The Triangular Game between Autocrats, Clerics, and the Military: An Application to Muslim Countries

Emmanuelle Auriol
Toulouse School of Economics

Jean-Philippe Platteau
University of Namur

Thierry Verdier
Paris School of Economics

Abstract. In order to elucidate the revival of religion in the Muslim countries, we must not only understand the spread of puritan interpretations of the faith (as they have permeated movements running from Muslim Brothers to violent Islamist movements), but also comprehend the process whereby these more radical ideologies have been accommodated by the (autocratic) Muslim states. This necessitates that we explore the internal political economy of Muslim countries without neglecting the possible influence of international forces. The theory used as a background to the present work has precisely allowed us to achieve that objective. It works out the strategic interactions between three key players: the ruler, the clerics, and the military, in the context of an autocracy; moreover, it highlights the channels through which external events and shocks make themselves felt through the local political and social fabrics. Among these shocks, military defeats by powers considered as imperialist, and the declaration of a world war against terrorism seem to have played a more important role than the end of the Cold War.

Keywords: autocracy, religion, Islam, military power, Muslim states

1. Introduction

A puzzling fact that has struck many observers of Muslim societies is the rapidly growing display, over the last decades, of religious symbols and fervor in their public sphere, as well as the increasing compliance of many political rulers with pressures exerted by religious clerics. Thus, for example, a visitor to Egypt will have noticed the pervasive presence in the streets of veil-

wearing women and beard-wearing men, a situation that offers a strong contrast to observations made just a few decades ago. What are the forces at work behind such an abrupt change in behavioral conduct? What can explain the underlying religious revival and its accommodation by prevailing regimes? These questions, repeatedly addressed by social scientists, have provided diverse and valuable insights, but what may be missing is a tight framework that allows us to articulate them together and, in particular, to link up international events or forces with the *modus operandi* of Muslim societies. To illustrate, the international diffusion of radical ideologies of so-called reformist Islam is no doubt an important source of the resurgence of religious manifestations in these societies. Since this is a supply-side explanation, however; it needs to be combined with a demand-side explanation to form a complete argument,. More precisely, an account must also be given of both the context in which these ideologies came to be considered useful and the mechanism whereby they could lead to a religious revival in a large part of the Muslim world.

One promising approach, and one in which economists can make their contribution, consists of characterizing the political economy of Muslim countries in a way that makes possible the study of the channels through which international forces impact their social, economic and political fabric. This paper uses a game-theoretical model that features three actors interacting strategically: the (autocratic) state, the religious clerics, and the military. An autocrat represents the political ruler or regime because autocracy has been and still is the dominant political regime in Muslim countries—if by Muslim countries we mean non-African countries in which Muslims are a majority of the population (these include either Arab or non-Arab countries, such as Turkey, Iran, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan).[1] The religious clerics are important providers of legitimacy to the autocrat, and they have a strong organizing ability, partly based on the high degree of mutual trust among Muslim believers (for recent quantitative evidence, see Livny 2020). Finally, long-term evidence shows the significant role that has been played (and indeed still is being played) by both the army and the deep state (including the intelligence services and police forces) in the lands of Islam. This role extends far beyond the military sphere to the economy and to politics.[2] According to Kuru (2019), the transformation that led the military class to

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[1] African countries present a special problem because clans and tribes play a more important role than religious movements—and the latter are generally Sufi orders or brotherhoods that have only local impact. (Think, for example, of the Tijane Brotherhood, which has formed a kind of isolated mini-Islamic republic in Medina Gounhas, southern Senegal). Ethnic and tribal identities also exist in the non-African Muslim world but they tend to coincide with religious identities, as attested by the realities of countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen.

[2] The power of the military in Muslim countries is confirmed by detailed studies dealing with particular countries (see, in particular, Laribi 2007; Benderra et al. 2020 for Algeria; Shah 2014; Siddiqa 2017 for Pakistan; Sayigh 2019 for Egypt; Clark 2010 for Yemen), and by international datasets that measure the importance of the army through several indicators and compare them across countries. Thus, the online

dominate the economy and undermine the (independent) merchants dates back to as far as the Seljuk Empire in the eleventh century.

Our endeavor is the first of its kind in economics: if the role of the army has recently been analyzed in a few papers, it has never been studied as part of a triangular game also involving the clerics as political actors in autocracies. The political economy model that underpins the present work is thus rather intricate, since it brings into play three actors acting strategically. To enable us to focus here on the bigger picture, we refer the interested reader to a separate paper containing all the technical details and the proofs that support the statements and the propositions derived from the chosen framework (see Auriol, Platteau, and Verdier 2020). Here, we will be content with presenting the central results of this theoretical construct, together with their most important assumptions and intuitions.

This paper explores the impact of international forces or events on the political economy of a stylized Muslim country by focusing on two key parameters: (i) a measure of the clerics' sensitivity to policies deemed adverse to their values or interests, and (ii) a composite index of the regime's strength. With regard to the first parameter, adverse policies are understood as institutional reforms that have the effect of disturbing social relations or practices considered to be validated by the faith, or encroaching upon the prerogatives of traditional authorities (including religious authorities). Adverse policies may also be interpreted as the extent of high-level corruption that is tolerated by the regime. With regard to the second parameter, the strength of the regime is conceived as resting on the legitimacy of the autocrat and the power of the military relative to the opposition driven by the clerics. While the impact of the international diffusion of puritan interpretations of Islam will be examined through the first parameter, the impact of shocks causing a change in external military assistance will be explored through the second. These shocks correspond to two major international events: the end of the Cold War, and the declaration of the war against terrorism.

Unfortunately, a rigorous assessment of the impact of the above factors is beyond the scope of the present study. Hence, we must fall back on case study material to elucidate the

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data published by the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SPRI) show that Saudi Arabia occupies the top world position in terms of military expenditures per capita, and the second position in terms of military expenditures measured as a proportion of GDP, or as a proportion of government spending. Algeria is ranked the fifth most militarized country of the world when the second yardstick is used (military expenditures represent 5.7% of GDP), while Pakistan is ranked 14th on the same scale (with a proportion of 3.5%). If military expenditures are alternatively measured as a percentage of government spending, three Muslim countries are featured in the list of the world's ten top countries: Sudan (in the first position: 30.9 percent), Pakistan (seventh position: 16.7%), and Algeria (eighth position: 16.1%). Finally, if we look at the ratio per thousand inhabitants of total military (active, reserve, and paramilitary) personnel (2018 data), Egypt now appears as the most militarized country of the Muslim world (13.5%), followed by Algeria (11.4%), Sudan (5.6%), and Pakistan (3.1%).

reasons behind the ascent of Islam to the forefront of social and political life in most Muslim countries. In a nutshell, we find no evidence that the end of the Cold War helped spark Islamic revival, which actually started earlier. But the war against terrorism has likely produced the opposite effect of better enabling autocrats to get rid of religious allies, especially those of radical stripes. In the meantime, Islamic revival was facilitated by Islamist ideas stressing political engagement and militancy. These ideas fell on fertile ground because of the mounting anger of religion-prone populations against distant secularist autocrats who had adopted a mix of blind capitalism and illiberal politics. Military defeats, when they occurred, produced the same effect. In this context, co-opting religious leaders became a necessity for contested rulers.

The outline of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, based on an underlying, fully formalized theory, we highlight not only the possible equilibrium outcomes of strategic interactions between an autocrat, religious clerics, and the military, but also the most salient comparative-effects. In Section 3, the international diffusion of puritan Islam and military shocks are described in sufficient detail to understand how they were able to modify the political economy equilibrium of a Muslim country. Section 4 presents the central lessons that can be learned from the country case studies of Egypt, Sudan, and Algeria, which are taken as illustrations. In order to focus on the pivotal messages of the paper in the main text, we have chosen to present the case studies in an Appendix. Section 5 briefly concludes.

2. Analytics of the strategic game between an autocrat, the clerics, and the military

The setup of the game

Our approach to the relationship between autocrats, religious clerics, and the military is inspired by a game-theoretic model developed by Auriol, Platteau, and Verdier (2020)—itself an extension of a two-player model written by Auriol and Platteau (2017a; 2017b), which is based on five central assumptions that define the setup.

First, because most political regimes in the Muslim world have been autocracies since the second world war and even before (Blaydes and Chaney 2013), political power is represented by an autocrat. He maximizes a rent (extracted from national output) from which are subtracted all expenses related to the remuneration of his supporters, whether military or religious.

Second, national output—and hence the rent of the autocrat—depends positively on progressive institutional reforms, such as land tenure reforms (aimed at enhancing investment incentives), and measures to emancipate individuals from the sway of communal customs or collective prescriptions (to replace rules emphasizing status or loyalty by merit-based selection

and promotion criteria, or to combat forms of social discrimination—against women and low-caste members in particular).

Third, opposition may come from two groups whose values and preferences may diverge from those embodied in the reforms: the religious clerics and the military. Aversion to reforms is most likely in the case of the clerics, particularly among the most radical or puritan of them. The latter are highly sensitive to what they perceive as serious breaches of their religious doctrine, such as when state authorities promote greater gender equality, the neutrality of the public space, and modern teaching detached from religion in public schools. Other threats may be perceived when state authorities enact certain legislation, including civil laws that ban polygamy and authorize divorce (or prevent unilateral divorce), criminal laws that punish erstwhile customs such as honor crimes, or commercial laws that explicitly allow for the charging of interest on savings and loans. Aversion to reforms may also be sparked by encroachments of the reforms upon prerogatives long enjoyed by religious authorities—including, for example, the administration of justice (in civil matters) and the management of (religious) schools, hospitals, and dispensaries, as well as organizations centered on the help to the poor and mutual assistance.

Fourth, the clerics and the military are corruptible, in the sense that they can be bought off or seduced by the autocrat. In other words, they are willing to trade off the attachment to their values and principles against personal material advantages obtained politically. However, the Muslim clerics, like those of the majority of religions (with the outstanding exception of Christianity, particularly of the Catholic and Orthodox brands), do not belong to a vertical chain of command: they operate in a decentralized manner. This implies that they are rather independent, in the sense that they are free to follow religious tenets to a greater or lesser extent and to interpret them in a more or less flexible way. Radical clerics are scripturalists (they follow the letter rather than the spirit of sacred texts) and puritans (they value purity above everything else)—two attributes that hardly make them amenable to discussion and compromise. To put it succinctly, clerics in decentralized religions have heterogeneous income-ethics preferences and, as a result, they are unequally seducible or co-optable by the autocratic ruler. The situation is entirely different for the military, since they belong to a hierarchical organization, the army. Like the clerics, they are corruptible; their income-ethics preferences are, however, uniform, imposed by the central authority at the head of their professional body. Conceivably, they have either been indoctrinated by the military establishment (and have internalized its patriotic values), or are prohibited from expressing any form of dissent.

Fifth, the clerics and the military constitute a threat to the autocratic regime because they can foment a popular rebellion or stage a military coup. While the power of the army comes from its possession of the means of repression, the influence of the clerics stems from their status and prestige as agents of supernatural powers and men of wisdom. If they decide to do so, the

clerics are able to confront the autocrat by their power to incite (with hateful speeches) and organize a popular rebellion. As for the military, they have the capacity not only to put down such a revolution but also to stage a coup against any ruler, whether civilian or religious. The problem of the autocrat is how best to keep himself in power, simultaneously achieving as high a rent as possible, through the optimal use of the available instruments. These include the magnitude of institutional reforms, the amount of perquisites paid to the clerics and the military (which differ because the military are less averse to reforms than the average cleric), and the size of the army (budget), which determines the extent of military strength.

Instead of choosing to optimize institutional reforms, the autocrat may choose to optimize the level of corruption tolerated in his clique of close supporters. Or, more realistically, he may take both decisions simultaneously under the assumption that the clerics and the military have an aversion not only to reforms but also to corruption. A reformist and corrupt autocrat would then arouse substantial potential opposition, whereas a reformist (benevolent) autocrat would keep corruption under control so as to be better able to pass reforms and surmount the resistance of the clerics (and, to a lesser extent, the military).

The problem faced by the autocrat is complex because in the presence of two opposition groups, and given his limited resources, several trade-offs arise. These include moderating reforms versus giving large perquisites to co-opted clerics and military, cajoling clerics vs cajoling the men in uniform, and building a strong army to beat back rebellious clerics vs limiting the army's strength to mitigate the risk of a military coup.

In setting the value of the various instruments at his disposal, the autocrat automatically determines the fraction of the clerics who will support him. That fraction may of course be zero, in which case the autocrat opts for exclusive reliance on the army to buttress his power; his regime is then based on exclusive co-option of the military. At the other extreme, all of the clerics are enlisted and profess loyalty to the autocrat. More realistically, however, the fraction will be positive but smaller than 100%, meaning that the clerics are divided between a group of regime supporters (the official clerics) and a group of dissenters (more radical clerics). When at least some clerics are bought off by the autocrat, the regime is based on double co-option. Intuitively, double co-option enables the autocrat to dilute the power of the men in uniform and thereby reduce the risk of a putsch, yet at the cost of less ambitious institutional reforms (bearing in mind that the clerics are generally more averse to reforms than the military are).

The choice made by the autocrat depends on a number of model parameters that capture important dimensions of the political environment: his initial, intrinsic legitimacy (or popularity), the effectiveness of the army in putting down popular rebellions (led by the clerics), and the effectiveness of (radical) clerics in inflaming and organizing the masses against the ruler. The size of the army may be an additional parameter, instead of a decision variable, if the autocrat is

constrained by geopolitical forces that play out on the international level rather than driven by internal political order considerations.[3]

Salient results

A central result obtained by Auriol, Platteau, and Verdier (2020) is that the autocrat may well choose the regime of double co-option of the clerics and the military even when he is able to set the size of his army (on the basis of strictly internal stability considerations). For this outcome to be obtained (that is, for the autocrat to rely on an army of moderate size and on a fraction of the clerics), the price of forsaking reforms must not be too high in terms of growth opportunities foregone (think here of a rent economy based on rich natural endowments). This implies that the indirect cost of co-opting conservative clerics is not too high. When this condition is violated, however, political economy equilibria emerge in which only the military are co-opted and the autocrat (the strong autocratic state) chooses a rather large army size. Equilibria in which only clerics are co-opted never arise: because the military hold the monopoly of the means of repression, they can never be dispensed with. Under exclusive co-option of the military (a regime more likely to be established when the autocrat's legitimacy is strong), the army is loyal. This is reflected in a small divergence between the army's preferences regarding reforms and the preferences of the autocrat. Moreover, the religious clerics are rather weak. In these conditions, reforms are always more important than under double co-option. This is according to intuition.

Other results directly relevant to our inquiry concern the effects of variations in the strength of the autocratic regime, or in the degree of radicalization of the clerics as measured by their aversion to reforms or in their rebellious strength. Let us begin with the effects of variations in the regime's strength. When it increases under the regime of double co-option (whether caused by a stronger legitimacy of the autocrat, a bigger army, or a better ability of the existing army to fight rebellions), the autocrat adopts more ambitious reforms, leading to a reduction in the fraction of official clerics. Since the amount of perks awarded to the clerics is adjusted by the autocrat at the same time as the level of reforms, the implication is that an increase in these perks is never sufficient to overcome the negative effect of a more ambitious reform program on clerical support. More specifically, this support declines when a stronger autocrat adopts more reforms—and this is despite a possible rise in the perks of the clerics. Conversely, an increase in the strength of the clerics, which is equivalent to a weakening of the regime, will prompt the

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[3] Note that we also assume that for the military, staging a coup entails an additional cost compared to repressing a popular rebellion. The idea is that while the organization of a coup requires a great capacity for coordination and for the control of state institutions and the society, repelling street demonstrators is a more routine task that the army is well prepared to perform.

autocrat to moderate his reform program, leading to an increase in the fraction of official clerics. This moderation is observed despite the adjustment of the perks paid by the autocrat to the clerics.

When the (average) aversion of the clerics to reforms rises, the optimal level of reforms declines for a given army size (or strength). However, if the autocrat chooses the latter, the effect of a radicalization of the clerics is to reduce the likelihood of double co-option. If double co-option is rejected, the level of reforms will actually increase. This result attests to the critical role that may be played by the military in allowing reforms that would not be feasible in their absence.

Consider now the instance in which aversion to reforms rises among the military rather than the clerics, while the army size is exogenously fixed. We again find that the optimal level of reforms declines. When the autocrat can choose the army size, however, the likelihood of double co-option increases—but only provided that the autocrat's legitimacy and the strength of the clerics are neither too high nor too low. Otherwise, double co-option becomes less likely in response to a more antagonistic military. Thus, a highly legitimate autocrat faced with a rather disorganized group of clerics is sufficiently assured of his power to avoid responding to this increased military antagonism by starting to co-opt men of religion. Assume that the autocrat shifts from exclusive co-option of the military to double co-option when the aversion to reforms of the military has increased. Reforms will then have to be mitigated to seduce the clerics who always evince a stronger aversion to reforms than the men of uniform. If, on the other hand, the autocrat sticks to exclusive co-option of the military, he will also have to moderate his reforms—but to a lesser extent than he would have if he shifted regimes.

Finally, we can use a game played between an autocrat and clerics alone (see Auriol and Platteau 2017b) to highlight the impact of different forms of religious radicalization. Thus, if radicalization is reflected in a shift of the distribution of the clerics between the more compliant and the more radical types (with the latter growing in importance relative to the former), the effect is similar to that obtained when aversion to reforms increases among all clerics: fewer reforms are enacted at the new equilibrium. But if radicalization takes the form of an increased aversion to reforms among the most puritan clerics yet not of the relatively compliant ones, the effect is the opposite of that described above (for a given army size): the autocrat enlists fewer clerics (he does not co-opt the most radical ones) and undertakes more reforms than before. The reason is that the most radical clerics have become too costly to buy. This result is presumably reinforced if the autocrat chooses the army size. This is because a stronger army is better able to repress the clerics whose support has been lost.

3. Toward an understanding of Islamic revival

How can the theory sketched above help us understand the revival of religious attitudes and symbols in many Muslim countries? Two ways of explanation—not necessarily exhaustive—may be suggested. The first one points to the process of rapid dissemination of puritan versions of Islam originated in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt. These versions, which are obsessively attached to the letter of the sacred texts (scripturalism), are also proselytizing and militant. The second explanation is of a different order, and looks at the consequences of military shocks, the abrupt termination of the Cold War and the declaration of the war against terrorism in particular. We examine these two forces successively.

The international dissemination of puritan ideologies of Islam

Since the operation of this force has been abundantly described in the literature and a full book chapter has been devoted to it by Platteau (2017, ch. 7), we focus here on its impact on the political economy of Muslim countries in the framework of the theory sketched in Section 2.

Through international transmission channels, the development of Islamic reformism in a few selected spots (Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Deobandism in Pakistan, in particular) has been widely felt across the Muslim world. The dissemination of Wahhabism has been especially important due to the effectiveness of two main transmission channels. First, vast numbers of Muslim immigrants seeking work in the prospering Saudi economy were exposed to the influence of Wahhabism and projected it into their own country when they later returned. Thus, continuous go-and-return movements from one bank of the Red Sea to the other wove the first operational link between radical fundamentalism and Wahhabism during the 1970s. Second, thanks to targeted financial support provided by the government of Saudi Arabia, Wahhabite institutions sprang up in many foreign Muslim countries and in countries with significant Muslim minorities.

The international diffusion of Islamist ideas has resulted in significant shifts in the distribution of clerics according to their income-ethics preferences. The proportion of clerics adhering to a militant view of Islam increased, implying that a higher number of them became reluctant to support autocrats bent on modernizing the institutions of their country and/or involved in large-scale corruption. This effect is especially noticeable among the younger generations: with bleak life prospects, they were easily attracted by the voluntarist and adversarial discourse of radical Islam. Another likely effect is that clerics who were already opposed to the autocratic regime became even more so under the influence of foreign ideologies. As explained in Section 2, these two changes have opposite effects on the level of reforms (or corruption). If the first (distributive) effect dominates the second (further radicalization of radical

clerics), the theory predicts that Muslim autocrats would respond to the ideological shock by moderating their reform program and/or taming corruption around them. Muslim societies would then appear as more "reactionary," in the sense that the pace of institutional modernization is slowed down or even reverted. Such an outcome would be even more likely if the distributional shift observed among the clerics was accompanied by a radicalization of the military. The opposite conclusion would nevertheless be reached if the second effect outweighed the first, since autocrats would then deem the co-option of radical clerics too costly, especially in the presence of the military alternative.

Finally, there is an additional effect of a different order that can be produced by the international diffusion of puritan ideologies aimed at reforming Islam: the strength of the clerics may be enhanced as a result of their improved ability to mobilize and organize the popular masses. This can happen if, for example, (young) radical clerics get training in foreign countries that enables them to design more effective communication and use better insurgent tactics in their opposition campaign against the ruler. The strength of the autocratic regime is then eroded, forcing it to make concessions to the clerics. In other words, the enhanced strength of the clerics induced by the diffusion of foreign Islamic ideas would yield the same effect as the induced change in the distribution of the clerics (and the military), thereby increasing the likelihood of a less reformist (and less corrupt) autocracy.

Military shocks

It is often unrealistic to assume that autocrats are under complete control of their military decisions, or that the size of their army is exclusively or mainly determined by internal political order considerations. As soon as the second World War ended and decolonization took place (starting with the independence of India in 1947), the Cold War began, preventing most developing countries from staying independent. As attested by the failure of the Non-Aligned movement created at the Bandung conference (1955) by prestigious leaders of the developing world (Nasser from Egypt, Nehru from India, Fidel Castro from Cuba, Sukarno from Indonesia, and Zhou Enlai from China), this was not a limited phenomenon: no country in the southern hemisphere could realistically escape the hard choice of choosing one camp over the other. Siding with one superpower had the instantaneous effect of attracting military and other types of assistance, which often had the effect of drastically modifying the internal political game and the social fabric of the recipient countries.

Because of their geographical position in the middle space between Europe and Asia and, in a good number of cases, because of their possession of immense oil resources, many Muslim countries acquired a strategic importance that made them impossible to ignore by the two

superpowers. Hence, they became clients of either the Soviet Union or, more often, the United States. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, Irak, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, and Egypt have thus received massive amounts of military aid and technical assistance destined to improve the effectiveness of the military and intelligence sectors.

In line with a prediction made in the setup of Section 2, the strengthening of the incumbent autocratic regimes that resulted from the military aid provided by a superpower will reduce their need for religious support, opening the way for more secular policies (and/or a larger measure of corruption). Conversely, by suddenly depriving client regimes of strong external military assistance, the abrupt termination of the Cold War is expected to have yielded the opposite effect: being weaker than before, these regimes were then compelled to strike alliances with more radical clerics or to give in to some of their demands. In other words, to make up for the diminished strength of their repressive apparatus, Muslim autocrats are presumed to have sought to appease radical opposition forces through the adoption of regressive laws and policies (and, possibly, through better control of corruption).

Figure 1 depicts the evolution of world military expenditures expressed as a proportion of GDP for the period 1960-2016. It must be borne in mind that the Cold War came to an end when the Berlin Wall was brought down and a series of mostly peaceful revolutions swept Eastern Europe in 1989. The actual thaw began a few years earlier with the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (March 1985). It was reflected in a major breakthrough that came in 1985-1987 with the successful negotiation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF).[4] As Figure 1 reveals, military expenditures significantly declined for the entire world from around 1985 precisely. This worldwide trend is confirmed for the developing countries for which data are available: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Oman, Indonesia, for the Muslim world, but also India and Sub-Saharan Africa taken as a whole. The major exception is Turkey, where the ratio slightly increased between 1990 and 2000 only to fall abruptly between 2000 and 2010. In Iran and Morocco, the ratio fell between 1990 and 2000 but increased in the subsequent decade (source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) dataset). Trends between 2010 and 2018 are more varied and reflect the intervention of other international events that disturbed the legacy of the post-cold-war environment.

The most important of those international events was no doubt the eruption, barely fifteen years after the thaw leading to the formal end of the Cold War, of a world war of a novel kind. Declared by Western powers and the United Nations in the late nineties, it aimed at eradicating terrorism and fighting the jihadist brands of the Islamist movement that were being

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[4] The negotiation culminated in a new Treaty signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1987. It provided for the elimination of all nuclear and conventional missiles, as well as their launchers, with ranges of 500-1,000 kilometers (short-range) and 1,000-5,000 kilometers (intermediate-range).

widely diffused across the Muslim world. The rise of Islamist jihadist movements during the 1990s culminated in the seizing of Kabul by the Taliban (1996) and the organization of the Mujahiddin by Osama bin Laden (1999). The Security Council of the United Nations reacted by setting up a special committee in charge of leading the struggle against Al-Qaida, the Taliban, and associated individuals (Resolution 1267). Fears of growing violence were confirmed by the blowing up of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salam (7 August 1998) and, later, of the Twin Towers in New York (12 September 2001).
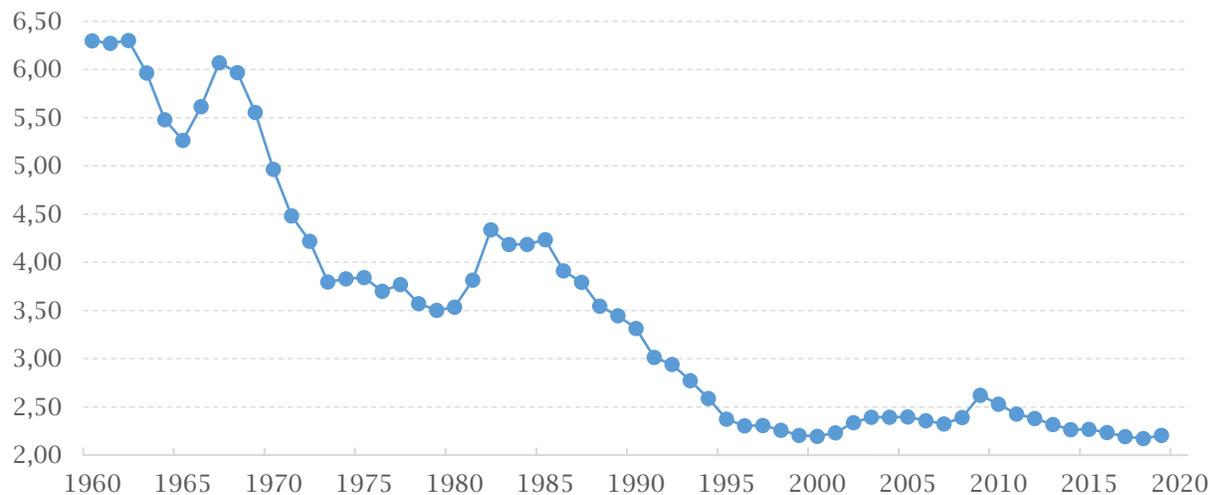
Figure 1. Military expenditures as a percentage of
Gross Domestic Product – whole world, 1960-2016
(source: SIPRI dataset as reproduced in World Bank dataset)

On the occasion of the new war against terrorism, countries vulnerable to violent jihadism, typically countries with Muslim majorities or significant Muslim minorities, could suddenly benefit from external assistance specifically destined to combat terrorist groups operating in their territories. This assistance has assumed two main forms: intelligence support, and tolerance on the part of Western powers and local populations for the excessive and indiscriminate use of brutal methods of repression. The latter, indirect support, has the effect of increasing the effectiveness of the deep state in fighting political dissent. There are actually numerous examples of countries (consider many Arab and Caucasian countries, in particular) in which moderate, non-violent opposition movements were branded terrorist groups, thus justifying their banning in elections and/or the persecution of their leaders and active members. What deserves to be stressed is that the ultimate predicted effect of the war against terrorism is identical to the effect of the Cold War and, therefore, the opposite of the effect produced by the Cold War's termination.

Methodological considerations

Attempting to assess the impacts of the above-discussed events in a rigorous way is a daunting task. To begin with, the international diffusion of radical Islam was less of a shock than a factor that produces its effects gradually over a rather protracted period. By progressively transforming the political environment of Muslim autocracies, it contributed to create a growing atmosphere of religiosity in which conventional clerics felt more and more compelled to respond to criticisms levelled by radical clerics, thus increasing the presence of religious arguments in public debates. Secularism never struck deep roots in the popular masses of Muslim countries, and socialist, Marxist or other brands of leftist ideas did not reach very far beyond the educated classes of big cities. Autocrats in these countries increasingly perceived that the most serious threats against their power stemmed from religious rather than secular opposition movements—seen by their preoccupation with co-opting the latter when their legitimacy was rather weak.

Unlike the diffusion of radical Islam, the termination of the Cold War, which occurred later, intervened in a discontinuous manner. One difficulty for the assessment of its impact arises, however: the time period over which we can observe its effect is rather limited, extending over about 12-15 years only, from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s. As we know, the upper bound corresponds to the occurrence of another military shock, the declaration of the war against terrorism, which is predicted to yield the opposite effect. Even if we would assume away the aforementioned difficulties, measurement problems and lack of proper data create an insuperable obstacle to the quantitative testing of the hypothesized effects.

We should have at hand yearly measures of our key variables for a sufficiently large number of countries. More specifically, we ought to have at least an approximate idea of (i) the fraction of clerics co-opted by a regime as it evolves from year to year, (ii) satisfactory yearly measures of high-level corruption and progressive institutional reforms, and (iii) reliable indicators of the autocrat's legitimacy and the power of the deep state that he commands. That these measures are hard to come by is evident and can be illustrated by reference to the last variable. Here, a proper indicator should capture not only the size of the army, paramilitaries, police and intelligence forces, but also the degree of their effectiveness in action. As a matter of principle, effectiveness is not proportional to the size of army, police, and intelligence personnel and the equipment at their disposal, but also depends on organizational factors that are not easy to pin down. Complicating the problem further, even if we would be content with using the SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) military expenditure database, we would have to face the following oddity: for a good number of developing countries under our concern, these data do not reflect in any smooth manner the fall of world military expenditures (as a percentage

of GDP) initiated in the mid-1980s (see Figure 1).[5] This may be partly due to the fact that the recording of military expenditure data is often incomplete for these countries. Thus, data for Sudan do not include off-budget financing from oil revenues, data reported for Egypt do not include spending on paramilitary forces and are said to be unreliable from 2011 onwards, data for Algeria from the year 2004 are based on budget figures, and so forth.

Because of such data limitations and methodological issues, we are unable to carry out a rigorous test of our theory. We will therefore fall back on a reasoned qualitative analysis based on selected country case studies. This is the more realistic task to which we now turn.

4. Lessons from selected country case studies

At this stage, it is important to recall the core idea that we want to validate (or reject): under the pressure of adverse external events or circumstances, autocrats are prompted to revise their political strategy by allowing religious clerics and Islamist movements to exert a greater influence on the social, educational, and judicial sectors of their country's life. Toward this purpose, we essentially rely on three country case studies: Egypt, Sudan, and Algeria. They are particularly insightful, yet do not exhaust the possibilities of illustration of the theory (for more case studies, see Platteau 2017, ch. 6, from which the case study material presented here is largely extracted). In these instances, the ruling autocrats did not enjoy strong legitimacy, unlike what happened with the regimes of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey and Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia (see Platteau 2017 and 2021 for detailed discussions). Atatürk gained considerable prestige from his military victory against the Entente powers in the Battle of Gallipoli, also known as the Dardanelles campaign (1915-1916), which formed the basis for the Turkish War of Independence and the declaration of the Republic of Turkey eight years later. As for Bourguiba, he came out of the anti-colonial struggle with a wide aura and his highly charismatic persona helped him win great support in the population. It is no coincidence, therefore, that both leaders were essentially able to dispense with the support of religious clerics and to build their regime on the strength of the army (in Turkey) or the Ministry of Interior and its police forces (in Tunisia).

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[5] In Sudan, for example, military expenditures expressed as a proportion of GDP actually rose from 1988 to 1993 (data not available for years before 1988) before falling until 1997. It then rose significantly for a few years (until 2000, when it reached 4.8 percent) before declining until 2003 and increasing again afterwards (with a peak of 6.0 percent in 2009). In Algeria, the same statistic rose perceptibly from 1988 to 1998-99 (when it reached 4.0 percent), then decreased over roughly a decade before rising again (at least from 2008) to reach about 6.0 percent in the years 2017-2019. Egypt displays a more expected pattern with a roughly continuous fall from 1988 (5.1 percent) to 2000 (2.6 percent). Afterwards, it oscillated for a few years before starting to fall more or less regularly to reach the low level of 1.2 percent in 2008-9. Bear in mind, however, that the data from 2011 onwards are unreliable.

In the case of post-Nasser Egypt, Sudan and Algeria, leaders of secular and military background sought to ally themselves with the men of religion when they realized that their rule was contested and militant Islam was becoming increasingly vocal and assertive. The army was not strong enough to form the sole foundation of the regime because its effectiveness was not as high as it could have been. This is the result of tragic military defeats at the hands of Israel for Egypt, of serious fragmentation of the military in Sudan (de Waal 2015) and, in Algeria, of a longstanding rivalry between two clans, one linked to the highest officers' corps of the army and the other to the intelligence service (Laribi 2007, 190-2; Sifaoui 2019, 106-14).

The following rough periodization emerges:

o Before 1970-75: The prevailing political regime relies on the support of clerics only to a moderate or small extent, compensating for low religious allegiance by high loyalty of the military.

o From 1970-75 to the mid-1990s or later: The enfeebled regime increasingly seeks the alliance of the clerics and religious movements.

o From the mid-1990s or later to the present: The regime tends to get rid of religious support, especially when the clerics are not of the pliant type. The military assume a more openly assertive role.

For lack of space, our case study material appears in the Appendix. Here, we concentrate on the central lessons that we may glean from it.

First, and as expected, it is impossible to detect precisely the impact of radical Islamist ideologies, since they have not appeared suddenly and discontinuously. This said, two things are evident: (i) the resurgence of puritan interpretations of Islam, and their international diffusion in particular circumstances, have had the effect of causing a growing radicalization of religious opposition against Muslim autocracies; and (ii) Muslim autocrats often responded to this new threat by compromising with the religious opposition in a way that they refused to do when dealing with secular left-oriented opposition. In that sense, it can be said that the effect of Islamist ideologies has been amplified rather than mitigated by autocratic rulers of many Muslim countries. This is evident in the three case studies discussed in Section 4, particularly for Sudan and Algeria.

Second, we have not been able to discern the predicted effect of the end of the Cold War. What the three case studies clearly show is that the rise of religious clerics to the forefront of politics and society, which has typically been the result of their political instrumentalization by opportunistic leaders, actually preceded that historical moment. Thus, in the 1970s in Egypt, Sadat started to court not only the official clerics of the al-Azhar establishment but also the more radical Muslim Brothers. His attitude contrasted with the more confrontational tactic of Nasser, who benefitted from immense prestige and great popularity as a result of the overthrowing of

the hated monarchy. Likewise, it is in the second half of the 1970s that in Sudan, Nimeiri made a U-turn by getting closer to religious factions affiliated to the Muslim Brothers. Finally, in Algeria, in the late 1960s, an odd alliance with the Conseil Supérieur Islamique was struck by Boumedienne—despite his earlier posture as a socialist and anti-imperialist leader. In all these instances, the pro-clerics move of the autocrats was dictated by internal difficulties and strong opposition against some of their policies, by strong concentration of political power, and by unfair distribution of the country's wealth.

We could easily add other cases attesting to the disjunction between the end of the Cold War and religious revival. Just to cite the important example of Pakistan, General Zia ul-Haq rose to power through a coup in 1977 and then immediately embarked upon hijacking the Islamic slogan of the anti-Bhutto agitation and getting the country's regime closer than ever to its clerics and the prospect of building a sharia-based state (Abbas 2005, 97; Paul 2014, 138-41; Platteau 2017, 215-20).

Third, the declaration of the war against terrorism appears to have had more visible effects than the end of the Cold War. These effects are as predicted by our theory. Two striking illustrations are provided by the rise of al-Sisi in Egypt and the "eradicationist" regimes of Zeroual and Bouteflika in Algeria. Clearly, in these two cases, the drastic change in the political environment created by the new war has stimulated the emergence or the assertion of particularly brutal autocratic regimes. Harsh repression was directed not only against Islamist movements but also against all forms of opposition regardless of ideology. This effect operates through two main channels. First is the massive increase in external assistance received by countries exposed to the risk of jihadist attacks. This assistance, primarily provided by the United States, has taken the form not only of financial flows and debt cancellation or restructuring (for example, in the case of Egypt), but also of military aid chiefly targeted to logistical and intelligence support for the anti-terrorist struggle. Second, and more subtly, the world powers and international public opinion have shut their eyes to blatant violations against human rights that they would not previously have easily tolerated. Authoritarian regimes did not hesitate to seize this golden opportunity to tighten their grip on the body politic, counting on the tacit understanding of powerful donor countries.

Perhaps the most egregious example of such cynical exploitation of the new anti-terror environment comes from the regime of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria. Here, in order to justify a vindictive and exceptionally violent reaction against peaceful protests started in Der'a in March 2011, it went on "repeating ad nauseam its mantra that it was fighting extremist Islamist terrorism, and using a sectarian narrative that was aimed at alienating secularists and the minorities from the opposition. There were sectarian attacks which often involved the regime's shadowy, Alawi-dominated militias known as *shabiha*, or ghosts" (McHugo 2014, 226).

Fourth, changes of tactic may be a response to military defeats at the hands of an external enemy. These defeats generally amount to dramatic reductions in the strength of the army and hence the strength of the regime. This is not only because of considerable destruction of military equipment and loss of human lives, but also because of weakened morale among soldiers and officers, as well as among the population at large. In terms of our theory, several effects are produced that run in the same direction: a smaller army size, a lower effectiveness of the military (due to lower morale of the troops and their questioning of the authority of the high-level staff), a loss of legitimacy of the autocrat, and a greater sensitivity of the army and the clerics (as well as the whole population) to his failings—all of which changes contribute to reduce the regime's strength. Our theory predicts that being weaker and confronted with stiffer opposition, the regime will come down and deploy more efforts to please the clerics.

The example of Egypt comes to mind here. Defeats by Israeli troops during the six-day war (1967) and the war of Yom Kippur (1973) have caused a deep trauma that damaged the Egyptians' sense of dignity and self-confidence, and incensed the Muslim Brothers and more extremist Islamists, in particular. Nasser's prestige was dented by the first defeat, while Sadat had to deal with the consequences of the second. Sadat's renewed efforts to accommodate the demands of the Brothers failed because he was at the same time under the strong pressure of the United States, its main arms supplier, to make peace with Israel. His signing of a peace treaty was immediately interpreted as a surrender to imperialist forces and an unacceptable blow to the nation's sovereignty. It constituted an act of treason and a breach of trust that proved to be beyond repair and eventually leading to his assassination.

Iraq offers another striking example of the devastating effects that can result from a military defeat. The inability of the Iraqi forces to win the war against Iran and the crushing defeat of the Iraqi troops at the hands of the US military force after the invasion of Kuwait compounded with the problems born of the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini to power in Iran (1979) and the subsequent stirrings of a Shi'i revolt in southern Iraq. All these circumstances forced Saddam Hussein to radically modify his attitude vis-à-vis the clerics toward the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s. While before he could boast to be ruling over a strong secularist pan-Arabic state (in the name of Baathism), he suddenly started to stress the significance of religion, to extoll the Islamic legacy of his country, and to refer to the sharia. More ominously, he adopted a number of regressive measures that were obviously intended to pander to the Islamists and affected not only the private life of Iraqi citizens but also the education and the legal systems of the country (see Baram 2014, 220-60; Platteau 2017, 235-51).

Lastly, an autocrat may deliberately choose to have an army of moderate size or effectiveness for fear of being overthrown through a military coup. This is in full keeping with our theory that then predicts that the autocrat will compensate the weakness of his army by co-

opting a large fraction of the clerics. There is no better way to characterize the regime of al-Bashir in Sudan. In this regime, indeed, the fragmentation of the repression forces went hand in hand with a large measure of compliance with the demands emanating from the men of religion. In Tunisia, Bourguiba also opted for a rather weak army but, as pointed out earlier, his legitimacy was so high that he could simultaneously dispense with religious support.

5. Conclusion

In order to elucidate the revival of religion in many Muslim countries, it is not sufficient to understand the spread of puritan interpretations of the faith, as they have permeated movements running from Muslim Brothers to violent Islamist movements. We also need to discover the process whereby these more radical ideologies have been accommodated by the (autocratic) Muslim states. This necessitates that we explore the internal political economy of Muslim countries without neglecting the possible influence of international forces. As attested by the lessons summarized in Section 4, the theory used as a background to the present work has precisely allowed us to achieve that objective by working out the strategic interactions between the autocrat, the clerics, and the military. This allowed us to highlight the channels through which external events and shocks make themselves felt through the local political and social fabrics.

Empirically, the dominant regime in contemporary Muslim countries is the regime of double co-option. Exclusive co-option of the military has characterized only a few regimes in which the autocrat's intrinsic legitimacy and the loyalty of his army are both very strong while the organizational effectiveness of religious movements is comparatively weak. Radical institutional reforms can then be implemented. Double co-option regimes, which always involve low intrinsic legitimacy of the autocrat, tend to vary significantly depending upon the proportion of clerics seduced and how well they are treated by the ruler. They invariably result in low progress of institutional reforms and, in the worst cases, in institutional regression.

External events or circumstances can work toward either weakening or strengthening the autocrat's rule. We have supplied examples of both, thereby helping to show that an autocratic regime may change tactics and that such changes do not proceed along a monotonous path. While military setbacks and international events favoring the widespread diffusion of Islamist ideas—such as the ayatollah revolution in Iran and the rising world influence of Saudi Arabia and associated Wahhabism—caused an Islamic revival that weakened autocrats who struggled to accommodate, the world war against terrorism worked in the opposite direction.

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Appendix. A review of selected country case studies: Egypt, Sudan, and Algeria

Egypt: Sadat-Mubarak (1970-2011) with prelude and postlude

PRELUDE. Upon accession to power (1970), Anwar al-Sadat immediately sought legitimacy from the official institutions of al-Azhar, Egypt's leading mosque and religious university, and he never really departed from this attitude. In that, he followed a tactic initiated in 1937 by the rather weak King Fuad to silence the liberal opposition represented by the Wafd party (Marsot 2007, 117-8). The Muslim Brotherhood really rose into prominence during the succeeding regime of King Farouk, whose alliance with the Wafd brought Egypt into World War II on the side of the British. This proved to be a catastrophic decision that created turmoil and even chaos when the prime minister was assassinated by a Muslim Brother and a brutal repression of the movement ensued (Zahid 2010, 73-6). A military coup led by the so-called Free Officers brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power (in 1952) and restored order in the country.

Because he enjoyed great popularity and legitimacy, Nasser felt strong enough to dominate the clerics and he did not hesitate to throw the leaders of the Muslim Brothers into jail and force them to go underground when they criticized his policies. In a move that resembled the actions of Atatürk, Nasser stripped al-Azhar institutions of their religious endowment and prevented them from holding sharia courts. In addition, the sheik of al-Azhar was named by Nasser and his salary paid by the state (in 1961). In this way, Nasser continued the tradition of subduing the religious establishment that had been initiated by Muhammad Ali and essentially consisted of transforming Azhar into "a ward of the Egyptian state" (Cook 2012, 78). As for the relationship with the Brothers, it is only when they refused to accept the Head of Agreement (July 1954) signed between the new regime and England to regulate the presence of the British around the Suez Canal that Nasser decided to crack down on them instead of pursuing his efforts to enlist their support (Cook 2012, 60).

SADAT. Because he did not enjoy the initial prestige of Nasser, Sadat did not only co-opt al-Azhar clerics in a less authoritarian manner than his predecessor, but he also gradually released the imprisoned Muslim Brothers during the years 1971-75. He actually wanted to broaden his constituency and consolidate his power in the face of a rival faction that had privileged links to the deep state. Moreover, he intended to use the Brothers against two political forces that threatened his rule: the forces of the political left, consisting of Marxists, Socialists and Nasserites, who criticized his economic liberalization policies, and those of the extreme religious right, the "Jama'at Islamiyya" (the Islamic Group) and the "Takfir wa-l Hijra" (Excommunication and Exodus) (Cook 2012, 124-7). Sadat went so far as allowing the Brotherhood to re-establish its press to

proselytize openly and to organize freely on university campuses. He also named a lawyer with strong ties to the Brothers as the new head of the Socialist Youth Organization of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), and a prominent Islamist as director of the powerful Professional Associations Syndicate. All of these measures had a profound influence on Egyptian politics, and the Brotherhood gradually took control of the prestigious professional associations of the engineers, doctors, lawyers, scientists, and pharmacists (Cook 2012, 123, 125). The so-called neo-Muslim Brothers, whose opinions were voiced in al-Da'wa, were in complete accordance with the official ideology of Sadat when they fought against communism, equaled to atheism (Ramadan 1993, 164-78; Kepel 2005, 105-31).

In spite of his shrewd political maneuvering, Sadat was playing with fire because the people of Egypt expected him to end the country's humiliation at the hands of the Israelis. The success of the demonstrations initiated by students of all hues, including Islamists, Nasserists, and Leftists, made it clear that the opposition was far broader than the regime admitted and that it was difficult to disentangle demands for democratic reforms from demands for military redress (Cook 2012, 129-30). To counter these threats, the authorities did not hesitate to encourage religious militant movements and even support them, organizationally and financially (Ayubi 1991, 74-5). The movement called Islamic Community started to organize government-sponsored summer camps, which were held with increasing frequency during the post-1973 years. In 1974, Sadat managed to organize the takeover of the Egyptian Student Union by the Islamic Community. He also issued a decree providing that the Union's chief purpose was "to deepen religious values among the students" (Dreyfuss 2005, 154).

Two main policies followed by Sadat were to eventually seal his fate. First, his policy of economic opening and liberalization, known as the "infitah" (opening), increased inequalities to the benefit of an emerging class of wealthy businessmen tightly connected to the regime. When subsidies on basic necessities were reduced at the behest of the International Monetary Fund, causing suffering among the lower and lower middle classes, "bread riots" swiftly erupted (January 1977), which forced Sadat to backtrack. The religious symbolism and idiom of the Islamist movements increasingly became "the language through which the petite bourgeoisie and lower classes expressed not only their resentment of corruption, decadence and inequality, but also their hostility towards the very state machine that embodied these evils" (Gilsenan 1982, 225-6, as cited by Ayubi 1991, 80).

Second, in the aftermath of the 1973 war, Sadat chose to strike peace with Israel through the privileged mediation of the United States. The warming of relations between Egypt and the United States went hand in hand with the development of a close personal relationship between Sadat and Henry Kissinger, at that time the American Secretary of State. These daring moves were bitterly resented by many Egyptians, especially so because they coincided with a Westernization

of the society from which a narrow elite generally linked to the clique in power drew ample profits. Particularly vocal was the opposition by the Islamists and the Nasserists (Cook 2012, 135-43). While the support and loyalty of al-Azhar clerics was unflinching,[6] the climate of cooperation with the Brotherhood sharply deteriorated as the neo-Muslim Brothers openly challenged the regime, calling for an abrogation of the peace treaty, a return to military options regarding Israel, and non-alignment of the country (Cook 2012, 151-2). More radical Islamist groups, such as the Jama'at, went one step further by denouncing peace with Israel as "munkar" (absolute evil or abomination), and declaring that its prosecution is the first commandment of Islam (Kepel 2005, 163).

In an attempt to pacify the Islamists, Sadat amended Article 2 of the constitution, now proclaiming that "Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic its official language" and that "principles of Islamic law are the principal source of legislation." But it was too late, and Sadat was eventually assassinated (in October 1981) by an extremist from the "al-Jihad" (Sacred Combat) group, of which many members previously belonged to the Jama'at.

MUBARAK. Mubarak learned the lesson and was initially more cautious in dealing with Islamists. He also pursued the same liberal economic policies as Sadat and continued the strategic partnership between Egypt and the United States by engaging his country on the side of the US in the first Gulf War.[7] This move was consistent with the constant preoccupation of Egyptian leadership to obtain sophisticated weaponry and financial assistance for the army (including the military, the intelligence service, and the police), so that it could enhance its external dissuasive power and beat back active religious movements. History repeated itself, as this subservient attitude of Egyptian rulers vis-à-vis the US was deeply resented by the political opposition, in particular by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Left, and the Nasserists. For them, the US-Egyptian strategic relationship nurtured during the 1980s was especially damaging to the national pride and sovereignty because the US was the privileged friend and supporter of Israel (Cook 2012, 161-2).

Thus confronted with unabating and determined political opposition, Mubarak chose to demonize the Brothers by conflating them with religious extremist groups.[8] The religious support

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[6] The sheikh of al-Azhar thus issued a fatwa (May 1979), called the "Islamic Opinion" and the "Religious Legal Verdict," to provide religious sanctioning of the peace treaty and the Camp David Agreement (Ramadan 1993, 169; Kepel 2005, 51, 116; Marsot 2007, 163-5). It actually cancelled a previous al-Azhar's fatwa that forbade peace with Israel (1962).

[7] For Egypt, this implied channelling US weaponry to Iraq in order to support Saddam Hussein against Iran, then turning against him after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi troops.

[8] This is despite the fact that "There never was a single, essential character of the Muslim Brotherhood, because the Brothers themselves never fully agreed with one another" about most issues (Kirkpatrick 2018, 122). In addition, they had long renounced the use of violent means.

for his regime was thus limited to the official clerics of al-Azhar, whose own credibility was dented by their unconditional justification of Mubarak's policies and their refusal to denounce the deeply authoritarian character of the Egyptian state (Platteau 2017, 196-200). As a consequence, the society became polarized between ordinary Egyptians (many of whom identified themselves with the Brothers) and the regime clique supported by the religious officialdom. While the Brothers were very active and well organized on the ground to help people with difficulties in their day-to-day livelihoods, the ruling clique was more aloof than ever, formed as it was by the presidential circle and a narrow business elite tightly linked to a deep state constituted by top military, "intelligence barons" and police officers who all enjoyed enormous economic privileges (see Sayigh 2019 for detailed evidence on the country's military economy).

The regime then resorted on a growing scale to all tricks conceivable, from vote rigging to diverse institutional and legal subterfuges (such as the disqualification of opposition candidates) and a covert manipulation of the judiciary, to deprive the Brothers from deriving benefits from their political gains in local elections. More ominously, the term terrorism was used in an increasingly expansive sense so that it could refer not only to violent extremists but also to members of the Brotherhood and other opposition activists. Even more ironically and cynically, people criticizing the regime, whether journalists, bloggers, intellectuals or political dissenters, could be arrested at any time on the ground that they were members of the Muslim Brotherhood, defame Islam, or disrupt social harmony. The message was clear enough: no opposition was to be tolerated, and any argument including the defense of Islam and Egyptian dignity could be used to buttress an official smearing campaign against an opponent and send him or her to prison for years. In this regard, Egyptian authorities found it highly convenient to justify their emergency repressive actions by referring to the provisions contained in the US Patriot Act, which was passed in both Houses of Congress in October 2001 by wide margins (Cook 2012, 191-6).

POSTLUDE. In a rather unpredictable manner, the Arab Spring protests broke out and Mubarak was overthrown. After a brief interlude that saw a Brother, Muhammad Morsi, becoming president after democratic elections were held, the army, which had in the meantime taken a more backseat position, decided to stage a coup that transferred supreme power to Field Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. This was justified on the ground that Morsi aroused a lot of anger and suspicion due to his inexperience and open partisanship (he professed the objective of establishing the sharia law as the law under which Egypt should be governed). In no time, the new ruler launched a brutal repression campaign that turned out to be much worse than what the Egyptians had experienced under Mubarak. Revealingly, the ulama of al-Azhar did not wait long to claim their support for the new authoritarian regime. And, of course, they were rewarded.

When al-Sisi set out to consolidate his control over religion in the course of the year 2014, he closed many mosques and small houses of worship who appoint their own imams and are often owned and controlled by wealthy families or groups (such as Salafists). All imams and preachers not licensed by the government were banned from preaching, and to have studied at al-Azhar mosque was the main qualification for getting a license. As of April 2014, the government reckoned, the regulations had led to the dismissal of no less than 12,000 imams who were quickly replaced by 17,000 newly appointed imams considered to be reliable thanks to the guarantee of political loyalty provided by al-Azhar. Moreover, all throughout the country, the imams were instructed to give the same sermon on Fridays, with al-Azhar serving as the model to be followed (Platteau 2017, 201-3). In pursuing such a harsh line, al-Sisi was inspired by the secularist model of Turkey's Atatürk and, in so doing, he actually went much further than any previous Egyptian president had dared to go.

It bears emphasis that the official clerics of al-Azhar duly complied with the newly emerging political system, and they actually excelled themselves in demonstrating loyalty to al-Sisi and justifying brutal state violence against opponents. As a result, the military and the official clerics spoke a common language in which Islam was put in service of the ruling autocrat with political opponents being pictured as non-believers.[9] Often, too, opponents are accused as working with terrorists to "bring down the state" (declaration of the Ministry of Interior, 2019).[10]

Sudan: al-Nimeiri and al-Bashir (1969-2019)

Jaafar al-Nimeiri, a young officer of the army, seized power through a military coup in May 1969. Under his impulse, a new constitution was enacted that established Sudan as a secular state in 1973, implying that in civil and criminal matters civilians' behavior was governed by a secular law, while personal and family matters were covered by sharia law for Muslims and customary law for tribal populations of the south. The combination of widespread corruption and liberalization policies that caused abrupt increases in the price of oil, bread, and sugar prompted

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[9] The army command thus started sending religious messages to its troops that bore the stamp of the highest authority of al-Azhar. Ali Gomaa, the former mufti appointed under Mubarak, has been seen in a videotape destined for soldiers and riot police as saying the following: "When somebody comes who tries to divide you, then kill them, whoever they are. Even with the sanctity and greatness of blood, the prophet permits us to fight this." In the same video made by the military's Department of Moral Affairs, Ali Gomaa likens the opponents of the military takeover to the members of an early Islamic sect who may be considered to be infidels, and thus permissible to kill (Kirkpatrick and El Sheikh 2013). An all-out war was launched in which all weapons available, including religious fatwas, can be used to dehumanise and possibly kill opponents. In other words, the regime decided to use the same methods as radical Islamist militants preaching violence through the jihad.

[10] Cited from "Egypt: No Contest." *Economist* 24-30 October 2020: 29.

street riots by students and angry consumers, and it intensified political opposition (Jok 2007, 72-3). Consistently with our theory, al-Nimeiri reacted by getting closer to Islamic factions and by inviting into his government (in 1977) two prominent Islamic politicians, including Hassan al-Turabi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and founder of the National Islamic Front (NIF) whom he had previously imprisoned. Appointed attorney-general, al-Turabi exerted steady pressure for the Islamic reform of the legal system (Lapidus 1988, 859; Jok 2007, 74).

In 1982, at the risk of losing his secular support base, al-Nimeiri began to dismantle the accord of Addis-Ababa (1972) which had ended the first north-south civil war triggered by the brutal Arabization and Islamization policies of Ibrahim Abbud (1958-1964). This was meant to please Islamist groups such as the NIF, which regarded the South as a challenge to Islam. In September 1983, al-Nimeiri completely reversed his initial secular policy by declaring an "Islamic revolution" and transforming the Sudanese state into an Islamic Republic to be governed by Islamic law, with no exemption for non-Muslim regions. Sudanese law had to be immediately reformed according to the sharia. The so-called September laws were quickly passed to show that so-called Islamic injunctions had to be taken seriously and understood in the strictest sense. They gave rise to highly publicized public executions, amputations of limbs for theft, and lashing for alcohol consumption (Jok 2007, 74-6).

In his quest of absolute power, al-Nimeiri attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to proclaim himself as Imam accountable only to Allah. Moreover, he demanded an oath of unconditional allegiance from all members of the civil service and judiciary, thereby causing the departure of prominent secularists and the dominance of the civil service, the army and the financial sector by Islamists (de Waal 1997, 88). Members of the NIF and Muslim Brotherhood were left free to gain influence within the civil service, intelligence, and institutions of government that dealt with education and welfare.

More ominously still, al-Nimeiri let al-Turabi draft the Criminal Bill (presented to parliament in 1988) which included an ominous provision for outlawing apostasy sufficiently vague to allow its application to be politically determined (de Waal 1997, 91; Meredith 2005, 356-7). The execution of Mahmud Muhammad Taha, the founder of the Republican Brothers, was ordered on the charge of apostasy (1984), offering a perfect illustration of the cynical use that the autocrat intended to make of the Bill. The fact is that "opposition to an Islamic government can be, and has been, defined as an act of apostasy," and this was directed not only against secular Muslims and other political opponents (e.g., communists), but also against other Islamic sects (such as the Khatmiyya, Ansar and Ansar-Sunna) that were regarded as a threat to the ruling clique (Johnson 2003, 129).

Brigadier (later General) Omar al-Bashir seized power in 1989. He immediately professed his goal of creating a theocratic rather than a democratic state, in the midst of the mounting

influence of the party of the Muslim Brothers. He rapidly re-created the apparatus of al-Nimeiri's police state in more extreme form, and promulgated the Sudanese Penal Code of 1991, with the aforementioned provision on the crime of apostasy. He also formed his own Islamic militia, the People's Defense Force (PDF), and its training was made compulsory for civil servants, teachers, students, and higher-education candidates. All rights of free expression and belief were outlawed, and public protests in objection to the government's policies were considered not only as a treasonable offence, but also as an insult to Islam (Johnson 2003, 128; Meredith 2005, 589; Jok 2007, 162).

The Arabization and Islamization policies of the previous junta were actively pursued, with dreadful consequences. People in the south were forced to renounce their faith and embrace Islam in order to be eligible for food aid (a major famine occurred in 1990-1), and their churches and schools were demolished under the pretext that they were built in violation of zoning regulations. In the Darfur, the government remained strangely passive when herders, both Muslim and Arab, armed themselves to force their way into the grazing lands occupied by farmers, mostly Muslim but non-Arab. Politicization of Islam and Arabism were the reaction of the government of Khartoum to the bloodshed in Darfur (Jok 2007, 89-90, 120-7) and, when the idea of United Nations involvement was initially proposed, it was immediately rejected as a "conspiracy against the Arab and Islamic world" (*Economist*, 4-10 March 2006: 39).

During the whole period 1990-1999, al-Turabi was a dominant force in Sudanese politics. He became the speaker of the national assembly and acted energetically to make Sudan a base for extremists from all over the Islamic world, including Osama bin-Laden (Jok 2007, 136-7). A clash eventually erupted between al-Bashir and al-Turabi, and the latter was dismissed. The fact remains that in Sudan "the bidding process forced religion to the centre of what had started as a conflict over the distribution of offices and economic resources" (Duffy Toft 2007, 125). The result has been catastrophic, as manifested in lethal famines and one of the longest and most brutal civil wars in the twentieth century.

Al-Bashir remained in power until as late as April 2019, when he was defeated by a national insurrection on the occasion of which the fragmentation of the forces of repression at his command came into the open. The fact is that besides the official national army of Sudan, al-Bashir controlled half a dozen semi-formal military outfits, from the much feared National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) to pro-government militias (such as the notorious Janjaweed responsible for mass rape and massacres in Darfur), which he tried to balance against each other in order to stay in power (de Waal 2015, 58).[11] The fights between soldiers affiliated

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[11] In Darfur, for example, there were violent incidents in which "government-armed paramilitaries fought against one another and against the army, police and security forces, and even different arms of the official security establishment fought one another" (de Waal 2015, 58).

with different parts of the state defense system eventually proved fatal to al-Bashir, yet not necessarily to the regime inherited from al-Nimeiri.

One may of course wonder how al-Bashir could create or let go such a self-defeating situation. A plausible explanation is that al-Bashir deliberately refrained from building a strong army because, having himself committed a coup, he lived in the constant fear of himself falling victim to one. This is congruent with our theory, in the sense that the fear of a military coup by the autocrat induces him to choose an army of moderate size (or moderate effectiveness) and to seek the support of religious authorities to complement military forces.

Algeria: From Boumedienne to Bouteflika (1965-2019)

BOUMEDIENNE AND CHADLI. General Houari Boumedienne seized power from Ben Bella in June 1965, supported by left-wing groups in and outside the National Liberation Front (FLN), which had won independence from French colonial power. Ideologically, he appeared in the garb of a socialist and anti-imperialist leader. Out of political opportunism, however, he quickly added another, ethno-religious, dimension to his public profile. He thus became the chief spokesman for a Muslim and Arab identity, as reflected in his political language infiltrated by the discourse of reformist Islam. He sealed a bizarre alliance between his left-oriented regime and the ulama represented by the Conseil Supérieur Islamique. This move is better understood in the light of the unpopular economic policies of Boumedienne, based on state control of the economy, as well as his strong-arm tactics and the corrupt patrimonial practices in which he and the clique around him were systematically involved. These misguided steps aroused a determined opposition led by intellectuals, students and trade unions. Represented, in particular, by the National Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) and the National Union of Algerian Students (UNEA), these oppositional forces seriously challenged his hold on political power during the year 1968 (Laabas and Bouhouche 2011).

To break the student movement, Boumedienne mobilized Islamist students of the El Hamel Brotherhood, inciting them to infiltrate the University of Alger and demonstrate their strength with impunity. In 1971, the UNEA was dissolved and transformed into the FLN's Student Youth wing after its leaders were arrested and exiled to the harsh prison of the South (Tamzali 2007, 199-202). More generally, Boumedienne used Islam to counteract any oppositional movement and to lock up the entire civil society. He thus gave freer rein to the ulama and the more reactionary clerics among them. In particular, he granted them the right to lead the Arabization of the country and to manage the education system (including the right to rewrite school textbooks). In a still more ominous move, he encouraged the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), whose more radical strand was headed by Ali Belhadj, a puritan cleric who called for

the formation of an Islamic state, if necessary by violent means (Bouamama 2000, ch. 3; Lapidus 2002, 599-600). According to Bachir Hadjadj, a close observer of the Algerian scene and himself a victim of the regime: "Such decisions, populist and demagogical, bore the seal of an illegitimate regime which exploited the religious feelings and emotions of the people of Algeria. The idea was to persuade common citizens that their religion was under threat and that the new laws enacted by the state were intended to preserve it (Hadjadj 2007, 436, our translation; see also Layachi 1995, 180).

The more puritan or so-called reformist members of the religious establishment did not wait long to exploit the window of opportunity opened by Boumedienne. They started to assert their views more aggressively and to meddle openly in matters of social policy (such as dress codes, amount of bride prices, and so forth). Moreover, they exerted considerable effort to implement the Arabization program and, toward the late 1970s, all education levels were completely Arabized. It is thus with the full support of the regime that the religious dignitaries started to spread the message of a conservative Islam through the creation of a wide network of Islamist institutes directly governed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Radical views inspired by the writings of Taymiyya, Qutb and Mâwdudi were diffused orderly (Chachoua 2001, 271-2).

Disastrous effects followed from the Arabization policy. Under-qualified teachers coming from the Quranic schools were suddenly promoted and many members of the intelligentsia left the country (Grandguillaume 1995). In addition, by imposing Arabic as the only language taught in official schools, it caused considerable frustration among the newly educated people who quickly found that they could not effectively compete with the Francophone elites for access to the highest positions in the state system. A fertile ground for future recruitment by Muslim extremists was thereby created.

The growing expression of puritanical views was part and parcel of the above Islamic drift. In particular, the idea of a 'renaissance' of the country based on the Islamic tradition and culture was explicitly taken over by the government (Chachoua 2001, 271-2). The Minister of Information and Culture, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, thus declared that "a cultural revolution implies a return to the sources," and that Islam represented the central value upon which to build the new Algerian society: "the other values owe their importance, their existence and their prestige only to their articulation with Islam or to the fact that they are inspired by or subordinated to Islam" (cited from Bouamama 2000, 163). Such views gained the highest official recognition when the Islamic character of the Algerian state was embedded most explicitly into the National Charter considered as the ideological and political program of revolutionary Algeria.

Revealingly, when he decided to revise the charter in 1986, President Chadli did not amend the passage dealing with the Islamic character of the Algerian state but was keen to suppress all references to socialism (Bouamama 2000, 161-2). This was no coincidence since, like

his predecessor, he deliberately chose to use Islamist forces to defeat the left opposition against his neo-liberal policies. Thus, when during the year 1986 and under the impulse of the students popular anger burst into the open and quickly took on an insurrectionary character, the Islamists tried to hijack the movement by themselves descending into the streets and clamoring for the establishment of an Islamist Republic in Algeria. Against all expectations, Chadli negotiated with their leaders as though they were the key actors behind these ominous events, therefore supplying a true "launching ramp" for the FIS. Although the new 1989 constitution was quite liberal in its terms, and explicitly banned the creation of political parties based on religion, the FIS was officially recognized on September 5, 1989. Such a show of tolerance was plausibly justified by the fact that the ideology of the FIS included the defense of private property and the recourse to the intervention of the IMF to help rescue Algeria from her economic and financial crisis. This posture provided a timely and badly needed support for Chadli's unpopular policies. The regime also relied heavily on the Algerian strand of the Muslim Brotherhood to counterbalance the influence of leftist and secular views on university campuses (Bouamama 2000, 214-8, 229).

The enactment of a rather reactionary Family Code in 1984 and the appointment as President of the University of Islamic Sciences (Constantine) of the Egyptian imam El-Ghazali who had belonged to the Muslim Brothers and justified violence against miscreants bore witness to the tacit condonation of the Islamists's extreme positions by the Chadli's regime. This happened in conditions where the regime was considerably weakened by serious infighting among the various wings of the FLN that literally broke the party apart (Laabas and Bouhouche 2011, 203). The outcome is well-known: the rise into prominence of the FIS through the ballot box and the increasing recourse to violent means, whether overt or covert, by its more militant factions (such as the so-called Afghans) and its military arm (the GIA, or Groupe Islamiste Armé).

A MILITARY TAKEOVER. Anticipating a sweeping victory of the FIS in the second round of the legislative elections of 1991, a small military clique, called the eradicationists, which refused any compromise with the Islamists, decided to enter more publicly into the stage of Algerian politics. They were behind the coup that overthrew President Chadli in September 1992. Following street protests, a curfew was enforced, the FIS was disbanded, its main leaders were arrested, and the mosques which refused to stop their political activities were closed (Bouamama 2000, 218-30). What was then launched was a full-scale war for control of the society in the name of secularism. By turning counter-insurgency over to village defense forces and militias, the new regime caused indiscriminate violence and numerous atrocities. Algeria thus fell into a nasty civil war, which was "perhaps more extreme and bitter than anything hitherto seen in the Muslim world" (Lapidus 2002, 600).

Nominal secularism came to be gradually re-established—but only in the shadow of continued military domination. War-weariness and a gradual reaction against the excesses of the Islamic movements helped secure growing support for the government, first under general Liamine Zeroual (who came to power in 1994), and then under Abdelaziz Bouteflika (who succeeded him in 2001). Not only middle-class bureaucrats and businessmen, but also moderate Muslim groups such as the Movement for an Islamic Society (HAMAS) rallied the cause of the military to rescue the country from chaos (Filiu 2015, 94-112).

How the Algerian military could gain so much influence and how a political regime openly leaning on them could acquire such entrenched power are questions that naturally spring to mind. An important part of the answer lies in the support given by France, which did not want to see the FIS to get hold of state power in its old colony (if only because it was keen to avoid the prospect of waves of migrants flowing to its borders), and in the military and intelligence assistance provided by Western powers in the context of the war against terrorism. This international war afforded a formidable protection and justification to authoritarian rulers determined to crush not only violent Islamist outfits but also any form of opposition, including moderate religious and non-religious groups or individuals.[12] Unfortunately, in the case of Algeria, Zeroual and above all Bouteflika exploited the sudden increase in the repressive power of their regime to engage in massive corruption and an unprecedented plunder of the country's riches (Malti 2020, 195-201). Bouteflika's rule lasted for as many as twenty years, and was abruptly ended in 2019 when his resignation was forced upon him under the pressure of a spontaneous protest movement ("hirak," or movement in Arabic) sparked by a farcical presidential election.

The events that followed attest that the change of a figurehead at the top does not mean that the nature of the regime and the deep state underpinning it are being transformed. The rise of General Gaid Salah reflected the increasing power of the military clan (or mafia as the population calls it) at the expense of the clan of the intelligence services led by General Toufik Mediene and allied to Saïd Bouteflika, the brother of the overthrown president. While Bouteflika had ended the longstanding role of the army as the main power-broker in the Algerian political system and conferred a prominent role to the intelligence services, his demise caused an

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[12] To convince the population of the necessity of a strong rule, the ruling clique did not hesitate to manipulate violent, allegedly Islamist groups to organize slaughters and nasty mass bombings, especially during the years 1997-1998 (Mellah 2020). Revealingly, the GIA, widely considered to be a branch of Al-Qaida, was called by ordinary people the "Islamist Groups of the Army," so evident was the infiltration of key intelligence officials in their structure (Gèze 2020, 54). The same applied to the "Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat" (GSPC, or Salafist Group for Preaching and Struggle), which relayed the GIA for executing the dirty work of the regime (it started in 1997 and was especially active in 2010). Finally, the intelligence service apparently placed one of its men at the head of the Islamist organization "Exil et Expiation" (Exile and Expiation) during the 1980s (Laribi 2007, 53).

inversion of that power balance within the ruling clique (Benderra et al. 2020). In other words, one clan used the opportunity of the "hirak" to dislodge the rival clan from the highest reaches of state power, thus hoping to appease the population. Behind the surface, however, the logic of the autocratic system and the co-opted nature of its narrow elite remained intact.