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## DISQUIETING ISLAMIST “ARAB SPRING” IN TUNISIA & LIBYA, AND SADISTIC ISLAMIST INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA, NIGER & BEYOND

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## ENNAHDA CLEARS THE DECKS TO DOMINATE

*Sana Ajmi*

[\*The Daily Star\*, Dec. 11, 2012](#)

Members of Tunisia’s National Constituent Assembly – the democratically elected body responsible for drafting the country’s constitution – put forward a new bill on Nov. 23 which would exclude politicians once affiliated with the former ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) from political

life for 10 years. Entitled “The Protection of the Revolution,” the measure – proposed and supported by Ennahda parliamentarians – is being seen by some as a tactic to hinder an opposition front to Ennahda and ensure the Islamists’ dominance in the upcoming election. Its supporters, however, see it as a protective measure necessary to safeguard the revolution.

Sahbi Atig, the head of Ennahda’s parliamentary bloc, explained that the bill would forbid any politician who had served in the RCD from running for president and participating in political life. Ennahda controls 89 out of 217 seats in Constituent Assembly and can easily pass the bill by an overwhelming majority – with the support of four other major blocs backing the measure: This includes the Fidelity to the Revolution, Congress For the Republic, Freedom and Dignity, and the Democratic Bloc – as well as some independent parliamentarians.

Farida Laabidi, head of the government’s Commission on Rights and Liberties (and a member of Ennahda himself) explained that “Through this law we will guarantee that those who served under the former repressive and corrupt regime will not rule the country again.”

This envisioned ban on former RCD members has sparked controversy particularly within the ranks of center-left parties in the opposition, a number of whose members were associated with the old regime. Parties like the newly formed Nidaa Tunis (as well others like Al-Moubadara and Al-Watan) have condemned the proposed bill. Khmais Ksila, a member of the Constituent Assembly representing Nidaa Tunis and who is formerly a member of the center-left Ettakatol Party (currently in coalition with Ennahda), described the proposed law as “anti-revolution”; the bill would render certain Tunisians second-class citizens based on political affiliations, and that these kinds of laws only encourage a revenge mentality among Tunisians and threatens to “resort to international institutions to invalidate it.”

Analysts have argued that Tunisia’s transitional democratic process cannot be based on exclusion. Kais Saiyed, a constitutional law expert at the Faculty of Political Science in Tunis, believes that proposing such a law contradicts the principles of democracy: “It is up to the people to decide who to exclude from the political,” he says. Furthermore, other figures – like Kamel Morjane, the former minister of foreign affairs under Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and the leader of Al-Moubadara, and Beji Caid Essebsi, the octogenarian head of Nidaa Tunis and interim prime minister during the transition (and also former interior minister under Habib Bourghuiba) – all see this as a purely politically motivated attack to eliminate parties and coalitions capable of competing with Ennahda in the upcoming election.

Nidaa Tunis has a wide range of secular liberals formerly associated with the RCD – which claimed a membership of 2 million people before its dissolution. Many of these saw in Essebsi’s party an opportunity to revive their political chances and perhaps even regain their lost status. Nidaa Tunis, which aims to unite Tunisia’s non-Islamist parties in a national unity movement, was perceived as a way to “protect” them from religious extremism and to uphold a modernist interpretation of Islam initiated under the Bourghuiba and Ben Ali regimes – which these former RCD-associates see Ennahda failing to do, if not supporting explicitly. Essebsi himself is especially outspoken in his criticism of the ruling coalition for its “failure” to protect its people from religious extremism and Salafism.

The pragmatism of which Essebsi’s party boasts and its espousal of “modernist” values – coupled with Ennahda’s perceived failures to deal with pressing socio-economic issues – have all given Nidaa Tunis an edge and a chance to have a strong showing in the coming election. According to a recent poll conducted by the Tunisian poll office and 3C Etude, Ennahda and Nidaa Tunis rank close in popularity.

The party has also announced an initiative to merge with the ranks of other center-left parties – among which include Al-Joumhour, Al-Massar, and the Popular Movement, as well as others – in anticipation of the 2013 parliamentary and presidential elections. Essebsi and his followers believe that the only way to counter Ennahda is through a united opposition front.

Ennahda's fear of a more robust opposition in the upcoming election may well be the motive behind its support of the proposed bill. And whether or not a concern for the rise of former-regime sympathizers is founded, a bill based on political exclusion and score-settling does not bode well for Tunisia's fragile political process. By pushing it forward, Ennahda is doing exactly what it claims to protect the revolution from: creating a one-party system and attempting to ensure an opposition vacuum – bringing the ruling party more in line with the RDC than it would perhaps like to admit.

*Sana Ajmi is a Tunisian journalist and writer. This commentary first appeared at Sada, an online journal published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.*

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## **BOKO HARAM'S GROWING PRESENCE IN NIGER**

*Jacob Zenn*

*[Jamestown Foundation](#), Nov. 2, 2012*

The recent arrests of Boko Haram members in the Niger town of Zinder come at a time when the Islamist movement's fighters are taking advantage of the porosity of the Nigeria-Niger border region to avoid security crackdowns in Yobe, Borno and other states of northeastern Nigeria. On September 27, a Nigerien security official reported that five Boko Haram members were arrested in Zinder, one of the rare times that Boko Haram members have been arrested outside of Nigeria since Boko Haram launched an insurgency in September, 2010 to dismantle Nigeria's secular regime and "entrench a just Islamic government". The only similar case in Niger occurred last February, when 15 suspected Boko Haram members were arrested in Diffa, Niger's easternmost city, allegedly planning to plant bombs in several of the city's public places. Diffa and Zinder (the largest city in southern Niger) both border Nigeria's Yobe State, where Boko Haram—then popularly known as "the Nigerian Taliban"—established a base nicknamed "Afghanistan" in a village three miles south of the border with Niger in 2003. Diffa is believed to be a principal refuge for Nigerian Boko Haram fighters.

On both sides of the Nigerian-Nigerien border, as well as in northern Cameroon and western Chad, Sunni Islam and the Hausa language are predominant. However, there are sizable minorities of Shuwa Arabic and Kanuri speakers in Diffa, western Chad and Nigeria's far northeastern Borno State, which has been Boko Haram's main area of operations since the start of the insurgency. These cross-border ties help unite the peoples of the border region.

The movement of Boko Haram members into Niger follows a series of blows inflicted on the movement by Nigerian security services in recent weeks:

On September 24, Nigeria's Joint Task Force (JTF) killed 35 Boko Haram members and seized ammunition and weapons in house-to-house searches in Yobe;

Also on September 24, the Special Security Squad launched "Operation Restore Sanity" in Mubi, Adamawa State, which borders Borno to the south. 156 Boko Haram suspects were arrested, four of whom were believed to be unit commanders. A top commander, Abubakr Yola (a.k.a Abu Jihad) was killed in the operation;

On October 15 the Joint Task Force in Borno State killed 24 Boko Haram members during a series of night raids in Maiduguri; and

On October 20, security forces arrested a wanted Boko Haram leader, Shuaibu Muhammad Bama, in Maiduguri at a house owned by his uncle, Senator Ahmad Zanna, who represents Borno Central.

Nigeria shares approximately 2,000 miles of border with Niger, Cameroon and Chad, but, according to the Nigerian Immigration Service, only 84 border points are staffed by immigration officials. Nigeria has previously closed the border after major Boko Haram attacks, such as the Christmas Day 2011 church bombings in Madalla, a city outside of Abuja. The Borno State National Service Immigration Comptroller said at the time that such measures were the only way to “prevent the entry and exit of suspected Boko Haram sect members and illegal aliens that have no travel or residence permit documents to remain in the country”.

Due to the linguistic and cultural ties along the 950-mile Nigerian-Nigerien border, Nigerien Muslims can easily cross the border and assimilate into Boko Haram’s ranks. According to local reports in Niger, many Nigeriens have joined Boko Haram because of economic rather than religious or ideological motives. Unlike northern Nigeria, Niger does not have a legacy of religious extremism, but it is one of the world’s least developed and most impoverished nations.

With an estimated 200,000 herdsmen and farmers in Niger subsisting on Red Cross food rations due to severe drought, the \$30 that Boko Haram offers its members for killing Nigerian security officers—or the \$60 it offers for also stealing the officer’s weapon—can be an effective recruiting tool. The hundreds of thousands of dollars that Boko Haram has acquired in several dozen bank robberies in the past two years, can provide additional economic motivation for the poor to join the insurgency, whether or not they share the same motivations as Boko Haram leader Abu Shekau. If such reports are true, the poor Nigeriens who are taking up arms for Boko Haram may join other illicit economic activities such as selling black market gasoline and cigarettes. In February, captured Boko Haram spokesman Abu Qaqa told interrogators that Nigeriens were among the groups commonly chosen by Boko Haram to carry out suicide bombings.

Boko Haram’s infiltration of the immigration service also facilitates its operations in the border region. Two days after the arrests of the five Boko Haram members in Zinder, the Nigerian Army announced it had arrested a Nigerian immigration official posing as an army officer. Under interrogation, the official confessed to having been trained along with 15 other Boko Haram members in weapons handling, assassinations and special operations in Niger, and named other officials who were conspiring with Boko Haram. The October 19 killing of a customs official and his son in Potiskum, Yobe State, by Boko Haram members was likely intended to coerce other officials to comply with – or at least not obstruct – Boko Haram’s efforts to infiltrate the immigration service. Boko Haram has similarly assassinated dozens of Islamic clerics, politicians and journalists who disagreed with Boko Haram’s ideology and militant activities in order to deter other influential figures from speaking out.

Since April, there have been reports of several hundred Nigerian and Nigerien Boko Haram members helping al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al-Din and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) consolidate control of northern Mali after the three militias expelled the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), the ethno-national secular Tuareg militia. As a result, the territory of Niger separating northern Nigeria from northern Mali—only 300 miles across at its shortest point, Sokoto to Gao—is becoming an important area of transit for the insurgents. Niger is the one country of these three that has thus far avoided an Islamist insurgency on its territory, but Niger has a restive Tuareg population in the northern Agadez region bordering northern Mali and an increasing Boko Haram presence in its southern border cities—both representing potential sources of instability. Given this pressure, Niger and Nigeria agreed on October 18—after

four years of discussion—to deploy joint patrols along their border in order to prevent the Boko Haram presence in southern Niger from growing into a cross-border insurgency.

*Jacob Zenn is a legal adviser and international affairs analyst who focuses on the Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria.*

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## LIBYANS SAY SHARIA WILL BE LAW OF THE LAND

*Jamie Dettmer*

*[The Daily Beast](#), Dec 11, 2012*

“Egypt is Islamic, it will not be secular!” Islamist supporters of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi have taken to chanting this slogan during street protests in Cairo. While the mantra fills opponents of the Egyptian president with dread, as does a Morsi-backed draft Constitution ensuring laws and rights will be strictly subordinated to sharia law, such chants would hardly prove controversial in Libya, Egypt’s neighboring Arab-Spring country—nor would they propel tens of thousands onto the streets of Tripoli or Benghazi to express dissent.

The constitutional debate that Libya is likely to have in the coming months—once its new rulers have decided on how to proceed with a draft—is going to be different from Egypt’s, and less about whether Islamic law should figure in the Constitution. Across the political spectrum, there’s a general acceptance that the country’s new laws must reflect religion and that sharia will figure prominently—only a small minority question this.

During the campaign for the country’s elections last July, party leaders—even those from moderate parties, such as Mahmoud Jibril, leader of the National Forces Alliance—acknowledged that sharia would significantly influence any Constitution. New laws should have a “reference to sharia,” Jibril told *The Daily Beast*, arguing, “Sharia law, when it was understood in the proper way, managed to create one of the great civilizations in human history. The problem is not with sharia or Islam; the problem is with the interpretation of sharia.”

Even among women agitating for a greater role in public and political life here, there’s agreement that sharia law should be at the heart of the country’s new Constitution. The only disputes are about the drafting process; whether the members of a 60-strong drafting panel should be elected or appointed by the country’s new Parliament, the General National Congress; and whether sharia should be the “only source of law” or a “principal source of law,” with the latter allowing greater possibility of adopting laws used in non-Muslim countries.

“Libyans wouldn’t accept a Constitution that isn’t informed by Sharia,” says 20-year-old Issraa Murabit, a second-year medical student from the town of Zawiyah and vice president of *The Voice of Libyan Women*, an NGO campaigning for greater women’s rights.

She says that a majority of women involved with civil-society activism are broadly comfortable with sharia and don’t see any contradiction between Islamic law and their demands for gender equality and a bigger role for women in Libyan society. Some women activists argue that women’s rights are, in certain cases, better protected under sharia than they are in the West. They cite property protections afforded to divorced spouses. “In the West, they think we are the oppressors of women and they have the best rights for women, but we have a different perspective,” says Murabit, who was raised in Canada until her early teens. “Islam doesn’t undermine women’s rights—the problem is with Muslim men and how they try to use sharia against women.”

For Western commentators, the mere mention of Islamic law prompts, at best, suspicion and oftentimes pure horror. “A dangerous pattern is emerging,” Bonnie Erbe, host of the PBS show, *To the Contrary*, wrote recently. “Islamic countries more often than not replace tyrants with religious dictators who can become even more despotic than their predecessors. Look at Iran. Unfortunately, look at Egypt.”

Libyan activists say such sentiments tarnish the Arab Spring and that the problem with Morsi’s draft Constitution lies with the underhand manner of its drafting process, involving a lack of consultation by the country’s Islamist-dominated Constituent Assembly. Islamists railroaded approval of the final draft in an all-night session on November 30....

When Libya’s government—led by the new prime minister, Ali Zeidan, and the country’s Congress—eventually decide on the process for the drafting the Libyan constitution, activists warn that Morsi’s example shouldn’t be followed. “If they are inclusive and consult and have women among the drafters, there won’t be a problem,” says Murabit.

One key area of contention could be over who interprets the Sharia provisions included in any Libyan constitution. Morsi’s Egyptian opponents take issue with the draft Constitution’s provision that Muslim clerics will be Sharia’s arbiters. Under the charter, clerics from Egypt’s conservative Al-Azhar University are “to be consulted on any matters related to Sharia.” Libyan women activists say no religious body or figures should be allowed under Libya’s Constitution oversight of the country’s laws—only the courts should decide. Others argue that religious arbiters would be acceptable as long as women religious scholars were also included.

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## ON TOPIC

**Tunisia Battles Over Pulpits, and Revolt’s Legacy:** [Neil MacFarquhar, \*New York Times\*, Nov. 11, 2012](#)—On the Friday after Tunisia’s president fell, Mohamed al-Khelif mounted the pulpit of this city’s historic Grand Mosque to deliver a full-throttle attack on the country’s corrupt culture, to condemn its close ties with the West and to demand that a new constitution implement Shariah, or Islamic law.

**Boko Haram’s Dangerous Expansion into Northwest Nigeria:** [Jacob Zenn, \*Combatting Terrorism Center\*, Oct 29, 2012](#)—During the past year, the Nigerian militant group Boko Haram has expanded from its traditional area of operations in northeastern Nigeria’s Borno State and is now capable of conducting attacks across a 900-mile breadth of northern Nigeria, including in the strategic state of Sokoto.

**Nigeria’s Most Sadistic Killers: Why is Boko Haram not Designated a Terrorist Group?:** [Eli Lake, \*The Daily Beast\*, Oct 16, 2012](#)—The group is one of the deadliest organizations in Africa, accused of killing at least 1,500 people between June 2009 and September 2012. Its victims are the cops, Christians, and those Muslims it sees as betraying the true faith. It is alleged to sabotage oil pipelines, take down automated teller machines, and rip up telephone lines in a violent jihad against the West.

**List of Designated Terrorist Organizations:** Wikipedia—This is a list of designated terrorist organizations by national governments, former governments and inter-governmental organizations, where the proscription has a significant impact on the group's activities.

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