor and Freedoms (DFLF) and the Congress for the Republic (CFR) in order to form the government. The ANC's presidency went to Mustapha Ben Jaafar, top leader of the DFLF and the presidency of the Republic to Moncef Marzouki, head of the CFR.
3. Constituent platform of the Movement of Islamic Tendency (Ennahdha's old name) in June 1980.
4. Maryam Ben Salem, *Le militantisme en contexte répressif. Cas du mouvement islamiste tunisien* [Militantism in a Repressive Context. The Case of the Tunisian Islamist Movement], PhD thesis in political science, under the direction of Daniel Gaxie, Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2013.
5. As noted by Jean Séguy, it is difficult to demonstrate empirically that a value system dominates in a society, but also the absence of unanimity in this domain in societies, *a fortiori* in a period of transition, also makes this enterprise more difficult and therefore requires paying attention to a differentiated relationship to morality according to social classes or layers on the one hand and, on the other, to the changes in these relationships as a function of the groups frequented by the individual. Jean Séguy, "La socialisation aux valeurs utopiques" [Socialization in Utopian Values], *Archives des Sciences Sociales de la Religion*, 1980, Vol. 50, no. 1, p. 9, p. 16.
6. *Kaba'ir* is a major sin under Islam.
7. Interview conducted in 2009.
8. Designates followers of Salah Ben Youssef (1907–61), a member of the Destorian party, comrade in arms of Bourguiba, and Minister of Justice in the Chenik Government who opposed the policy of the Tunisian Republic's first president and was assassinated.
9. Interview conducted in 2007.
10. Interview conducted in 2012.
11. This reference to the Carthaginian Republic, a non-Arab and non-Muslim African power, is quite revealing about the territorial reading of the East–West conflict. It likewise denotes after all a basic knowledge of Phoenician history, Carthage, like Athens, being an aristocratic Republic.
12. According to a study by A. Hermassi, Baqir Essadr and Ali Chari'ati are high on

the list of Islamist most-read authors. Abdelbaki Hermassi, “La société tunisienne au miroir des islamistes” [Tunisian Society in the Islamist Mirror], *Monde arabe Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 103, 1984, 39–56.

13. Interview conducted in 2008.
14. Sadri Khiari, *Tunisie. Le délitement de la cité. Coercition, consentement, résistance* [Tunisia. Distintegration of the City. Coercion, Consent, Resistance], Paris, Karthala, 2003.
15. A Tunisian blogger Olfa Riahi exposed to the media an affair of misappropriated funds directly implicating the Minister of Foreign Affairs.
16. In Arabic, the term *taghrib* refers to the West *gharb* wholly in its allogene character.
17. Constitutive rules of the movement after revision (ninth Congress):
18. بعث الشخصية الإسلامية لتونس حتى تستعيد مهمتها كقاعدة كبرى للحضارة الإسلامية بأفريقيا ووضع حد لحالة التبعية والاعتراب والضلال. تجديد الفكر الإسلامي على ضوء أصول الإسلام الثابتة ومقتضيات الحياة المتطورة و من تنقيته رواعصو سبر الانحطاط وأثار التعريب. البيان التأسيسي
لحركة الاتجاه الإسلامي (حركة 1981 6-6-لنهضة لاحقاً) تونس في
19. The diplomatic correspondence of the Tunis Regency kept in the Tunisian National Archives (TNA), historical series, attests unequivocally the use of French as the language of diplomacy with foreign powers and Tunisia’s own representatives abroad from the early nineteenth century on. Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, and Italian were also utilized.
20. Tunisian politician, president of the Patriotic Democratic Movement WATAD (al-WATaniyyun al-Dimkratiyyun al-Muwahid), who was assassinated on February 6, 2013.
21. This version is questioned by a source in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which assures that it was meeting.
22. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
23. One accusation was leveled by the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs in a newspaper interview. Having met Rached Ghannouchi during a visit to the emir of Qatar, the Syrian minister asserted that the latter is supposed to have ordered disbursement of USD 150 million for supporting the Ennahdha party in its campaign for the October 23, 2011 elections.
24. Anouar Chennoufi, “Ennahdha réfute les accusations du porte-parole du parti algérien le Front de Libération Nationale (FLN),” *Tunivisions*, May 12, 2012, <https://www.turess.com/fr/tunivisions/34660>, last accessed October 9, 2016.

25. Today, Ennahdha and Nidaa have equal number of seats within the parliament (sixty-nine) given the crisis within Nidaa that led to the resignation of seventeen of its deputies.
26. Interview granted by the Minister to the Egyptian newspaper *al Abram* on September 11, 2016.
27. In an interview with TRT Arabic, R. Ghannouchi condemned “Hezbollah’s commitment to the counterrevolutionary forces in Syria and Yemen and its contribution to the destruction of the country” and stated that Ennahdha cannot be at his side given the fact that Hezbollah “has blood on his hands.”
28. The congress was held in Hammamet on May 21–22, 2016.
29. Seif Soudani, “Discrète visite de Rached Ghannouchi aux États-Unis: décryptage d’une réconciliation,” *Le courrier de l’Atlas*, December 7, 2011, <http://www.lecourrierdelatlas.com/139607122011Discrete-visite-de-Rached-Ghannouchi-aux-Etats-Unis-decryptage-d-une-reconciliation.html>, last accessed October 12, 2016.