

Transcript

Arab Nationalism, Islamism and the Arab Uprising

November 30 2011

Professor Sadik Al-Azm

*Fellow, Centre of Advanced Studies, Bonn University &
Professor Emeritus, Damascus University*

Chair: Professor Fawaz Gerges

London School of Economics

Professor Fawaz Gerges: Good evening. Welcome to you all. My name is Fawaz Gerges and I teach the Modern Middle East here at LSE. It really gives me great pleasure to introduce our distinguished speaker tonight, Professor Sadik Jalal Al-Azm. A professor, a public intellectual, an educator and a philosopher who has really made a critical contribution to Arab political thought, to Arab liberal thought as well as western social sciences. Professor Al-Azm does not really need much introduction. Most of you know his contribution, his books, what he has done in the last 40 years. But I want to just say a few words for some of you students who do not really know what kind of universities he taught at in the last 40 years. For many years, he taught modern European philosophy at the University of Damascus – That's really your home? He is currently a fellow at the University of Bonn and he asked me specifically to say that he is a fellow at the Centre of Advanced Studies at Bonn University. He also taught at Princeton University in the 1980s. He taught at the University of Beirut in the early 1960s, and of course he taught at the University of Hamburg and other institutions.

I would argue – and I know I wish I had the time; I don't have the time – that Professor Al-Azm's contribution truly transcends the academic field. Most of us academics are very narrowly based. As an Arab intellectual, as a public intellectual, as a philosopher, I would submit that he has made a key role, a key contribution to the great awakening that we have witnessed in the last 10 months, not just in terms of the classroom but more than that.

A few weeks ago, the *New York Times* published a piece titled 'Why Arab intellectuals did not roll over, did not bark?' Implying that the great awakening that we have witnessed were not driven by Arab intellectuals, this is the premise of the article. Somehow in revolutions, great revolutions and awakenings, you have a petition, you have a manifesto and that would really serve as a spark, that basically produce great events like the events we have witnessed in the last 10 months. If the correspondent of the *New York Times* had really bothered to take a look at the history of ideas in the Arab world in the last 100 years, he would have realized that many intellectuals, many scholars, against great odds defied the dominate political and religious patterns of thought in the Arab world. In really the darkest moments of the Arab world, there have been great minds and intellectuals that really have been roaring and barking by questioning the patterns of political and religious thought.

Take Professor Al-Azm, for example: in the late 1960s, he published two seminal texts. One is called *al nakd al thati baad al hazima* which is Self-Criticism After the Defeat of 1967 and he would be delighted to sign the book afterwards, if you would like to purchase a copy of the book, which was recently published in English.

And his second book is *nakd al fikr al dini* (a critique of religious thought) I don't have the time really to highlight and lay out the basic arguments of the two texts, where again Professor Al-Azm challenged the dominate patterns of thinking in the Arab world and he also called on Arab citizens to embrace democracy, gender equality and science to achieve progress. I think his books – and I'm truly not exaggerating – represented a turning point in nourishing the political culture of self-criticism because the two books came after that dark moment many Arabs called *Al-Naksa*, the defeat, after the Arab defeat in the 1967 war.

And he was not he only one, take Constantine, take Nizar Kabbani, take Adonis, I mean dozens of scholars and writers and poets and long before them. If the New York Times correspondent had read Taha Hussein and Abdul Halim Al Razak and the great liberal minds that are really barking and roaring to basically bring about a renaissance in the Arab World. If the *New York Times* correspondent would have taken the time, then he would have realized that Arab intellectuals and scholars and philosophers have been barking over the last hundred years nonstop in order to bring about the new awakenings that we have witnessed in the last 10 months. Please join me in welcoming an Arab intellectual who has never stopped barking and roaring and I believe has really produced and supplied some of the currency that has bankrolled that great Arab awakening in the last ten months: Sadik Jalal Al-Azm.

Professor Sadik Al-Azm: Thank you very much, Fawaz. This was more than I sort of deserve. I am certainly very grateful for the invitation and indeed I am greatly honoured by this beautiful presence here. Inviting me to speak about, your formal invitation, apropos of the Arab revolutions on nationalism, Islamism and liberalism filled me with a lot of fear and trembling because to deal with all these three in one shot does fill you with fear and trembling, but I promised to do my best about that.

Now, I will start with a note of caution. Given the fact that the overall topic of this series of lectures, as I understood from Professor Fawaz, speaks of a new era of politics inaugurated by

the unfolding of the Arab Spring, if, in fact, we Arabs are on the verge of a new era of politics, I find it then necessary to draw the serious attention of the newly emerging forces of the Arab Spring to two highly related, deeply ingrained and highly regressive tendencies in Arab political life in general.

The first tendency as past experience has shown is for Arab political changes and shifts to proceed in spite of inflated rhetoric and hyperbolic discourses. To proceed on the basis of the famous French maxim which says: *'plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose'*. The second tendency can be summarized in a few telling words: the persistence of the ancient regime. No matter what, and even after the revolution has worked itself out, we can already see the persistence of the ancient regime asserting itself in Egypt now and in Cairo's Tahrir Square opposing that and Cairo's Tahrir Square in a certain sense is the paradigm for all the other Tahrir Squares of the Arab world during this last period.

It is clear to me now that the military ancient regime in Egypt sacrificed a part of itself in order to save the rest of itself. Another means of persistence is for the ancient regime to technically withdraw to its barracks and leave the front stage to civil society, civil politicians, political parties and electoral politics, but still wielding power behind the scenes. In other words, we may very well have in Egypt a situation similar to the one that prevailed in Turkey before the Justice and Development Party won power electorally in the country.

That is, without the upmost careful attention to these two regressive engrained tendencies in Arab political life, the inauguration of a new era of Arab politics where various Arab peoples may have finally found their voice and are in the process of affirming it, this new process will be hindered, distorted and even reversed. Let me add that the worst and most damaging form of the persistence of the ancient regime is when it persists in the very lives, behaviour, habits and decisions of the revolutionaries themselves. Actually, this has been a very common and prevalent Arab failure as we all ought to know from our own experiences with past Arab revolutions, or so-called revolutions, and past Arab revolutionaries.

Now I move on to confess that the unfolding of the Arab Spring often takes me back to what I had learned and got to know about classical European revolutionary politics and the intellectual energies expended on the theorisation of these politics.

Tahrir Square experiences seem to me to come nearest to the venerable European debates, theories and practices of the general strike. The revolution in Syria has no Tahrir Square as yet. The Syrian revolutionary experience now seems to come closest to the theory and practice of the revolutionary [inaudible], especially as first expounded by Régis Debray in his early work '*Revolution in the Revolution*'. Again, the revolution in Syria is often accused of being spontaneous, leaderless and lacking in strategy, but then is there not in all this an echo of classical European revolutionary politics, debates and controversies over the role of the leading highly organised vanguard party as against the natural spontaneity of the revolutionary politics, debates and controversies over the role of the leading, highly organized vanguard party as against the natural spontaneity of the revolutionary masses. Do not the formation and the rise of the Syrian *tensikiyat* – that is the local coordinating committees – does not this ring a bell of sorts in some European minds as they seem to come nearest to the again venerable idea of local revolutionary councils that operate regardless of what the traditional political organizations, opposition groups and personalities say or do?

In Syria today, these *tensikiyat* lead and energise the street power of the revolution and are responsible for sustaining the, on the whole, non-violent character of the intifada against military rules, marshal law, the police state that Syria has been for the last half century. Given the spontaneity of these *tensikiyat*, still they have been able to knit themselves into a national network continually in touch with similar activists both in Syria, the Arab World, as well as the wide-world beyond. Using with great expertise the most up-to date electronic forms of communication, to further their revolutionary agenda, they have been able as well to frustrate the military regime's efforts to block and suppress the flow of information. They achieved that by sustaining a steady flow of real time images and vital pieces of information concerning what is actually taking place on the ground, all around the country.

One last reflection concerning these kinds of comparisons. The revolution in Syria today reminds me very strongly of the Arab revolutionary politics of the 1950s and 1960s of the last century, particularly Egypt and Syria. Remember that Egypt and Syria at that time formed a short-lived union called then the United Arab Republic. The major enemy of the revolutionaries, activists and progressives of those days was called *tahalouf al iktaa wal bourgeoisie* - that is the alliance of the feudal lords with the high bourgeoisie of that time, an

alliance that once dominated the politics, power and wealth of those countries to the detriment of everyone else. Now I can say with confidence that today's revolution in Syria or *intifiada* in Syria is again directed against a similar alliance of new military feudal lords with a state-formed high bourgeoisie which arrogantly, vainly, hotly and insolently dominates the politics, powers and wealth of the country to the detriment of everyone else as well. An alliance that I once called in its earlier stages the merchant-military complex that really rules Syria while the activists and commentators of a younger generation – that is the activists and commentators of today – have come to call the merchant-military conference *al mourakkab al siyasi al amni al mali* - that is the political security financial complex.

Conspicuously absent from the Arab Spring and from its Tahrir Squares and its revolutionary focus in Syria are the traditional cries, slogans, demands and banners of good old Arab nationalism, especially as we have known it over the famous nationalist period of the last century. It was in its heyday in the early post-colonial era in Egypt and Syria. So just as no banner was raised anywhere from Tunis to Cairo to Tripoli, Libya to Sanaa to Manama, Bahrain and to Homs, Syria, no banner was raised saying 'Islam is the solution'. Similarly, no banner was in sight either saying 'Arab unity is the solution'. Actually, it is remarkable that what was on exhibit through the Arab Spring are metamorphosed and both more interesting and more sublimated expressions of a different kind of Arab unity than usual or than we have been accustomed to. First, the Arab regimes being put to the test by the *intifadas* of their peoples showed a peculiar kind of official Arab unity after years of vociferous rhetoric about the basic unity of *Al Umma Al Arabiah* – the Arab nation –and about its unifying historical commonalities such as language, religion, ethnicity, culture and shared destiny and all the rest. These same Arab regimes seemed united in going on a rhetorical binge emphasising Arab particularities, peculiarities, uniquenesses, singularities and so on.

So all of a sudden, we hear instead of the traditional Arab nationalist discourse and rhetoric, we hear the tumultuous Arab governmental claims that Egypt is not Tunisia and that Libya is not Egypt or Tunisia and that Syria is neither Tunisia nor Egypt nor Libya and so on. All this, at a time when Egypt was never more similar officially to Tunisia, Bahrain and Libya than in these revolutionary days. So just as the revolting Bahraini citizen wants reform that provides him with a constitutional monarchy and a prime minister that is not appointed by the royal place, but

produced by the actual political arena and its balance of forces, similarly the revolting Egyptian and Syrian citizen wants in his turn, a reform that provides him with a genuine constitutional president of the republic and a prime minister not appointed by presidential fiat, but actually produced by the democratic political arena of his country. Thus I say, for a relatively long time, the Arabs did not feel the closeness similitude and unity of the Arab countries as to their challenges, blockages, tyrannies, social movement and possible solutions as the Arab feels them these days. We can also say that the unity of the Arab states as police states and their similarities as tyrannical regimes were never as manifest as during the Arab Spring. The Arab unity in despotic rule and in the realities of oppression was certainly on exhibit as never before.

Please note as well how the Arab unity of the regimes rushed with extreme anxiety and unmistakable panic to take refuge in mega-conspiracy theories to explain away what in the end they brought upon themselves. All this after the incessant efforts that regimes of tyranny states that they run had worked hard to present themselves as the centre and locus of the most rational, enlightened, inclusive, patriotic and civilized tendencies in Arab societies. Societies that are still, they say, plagued by vertical sectarian ethnic tribal and regional divisions, which cause the fragmentation of the peoples and act to reinforce their backwardness and anachronism.

We saw those very Arab regimes united in clinging mechanically, repetitively and neurotically to the fables of conspiracy explanations and interpretations and persisting at any rate with the Kafkaesque absurdities of their delirious logic. It is certainly significant that it was not the Tahrir Square revolting masses that resorted to conspiratorial justifications although many of us have accused those same masses of being enamoured of conspiracy theories at times to the point of dementia. The Arab unity of the top dogs show itself best in such united policies as official, wilful blindness, arrogance and denial in devising a security solution for each protest, demand and demonstration and in treating popular demands as nothing more than subversion, rebellion, treachery and betrayal. This is why I can confidently repeat that the unity of the Arab states as police states and their similarities as tyrannical regimes were never as manifest as during this Arab Spring. The Arab Spring showed as well the emergence of another type of Arab unity, welling up from below this time. This kind of popular Arab unity was never more evident than in the resounding shout reverberating from Tunis to Egypt to Libya to Yemen to

Syria '*Al shaab youridou iskat al nizam*' - The people want to overthrow the regime. Since when such words as 'the people want' had meant anything at all in our Arab world?

Another important manifestation of Arab unity from below – that is from the world of the underdogs, not the top dogs – is to be found in the fact that the charisma of the revolutionary moment shifted from the usual concentration on a single and unrivalled leader to the flow and diffusion of the assembled masses in the many Arab Tahrir Squares, making the congregation itself the true charismatic moment of the revolution and of change. This important development is certainly new for us Arabs and for our modern, social, political history.

For this reason the Tahrir Squares in Tunis, Cairo, Manama, Sanaa, Benghazi were unified for example by immense civil participation of women and the visible presence of children, boys and girls, this in extremely conservative societies and cities. In addition, they were unified by various forms of art, innovative forms of expression, music performances, songs, plays, dances, balloons, prayers, satirical cartoons, sarcastic comments and critical graffiti. Generally all that was done with happy faces relatively. This, in spite of the whole [inaudible] of aggressive thugs, deadly militias, indiscriminate regression and live ammunition. There was something of a carnivalesque spirit and practice and I use 'carnivalesque' here in the Bakhtinian sense of carnival mocking and deflating the pretension of high power and oppression. This is something which is certainly unheard of in the history of modern Arab political demonstrations and forms of mass political protests.

The charismatic moment of the Arab Spring showed a high degree of maturity trying to transcend the alarmist scenarios promoted, reinforced and put into practice for a long time by the regimes, by the top dogs of the regimes. I mean the scenarios that put our societies before such drastic, harsh, and inescapable choices as, either the continuation of despotic regimes, their marshal law, permanent state of emergency and their security apprentices in place or the inevitable vertical disintegration of our societies along religious, sectarian, ethnic, regional and tribal lines with what all this means as social discord and strife.

If I said earlier, Arab nationalism and the usual ideas about Arab unity were conspicuously absent from the Arab Spring commotion, still it remains undeniable that political Islam proved to be conspicuously present and the talk is all about Islam, Islamism, the Muslim brothers,

Salafis, Salafism, fundamentalism, and the spontaneous religiosity of the masses of Tahrir squares everywhere. A good way to start the discussion on this issue is to take off from Bernard Lewis's celebrated essay of the 70s of the last century, titled 'The return of Islam'. Now the most important question which Lewis fails to address in his essay is where did Islam go? Let me clarify that for Lewis, Islam really neither goes nor returns but it simply reverts to type. In other words, Islam here is presented as an expressive totality with a constant core which manifests itself and infuses every bit, piece and part of that totality.

The movements, processes, drifts, tugs and pulls of history, may temporarily affect the surface of that expressive totality and introduce such abnormalities and distortions in it such as nationalism, socialism, populism, modernism, Marxism, secularism, reform and so on. But in the end, the totality reverts to type and remains faithful to its transcendental core eventually shaking off all these foreign distortions and abnormalities in the process. So, *homo islamicus* remains *homo islamicus* no matter what. And Lewis's concept of the return of Islam turns out to be no more than a static euphemism for Islam simply reverting to type as usual. Allow me to add here that the grand Arab debates and controversies of the 60s and 70s such as issues as *al-asala wal mouaasara* (authenticity vs. contemporaneity), *al tourath wal hadatha* (heritage vs. modernity), *al Islam wal tajdid* (Islam and renewal) in which very prominent public intellectuals and thinkers were involved like Tayyib Tizini in Damascus, Adonis the famous poet and public intellectual, Muhammad Abid al Jabiri, Hussein Mroue, and of course others, Mohammed Arkoun, and so on. What I want to say is that these debates over these issues were certainly in my view not innocent at all from similar Lewisian assumptions and premises in the first place. Now, I will assume a more empirical and realistic approach than Lewis's of Islam reverting to type. No one can compare say Egypt under Nasser and during the nationalist populist phase of Arab socialism that Nasser led, compare it to the Egypt of Hosni Mubarak without being struck by the fact that there is a return of Islam in some primary manifest sense and by the presence of a new Islamic symbolic reference points for communal and inter-communal identification on the one hand and for differentiation, conflict and strife on the other. If there is then such an obvious, in the empirical sense, of the return of Islam, still a question remains, where did Islam go in the first place for it to return?

I will try to give some sort of an answer. During the nationalist populist phase in the post-colonial life of key Arab countries, especially Egypt, Syria, Iraq and so on, Islam's primacy over the public institutional economic social legal and cultural life of key Arab society had eroded unmistakably. Thus it was strikingly clear that at that time, hardly anything in the society, economy, politics, culture and law of those states, of those key countries, was run according to Islamic pre-sets administered along the lines of sharia law or functioned in conformity with the theological doctrine and or teachings of Islam, except in family law. Actually in those countries, the modern secular nationalist calendar with its new holidays, symbols, monuments, historical sites, battles, heroes, ceremonies and memorial days and come to fill the public square relegating in the process the old religious calendar and its landmarks to the margins of public life. Nasser himself never justified his own regime by appealing to religion or Islam for example. To give you an idea of the mood prevalent during that phase, concerning the issues I'm dealing with, I will read out before you a translation of Adonis's manifesto directed to the revolutionary Arabs of those days. Now I quote from Adonis in translation:

As revolutionary Arabs, what we aspire to and work for is laying the foundations for a new age for the Arabs. We know that instituting a new age presupposes from the very beginning a complete break with the past. We also know that the starting point of this founding break is criticism, the criticism of all that is inherited, prevalent and common. The role of criticism here is not limited to exposing and laying bare whatever prevents the establishment of a new age but extends to its destruction. Our past is a world of losses in a variety of religious, political, cultural and economic forms. It is a realm of the unseen and the illusory, which continues and extends. It is a realm that not only hinders the Arab from finding himself but also prevents him from making himself/and since the structure of prevalent Arab life and culture is based on religion, we understand very well the dimensions of Marx's statement to the effect that the criticism of religion is the condition for all other criticism. If we keep in mind also that criticism for Karl Marx is neither mental nor abstract, but practical and revolutionary, then we can say that the revolutionary criticism of the Arab heritage is the condition for any revolutionary Arab action.

To press the point more seriously, I shall read out as well the translation of a similar declaration of a prominent Syrian theoretician and activist of those days, Yassin Al Hafez, reflecting the same then prevalent mood and spirit, especially concerning religion, because this is where Islam went. I quote now from Yassin Al Hafez:

A critique of all aspects of actually existing Arab society and its traditions, a strict scientific and secular critique plus a deep and penetrating analysis is one of the fundamental obligations of the revolutionary socialist Arab vanguard in the Arab homeland. Such a critique alone is capable of readying the conditions that would permit the sprouting of all the negative, inhibiting and disabling aspects of our social heritage. Exploring the traditional frames of Arab society, will lead precisely to the acceleration of the rate of work on the construction of the completely modern Arab society. Without this act of exploding, the possibility of a systematic, speedy and revolutionary development of the traditional intellectual and social structures of the Arab people becomes questionable if not impossible. At the same time, this will in its turn cast its negative and disabling shadows on serious and swift Arab economic growth.

Now I think the concept of the return of Islam starts making historical and sociological sense in contrast and in comparison with what was prevalent during the nationalist populist phase of Arab political social and cultural life. Given the Arab Spring and its forces now, how do I see the present situation and distribution of forces of this returned Islam, especially in its ideological form known as Islamism? I see right now that the stakes are very high in the fierce struggle going on over the definition of Islam and over the control of the meaning of Islam. This in the Middle East in general and in the Arab world in particular, of course the Arab world being the heartland of Islam. In the following you will find my classification of the main contending parties in this battle over the definition of Islam and over the control of the meaning of Islam at present and pretty much as the Arab Spring is unfolding.

First, we have governments, state apparatuses, established clerical elites and hierarchies who formulate propagate and defend what may be conveniently called 'Official State Islam'. The most prominent form of this kind of Islam at present is the petro-Islam of countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran fully funded and supported all over the world by abundant petro-dollars. The official doctrine of Iranian petro-Islam is that of the rule of the jurist (*wilayat al fakih*), while the official doctrine of Saudi Islam says '*the Koran is our constitution.*' In other words, we need no constitution of any kinds for the kingdom, absolute monarchy is best for true Islam. Every state in the Islamic world and the Arab world certainly has by now developed its own version of official state Islam to help serve its vital interests and shake those of competing states. Even the secular Kemalist Turkish state has found for itself a benign, elastic and tolerant version of Islam to toy with as necessary for a while. Let me note that to the whole, Sunni official Islam had proved to be an indispensable ally for the west throughout the cold war and particularly in Islam's most literal and rigorous readings forms and applications. Thus, this Islam and the

west know each other very well, understand each other very well and know how to operate together very well. This is why I take with a grain of salt the bombastic complaints they keep making about each other in public. We know also that official Shia Islam in Iraq, especially Iraq, has come around by now to align itself as well with the US and with western politics and policies in the Arab world and in the middle east in general. I will say something concerning official Shia state Islam in Iran. What we need is to note that official state Islam in Iran, has gone a long way in liquidating all the autonomous, independent, descending and marginal forms and varieties of Shia Islam that flourished through the history of Shi'ism by slowly but surely bringing all under the sway and control of the Iranian state and by absorbing them into official state Islam, a process that had been completed long ago for the Sunni Islam under the ottoman sultans. This process of subjugation and absorption partially explains the eruption of the vigorous protest movements in Iran after the presidential elections of 2009 and explains the participation of many mullahs and ayatollahs in the protest movement, who wanted to maintain their autonomy and independence.

I come now to the second contending party. On the other extreme side of official state Islam, we have militant insurrectionally Islam, with a plethora of fractions, factions and groupings that resort to spectacular terroristic violence both locally and on a world scale under the banner of resurrecting Islam's forgotten imperative of jihad, *al farida al gha2iba*, against all infidels to further their agendas. It is this Islam that occupied the holly shrine in Mecca, the Kaaba in 1979, shaking the Saudi Arabian kingdom to its foundations, assassinated president Anwar Sadat in Egypt in 1981 in the hope of sparking an Islamist revolution in Egypt, conducted a losing but bloody battle against the Syrian, Egyptian and Algerian regimes, and carried out the assaults of 9/11 inside the US. Its doctrine of jihad apostasies (*takfir*) all the ruling regimes in the Islamic world as well as all the Muslim societies so ruled, regarding them as no more than nominary Muslim entities and governments that require urgent re-Islamisation. The practitioners of this type of Islam summarize their approach in two words: *takfir wa tafjir*, which translates as apostasies and explode. The logic of *takfiri* Islam is simple and far reaching, following is my attempt to formulate that logic rigorously in the shape of what I shall call the '*takfir* syllogism', using the Muslim brothers in Egypt as an instance or example and using Sayyid Qutb as a basis. This is how the *takfir* syllogism goes. Premise Number 1: the Muslim brothers were persecuted and tortured in Egypt during Nasser's time, when all they were

saying was 'god is our law, Islam our way and the Koran our constitution.' And when all they were doing was to work for Islam in supposedly a Muslim country and society. Number 2: those who carried out the persecution of the Muslim brothers and inflicted such pain and sufferance on them for saying what they were saying and for doing what they were doing, cannot be really Muslims and must be *kafers*. This is now the first level of *takfir*. Number 3. If these agents of prosecution and practitioners of torture are *kafers*, then the authorities than the authorities that appointed them and commended them to do what they did must be more *kafers* than those *kafers*, which is the third level of *takfir*. The fourth level, all the elites, that do not acknowledge that those authorities are *kafers*, are themselves *kafers* as well. Therefore, the popular masses that obey, applaud and follow these *kafer* authorities and their *kafer* elites, become *kafers* themselves because any approval of *koufr* is itself a *kofr*. This is then the *takfir* of the entire society. This is the end of my syllogism.

Let me make a cautionary remark here, that is of particular relevance: although Lebanon's Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas carry some family resemblances to this kind of Islam, they are not to be reduced to it. Both organisations are up to a point, reminiscent of old 20th century type of national liberation movements with an Islamist dominating ideology concentration mainly on freeing occupied territories, there are real occupied territories, they conduct their struggles and fights locally on the whole, attack only the occupying country, have a carefully defined and achievable goal, are in principle ready to negotiate a deal with the enemy and have a strong and highly supportive popular constituency. However, since Hezbollah is a purely Shia organisation and Hamas is a purely Sunni movement, neither of them can qualify for a honorific title of national liberation movement. This kind of jihadi Islam declared unambiguously its despair from any other method and or means of furthering its vital goals and programs other than the direct and immediate attack on the internal and external enemy, as violently, extravagantly, spectacularly and destructively as possible. Headless of the longer term chances of success or failure, of such attacks, contemptuous of their self-destructive consequences and dismissive of their social, political and economic fallout even on Islam and Islamism itself. In fact, the general outlook and tactics of this kind of Islam, bear in my view a lot of resemblances to the outlook and tactics of Europe's left wing arm insurrectionary factions and fractions of the 1970s, such as the Action Directe in France, Baader-Meinhof Gang in Germany, the Italian Red Brigades, who kidnapped and assassinated Aldo Moro then the dean

of Italy's politician and statesman. In other words, what we have on our hands here is a kind of Action Directe Islam opting for blind, spectacular and violent forms of jihad. Obviously these two sources of jihad, the European and the Muslim, share a preference for shortcut solutions such as assassinations, hostage taking, kidnappings and suicide bombings over long term political work and the patient elaboration of credible alternatives and programs to the status-quo. I suppose that the American equivalent for that period would be the Action Directe of the Weatherman, Jerry Rubin's manifesto of the 1970 'DO IT' and the resulting cries of the Watts riots of 1965 'Burn baby burn'.

Finally, I come to the third main contender in the fierce struggle for the definition and control of the meaning of Islam and this is middle class commercial Islam, represented primarily by the bourgeoisies of various Muslim and Arab countries and led by an assortment of agencies such as the chambers of commerce, industry, agriculture, multiple forms of Islamic banking, investment houses, venture capitals and so on. In so far as these middle classes form the backbone of civil society in their respective Middle Eastern countries, their Islam becomes the Islam of civil society in general. It is an Islam that is moderate, conservative and good-for-business and certainly not to be confused with either the Islam that is good for absolute power or with the other form of Islam that is good for violent eruptions without a cause. It abhors the salvific projects of the radical secular left, no less than the similar projects of the radical Islamic right. Generally speaking this Islam organises itself around the notion of civil society and its empowerment and around an emerging quasi-consensus calling for some respect of human rights, a measure of democratic rule, some independent judiciary, the end of marshal law, and the end of the state of siege imposed on any one of our countries. A model of the hegemony of this kind of Islam is to be found today in turkey under the rule of the justice and development party there. The impact and lure of the Turkish example are already being powerfully and widely felt in the Arab world; again the Arab world is the heartland of Islam. Politically, this Islam is of decisive importance at present because turkey now is the only Muslim country with a developed and explicit secular ideology, in tradition and practice and also the only Muslim society to produce a seemingly democratic political party, something like Europe's Christian democratic parties, they certainly present themselves that way, capable of ascending to power electorally and peacefully without a catastrophe befalling the whole polity as happened elsewhere. This novel achievement of middle class good-for-business Islam showed itself

capable of bringing the Turkish military establishment finally under democratic civilian control. Arab Islamic justice and development political parties are already mushrooming in various Arab countries and states. Therefore, my own anticipation is that when currently turbulent Arab states and societies stabilise, and to some extent democratise, it will be some version of middle class good-for-business Islam that will float to the surface.

Traditional Arab nationalism is absent in the current uprisings, but there are commonalities in the uprisings and the regime reactions across the various states. The remarkably charismatic nature of the uprisings is a new and important development: Islamism has "returned" to the debate, and the definition of Islam is fiercely contested between the religious/state establishment, middle-class commercial Islam and militant insurrectionary Islam. The middle-class model is the AKP in Turkey, while militant jihadist groups can be compared to European armed factions in the 1970s. Even if only partial