



CONCEPT NOTE

**INTER-REGIONAL CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT IN
NORTH AFRICA IN RELATION TO NETWORK
SUPPORT**

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North Africa has become increasingly a region that host, breed and export Islamic fundamentalism to the rest of the world. This phenomenon impacts on the region ability to North Africa region has vast natural resource as well as diverse and rich cultural and historical resources. However, economic development of the region since 1975 has lagged far behind average world economic growth rates. In addition, the region has a strategic location linking Africa to Europe as well as Asia. However, most countries have had major economic problems and many of them have not been successful in consolidating the various forces that had fought for independence. The economic crisis which started during the 1970s and gathered strength during the 1980s, generate a new type of dissent, articulated most vehemently by fundamentalist movements. As the rest of Africa's post-post-colonial state regimes, state institutions have become too exclusivist or predatory. Freedom of expression often restrained, opposition bodies were banned or prevented from organizing and hence had no choice but to go underground. Those denied power sharing and freedom had few reasons to form loyal oppositions, or abide by the rules of the game, and hence potent and unhealthy conflicts emerged. One of its manifestations is the fundamentalism tendencies. Furthermore, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has also contributed to the emergence, and restructuring of fundamentalist movements across the region.

These movements mostly seek to change the status quo through, subversion, propaganda, terrorism and other possible actions in between. Yet, they vary considerably in their approach, their ideologies, their modus operandi, their origins, their geographical, demographical popular support, their internal cohesion and their tendencies to splinter. Although violent religious fundamentalism represents a minority view, yet their threat is real within and outside the immediate. On the other hand some of them have sought to become overtly involved in the political process, while holding on to their pragmatic approach, with more or less success.

Decades of economic, political and religious conflict in the region have spawned the volatile environment that enables these groups to gradually build a loose, informal network of affiliates, operational partnerships and sympathizers around the globe. Such networks are fostered by two simultaneous trends: the first is the spread of fundamentalism ideologies and the second is the growth of transnational 'supporting' factors that guarantee illegal mobility and access to required resources. A new group of regional and global actors has emerged including financiers, document forgers, transportation experts, propagandists, cultural groups, operations experts, logisticians, and others, who connect these movements to the global network. Therefore, there is a need for a more comprehensive analysis that takes into account not only the development of the ideologies but essentially the actors that provide support to fundamentalist groups, and their social dynamics.

Each country has undertaken different approach and strategies to combat the threat of fundamentalist's destructive activities. These have ranged from attempting to address the ideological underpinnings, (i.e. the root causes behind the diverse discontents) to coaxing and cooption and repression. Thus far, most North African governments have exhibited the aptitude to at least reduce the level of fundamentalists operations. Yet, fundamentalists groups have also shown to be more skilled at inventing new ways to thrive and expand.

The tools necessary to effectively combat the threat of fundamentalist's destructive activities have undergone considerable changes. While in the past, states were the major influential bodies, currently, the global policies play a major role in terms of combating security threats no matter where. September 11, 2001 has resulted in a global alliance against terrorism. While these alliances are primarily directed towards eradicating malevolence, yet there is a need also to address

the root causes that generate and sustain these movements or as framed eloquently by (Stiglitz, 2002) there is a need for “a global alliance for reducing poverty and for creating a better environment, and alliance for creating a global society with greater social justice”.

These concerns are at the root of the Experts’ Roundtable Discussion to be held on the 17th and 18th of June 2009, Hilton Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). The title of the discussion will be: Inter-regional challenges of Islamic fundamentalist Movement in North Africa in relation to network support in terms of logistics, training, capacity development and joint activities. The Round Table will bring together ten prominent academics, researchers and practitioners in this field. Their contributions are expected to tackle two broad areas:

1. Fundamentalism in North Africa in terms of group’s ideologies, *modus operandi*, their origins, and state responses to them)
2. the national, regional and international factors that facilitate their operation and cooperation around the globe.

Objective and Rationale

The main objectives are:

- To understand the ideological foundation of fundamentalism in the region and its current trends.
- To assess the spectrum of international and regional factors and forces that sustain religious fundamentalism, including, porous borders, availability of small arms and explosives, as well as the advancement of technology and communication.
- To provide better understanding of the way convergence - the growing connection between different fundamentalist’s groups- is heightening the regional vulnerabilities to instability and violence.
- To provide an in depth analysis of the current measures by states (and regional actors) to deal with fundamentalism and to highlight any limitations that impede their efforts.

Expected results:

- Contribute to a better understanding of essential linkages between fundamentalist’s activities and security issues.
- Provide an understanding of the fundamentalist movements’ activities from both functional and country-specific perspectives.
- Contribute to insightful opinions for informing policy and practice of decisions across all sectors involved in the struggle against fundamentalism.
- Contribute to a better understanding of the evolution, appeal, and capacity of transnational fundamentalism groups in North Africa.

Expected beneficiaries

- Policy makers and programming officers in both government institutions and civil society organizations including the AU, RECs and African think-tanks and the international community.

The Papers and presenters

- Prof. Belkacem Iratni: The emergence of Radical Islam in Algeria: Domestic Challenges and External Entanglements
- Dr. Amel Boubekeur: The radical Islamist actors in Algeria 20 years after (former FIS activists, salafi wahabi and djihadi and their role in Europe and in the Maghreb.
- Prof. Sami Zemni: Moroccan Islamism between local participation and international Islamist networks of influence?
- Ms. Omayma Abdel-Latif: The role of women activists in radical organizations with special reference to women activists in Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt
- H. Samira Chouachi: The fundamentalist movements in Tunisia
- Mr. Seyid Wild Abah: Fundamentalist movements in Mauritania
- Mr. Muhammad Kabir Isa Fundamentalist movements in Libya
 - Prof. Abdel Gaffar M Ahmed: the development of fundamentalist in Sudan.
 - Mr. Berouk Mesfin: An Islamist Threat in the Horn of Africa: Al Itihad Al Islamiya Revisited.
 - Mr. Hugh Roberts: How the state, non-state and political actors responded to the challenge posed by to extremist movements
 - Prof. M. Salih: Blurring Geopolitics: Party Politics and Extremist Islamist Organizations in North Africa