

Borders and sovereignty in Islamist and jihadist thought: past and present

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It is very simple. We want Sharia. Sharia in economy, in politics, in judiciary, in our borders and our foreign relations.

Muhammad Abdul-Rahman,¹ *Time Magazine*, 8 October 2012

For almost a century, academic scholarship and public opinion have used the term ‘Islamism’ to refer to the ideology of religious and militant movements that aim to establish the political independence of Islam, not only as a religion but also—maybe primarily—as a nation, a state and a civilization ruled by a central and unique entity (the caliphate). Extensive efforts over numerous decades have been dedicated to restoring a single Islamic sovereignty in response to the alien oppression faced by Muslim communities living under European colonial supremacy. This intense identity protest has sought to hark back to the first centuries of their religion, from which any intellectual or political framework not stemming from Islam had been disassociated. Indeed, the historical progression of Islamism makes for an interesting study in examining the continuities and ruptures that pertain to the application of foundational discourse—as they have been reinforced, nuanced or reframed—in the circumstances of the last century. Moreover, it offers relevant material in drawing comparisons between an initially intransigent ideology (Islamism, now divided into several conceptions) and one that is still related to an uncompromising fundamentalist understanding of Islam (jihadism). Indeed, although ‘jihadism’ does share the same purpose with predominant forms of Islamism, the ideology reflects a global vision that does not require a ‘nationalist moment’ in favour of armed contest. Organized as violent movements (such as Al-Qaeda or Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/ISIS), whose understanding of ‘jihad’ prompts them to accord importance to armed insurrection in defeating their enemies, ‘jihadists’ do not engage in institutionalized politics (such as establishing a political party) in the service of some global action aimed at achieving the caliphate ideal.²

¹ The son of Shaykh Umar Abdul-Rahman (b. 1938), a blind Egyptian Islamic scholar and a leader of the Gama’ al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group), currently serving a life sentence of imprisonment in the United States after prosecution as one of the sponsors of the World Trade Center bombings of 1993.

² For an in-depth study of Islamism and jihadism as concepts, see John Esposito, *Unholy war: terror in the name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Indeed, armed with their ideology in confronting highly complex socio-political realities, Islamists have found themselves increasingly factionalized, owing to divergences in how their original ambitions have been instrumentalized in local contexts. These pressures have, according to circumstances, compelled Islamists to reorientate themselves towards ideas that may have been vilified in the original doctrine. This inexorably creates a contest of ideas between the intent of actors in preserving the original design of the Islamist project and those compelled to adopt revised ideals.

The Islamist proposition emphasizes the centrality of borders and sovereignty, and seeks to reunite all fellow believers across existing external geographical divisions such that the only remaining boundary would be that between Muslims and non-Muslims. This radical turn stems from a desire to reinstate Islam as a political body capable of suppressing internal splits that have supposedly divided the global Muslim community as a result of the 'artificial' constructs of nations, tribes and states. Under the continuing impulse of this desire, Islamists have evolved from a preference for revolutionary action aimed at restoring the caliphate towards a gradualist and incremental effort aimed at integrating fractured communities within traditional power structures and mechanisms, even if these efforts may set them at odds with their original values.

In 1927, when it had become obvious that the Islamic world was failing, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Association took shape in the city of Isma'iliyya. The Brotherhood's ideology stemmed from the religious tenets of the Islamic preacher Hassan al-Banna.³ Among its original objectives lies the construction of a central and sovereign Islamic state aimed at uniting the entire Muslim population (*umma*) under the single rule of the caliphate. Decades later, another key Islamist thinker, Rached Ghannouchi,⁴ would present the Islamist vision as evolving from an intransigent ideology to a nationalized project incorporating significant parts of the Westphalian system, leading notably to a new theorization of borders and the caliphate. In the process, however, this allowed for the rise of new and contending forms of political Islam. Indeed, as a social movement, Islamism adopted many faces over the decades in dealing with challenging—both domestic and external—realities.⁵ Although it is difficult to affirm that all the

³ Hassan al-Banna was born in 1906 in Mahmudiyya and brought up in the tradition of the Islamic reformers (Jamal-dine al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rached Rida) who in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries advocated a revivalism which would lead Muslims to generate a political resurgence. Hassan al-Banna, as an imam, preacher, teacher, charitable worker and political activist, set out to achieve this goal through the creation in the 1920s of a modern organization that he named the Association of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although his fundamentalist understanding of Islam was based on the need to return to the legacy of the 'pious ancestors' (*al-Salaf al-Salih*), that is, the very first generations of Muslims, his political ethic was modern and echoed the rise of mass militancy in Europe at that time. See Brynjar Lia, *The society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: the rise of an Islamic mass movement 1928–1942* (Reading, MA: Ithaca, 2006).

⁴ Born in 1941, Rached Ghannouchi was the co-founder in 1981 of the Tunisian Ennahda Party (initially known as the Islamic Tendency Movement), which was inspired by the model of the Muslim Brotherhood and formed a government after the first free elections held in Tunisia after the 2010 uprising. He remains president of the party and is known for advocating a synthesis between Islam and democracy, notably after serving a prison sentence in 1984. In 2012 he was named one of *Time's* 100 most influential people and *Foreign Policy's* top 100 'global thinkers'. See Azzam S. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: a democrat within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵ Mohammed Ayoob, *The many faces of political Islam: religion and politics in the Muslim world* (Ann Arbor: University

movements that initially referred to an 'Islamic order' (over the individual, family, society, state and international system) have engaged with a process of reformation, many of them have had to take into consideration new elements such as the relevance of a violent strategy against established regimes, the reaction of the wider society and the legitimacy of free elections. Not all movements, for instance, have acknowledged the place of democracy within Islam—the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front advocated free elections on condition that it would seize power for good with no possibility of returning it.⁶ Having faced repression from the regime, the Front, or at least part of it, opted for armed rebellion⁷—a clearly different strategy from Ennahda ('Renaissance') in Tunisia, which rejected this option. It should be noted that at present Islamist forces are mainly connected by a common legacy rather than a common trajectory. Across the spectrum, various forms of politicization and discourses are present, principally owing to the local and national circumstances under which the different faces of political Islam have emerged. Sometimes, its proponents have remained faithful to both original aim and means; in other cases, the changing sociology of Islamism has generated a significant ideological shift.⁸

The core elements of the ideology that inspire Islamists include the reinstatement of an identity that has allegedly 'petered out', a quest for a counter-political discourse that begins with a new ideation of borders, as well as a revolt against 'modern' standards. By examining the discourse and writings of two of the most prominent Islamist thinkers, and drawing some comparisons with jihadists, in relation to the three main topics of caliphate, border and sovereignty, this article will address the issue of radical Islam from an internationalist perspective, with a focus on the impact of the Arab uprisings, to assess whether and how these notions have been reframed. It will focus principally on how Hassan al-Banna and Rached Ghannouchi have framed issues of borders and sovereignty in their writings and discourses, in order to consider the impact of both the original and reformed ideology. Naturally, these two figures do not reflect the whole spectrum of Islamist thought; nevertheless, they offer a relevant outlook from both the past and a present version of it with respect to some of the key concepts in International Relations (IR). In making this examination, we can draw a comparison between the founder of the vision of the main Islamist movement (al-Banna) and the successor who has gone the furthest in revising it (Ghannouchi).

The discussion below is premised on the belief that analysing how borders have been framed in Islamist thought is useful in understanding how the discourse on

of Michigan Press, 2008).

⁶ This was the stance of Ali Belhadj, one of the Front's principal figures, who was criticized for opposing democratic principles although his movement did run in, and win, the elections in 1991. After he was released in 2012, he continued to support violence and rebellion against 'impious' regimes.

⁷ Katerina Dalacoura, *Islamist terrorism and democracy in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁸ Some scholars have argued that the internal tensions within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood today are attributable in part to the reluctance of the 'old generation' of leaders and activists to revise the original ambition of achieving an 'Islamic regime'. Conversely, 'new generations of Brothers' are more likely to support the adoption of a 'civil state' with an agenda that incorporates a religious reference. See Khalil Al-Anani, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: religion, identity, and politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

political Islam constructs the artifice of state-building. By examining underlying principles and their evolution, we can arrive at a more nuanced account of the rise of various Islamist political movements, as well as the outgrowth of the logic espoused by jihadists. More interestingly, our insights help to enrich discussions of pressing contemporary concerns such as the steps Islamists have taken to integrate ‘Westphalian features’ in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings (and perhaps even prior to this), the increasing visibility of Islamists in responding to popular calls for democratic legitimacy, and other factors that have propelled a new generation of radicals to rally around revisionist rhetoric—for instance, the call by ISIS for ‘caliphate-building’. We will also explore how the study of borders may help in forecasting the directions likely to be taken by some of the Islamist and jihadist groups in the region—whether they tend towards a growing nationalization or rather towards revisionism.

Comprehending the historical evolution of Islamism through its leaders’ conception of borders and sovereignty

Only a few works have highlighted the responses of Islamist thinkers to traditional concepts within IR,⁹ beginning with the Westphalian state system, a model through which key contributions have been made to the study of sovereignty, borders and the balance of power.¹⁰ The founding belief that Islam cannot be reduced to a merely spiritual movement, but naturally generates a conscious form of political activism orientated towards state-building, has led Islamists to constantly seek the (re-)establishment of the caliphate in order to rescue fellow Muslims from a sinful existence. Islamist theoreticians have consequently been distinguished by their attempts to bring their religious vision of the world into the secularized realm of power struggle.

This leads us to consider two essential points when examining the Islamist conception of foundational notions such as ‘borders’ and ‘sovereignty’. First, the essentialization of religion, and its use as the principal point of division between Muslims and non-Muslims, requires that concepts of borders, and therefore of sovereignty, reflect some sort of metaphysics. Material and physical supports of politics such as borders and territories must therefore be subjected to Islamist ideals, starting with the principle of ‘unicity’ (*al-tawhid*), which is partly interpreted as the duty to provide all Muslims with a central unified leadership. This primary concept is that of a caliphate, ruled by a recognized commander of the *umma* (*al-amir al-muminin*), to whom obedience is compulsory, which functions as both a religious community and an institutionalized body politic. This further entails that there should be one single territory distinct from the remaining non-Muslim land inhabited by non-believers (*dar al-kufr*), which hence provides the impetus

⁹ See e.g. Wael B. Hallaq, *The impossible state: Islam, politics, and modernity’s moral predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Henry Kissinger, *World order: reflections on the character of nations and the course of history* (London: Allen Lane, 2014); Andreas Osiander, ‘Sovereignty, international relations, and the Westphalian myth’, *International Organization* 55: 2, 2001, pp. 251–87.

for eradicating borders that do not conform to this principle as part of a broader challenge to the rules of IR. Second, as an ideology emerging with the aim of restoring a religious and political entity diametrically opposed to the contemporary world order, political Islam clearly puts forth a revisionist view of the international system. Islamism's culturalist motivation to oppose and break free from the Westphalian framework¹¹ has created a paradigmatic shift in conceiving of IR.

The revolutionary paradigm has also gained traction through suspicions that formal borders and territorial markers have been used by enemies of Islam to undermine traditional Islamic statehood and power by favouring the rise of contending identities as well as demanding non-religious sovereignty over territories formerly under the rule of the caliphate. In effect, these artificial borders therefore solidify the decline of Islam as a nation and a civilization. Beyond the concept of external borders, delineating non-Muslim lands, weakness and domination are believed to appear in the guise of internal territorial divisions related to modern nationalism. Given that Muslims have succumbed to alien influences, it is no surprise that they have evolved from a faith generating a single global sovereignty to a religion divided into countries, tribes and parties. By manipulating these sources of division, 'enemies of Islam' have introduced a 'poison' that Islamists offer to cure through a major reform, including political revolution when necessary. The domestic anarchy that the *umma* has had to face for centuries is hence unquestionably related to the global one which has been built upon civilizational struggles.

This dual-level game of domestic and international power play is at the heart of the Islamist agenda. In responding to existing power dynamics and structural realities, Islamist leaders have inadvertently become socialized into a state-centric orientation, even as they preach pan-Islamic ideals and unity.

However, unlike strictly transnational movements, which also share the objective of restoring the caliphate through insurrectional and violent revolutionary action, Islamist movements have distinguished themselves by displaying an increasing degree of integration within domestic institutional politics. This willingness to engage with existing power structures and foreign logics of governance has led to a struggle within the Islamist movement. In the process, certain Islamists have had to adopt new logics and accept new realities, and this in turn has led to the emergence of new understandings. In the arena of global revisionist foreign policy, this has had a clear impact on the way issues such as borders, sovereignty, territories and diplomacies have been articulated. The focal point of such discussions is the effect of replacing 'immediate transnational statehood' with 'national priority'.

A long-term comparison of Ennahda's official platforms, for instance, shows how far the party has come in transforming the 'Islamist perception of the world'.

¹¹ One striking illustration of this is Lewis Attiyyatullah's depiction of his version of a desirable international system. A thinker close to Al-Qaeda, he declared in the aftermath of the Madrid attacks of 11 March 2004 that the 'international system built up by the West since the Treaty of Westphalia will collapse; and a new international system will rise under the leadership of a mighty Islamic State'. See Yaniv Berman, 'Exclusive—Al-Qaeda: Islamic State will control the world', *The Media Line*, 1 April 2004, <http://freerepublic.com/focus/news/1115214/posts?page=41>.

For example, Ennahda's objective in its early years had been to:

Restore Tunisia's place as the basis of the Islamic civilization in order to put an end to the latter's alienation and bewilderment by promoting Tunisia's Islamic personality. Renew Islamic thought in the light of the founding principles of Islam by taking into account the requirements of progress while getting rid of the remains of times of decadence and the influence of the West.¹²

The construction of a new Islamist identity that acknowledges a plurality of allegiances as well as the possibility of enhancing Muslim solidarity on a global scale through new frameworks (illustrating the persistence of the original and central intention to defend oppressed Muslims) had clear implications for foreign policy discourses. As displayed in the work of Ennahda's 12th Congress, held in 2012, the tone adopted with respect to the agenda of international relations had evolved significantly, highlighting a change in purpose that would

contribute to the establishment of a foreign policy based on the principle of states' sovereignty, unity and independence *vis-à-vis* any power, establishing international relations supported by mutual respect, cooperation, justice, equality and peoples' right to self-determination; and act to support weakened peoples and their just causes, among which the Palestinian cause is the first priority.¹³

Traditionalists see these concessions as treasonous and heretical, while modern Islamists justify their present concessions as necessary in paving the way for the future caliphate. These strands of Islamist influence have gradually shaped national politics in the course of a concerted effort to bring the Islamist conception of statehood within the body politic of the state. Ennahda in this respect is no exception: a parallel development separates modern and traditionalist Islamists in Morocco's Party of Justice and Development (PJD). On 9 February 1992, the movement's magazine *al-Raya* ('The standard') published an article titled 'Zionist defeat and Palestinian great gain', alluding to 'an international conspiracy' that was targeting the entire *umma*, sharpened by 'the West and Zionism'. A few years afterwards, as the party came closer to power, it increasingly emphasized the role of international law and geopolitical constraints in its understanding of Islamist foreign policy. The 2008 booklet entitled *The foreign policy of the PJD: principles and orientations*¹⁴ and the party's doctrinal charter published in 1997 had noted the necessity of considering 'the challenges, the internal and external constraints and the regional and global context in which [the] country evolves'. Furthermore, even though recognition of 'the Zionist entity' is still rejected, the documents highlight the obligation 'to respect the execution of international legal decisions'.¹⁵

¹² Movement of the Islamic Tendency, constitutive platform, June 1981. Translation by Mohamed-Ali Adraoui.

¹³ Maryam Ben Salem, 'The foreign policy of Tunisia's Ennahda: constancy and changes', in Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, ed., *Islamism and foreign policy: ideology in practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2018). Translation by Mohamed-Ali Adraoui.

¹⁴ *The foreign policy of the PJD: principles and orientations* (Rabat: Tub Paris, 2008), pp. 4–5.

¹⁵ Haoues Seniguer, 'The Islamists of Morocco's Party of Justice and Development and the foreign policy problem: between structural constraints and economic imperatives', in Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, ed., *Islamism and foreign policy: ideology in practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2018).

Achieving Islam's revival through independence and unity: the Islamist outlook on political geography and statehood

According to early Islamist thought, external borders serve a dual function: they are both cultural and political. In territories where 'Islam' has percolated, Islamists ought to take charge of demands for sovereignty. Hence, should geography fail in reflecting any religious or civilizational concern, it becomes the obligation of Islamists to restore any past sovereignty over a region that has suffered the disintegration of Islam.

Politics, to that extent, is not independent practice and thinking, but is instead conducted under the auspices of religion. As Hassan al-Banna stated in his *Epistles* of 1936, in a famous text called 'What do we call for?',

Our people, we call you with *Quran* in one hand, and *Sunna* in the other, and the acts of our Pious Ancestors to this Community are our ideals. We call you to Islam, to the teachings of Islam, to the precepts of Islam, and to the path of Islam. If this has to do with politics in your eyes, so this is politics, and if anyone calling to these principles has to do with something political, so we are the ones who are the most involved into politics.¹⁶

In the same *Epistles*, Al-Banna, founder and guide of the movement, introduced his vision of how 'preaching policy' was to be successfully pursued. Focusing on a 'bottom-up' dynamic, he prescribed progressive purification for both the state and the *umma*. Territories and borders would become 'Islamic' again once the Islamist vanguard had succeeded in reforming individual, family and social conduct. As politics systematically aligns itself with religious morality, Islamists will clinch geopolitical victories, embodied in the restoration of the caliphate as the ultimate achievement of their project. In context, the Muslim Brotherhood, born in opposition to British imperialism in Egypt, sought the re-establishment of a single unified political sovereignty as the indicator of success for its renewal project:

We do know exactly what we are doing and we know how to reach our objectives.

- 1 We want a Muslim individual, in thought and faith, in morality and feelings, in his deeds and behaviour ...
- 2 We want, then, a Muslim family, in thought and faith, in morality and feelings, in its work and behaviour ...
- 3 We want thereafter, a Muslim people ...
- 4 We desire, then, a Muslim government which will lead, through its people, the folk towards Islam's guide.
- 5 We want, then, to bring together all members of this Islamic homeland, that Western politics have striven to drive apart, that European greed has led astray and imprisoned within delineated boundaries. We reject for that matter all international agreements that have transformed the Islamic homeland into a set of small powers, weak and torn apart ... Thus, Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz, Yemen, Tripolitania, Tunisia, Algeria, Marrakech, and any land where a Muslim dwells ... , all of these form part of our homeland, that we shall endeavour to liberate ...

¹⁶ Hassan al-Banna, 'What do we call for?', in *Al-rasail al-thalath: da'watuna, ila-ay, shy'a nad'u al-nas, nahwa al-nur, kitab al-da'wa* [The three messages: are our call, to what things do we invite people, toward light, the text of the book] (Cairo: Dar al-Tiba'a Wal-Nashr al-Islamiya, 1977), p. 84. Translation by Mohamed-Ali Adraoui.

6 We want, thereafter, Islam's flag to wave again, at full mast blowing in the wind, in all lands that were fortunate once to welcome Islam ... And thus Andalusia, Sicily, the Balkans, the Italian coasts as well as the Mediterranean isles are all Mediterranean Muslim colonies, and they return to Islam's cradle.¹⁷

As a result, external borders that divide 'Islam' (understood as a religious community that is said to desire political and territorial unification) represent the constituent division of land into regions where Islam has ruled, and those where it has not. In the *Epistles*, a famous text entitled 'Our message' highlighted Al-Banna's vision of 'the borders of [the Muslims'] homeland' and makes clear the basis of his differences with Egyptian nationalists at that time:

The subject of dissent which goes between us and others is that we consider borders of patriotism in accordance with belief, whereas they do it according to territorial limitations and geographical borders ... All the Muslims living in these geographical areas [aforementioned] are our people, they are our brothers, our situation does matter to us, we share their feelings and sufferings. But nationalists are not like that; what matters to them is the territory that is limited to this part of the world [Egypt].

Evidently, early Islamist ideas conceived of internal borders that were inherently cultural in the sense that while 'Islam' needed to be restored under a single statehood that would exert both religious and political power, languages, local histories, customs and (non-denominational) identities had to be respected.

According to Al-Banna, contemporary cultural borders among Muslim communities had been politicized by non-Muslims and 'weak' Muslims (those unaware of Islam's uniqueness) as a means to engender divisions and opposition within the *umma*. Islam's so-called political borders (stemming from the caliphate) had thus been reduced to a symbolic artifice. More fundamentally, according to early Islamist thought, colonial oppression would never have been possible without a divided *umma* ('Islamic nation'). To achieve their supremacy, imperial powers had exploited the fact that by dominating these lands, they would succeed in fragmenting the integrity of Islam within a historical territory. Imperialists were hence argued to have purposefully targeted the Islamic world's 'historical' boundaries in order to better dominate Islam as a religious and political nation. Boundaries refer therefore to what we have defined in this logic as 'external borders'. To achieve this purpose, which early Islamists presented as a conspiracy against 'the truth', 'borders' (as in 'internal borders') were manipulated to generate division and the rise of modern nationalism.¹⁸

In its fight against colonial supremacy, the Muslim Brotherhood advocated a counter-project to statebuilding based on 'new' (actually old in their eyes) schemes, by preaching and being political activists (even soldiers when needed), to foster the political impetus towards a new caliphate. Focusing—for instance—on Pales-

¹⁷ Hassan al-Banna, *Majmu'at rasa'il al-imam al-shahid Hassan al-Banna* [Anthology of the Epistles of the Martyr Imam Hassan al-Banna] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-Islamiyya, 1984) p. 79. Translation by Mohamed-Ali Adraoui.

¹⁸ Jean-Pierre Cassarino, 'Approaching borders and frontiers: notions and implications', Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration Research Report, CARIM-RR 2006/03 (Fiesole: European University Institute, 2006).

tine, the land was identified as the heart of ‘the Arab and Islamic nation’. Though borders existing between Egypt and this country may have been imposed, because Muslims then were divided, there was no doubt about the *umma*’s intention to get rid of these borders some day. Accordingly, Palestine should never have been split, with neither ‘the Jews’ nor the ‘the Western states’ being allowed to establish predominance over lands which ought to rightfully remain Muslim property.¹⁹

As well, we intend to secure our eastern borders by providing the Palestinian issue with a solution that would also take the Arab point of view into account and prevent the predominance of the Jewish presence in the region. Egypt and the whole of the Arab and Islamic world do suffer because of Palestine. Egypt, as it is its direct border; the Arab countries, as Palestine is their living heart, the jewel, the core that makes it united and we do care about this unity, whatever circumstances and sacrifices to achieve ... We claim this since it deals with the security of our borders and a direct interest to us. We claim too as it is the right of two Arab nations in the East and in the West; we do form one single entity and nothing will ever divide us. What God has united, no man can put apart.²⁰

All in all, it seems justifiable to conclude that the original Islamist understanding of borders was predominantly political and inextricably tied up with religious identity. The study of Hassan al-Banna’s writings and speeches leads us to affirm that the issue of borders is intimately connected to group identification, to processes of self-ascription and social categorization, and to the establishment of dichotomies between ‘self’ and ‘other’.²¹ As a reaction to cultural and political alienation (given the dismantling of the caliphate in 1924), Islamism provides an inverse of the colonial imperialist logic through revisionism and a new kind of state- (or civilization-)building. Borders, in this view, therefore, pertain to both a ‘power dimension’ (as an instrument of statehood-building and challenging imposed borders) and an ‘identity dimension’ (relating to political and religious unity).

By referring to a counter-imperialist project as well as the tools of resistance and conquest to unify all Muslims worldwide on behalf of a ‘religious nationalism’, Islamist ideals evidently can—albeit with difficulty—fit into the traditional frameworks of political science. Indeed, as a reaction to what were seen as ‘religiously failed’ states—unable to attain protection from European supremacy—early Islamists adopted a vision of the world through which ‘civilizations’ become the central players within world politics. The European colonizing states, perceived as inheritors of Christian powers, therefore needed to be defeated by a new contender: one that would only be able to rise to the challenge by redesigning the whole international system. In this view, expansion is aimed neither at wealth accumulation nor at racial superiority, but at the re-establishment of supposedly

¹⁹ In this connection, it must be observed that the position of Hamas stands in line with the original Brotherhood’s understanding of ‘holy lands’. This is not surprising given that the Palestinian ‘Islamic Resistance Movement’ is directly related to the Egyptian Islamist organization. Palestine is hence described as *wakf*, which refers to some sort of ‘inalienable and indivisible religious property’. Giving up sovereignty over the land would therefore imply political capitulation—a serious religious sin. See Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas: the Islamic Resistance Movement* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

²⁰ Robert P. Mitchell, *The society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 267.

²¹ Bonnie Urciuoli, ‘Language and borders’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 24, 1995, pp. 525–46.

besmirched ‘historical rights’. A single sovereign state is thus alleged to rule the *umma*—a notion that remains premised upon the assumption that Muslims across the world would form one specific nation. The caliphate, as understood by early Islamists, would therefore stand as a ‘defensive empire’ aimed at restoring a previously lost sovereignty—one that entails a reversion to a historical state that brings Muslims back to their ‘natural condition’. In this regard, the *umma* is a unified people that ‘the enemies of Islam’ have failed with un-Islamic notions of secular nations. The *umma* as a de facto religious nation without a state thus retains the right to self-determination and to the recovery of its historical territory that modern borders have divided.

Reflexive Islamists? Reframing the original ideology as political Islam is nationalized

In its most recent manifestation, political Islam as a gradualist methodology, although diverse, emphasizes political engagement on the domestic national terrain. Although this ideology has clearly implied an armed wing through which the anti-colonial agenda (and, to some extent, the conquest of domestic power) is pursued, the use of ‘traditional’ militancy (political parties, journals, street demonstrations, etc.) had become as important as preaching activities over the decades. While this did not imply the abandonment of pan-Islamic ambitions, it is arguable that the national realm has been reinvigorated as central to this project. By integrating themselves into the national political landscape, as the experience of Ennahda in Tunisia has shown, Islamist forces have evidently reframed their initial ideology to suit local constraints.²² This has occurred most clearly in the reconceptualized notions of territories and borders that have gained traction in tandem with the various evolutions of the ‘Islamic identity’. Indeed, original doctrinal principles have been subjected to numerous tests in highly fluid realities, such as those that certain Arab countries have been experiencing since 2011.

The gradualist trend that has historically been a key motif of Islamist forces suggests that state leadership was supposed to be a transitional phase. But herein lies a source of major reorientation regarding doctrinal and political practice as a whole: the structural effect,²³ induced when one enrolls in an international game and yet operates outside its original design. While the initial Islamist project voluntarily echoes an essentialized vision of religion, the forced inscription into

²² In this respect, it comes as no surprise that Islamist movements that adhere to the original ideological ambitions, such as overthrowing ‘impious regimes’, are the ones that have continued to support violence most strongly—for example the Islamic Salvation Front in the early 1990s.

²³ Kenneth Waltz’s argument in his *Theory of international politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2010) stresses the weight of the international system and the parties who would like to change it. His work has been compared to Durkheim’s definition of the social fact (of which the international system is an example). Durkheim uses four criteria: generality (it must be sufficiently frequent), externality (it is outside individuals and in the collective sphere), the coercive power or strain effect (it is imposed on individuals, and is the result not of individual choice but of the interaction of different social factors, such as geography, history or politics), and the history criterion (it must be generalizable). See Emile Durkheim, ‘What is a social fact?’, in *The rules of sociological method* (London: Macmillan Education, 1982).

a nationalistic surrounding generates a cognitive conflict. As Olivier Roy states,²⁴ by entering the national political sphere, the Islamist ideology necessarily becomes 'secular' since it needs to address a very specific identity, which is national and tackles non-transnational sovereignty issues. The rhetoric might remain the same but, as political practice, pan-Islamism gives way to a synthesis between religious and 'traditional' nationalism. Thus, the influence of the international system, coupled with the changes that occur when an Islamist movement becomes integrated within the national political game, engenders significant ideological reworking.²⁵

Beyond understanding political Islam and its evolution through an ideological lens, some frameworks have highlighted the paramount importance of acculturation, forced migration (most often, political exile) and generational renewal in analysing how certain concepts have developed.²⁶ This 'reflexiveness' explains why new considerations matter when dealing with the formation of political constitutions and the anxiety of Islamists about maintaining ideological relevance in modern societies. One of the leading Islamist theorists, the Tunisian Islamist leader Rached Ghannouchi, offers significant insight into this reflexive evolution. His writings and discourses are still consciously orientated towards the traditional Islamist concept of the caliphate as he has never ceased to regard it as relevant for the present times. In this regard, his position continues to represent some of the founding principles in political Islam. However, his framing of these issues has evolved substantially, at least conceptually speaking. In 1997 Ghannouchi described territorial division within the historical Islamic world, highlighting the role of transnational religious bodies such as Sufi orders that never really fitted into one single state because they were at the service of the Muslim religious community and not of any specific national authority:

For some time, the early Islamic fuqaha' (jurists) insisted that the idealistic situation, where a single state represented the entire Umma, should alone be recognized as legitimate. However, eventually they succumbed to the status quo and recognized the legitimacy of the existence of more than one political entity within the same Umma. The fuqaha' were faced with real problems that required practical solutions. Within a very short period of time, the territory under Islamic rule expanded manifolds and the size of the population grew massively. Thus, the emergence of semi-autonomous political entities, or 'territorial states,' was inevitable. The history of Islam witnessed the emergence and coexistence of several such states, including those that existed in al-Andalus (Muslim Spain), in the Maghreb, and in India. Notwithstanding the existence of these states, *khilafah* (caliphate), the symbol that represented the overall political unity of the Umma, persisted. Shari'ah was still the frame of reference for all Muslims, the fuqaha' held on to the prerogative of legislation, and borders between states remained open. A Muslim could travel freely from one state to the other without restrictions. Thus, the conditions of 'citizenship' remained simple; whoever belonged to the Umma was a citizen irrespective of the state or the power

²⁴ Olivier Roy, *The failure of political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁵ Some scholars have referred to this as 'post-Islamism'. See Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: the changing faces of political Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁶ Mark Gould, 'Toward a theory of Islamist movements', *Sociology of Islam* 2: 1–2, 2014, pp. 21–59.

to be, and thus a Muslim could settle wherever he or she wished because wherever he or she went he or she was a full-fledged citizen. In other words, in spite of the existence of more than one state, the social matrix of the Umma remained intact. Tribes, sufi orders, and schools of jurisprudence permeated and transcended borders, which anyway were so flexible, expanding or shrinking depending on the power of the relevant state. The expansion of a state, or its seizure of additional territory, did not represent an alien invasion by a colonial power. To the subjects, it did not matter who ruled them so long as it was a Muslim.²⁷

Even as Ghannouchi's words echo the original Islamist conception of borders, he refers to a dual perception—opposing the 'external' to the 'internal'. In this passage, he seems to admit that as long as there is a commitment to Islam as an ideal for a nation (in engendering a single sovereign statehood), then religion is not really in decline and certain states that rule Muslim societies may legitimately exist. That is why when non-Muslim powers began dominating the 'Islamic world', what were once regarded as acceptable divisions were seen as posing new dangers to the unity of Islam by dividing the nation over cultural variances or 'internal borders'. Upon closer examination, borders are seen as being used as a tool to turn Muslims against each other by encouraging action in virtue of a (nationalistic) state logic at the expense of the transnational agenda, thereby giving credence to the traditional Islamist view that the existence of borders indicates that Islam—as a political body—is in decline and has failed to maintain its territorial unity.

Increasingly, reflexive Islamists have been acknowledging the fading relevance of this fiction, since the political system within a country is compelled to consider serving, in the first place, the nation—in the modern meaning of this concept—before the *umma*. In this sense, Islamist leaders ought either to socialize their supporters on the basis of a new identity and framework, or to re-evaluate their ideological affiliations and become, to an extent, 'post-Islamists' in terms of political context. Nationalized Islamists found that the societies they had sought to reform continued to retain a persistent nationalistic vision at odds with their pan-Islamic ambitions. This has compelled them to construct a novel self-identifying framework for generating a reconceptualized definition of sovereignty by assimilating external and internal borders, through a revised political logic.

On the one hand, territorial limits that separate 'Islam' as a historical civilization from the rest of the world are no longer presented as necessarily representing an irreducible ontological difference. Although they still carry some historical symbolism, contemporary non-Muslim majority countries are no longer mentioned as part of the Islamic land. The West, for instance, is constructed within previously unheard formulations no longer referring necessarily to the idea of western dominance. In other words, external borders are historicized and to some extent demystified. The central focus is the re-establishment of strong states based on Islam as an identity but not unavoidably in opposition to a specific cultural or political body. While internal borders used to be accepted as cultural or linguistic separations among the Muslim people, the idea that these territo-

²⁷ Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: a democrat within Islamism*, p. 160.

rial splits could also be a political mechanism is a notion that has gained traction. Although the ideal of the caliphate remains at the heart of the discourse, it has been resituated in the context of a different sort of statehood. In other words, both conceptions of internal borders and caliphate seem to integrate at some point within a body of 'nationalistic' ideas—as is evident in countries such as Tunisia, for example. In the aftermath of the revolutionary processes that overwhelmed the Arab world, the official discourse of Ghannouchi has mobilized key motifs, such as the caliphate, while imagining this motif within new realities and relations that pertain to existing socio-political realities.

To understand how nationalized Islamist movements have redefined their revolutionary ambitions, it is vital to acknowledge the fact that modern Islamists have narrowed their focus to a localized polity,²⁸ often contained by geographical borders. Within this narrowed focus, the traditional Islamist ethos combining a fundamentalist religious approach with the desire to overthrow the existing political system has lost relevance. The ambit of the Islamist project has evolved to focus on offering a synthesis between Islamic references and the nation-state framework. From 2010, in the Arab Spring, these revolutionary tides were brought to the fore and the central dynamic of a state-centric approach was reinforced.

Ghannouchi's brand of Islamism seeks to advance the integration of political Islam within a democratic and pluralistic society without the radicalism and revolutionary struggle imagined by traditional Islamists. Instead of pursuing the formation of the caliphate, Ghannouchi seeks to harness the transformative potential of Islamist values by focusing on how Tunisian society can be unified to form an international civil society as it grapples with the tide of modernization.²⁹ In this case, unity is conceived of within the state's borders, rather than as the emancipation of the entire community of believers—implying therefore the adoption of a state-centric logic of sovereignty. In this way, realist concerns have eroded revisionist ambitions, thereby requiring reflexive Islamist actors to fall in line within geographical frameworks, internationally agreed borders and inherited sovereignties. This 'taming' of ambitions also seeks to distinguish between 'moderate' Islamists and jihadists.

In Ghannouchi's case, his rejection of the ISIS 'caliphate', officially proclaimed in June 2014, provided the platform for him to engage in a theoretical explication, framing the caliphate as a political entity rather than a religious utopia. The major redefinition of fundamental elements of Islamic thought also led him to explain the distinction between 'pure' religious discourse and 'politics'.

In the 1990s, Rached Ghannouchi had explained that:

The territorial state was never intended to serve the interests of the Umma, nor did it come to being because this was what the Umma wished or willed; it was founded so as to

²⁸ Yale Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, *Polities: authority, identities, and change* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

²⁹ Barry Buzan, 'From international system to international society: structural realism and regime theory meet the English School', *International Organization* 47: 3, 1993, pp. 327–52; Youssef Courbage, Emmanuel Todd and George Holoch, *A convergence of civilizations: the transformation of Muslim societies around the world* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

serve foreign interests in accordance with foreign wishes and willpower. Its whole purpose was to Westernize life and, therefore, its project is in essence at odds with the Islamic project. In a bid to bestow some kind of legitimacy upon these new Ummas new national identities were forged in emulation of the European experience, and the fragmentation of the one Umma was accomplished in the name of national self-determination.³⁰

In contrast to this former ideological stand, Ghannouchi has since offered some new ideas in his understanding of doctrinal concepts of political Islam at the present time. During an interview with the journalist Mahan Abedin for *Religioscope* in March 2013,³¹ this is how he introduced his agenda:

Mahan Abedin: The quest for Khilafah [caliphate] is still the primary ideological goal for many Sunni Islamists. Has Ennahda abandoned or merely re-formulated the quest for an Islamic caliphate?

Rached Ghannouchi: Ennahda operates within a national framework and we regard the nation-state as the primary point of reference in international politics. But of course, from a religious point of view, we believe in the concept of an Islamic nation (Umma), but the fact is we are divided into nation-states and we have to work within this framework. The only thing we can do is to increase cooperation between Islamic states with a view to entrenching unity at an institutional level.

Mahan Abedin: To what extent can we re-formulate the Khilafah concept to serve practical political goals at the international level? For instance, can you imagine a supra-national body like the European Union emerging from a radically transformed Khilafah concept?

Rached Ghannouchi: Yes, the EU is a powerful example and a similar project can be undertaken in North Africa and the wider Arab world. In any case, Khilafah is a political concept not a religious one.

Mahan Abedin: But there is a body of opinion which contends that an Islamic state, based on the Sunni tradition, can only be viable and durable if it is underpinned by the Khilafah concept and the resulting institutions ...

Rached Ghannouchi: Our model is the nation-state. It is neither possible to overcome this centuries-old system nor to operate outside it. But we can create new spaces and possibilities with a view to promoting and entrenching Islamic unity on the global stage.

By mentioning the European Union as a possible source of inspiration for Muslims worldwide following the deposition of Ben Ali, and with the subsequent emergence of Ennahda as one of the leading parties of Tunisia, Ghannouchi has unequivocally espoused a democratic, reflexive and nationalized form of political Islam which acknowledges domestic pluralism and new constitutive lines with respect to international politics.

³⁰ Rached Ghannouchi, 'The Islamic conception of the state', paper presented at conference of young Muslims in London, April 1992.

³¹ Mahan Abedin, 'Tunisia: Islam and politics two years after the revolution—interview with Rashid Al-Ghannouchi', *Religioscope*, 2 March 2013, http://religion.info/english/interviews/article_599.shtml#.Vqm47VL-Gq3h. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 3 June 2017.)

While Islamism is becoming nationalized, how do radical aspirations take root? The case of jihadism

The rise of jihadist movements since the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, with the formation of armed transnational groups dedicated to the service of a re-established caliphate and the deletion of any border splitting Muslim societies across the world, has prompted a renewed conversation about the significance of borders and sovereignty, with a range of voices taking part. Organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS³² have accorded themselves the duty of overthrowing any ‘un-Islamic’ regime through insurrection. For modern Islamists, external borders appear to be sealed, at least when it comes to discussing Muslim-majority countries. Spain for instance, as the ‘Land of Al-Andalus’ (Andalusia), has never been mentioned in Ghannouchi’s writings and discourses, if only since claiming to rule this country would also necessitate its recapture.³³ The logic of potentially unlimited territorial claims is a core difference between contemporary Islamists and activists endorsing a violent response to what they perceive as a failure of political Islam.³⁴ Indeed, the cornerstone of the jihadists’ beliefs remains a conflictual relation with the rest of the world. However, because internal borders are subjected to very severe criticism, jihadist reaction to the perceived oppressiveness of the nation-state remains even more brutal. Within this framework, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and territorial separations are considered intolerable: the aim of jihadists is to assert the singularity of Islam without having to acknowledge the reality of transnational Islamic statehood. These aims further include desires for religious supremacy and, in some cases, ethnic cleansing, or at least the granting of unequal rights, often to the detriment of non-Muslims. The jihadist experience thus represents another form of radical reaction to the redefinition of Islamist principles, by returning to theoretical fundamentals that entail systematic violence towards any system not corresponding to very specific religious norms. In the quest to topple any anthropological structure that is not based on their understanding of ‘unicity’, the main difference between jihadist ideology and historical forms of political Islam lies in the former’s obduracy in seeking a major and radical revision of the international system.

The jihadist mantra is innately oppositional, as both external and internal borders become matters of political and military dispute. Jihadists earnestly adhere to the incarnation of Islam as a civilization, state and territory, which cannot be fragmented without creating a sinful situation. Accordingly, an admission that Islam is incapable of political and geographical unity would signify that its ‘inherent’ uniqueness is jeopardized. This may be observed in the words of the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Qurayshi al-Baghdadi, who was proclaimed ‘the caliph of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’ in 2014,³⁵ and stated explicitly that there is no

³² In its own terms, *Dawlat al-Khilafa fi ‘Iraq wa-Bilad ac-Cham*, the caliphate state in Iraq and the Levant.

³³ Although Hassan al-Banna mentioned this as a rightful request: see p. 924 above.

³⁴ Disputes exist, however, between Al-Qaeda and ISIS. By proclaiming the caliphate, ISIS has modified jihadist priorities, legitimizing expansionism of its external borders at any time. See Simon Staffel and Akil Awan, eds, *Jihadism transformed: Al-Qaeda and Islamic State’s global battle of ideas* (London: Hurst, 2016).

³⁵ ‘Rush O Muslims to your state. It is your state. Syria is not for Syrians and Iraq is not for Iraqis. The land is for the Muslims, all Muslims.’

homeland for Muslims other than the current 'caliphate' that has been established across Syrian and Iraqi territory. By claiming his power over the *umma* in that declaration, he designated all other kinds of statehood, even if officially ruled by Muslims, as illegitimate. On the basis of his view, jihadists are entitled to try to obliterate any political border that seeks to contain the rise of this new caliphate. The most striking illustration of this hatred of 'colonial' and 'anti-Islamic' borders is the attention paid to the bulldozing of the Sykes–Picot borders and the barricades separating Iraq and Syria. The eradication of these boundaries is the clearest physical manifestation of what 'interstate borders' represent to the jihadist eye, and of the means by which this radical revisionary project is furthered. Bearing in mind some of the declarations of the leaders of ISIS, it is beyond doubt that the notion of borders is completely irrelevant to the jihadists, since their aim is to exert domination and sovereignty all over the world. As for Al-Qaeda and the first generation of global jihadism, geography no longer follows the modern naming convention. The Islamic countries' territories are denominated in the terms Muslim scholars used in the Middle Ages (Khorasan instead of Iran and Afghanistan, for instance, or Bilad al-Cham instead of Syria and Lebanon). From this perspective, it does not make sense to adopt the Westphalian framework on the basis of which some sort of political modernity has been established in Europe and beyond over the last five centuries. States and borders (either interstate or intrastate) are openly targeted and denounced. This is a major difference between Al-Qaeda and ISIS, at least in so far as their official discourses are concerned. Osama bin Laden was fighting to restore the caliphate to restore some prestige, dignity and power to Muslims worldwide. His vision of the caliphate would have implied, at least theoretically, some legitimacy for external borders separating this religious and political state from the rest of the world. In his view, Afghanistan was the first stage, and the caliphate would have been an outcome that Muslims could achieve after victory against their enemies. In a letter written to *Nawaiwaqt Rawalpindi*, a Pakistani newspaper, in 2001 he detailed his intention of creating an Islamic state:³⁶

Today, every member of the Muslim world agrees that all the Muslim countries of the world having geographical boundaries on the basis of nationality, geography, religious discord, colour and race, should be merged into one Muslim state, where men do not rule men. There should be one caliph for the whole state whose capital should be Mecca. There should be one currency and defense for this state and the Holy Quran should be its constitution. The name that has been proposed for this vast state is Global Muslim State.

Unsurprisingly, the objective of ISIS expands on this revolutionary ambition by placing all the world's regions under the rule of the 'global caliphate' to reverse all the power struggles that have undermined the independence of Muslims over past centuries. Al-Baghdadi stated among the justifications for creating the caliphate in *The revived caliphate*:³⁷

³⁶ United States FBIS, 'Compilation of Usama bin Laden's statements, 1994–January 2004', Federation of American Scientists, Jan. 2004, <http://fas.org/irp/world/para/ubl-fbis.pdf>.

³⁷ No author is named on this book; it carries a photo of Baghdadi on the cover, although it may have been written or compiled by any other ISIS affiliate.

Borders and sovereignty in Islamist and jihadist thought

The Islamic State has made its intent clear that it wants to liberate Palestine, even Arabia, and in fact the entire Muslim world from the tyrants. It has made its intention clear of a Global caliphate while the rest of the groups have not ... The aim of the Islamic State is to bulldoze all the Sykes–Picot borders which divide the Muslim world, to remove the puppet-rulers and to establish a Global caliphate.

However, the ambition here is to go beyond restoring the ‘classical’ territorial caliphate that was supposedly observable for centuries. In *Dabiq*, the official journal of ISIS, it is clearly stated that non-historical Muslim lands are envisaged as conquerable:

The flag of Khilāfah will rise over Makkah [Mecca] and al-Madīnah [Medina], even if the apostates and hypocrites despise such. The flag of Khilāfah will rise over Baytul-Maqdis [Jerusalem] and Rome, even if the Jews and Crusaders despise such. The shade of this blessed flag will expand until it covers all eastern and western extents of the Earth, filling the world with the truth and justice of Islam and putting an end to the falsehood and tyranny of jāhiliyyah [anti-Islam paganism], even if America and its coalition despise such ...³⁸

As a reaction to the ‘secularization’ of Islamist movements, and to attract certain generations of Muslims worldwide whose dream of building a transnational contemporary caliphate remains a cardinal motivation, jihadism expresses the complete negation of modern geographical and political denominations. In this respect, ISIS, as well as being a revisionist player within the international system, must be seen as an unbounded de facto state,³⁹ as a political entity that possesses the control of territory but lacks international recognition (and is even fought over by a coalition of contending states). In the meantime, because it does not recognize any limit in its definition of people or territory, ISIS continues to make claims of sovereignty that relate to a revolutionary conception of the world order. To this extent, it is not only a de facto state but also a would-be empire, viewing every difficulty faced by Muslims anywhere in the world as a potential motive for interference. This unbounded de facto statehood, by laying claim over the globe, aims ultimately at redefining the rules of sovereignty and, in theory at least, entails a permanent state of war.

Conclusion

Several Islamist notions of borders and sovereignty have evolved, ranging from revisionary ambitions to a greater focus on realism. The fact that this form of political Islam has been more ‘political’ than ‘Islamic’ highlights the persistent centrality of the state logic in contemporary international relations.

In the context of Arab societies after the uprisings of 2010, two main questions call for further investigation.

³⁸ *Dabiq*, no. 4, 2014, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf>.

³⁹ Harris Mylonas and Ariel I. Ahram, *De facto states unbound*, PONARS Eurasia policy memo no. 374 (Washington DC: George Washington University, 2015).

First, what would a new Islamist conception of borders look like? Although several Arab societies will certainly be struggling again for the right to be ruled democratically, it is nevertheless possible to draw some conclusions from cases where political Islam has put ideology into practice. Tunisia turns out to be, in this respect, a test case. In May 2016, in an interview with *Le Monde* at the tenth congress of Ennahda, Ghannouchi officially stated that his movement would move away from this ideology, while insisting this statement was not ‘a sudden decision or a capitulation to temporary pressures’: ‘We are Muslim democrats who no longer claim political Islam.’⁴⁰ In Tunisia’s case, it becomes apparent that politics triumphed over religious affiliations and that we can therefore envisage that Islamists may not always hold on to their religious convictions when they find themselves in new positions of power and accountability.

Extrapolating from the Tunisian experience, it would seem that Islamists are left with a Hobson’s choice between relinquishing the ideal of a caliphate—which would be illogical, since it remains the core objective of the Islamist experience—and reframing that original ideology to allow for interstate cooperation as a necessary concession for state survival. In this regard, how would modern Islamists manage to forge closer ties with Islamic societies which are not ruled democratically while they have moved away from their initial non-democratic stances? Internal borders, according to this new scheme, might become political again, since partnership between democratic and non-democratic regimes is rarely successful. Even external borders may be no more than markings on a map, since an insular focus on classical statebuilding would not be conducive to international traction.

In fact, the key question would be: how far can Islamist thinkers go in the partial or entire detachment from their initial ideology? Our study shows that in confronting reality, original ambitions may be tamed and traditional motifs redefined to ensure that Islamists remain relevant and gain popular support.

Second, when it comes to jihadist actors, on what sort of state logic should we focus? ISIS has shown a profound intention to disrupt the regional order, in seeking to abolish internal borders dividing Islamic countries. As long as ‘the caliphate’ remains a reality, there is no reason why the expansionist drive should cease, unless some strategy of compromise or even an ideological amendment comes about—in which case, external borders would need to be fixed. It is also possible that the ISIS leaders may decide to consolidate their authority over one territory and, in doing so, turn the ‘caliphate’ into an ‘emirate’ dedicated more to building a strong Islamic society from above than to perpetually expanding and existing under a permanent state of war—a sort of ‘Talibanization’ process. In this case, too, geographical demarcations would become necessary. Alternatively, as a predominantly subversive movement, potentially targeting any country in the world, ISIS would live in a permanent state of war. As such, it would have to give up one of the two principal prerogatives of any ‘real’ state, namely achieving

⁴⁰ Frédéric Bobin, ‘Rached Ghannouchi: “Il n’y a plus de justification à l’Islam politique en Tunisie”’, interview in *Le Monde*, 19 May 2016.

peace (the other being to go to war). In other words, seeking political survival in the Middle East implies a moderation of the ISIS 'caliphate logic' that involves a redrafting of ideology in the direction of a 'state logic'. As it appears obvious that nationalized Islamists no longer agree with the current strategy, the jihadists of ISIS embody the ultimate attempt at achieving its founding objective of getting rid of both the internal and external borders that have supposedly weighed on Muslims.

Finally, it appears that whenever reflexive Islamists have had the opportunity to achieve their nationalization process in the context of democratizing systems, there has been an imperative need to amend their original radical beliefs, as seen in the case of Tunisia. The process of confronting realities has thus transformed an ideology that was initially designed to tear the international system down into a project that is today accepting the rules of the game both internally and externally. In this regard, the study of the conception of borders and sovereignty from an internationalist perspective has provided decisive material in assessing how Islamism has emerged, consolidated, evolved and sometimes been amended over the past century. This analysis permits us to conclude that, at least in the cases of nationalized movements such as Ennahda, there is now not only a difference of degree between what political Islam has become *vis-à-vis* jihadism (especially as expressed in the form of ISIS), but also a true difference in nature. The failure to seize power in the name of the original ideology, a necessary reflexivity, and the possibility of integration within a political landscape open to accept new elements seem to have changed and moderated the original Islamist ambition of building a new world. Established borders and sovereignty have unquestionably been both key constraints in, and indicators of, this process of change.

