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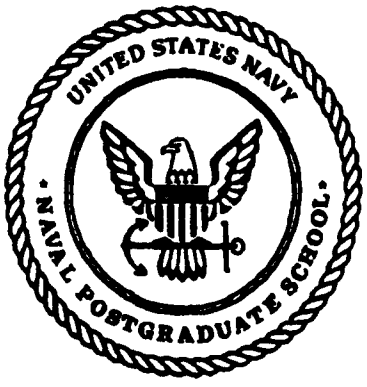




# THESIS

TUNISIA

ISLAM AS A POLITICAL FORCE

by

Jayne E. Garland

June, 1992

Thesis Advisor: Ralph H. Magnus

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In the wake of the Iranian revolution, a number of Middle Eastern countries are experiencing a resurgence of populist Islam. Described as "fundamentalist", these movements appear to be the most serious threat to the governments of these countries. In Tunisia, the government has virtually halted its promised democratic reforms claimig that the Islamists will use the political process to gain control of the government and that they are violent radicals attempting to overthrow the government.

This thesis argues that the Islamic movement in Tunisia is neither revolutionary, radical, nor fundamentalist. Islam has jplayed an important role historically in the creation of Tunisian nationalism and the current movement is a political movememt attempting to reform a repressive, unresponsive regime.

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Tunisia:
Islam as a Political Force

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## ABSTRACT

In the wake of the Iranian revolution, Middle Eastern countries are experiencing a resurgence of populist Islam. Described as "fundamentalist", these movements appear to be serious threats to the governments of these countries. In Tunisia, the government has virtually halted its promised democratic reforms claiming that the Islamists will use the political process to gain control of the government and that they are violent radicals attempting to overthrow the government.

This thesis argues that the Islamic movement in Tunisia is neither revolutionary, radical, nor fundamentalist. Islam has played an important role historically in the creation of Tunisian nationalism and the current movement is a political movement attempting to reform a repressive, unresponsive regime.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Following World War II, North Africa was viewed as critical to the defense of Europe against a Soviet invasion. Direct U.S. involvement in the region, however, was limited to Libya as Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia were still French colonies. Following Tunisia's independence in 1956, U.S. aid was limited as Tunisia was still viewed as an exclusive French preserve. During the Kennedy administration this position changed and, with a significant increase in U.S. economic aid, Tunisia embarked on a modernization program. Tunisia's President Habib Bourguiba, decidedly pro-Western in his views, eschewed Nasser's pan-Arabism and rejected Islam as a backward influence on his efforts to modernize Tunisia. Described as a "friend" of the U.S., Tunisia was held up as a model of modernization for other Arab and third world countries.

Tunisia took a back seat in U.S. policy during the 1970s as events in the Middle East erupted, although it was still considered relatively important (in part due to the loss of Wheeler Air Base in Libya) to the U.S.'s Middle East policy and the defense of the Mediterranean. Under Reagan's anti-communist and anti-Libya policies, Tunisia's position in U.S. policy rose again. By the 1980s,

U.S./Tunisian policy was essentially twofold: denying Soviet influence or intervention in the Mediterranean area; and ensuring the territorial integrity of Tunisia, particularly against Libya. Although Tunisia was experiencing serious economic difficulties in the 1980s, Reagan's emphasis on military build-up resulted in U.S. military assistance soon surpassing economic assistance. Even so, Tunisia played a minor role in Reagan's global strategy. As Ambassador Richard Parker noted in the mid-1980s:

> "An area of critical interest once in American history, North Africa does not bear heavily on the consciousness of the average American today. U.S. policy makers are usually too preoccupied with the Middle East, Europe, or Asia to devote sufficient time to it, and one looks in vain for meaningful coverage of North African events in the U.S. press." [Ref. 20, pg. ix]

The collapse of the Soviet Union, coupled with Tunisia's small size and limited military capabilities have raised questions concerning Tunisia's continuing importance to the U.S. Opinions among analysts vary. Some hold that Tunisia no longer has strategic importance to the U.S. while others claim it is critical in light of U.S./Libyan relations. These views are, unfortunately, based on President Reagan's foreign policy paradigm that might makes right and a nation's greatness is measured by its military strength.

Tunisia is both an African state and an Arab state. Much of the world's oil comes from Africa and the Middle East, yet as the Gulf War and current events demonstrate, these regions face ongoing threats to their stability. Tunisia is influenced by and influences other countries of the region. One of the greatest apparent threats faced by the region today is Islamic "fundamentalism".

Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the majority of Westerners have associated Islamic movements with terrorism, radicalism, and hostage taking. The term "fundamentalist" is used broadly, and frequently inaccurately, to characterize these movements. Accordingly, Islamists are viewed as representing a society which is backward and whose intransigent religious beliefs prevent them from ever accepting modernizing changes. Anti-Western sentiments are perceived as irrational and evidence of a conscious unwillingness to form productive ties with the West. This view of Islam has its roots in the writings of European academics of the nineteenth century who, in short, justified colonization as a means of enlightening a backward, barbaric people. As one of the most influential theorists of colonialism, Jules Harmand, wrote:

> "We must therefore accept as our basic principle the fact that a hierarchy of races and civilizations exists, and that we belong to the highest race, the highest civilization. But we must realize, too, that our superiority imposes important duties on us, as well as giving us certain rights. For we are superior not only in

> the economic and military, but especially in the moral, sense. That fact constitutes our main justification for the conquest of native peoples." [Ref. 74, pg. 4]

The reassertion of Islam as a new social and political ideology bears four major characteristics:

1. it is a force of international appeal and is evident in societies with widely varying economic and political systems;

2. it is a growing, powerful force within both the Shiite and Sunni schools of Islam;

3. it is not a monolithic, formally organized, or centrally controlled movement but rather a loose coalition of highly diffuse groups that manifest themselves differently from country to country and from time to time; and

4. it is primarily a populist movement as opposed to an official or establishment phenomenon. [Ref. 36, pg. 130]

Tunisia's classification as a democracy by the West has been largely based on the fact that Tunisia holds local and national elections. However, until the early 1980s, the ruling party, the Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD), was the only legal party. In 1974, Bourguiba had been elected president for the life of the party which, coupled with Bourguiba's need for absolute control of the government, did not allow for the recognition of opposition parties.

Bourguiba's decision in April 1981 to finally include these parties in elections was prompted by increasing criticism of the government and an effort to stem the growing popularity of the Tunisian populist Islamic movement which named itself the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI). The rules for recognition, however, made it difficult for the opposition parties to participate and the government immediately cracked down on the MTI, claiming the movement was attempting to overthrow the government. Although the U.S. continued to voice its support for Tunisia, concerns were growing over the aging president's succession and increasing reports of repression and human rights violations. Repression of the MTI continued to increase until 1987 when Bourguiba was removed from office by his Prime Minister Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, a brigadier general and former head of Tunisia's secret police.

In two visits to the U.S., Ben Ali assured the U.S. of Tunisia's continued support. In Tunisia, he embarked on a sweeping program of political liberalization. This did much to alleviate U.S. concerns. By mid-1989, however, as Ben Ali was implementing essential economic reforms, his popularity was waning. Politicai dissension had not been curbed and he appeared increasingly autocratic. Repressive measures were reinstituted against the MTI and other critics of the government and the political climate of Tunisia has

become as oppressive as it was in the later years of Bourguiba's presidency. The primary goal of the government of Tunisia continues to be the elimination of the Islamic "threat".

This thesis will argue that, contrary to commonly held views, the Islamic movement in Tunisia is not a movement attempting to replace Tunisia's secularist government with a fundamentalist ideology. Instead, Islam has historically played an instrumental role in the creation of Tunisian nationalism and serves as a political vehicle for challenging corrupt and unresponsive governments.

## II. THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

### A. THE APPEAL OF ISLAM

The underlying appeal of a recourse to Islam as the basis of dissent is fourfold. First, Islam is venerated as the focus of Middle East identity and the source of the socio-political framework passed down from earlier generations. Secondly, while modern liberal nation-building commenced with the depoliticization of Islam, the great periods of Islamic history were those in which the caliph was the real ruler and the empire was an Islamic political state. Militancy thus acquired the stature of a problem-solving doctrine, given the failures of the secular elites. The third reason relates to the Prophet's particular dislike of idolatry--his rejection of false gods and values. The image of Islam as a purifying religion has popular appeal today because to many people the Middle East and North Africa seem "polluted" by Western secular culture. This culture is identified as anti-religious and anti-social in the sense that it rejects all the moral principles upon which the unified Islamic community was traditionally based. Finally, the use of Islam as the framework of dissent seems to offer a way of over-

coming the paralyzing split between the Westernized culture of the elite and the popular culture of the masses. [ 73, pp. 127-8]

## B. SIX MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

Although there are hundreds of different Populist Islamic groups and organizations, all share the following six major characteristics:

1. All believe in the centrality of the Prophet Muhammad, the Quran, and the Sunna (the body of Islamic customs and practices based on the Prophet's words and deeds);

2. All stress the principles of equality and social justice;

3. All oppose corrupt and repressive government;

4. All condemn external, imperial intervention in the affairs of their societies;

5. All demonstrate a complete dedication to their principles and are often willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for them, and;

6. All believe that the only ideological system that will enable them to achieve these goals is the Islamic system. [Ref. 36, pg. 131]

## C. THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The Western held theory of "Oriental despotism" espouses the ideas that Muslim societies are lead by patrimonial leaders and bureaucracies whose absolute domination of the state is prevented by the segmentation of society into smaller self-contained units (tribes, clans, etc.). In such a setting, revolts are infrequent and of little importance. Additionally, it is understood that rebellion is not sanctioned within Islamic tradition. [Ref. 4, pg. 334]

On the contrary, an Islamic state is not an absolute or sovereign entity. It is subject to the higher norms of the *shariah* (Islamic law) that represent the will of God. Politically this rules out all forms of absolutism. Legally it paves the way for the development of constitutional law, a set of norms limiting state powers. In fact, the Islamic tradition of rules limiting the power of the sovereign is much older than the concept of constitutional law in the secular West. [Ref. 3, pg. 246]

Examples of the obligations of the ruler to the people as dictated by the *shariah* include the prohibition on usury, the assurance of the supply of grain to the market at reasonable prices and the insistence that only Quranically sanctioned taxes be imposed. When economic justice is flagrantly violated, Muslims have invoked their religiously sanctioned right to rebel. Such a

rebellion occurred in Tunisia in 1864 (discussed in Part III) and was analogous to the Western European Christian notion of a moral economy and the eighteenth-century English riots. [Ref. 4, pg. 335]

The fact that Muslim governments often responded to the demands of such rebellions challenges the view of despotic leaders and submissive masses. Further, those leaders who did not respond were regarded as illegitimate.

## D. THE ECONOMY

It is the concept of a moral economy which prompts many Muslims to reject both the Western model of individual capitalism and the Socialist model of state capitalism. The priorities of capitalism which are materialistic, are basically different from those of Islam, and have aspects which permit wholesale exploitation. Economic activities, according to Islamic thought, must be conducted for the good of all and it is the duty of every man and woman to participate in economically productive activity. The *shariah* provides guidance on savings and the investment of surplus earnings into the process of production in the form of capital to further social productivity. [Ref. 13, pp. 271-2]

## E. FUNDAMENTALISM

Fundamentalism, by definition, was a phenomenon occurring in certain periods of Western Christian history which tried to impose a literalist interpretation of the Bible. The fundamentalist groups in Christian history came up with many new interpretations and strange religio-political positions and are generally regarded as reactionary and unrealistic. In contrast, the Islamic resurgence is a future-oriented movement. [Ref. 1, pp. 225-6] Islamism is not, for the most part, a blanket rejection of modernization. It is an attempt to create a social moralism to replace the traditional moral system which has been destroyed by modernization.

The term fundamentalism is used by non-Muslims to refer to the system of *taqlid.* From its beginnings, the practice of Islam included the process of deducing laws and regulations from the original texts of the Quran and Sunna--a process which involved a high degree of reasoning and interpretation--known as *ijtihad.* Toward the end of the eleventh century, many sections of the Muslim community, especially jurists, became more and more anxious about the ever present tendency of despotic rulers to manipulate *ijtihad* for their own purposes. They were also anxious about the corrosive effects of foreign concepts and ideas which *ijtihad* inevitably drew into Muslim thought. Those anxieties caused the emergence of the

*taqlid* (to follow or imitate) which discouraged *ijtihad* and required succeeding generations of jurists and lawyers to recognize the authority of the deductions, interpretations and reasonings of the first generations of jurists as final. Over time, *taqlid* in the Sunni community reigned supreme and jurists and lawyers were no longer allowed any initiative. [Ref. 2, pp. 234-5] It is through the revival of the practice of *ijtihad* that the Islamists hope to bring Islam and Islamic societies into congruence with the modern world.

In another way, fundamentalism is used to describe a belief system in which the social and the political are inseparable. When fundamentalism is state-sponsored, it focuses mainly on the social aspects and is used as a way of preserving the political status quo. In the cases of Saudi Arabia and Iran, this includes social pressures such as forcing women to wear veils and making men go to mosques. The purpose is to invade the private sphere of the citizens and keep them from questioning the government's legitimacy. While some fundamentalists are extremely political, their agenda habitually confuses political and social issues. That is, they want the political power to force their social norms on everyone. [Ref. 25]

## III. TUNISIAN REFORMS IN THE MODERN ERA

### A. EARLY REFORMS 1759-1814

Although a part of the Ottoman empire since the sixteenth century, the sultan's authority over Tunisia and the other Barbary states of North Africa, was never very imposing. In the eighteenth century, North African Corsairs recognized the sultan's overlordship only to the extent of sending him an annual token gift. [Ref. 5, pg. 246] The image of North Africa engraved in most European history books is that of the Barbary pirates and the sin, wickedness, and vice in the Maghrebi port cities, but do not mention European privateering activities against North African vessels. Similarly, European history books make no mention of the flourishing commercial relations that existed between North Africa and Europe in the eighteenth century. The U.S. holds a similar perception. [Ref. 33, pg. 13]

In the late eighteenth century, the Tunisian economy went into decline. From 1784 to 1860 there were repeated crop failures and outbreaks of plague. At the same time, Europeans turned the terms of trade in the Mediterranean to the disadvantage of Tunisia. The industrial revolution and the tremendous increase of European

production undermined Tunisian industries. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century the most highly capitalized and profitable Tunisian industry was in decline. At the same time the price of olive oil declined drastically, and Tunisia was left importing manufactured and luxury products in an unfavorable balance-of payments situation. [Ref. 6, pg. 396]

During their combined reigns from 1759 to 1814, both 'Ali II and Hammuda Bey took a direct interest in developing agriculture and correcting government abuses which had hampered its growth. 'Ali abolished the *mushtara* system in which the state bought crops from peasants before harvest at low prices. In bad harvest years, the peasants often had to sell their cattle and equipment to repay the state. He also reformed the land-lease laws which had prevented peasants from surrendering their leases, even if the land no longer yielded enough crops to pay the lease, until others made higher bids for them. The new laws called for a fixed-term lease which the peasant, upon expiration of the lease, could freely choose to retain or surrender. [Ref. 7, pg. 180]

Under Hammuda Bey, Tunisia reemerged as a Mediterranean power, able to threaten piracy to force the small European states to give him fixed annual presents. He was careful not to burden the treasury with his personal expenditure, encouraged industry by

wearing locally produced garments, and encouraged his ministers and government officials to take an interest in agriculture by riding every week to his estate to supervise work in person. He delegated to the *ulama* the tasks of administering justice, but looked personally into complaints about the conduct of government agents. He established direct personal contacts with the chiefs of the tribes and consulted them in affairs of their people. And he encouraged his provincial governors to express their opinions about state matters freely even when critical of his actions. [Ref. 7, pg. 181]

## B. MODERNIZATION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

These improvements, unfortunately, did not last as subsequent beys became removed from their people and their extravagances generated repeated increases in taxes. As the beys found their authority declining in the face of the growing political and commercial power of Europe and the deteriorating social and economic situation within the country, they attempted to deal with the situation by building up a modern military and civil service. France's annexation of Algeria in 1834 followed by the reassertion of Turkish sovereignty in Tripoli in 1837 concerned Ahmed Bey (1837-55) who intended to preserve Tunisia's autonomy from the Ottoman Empire and did not want to create a situation which would

give an excuse for foreign intervention in Tunisia. Slavery was completely abolished and privateering suppressed in response to European objections. [Ref. 8, pg. 27-28]

Ahmed Bey founded a military academy which he staffed with European advisers, equipped his soldiers with new weapons and uniforms and attempted to create a modern navy. His successors, Mahammad Bey (1855-9) and al-Sadiq Bey (1859-81) were not as enthusiastic about reforms as Ahmad, but they were convinced by advisers and pressured by foreign diplomats into making some significant technical and constitutional advances. [Ref. 9, pp. 226-7]

In 1857 Muhammad Bey attempted to introduce a positive reform plan which stated as a principle that all individuals had the right to liberty and security before the law and that there should be complete equality between Muslims and non-Muslims. [Ref. 10, pg. 129] He also extended to Europeans the right to own land in Tunisia.

The latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the Islamic world witnessed the rise of a number of Islamic reformers, or "early modernists", struggling to give form to the regional political entities emerging from the crumbling empire. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe had produced the ideological basis for political legitimacy independent of religious institutions. Independent nation-states broke the economic and

political bonds which kept them subservient to the central religiously legitimized powers, and at the same time, struggled to replace the universal Church as the community of highest allegiance. No longer did rulers derive their legitimacy from God or through God's representatives. Leadership was autonomous of the Church. It was the challenge of these same issues that caused the rise of the early modernists in the Ottoman Empire. [Ref. 32, pp. 284, 286-7]

A Tunisian constitution, the Arab world's first, was drafted in 1861 creating a consultative assembly as well as a penal court and a court of appeals. Technical reforms during this period included roads, railways, telegraph lines, a restoration of the Roman aqueduct from Zaghouan to Tunis, sewers, quarantines, and vaccinations. [Ref. 9. pg. 227]

The constitution converted Tunisia, in theory, into a limited monarchy. In practice, however, the experiment failed and the constitution was suspended four years after its promulgation following an uprising in 1864. The Tunisian reformers were few, and without the support of the consuls of the economically and militarily more powerful European countries, they had no means of getting the Bey or his prime minister, who were unwilling to concede any of their authority, to comply with the decisions of the supreme council. The European powers, especially France, however,

had no interest in fostering political reforms which did not benefit them directly or which might help improve Tunisia's ability to govern itself more effectively.

The leading *ulama* of the country disapproved of the constitutional innovation which deprived them of their traditional position as counselors of the Bey and implied that political authority could be legitimized by a means other than the upholding of Islamic law. They expressed their disapproval by withdrawing from the commission which drafted the constitution and remained aloof from the process. [Ref. 7, pp. 278-79]

The 1864 rebellion occurred in response to the brutal fiscal impositions of the government and the opening of the Tunisian economy. It came about as the culmination of a half century of governmental reforms, increased European interventionism, and the commercialization of agriculture. To pay for these reforms, the Bey had doubled and then redoubled the chief land tax. A new tax, *majba* (capitation tax) had been created in 1857 and was increased to pay for Tunisia's first European loan which was contracted in 1863--35 million francs at an estimated effective interest rate of nearly 100 percent. [Ref. 11, pg. 99] The revolt began with the rural populations and spread to the urban populations.

> "In each city, the rebellion appears to have been precipitated by the arrival of bands of pastoralists and

> nearby villagers at the city walls. They called for the town to join forces with them, and a large and unruly crowd gathered at the chief mosque to decide what to do. At this meeting, the religious authorities, and in some instances the civil ones as well, were compelled by the crowd to reject the authority of the Bey, and to establish an interim governing committee for safekeeping. The committee was composed of leading members of the *ulama* ...together with several of the leading insurgents. Their mandate was to maintain order and to serve as the spokesmen of the rebels.
>
> Initially the demands of the insurgents focused upon ending the hated new taxes, the *majba*, and other impositions, and abolishing the constitution and the mixed courts. But within a few months they had escalated to include the Thirteen Demands, which in addition to the above included amnesty, the abolition of foreign extraterritorial rights, the application of the Shariah and the return of various taxes to their former levels and administrative practices to their former state." [Ref. 4, pp. 340-41]

The insurrection lasted for nine months and was put down only after a European show of force and brutal repression.

Several additional loans had been contracted in the aftermath of the revolt, all on extremely disadvantageous terms, and the repression of the revolt had left the country's tax base a fraction of what it had been a decade earlier. Unsuccessful attempts to negotiate a loan in 1869 precipitated a government default on its payments to its European creditors and that year Britain, France and Italy established an International Financial Commission to supervise

the reorganization of the Tunisian budget. The commission negotiated the consolidation of the government's foreign debts and began attempts to reorganize its internal financial system. The military academy established by Ahmad Bey was closed, the army reduced from more than 40,000 troops to 9,000 troops, and the naval budget cut. The *majba* was revived, but at a lower rate and taxes on wheat and barley were reduced. [Ref. 11, pp. 101-2]

## C. KHAIR AL-DIN--AN EARLY MODERNIST

Despite the collapse of the constitution, the attempts at political reform continued, especially under the premiership in the 1870s of Khair al-Din, a representative of the Ottoman elite. Khair al-Din and other like-minded Tunisian officials and thinkers still retained hopes of progress and development for the country as an autonomous region of the Ottoman Empire. [Ref. 10, pg. 530]

Khair al Din studied and admired Europe's political, social and economic institutions and proposed that the Muslim peoples should take over the best of them. There was no question of abandoning Islam for the sake of progress because, in Khair al-Din's view, the progress of Europe had nothing whatever to do with its being Christian. Christianity aims at happiness in the next world and not in this. "If it were a cause of worldly progress, the Papal state

would be the most advanced, not the most backward state in Europe," he wrote. [Ref. 10, pg. 138]

Similarly, he did not even consider the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, he took it for granted that it was the protector of the Islamic community, and if he advocated the introduction of constitutionalism, representative institutions and freedom of the press it was to strengthen the empire by improving relations between the rulers and their subjects. [Ref 10, pp. 138-39]

Khair al-Din called for political justice as the basis of progress. The power of the Bey, he argued, should be limited by the *ulama,* who should function as a parliament. Government, he believed, should promote science, industry, agriculture, and commerce. As the reform effort depended upon the support of the *ulama,* he tried to persuade them to accept the European methods of government. He justified this by couching his arguments in the classic Islamic political terms of the responsibility of governments for their subjects. [Ref 6, pp. 697-8]

But he was also, more than most other Tunisian leaders, conscious of and concerned over European, particularly French, ambitions in the country. And he shared with other nineteenth-century Muslim reformers the naive conviction that cultural borrowing could be restricted to specific areas, so that the Islamic

society would be rejuvenated while retaining its religious beliefs and values. [Ref. 7, pg. 285]

At the Congress of Berlin in 1878 Britain and France made a secret deal: Paris would recognize British primacy on the island of Cyprus and London would acknowledge the demand of Paris for a free hand in Tunisia. In 1881 a French army crossed into Tunisia from Algeria on the pretense that the soldiers were pursing Algerian rebels. [Ref 12, pg. 174]

Long-range French political and economic interests in Tunisia went well beyond the momentary question of frontier security. The Bey's leanings toward Italy as well as a colony of Italian settlers had given substance to French alarm at Italian claims to a sphere of influence in Tunisia. Economically, the French argued that Tunisia was a backward and impoverished country incapable of coping with its indebtedness. The French demanded that the Bey sign a treaty which, in theory, left Tunisian sovereignty unimpaired, but sanctioned the temporary military occupation of strategic points in Tunisia to put an end to disorders there. The Bey signed the treaty, but as soon as French troops were withdrawn, he disavowed it claiming he had signed it under duress.

The French responded swiftly and reinvaded Tunisia a few weeks later, occupied Tunis and subjected Sfax to a naval

bombardment. By June of 1883, Tunisian resistance had been crushed and a humiliated Ali Bey (1882-1900) accepted the French protectorate. [Ref. 8, pp. 30-31]

# IV. THE PROTECTORATE

## A. TUNISIA UNDER FRENCH REFORM: 1881-1907

Although the French rule was consistently portrayed as the benevolent tutelage of a backward people for their own benefit, the French administration was never designed to advance the interests of the Tunisians as a whole. The architects of the Protectorate regime concerned themselves somewhat with the welfare of the Tunisian population, but efforts to improve the lot of the average Tunisian were secondary to the purposes of French control. French rule in Tunisia was to profit France primarily by guaranteeing the security of Algeria and by offering an unobstructed field for French colonization and commerce. [Ref.11, pg. 188] The Bey was allowed to remain in office even though he had no real power.

French policy in Tunisia during the 1881-1907 period seemed to be based on the following premise: endowing Tunisia with French educational, judicial and administrative institutions would at once facilitate European colonization and raise up generations of loyal, French-speaking Tunisians. [Ref. 9, pg. 235]

Under the French, Tunisia's economy experienced a revival. The French reform was thorough. In addition to restructuring

governmental functions which created a more efficient, professional system, the *shariah* courts, which administered law affecting the personal status of Tunisians in such areas as marriage and inheritance, were gradually overlaid by the French legal code, particularly laws of property. While Tunisians retained their court system for civil cases, all criminal cases were reserved for French courts. [Ref. 8, pg. 34]

The apparent acceptance of Tunisians of the French in the first 25 years of the protectorate is attributed to the fact that prior to the protectorate, the Tunisian government had not been representative. Therefore, Tunisians were not disturbed by the paternalistic nature of the protectorate. Additionally, the politically conscious leaders of the capital, most of whom were followers of Khair al-Din, viewed the French rule as an instrument of modernization. At the beginning of the twentieth century some of these reforming intellectuals, calling themselves the Young Tunisians, came into the open in favor of creating a modern liberal Tunisian state through cooperation with France. They advocated education of women, attacked the Sufi *shaykhs* who they held responsible for the spread of religious superstition, and were even willing to accept French colonization as long as it helped to

introduce modern methods of farming and the Tunisians were not deprived of their best lands. [Ref 7, pg. 296]

## B. THE REVIVAL OF NATIONALISM

Most Western historians place the beginnings of Tunisian nationalism with the Young Tunisian movement after the turn of the century, ignoring the reformist movements of the nineteenth century. Attempting to emulate the Young Turk reformers in the Ottoman Empire, the Young Tunisian movement, in 1908, called for the restoration of the authority of the Bey along with reforms on democratic lines. [Ref. 14, pg. 846]

The first violent Tunisian reaction against European influence occurred in 1911. The Djellaz Cemetery affair erupted when it was rumored that inalienable religious land was threatened. Although the French Consultative Council assured the Sheikh-el-Medina (religious and secular head of the Arab section of Tunis) that no such land would be touched, a riot had already broken out. An estimated nine Europeans were killed and twenty injured, while the Tunisian casualties were unreported. Although no evidence connected the Young Tunisians with this incident, they did support a subsequent tramway strike. [Ref. 15, pp. 93-4]

An accidental death on February 9, 1912, in which an Arab child was struck down by a tram operated by an Italian, worsened the situation. Arabs boycotted the trams, demanded that no Italians be allowed to drive trams and that equal pay be given for equal work regardless of nationality. More bloodshed followed and when the strike did not end by the deadline set by the French Resident-General, the Young Tunisians were arrested. Four of them were labeled Communists and deported, the rest imprisoned. Nationalist newspapers were suppressed, and a state of emergency was proclaimed that lasted until 1921. With the major leaders gone, the nationalists confined their activities to anti-French pamphlets, but this lead to searches and more arrests of nationalists and their detention for the duration of World War I. French prisons supplied a continuous line of martyrs for the cause of Tunisian nationalism. [Ref. 15, pg. 94]

Although the ulama had initially resisted the protectorate and its policies, the rise of Tunisian nationalism presented a greater threat. The militant journalists, whose numbers mushroomed during periods of tolerance, considered themselves watchdogs of the public interest and spokesmen of the Tunisian people. In so doing not only did they presume to exercise functions traditionally performed by the ulama, but they even had sufficient gall to criticize the religious

leaders. The French, who had always treated the ulama with circumspection in order to minimize their opposition to French reforms, began to curry the support of the whole religious establishment. From about 1907, the French instituted an "orthodox policy" claiming the need to protect *shariah* institutions from the irreverent Tunisian nationalists. While the Tunisian ulama withdrew as much as possible from the political currents of the nationalist period, allegations that the Tunisian ulama sided with the French against the nationalists largely explains the ruthlessness with which the religious leaders were stripped of their remaining functions and authority at independence. [Ref. 9, pp. 238-40]

Tunisian nationalists emerged from the war better organized and more ready for their struggle. President Wilson's Fourteen Points, including self-determination, had made the U.S. president a hero to oppressed peoples throughout the Arab world. On January 2, 1919, Tunisian leaders sent a cable to President Wilson in Rome enlisting his assistance. In February, a memorandum on the French Protectorate was presented to the American President. This memorandum asked for the independence of Tunisia as the ultimate aim. It explained the origin of the imposed French Protectorate and dealt with Tunisian grievances at some length. Although the U.S. had refused to officially recognize the French protectorate until 1917,

under the influence of a wartime alliance, it remained reluctant to become involved in France's colonial affairs. When Tunisian delegates failed to obtain any concessions from France at the Peace Conference in Paris later that year, Tunisians were left to conclude that their problem was Tunisian-French in essence, and had to be dealt with along Franco-Tunisian channels. [Ref. 16, pp. 90-91]

## C. FROM NATIONALISM TO ANTI-COLONIALISM

The decade of the 1920s saw a shift in Tunisia's political movement from nationalism to anti-colonialism. This was the period when the Destour (or Constitution--in reference to the Constitution of 1861) party, founded in 1920, acted as the spokesmen of Tunisia's politically conscious groups. They vainly tried to convince France that it was time for political reform. When this failed, they presented their demands to Naceur Bey. Their eight demands were:

1. an assembly of both Tunisians and French elected by universal suffrage;
2. institution of a government responsible to this assembly;
3. separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers;
4. access of competent Tunisians to all administrative posts;
5. equal salary and treatment of elected municipal

governments;

6. institution of elected municipal governments;

7. privilege of Tunisians to purchase land on an equal basis with the French and

8. freedom of the press, assembly and association.

The addition of an obligatory educational system was soon added. A copy was sent to the French resident-general. The demands were largely ignored by the French, who dealt with the issue by promising to carry out broad measures of political reform, but which were in reality mainly administrative and did not significantly shift the power of government from France to Tunisia. [Ref. 15, pp 97-98]

Under French control, mechanisms for the near-monopoly of the use of force were perfected and the state became better equipped to interfere in the daily political and economic lives of the Bey's subjects. The primacy of the State in reorganizing the economy continued and state-building was linked to commercialization of the economy. By the time of the Depression of the 1930s, the policies of the protectorate were not only profiting French interests in Tunisia, they were clearly and seriously detrimental to the well-being of the vast majority of Tunisians, rich and poor alike. [Ref. 11, pp. 220-223]

## D. BOURGUIBA AND THE NEO-DESTOUR

In 1934, the Neo-Destour party came into being as a result of dissatisfaction by newer members of the Tunisian elite. Tunisia's new elites were increasingly coming from poorer backgrounds and competing with the scions of the old Tunis families in the prestige professions and for appointment to the high administrative jobs open to Muslims. Neo-Destour leaders introduced into Tunisian politics not so much a new political aim, but a new style of action, a greater sense of mission and commitment, and the will not only to achieve independence but also to create a new society. Habib Bourguiba, represented this orientation and led the Neo-Destour from the start.

Bourguiba, a lawyer, had obtained his legal training in France. He returned to Tunisia in 1927, with his French wife, to practice law, but found he was not accepted by either the French or the Tunisian elites. Frustrated, he had gone into politics. Bourguiba's first arrest in 1934 was as a result of the disturbances which occurred between the Neo-Destour and the Old Destour. The Neo-Destour was formally banned six months after its foundation and remained illegal for the following twenty years. [Ref. 7, pp. 358-61]

Bourguiba realized that for France to recognize the Neo-Destour it needed to prove that the party was the true

representative of Tunisians. However, it was not until he began to couch his speeches in Islamic terms that he began to get the attention of the masses. Islam played a critical role in the Tunisian nationalist movement. It incorporated a system of concepts and symbols which the common man identified and whose language he understood. Islam was communication between this "new" leadership and the masses. [Ref. 17, pg. 92]

Against the backdrop of the dismal economic conditions of the 1930s, the Neo-Destour rapidly gained in popularity. Its implicit promise was the fruits of independence, for which the new party struggled openly. Equal pay and more jobs in the government, equitable economic policies, land, and political rights were all part of the promise of self-rule and independence. By 1937, the party was reported to have established an "Aid Service for the Indigent and Unemployed" which had, according to French reports, "contributed significantly...in extending Neo-Destour activity among the disinherited masses of the interior where it has branches". [Ref. 11, pp. 254-55]

A common tactic that France used in Tunisia was the accusation that the nationalist leaders were communistic. Although it was almost entirely spurious this charge carried great weight on the French domestic scene where the spread of communism into

Western Europe was considered a great menace. The climax between the Neo-Destour and the Protectorate came on April 9, 1938, a day now celebrated in Tunisia as Martyrs' Day. When a mob in front of the French Residence protested the arrest and trial of a popular leader, they were dispersed only to appear the next day by the thousands. The troops fired into the crowd killing 122 and wounding 62. A state of siege was proclaimed and the wholesale arrest of Neo-Destourian leaders began. Sabotage, arson, mutiny and bombings followed and although Bourguiba was once again in prison, the party was now well enough organized to keep up the terror. [Ref. 15, pp. 100, 106]

During WWII, the nationalists were as concerned as France by the large number of Italians in the protectorate and the threat of Italian fascism. Even the fall of France in 1940 did not stir the Tunisian nationalists to violence against France as an Axis victory was still considered a greater threat than colonialism.

In 1942, Moncef Bey, demanded that the Vichy government grant major reforms giving the Tunisians more power and influence in government. The French responded by asking the Bey to abdicate. When he refused, he was removed from the throne and died in exile in Algeria in 1948. The throne went to Sidi Lamine who was willing to cooperate. [Ref. 15, pg. 113]

Tunisian nationalist hopes for U.S. support for their cause were dashed a second time when, following the 1943 allied invasion of North Africa and the expulsion of Axis forces from Tunis, the U.S. refused to support Tunisian independence against its Free French allies. At the end of the war, the French refused to recognize Tunisian contributions to the war effort by granting independence and the struggle was renewed.

Following WWII, Tunisia again turned to the U.S. *Through* contacts between the American labor unions, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and Tunisia's Union Generale Des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT), Bourguiba was able to visit the U.S. and present the Tunisian case to key political figures [Ref. 17, pg. 117]. In the post-war period, American views on the rights of colonial peoples came into more obvious contradiction with feelings of solidarity and appreciation toward wartime allies. The extent to which the U.S. should support independence for the colonies or press concessions on the colonial powers was the subject of heated debates within government councils. The advent of the Cold War soon made this more than a moral dilemma. The importance of the Mediterranean in the defense of European allies and alliance solidarity overshadowed the issue of decolonization. [Ref.18, pg.39]

The U.S. abstained from voting in 1952 when the Asian-African bloc asked the U.N. Security Council to study French repression in Tunisia. Although the U.S.S.R. backed the study, U.S. abstention amounted to a negative vote that blocked the debate. In 1953 Washington opposed another U.N. resolution urging France to take the necessary steps leading to full Tunisian sovereignty and failed to react to the (third) imprisonment of Bourguiba. [Ref. 19, pg. 118]

France's humiliating defeat in Vietnam, its involvement in Algeria's struggle for independence, and growing opposition within France toward France's foreign involvements finally prompted it to grant Tunisia's independence on March 20, 1956. Bourguiba returned from negotiations in France as the hero of Tunisia's independence.

# V. BOURGUIBA'S TUNISIA

## A. CREATING THE NEW TUNISIA

Elections for the Constituent Assembly, immediately held on March 25, resulted in all 98 seats being won by the National Front. Bourguiba became Prime Minister on April 11, leading a government in which 16 of the 17 ministers belonged to the Neo-Destour.

The bey, Muhammad al-Amin, was the object of constant criticism from Tunisian nationalist leaders, who accused him of reluctance to participate actively in the struggle for independence and of being apt to rely on French support. After independence his remaining powers were whittled away and on July 25, 1957, the Constituent Assembly decided to abolish the monarchy, proclaim Tunisia a republic and invest Bourguiba with the powers of head of state. [Ref. 14, pg. 448]

The necessities of immediate nation building, undertaken by the new political organization under the charismatic leadership of Bourguiba, pressured Tunisian society into accepting and actively supporting a single-party political system. The party minimized political debate, eliminated potential opposition (such as the assassination of Salah ben-Youssef in 1961), and devoted itself to

the tasks of mass education and economic development. Thus, the leadership of the country exerted economic and sociocultural as well as political dominance, and the incumbent political leadership appeared to be the only elite worthy of recognition. [Ref. 39, pg. 144]

President Bourguiba embarked upon an unprecedented program to modernize the state religion. A personal status code suppressing polygamy was enacted, religious courts were suppressed, and the religious endowments were nationalized. The status of the historic Zeitouna University, a major religious school, was downgraded, and workers were encouraged to break the Ramadan fast, one of the five pillars of Islam. In his most notorious action, Bourguiba publicly drank a glass of orange juice during the fast and explained that those who were working, like himself, were excused from fasting. [Ref. 20, pg.100]

To make his proposal more palatable, Bourguiba asserted that Tunisia was engaged in a *jihad* against underdevelopment and that Islam excused participants in a *jihad* from fasting. However, Bourguiba miscalculated the depth of popular attachment to tradition. Almost all Tunisians observed the fast. Even those who were not particularly religious regarded Ramadan and the various festivities and customs associated with it as symbols of their Arabo-Islamic heritage. Even in the upper echelons of the Neo-

Destour, Bourguiba's public breaking of the fast and his urging others to do likewise had limited support. Many religious leaders openly rejected Bourguiba's reinterpretation of Ramadan, which they considered the last straw in a series of government infringements on religion. Most of those criticizing Bourguiba were quickly removed from their posts. Just before Ramadan in 1961, antigovernment demonstrations erupted in Kairouan (a city of religious significance as it was built by the first Muslims in North Africa), but were quickly crushed. This incident, however, sent a signal to Bourguiba that he could only go so far in forcing religious changes without creating a dangerous backlash. [Ref. 21, pp. 119-21]

Islam was not the only target of Bourguiba's new Tunisia. He also eschewed pan-Arabism in favor of developing a local, secular Tunisian nationalism. [Ref. 22, pg. 181] Bourguiba pointed out that Tunisia's culture began well before the Arab invasion and the subsequent adoption of Islam. He strongly disagreed with Egypt's President Nasser over many fundamental issues and did not approve of Nasser's confrontation politics with Israel. As a protest of Nasser's domination of the Arab league, Tunisia did not join the organization until 1958, although it joined the United Nations immediately. [Ref. 21, pg. 160] Between 1959 and 1961, Bourguiba

severed ties with the Arab League in response to the spread of Cairo-sponsored pan-Arabism in Tunisia. [Ref. 28, pg. 747]

By the early 1970s there was evidence that an Islamic movement was underway. The movement sought to reassert religious influence in areas from which the regime had attempted to exclude it, including the political process. Islamists decried the identification of modernization, which they did not generally oppose, with Westernization, which they blamed for the alleged decline of moral values in Tunisian society. Although many observers suggest that the government had tacitly encouraged the movement's activities as a counterweight to left-wing critics of the private enterprise policy, the Muslim revivalists could not long serve the purposes of the new bourgeoisie. They opposed the continued foreign influence in the economy and society, decried the reliance on tourism--the country's major earner of foreign exchange--and objected to Bourguiba's secularization policies. [Ref. 23, pg. 245]

Tunisia's former colonial power had exacerbated the conflict between acceptance and rejection of the West. In the first few years following independence, relations with France passed through three major crises. The first occurred in February 1958, when French forces attacked the frontier village of Sakiet Sidi Youssef, which was allegedly harboring Algerians, and killed some eighty

Tunisians, including children. It took the intervention of the U.S. and Great Britain to smooth things over between France and Tunisia. Nonetheless, the U.S. made it clear at this time that it considered North Africa within the French sphere of influence. [Ref. 17, pg. 162]

The second crisis came when France agreed to limit its troops to a few isolated posts in the Sahara and its large naval base at the city of Bizerte. Tunisians chafed at the extensive operations at the Bizerte installation. When France expanded its facilities there in 1961, despite persistent Tunisian objections, Bourguiba demanded the base's evacuation. France refused and fighting began between French and Tunisian troops. In the ensuing combat, the French captured the road and railway linking Bizerte to Tunis as well as large parts of the city itself. The Tunisians sustained thousands of casualties. [Ref. 21, pg. 163]

Tunisia quickly brought the Bizerte issue before the United Nations which partially supported Tunisia's position by calling on France to withdraw to the confines of its bases, and by urging bilateral negotiations to determine the base's ultimate fate. France ignored the U.N. decision and continued to occupy the city for several weeks. It also postponed discussions over the final disposition of the base until after the Algerian War had ended the following

summer. France finally turned the Bizerte base over to the Tunisian naval authorities in late 1963. [Ref. 21, 163-4]

Relations between the two countries had barely begun to improve by May 1964, when the third crisis took place. Bourguiba, feeling he could no longer ignore internal pressures, took over all the land (about 675,000 acres) still owned by Frenchmen. De Gaulle particularly resented this act of nationalization because it was carried out without any prior warning. In response, he withdrew French financial aid and trade favors. [Ref. 24, pg. 190]

The effects of the Islamic movement were manifested in reviewed sensitivity toward religion in the population at large and a greater respect for Muslim customs on the part of government authorities. Attendance at mosques for prayer noticeably increased. The first highly visible manifestation of the Islamist discontent that was centered in the university was the appearance of a young female instructor, dressed in traditional garb, on a nationally televised program marking the beginning of Ramadan in 1975, during which she challenged government policies in the presence of Bourguiba. [Ref. 8, pp. 125-6]

The Islamists were not the only group criticizing Bourguiba. By 1977, there were signs of a succession struggle in the increasing demands for the free development of a multi-party democracy from,

among others, former ministers Ahmad ben Salah, in exile, and Mahmoud Mestiri, leader of the unofficial liberal group of the Social Democrats (MDS). From June to August 1977, 33 members of another opposition party, the Popular Unity Movement (MUP), which had been declared illegal in 1973, were arrested and tried on charges of threatening state security and defaming the President. The government's actions indicated the continuing hostility of the government to any form of organized opposition. [Ref. 14, pg. 850]

By 1981, Bourguiba, apparently concerned that the criticisms of the Muslim groups threatened the stability of his regime, acquiesced to urging by Prime Minister Mzali that the state's commitment to capitalist development be matched with political democratization. [Ref. 23, pp. 246-7] In April 1981, Bourguiba declared that he saw no objection to the emergence of political parties provided that they rejected violence and religious fanaticism and were not dependent "ideologically" or "materially" on any foreign group (effectively eliminating the communists and Islamists). [Ref. 37, pg. 31133]

The National assembly elections of November 1981 were to be openly contested. Tunisia's labor union, the UGTT and the Neo-Destour ran joint lists in a "National Front", and three other groups were permitted to present candidates. The announcement of the

elections, made in April, suggested that any group winning over 5 percent of the vote would be permitted to form a legal political party. [Ref. 23, pp. 246-7]

Bourguiba's decision to open the political process to other parties was designed to weaken opposition to the government by removing one of the major political grievances against the regime. It also permitted the regime to move against its most immediate, and perhaps most dangerous, opponents well before the elections. In May, several leaders of the Muslim renewal groups established the Movement of the Islamic Way (MTI), with an eye to contesting the November elections. In September, after anti-Bourguiba speeches were reportedly given in mosques, the regime cracked down on the group: sixty-eight were arrested, tried and convicted of defaming the president and sentenced up to twelve years in prison. Rachid Ghannouchi was among those arrested. [Ref. 23, pg. 247]

## B. GHANNOUCHI

Rachid Ghannouchi was born in 1941 in an oasis, Al-Hama, in a region close to the Libyan border. He was forced to leave primary school for two years because of the poverty of his family. He completed his education in the traditional school system of the Zitouna Mosque, whose instruction in Arabic did not prepare for

higher education in Tunisia, because the latter was exclusively taught in French. He began his career as a primary school teacher, and was able to earn enough money to continue his education. A supporter of Nasser's pan-Arabism (which he confused with Islamism, as many Tunisians did at this time), he went to Egypt where university education was given in Arabic. When Tunisia severed relations with Egypt, Ghannouchi found himself threatened with expulsion. He went to Damascus and graduated from Damascus University in Philosophy and Social Science. [Ref. 29, pp. 213-4]

The defeat of the Arab states in 1967 convinced him that Islam was the only force of resistance able to oppose the policy of domination of the Western powers. However, like all Tunisians of his generation, he was fascinated by the West. While in Syria, he visited several European countries and, upon completion of his studies, he went to Paris where he spent a year working as an immigrant in order to prepare for his doctorate on Muslim philosophy. The death of his mother ended his plans and on his return to Tunisia at the beginning of the 1970s, he was rapidly integrated in a group, the Association for the Preservation of the Quran, that organized discussions and studies in mosques. [Ref. 29, pp. 214-5]

## C. THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN TUNISIA

In the late 1960s, the Pakistan-based Da'wa gained a foothold in Tunisia. The Da'wa in Pakistan had been formed around the writings of Abul Ala Mawdudi, a Pakistani who began his career as a journalist and is now viewed as a pioneer in the Islamic reform movement.

Mawdudi's writings were influenced by the events in India before independence. He did not believe that the Muslims of the subcontinent constituted one nation along with all other Indians. He insisted that the Muslims had an identity or nationality of their own which was Islam; they were bound together not by ties of race, geography, language, or culture, but by their commitment to follow the will of God in their lives. To Mawdudi, democracy was the tyranny of the majority, and since the Muslims in India were the minority, this was unacceptable. Mawdudi was concerned with the restoration of Islamic society to its former glory and his voluminous writings espoused the concept of an Islamic state which was all encompassing. Social change required first changing the theoretical views of leadership, which society would then follow, hence it was not a mass based movement. Mawdudi's shortcomings were his inability to relate his ideas to the solving of everyday problems and because his monolithic ideology did not allow for

dissension or diversity, he viewed criticism as rejection of his beliefs. As a result, he was feared and disliked by many in his own country. [Ref. 26, pp. 102-3, 128-30]

The application of the Da'wa in toto to Tunisia had its drawbacks and in 1974, there was a split in the movement. While part of the movement continued with the Da'wa ideology (later becoming known as the Group of the Call and Communication), the dissenters, who had decided to follow the path of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, became known as the Islamic Group. The Da'wa's emphasis was on the individual and personal uprightness, while the Islamic Group began by emphasizing Islamic conviction and character and issues of thought, culture, and society. The Da'wa, as their name implies, travel in groups "calling" to people to listen to Islamic lessons. Although they are not concerned with political activism, their "calling" caused problems with the government.

Another split occurred when members within the Islamic Group questioned the group's approach, especially in light of the fact that the brotherhood had failed to realize its goals in spite of nearly fifty years of struggle. In 1978-79, they formed an independent association of Islamicist thinkers that they named the Progressive Islamists. Their focal point is the search for a modern Islamic thought able to lead Muslims in the work of building a civilization

that will be both fully Islamic and fully in touch with the modern age.

The Islamic movement, encountering harsh opposition from the Tunisian government and faced with difficult challenges in the form of severe social problems, became politicized. This culminated in 1981 with its self-designation as the Movement of the Islamic Way, an official declaration of organization, and an application for permission to exist as a licensed political group. Since the beginning of the 1980s, there has been a shift in the movement away from the political slogans of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as the MTI has attempted to tailor its message to the realities of the Tunisian situation. [Ref 27, pp. 169-79]

## D. GHANNOUCHI AND THE MTI

In a series of articles, Ghannouchi had demonstrated how the potent combination of economic hardship, lack of political expression, and Islamic concerns had gradually politicized the MTI. A general strike in Tunisia in 1978 and the subsequent repression and then cooptation of the labor union movement by the government, stood out initially as two important events in Ghannouchi's increasing concern with political and economic rights. Two other factors had added impetus to the Islamic movement. One was the

active intimidation campaign the government had initiated against the Islamists after removing MTI supporters from the Association for the Preservation of the Quran. The second was the Iranian revolution of 1979. Ghannouchi had initially strongly supported the overthrow of the shah but remained ambivalent about the use of violence, an ambiguity which was resolved after 1980 when his writings began to stress persuasion and consciousness-raising as a first step toward the establishment of an Islamic state. By 1980 the MTI distanced itself from the new Iranian regime, arguing that it represented only one particular way of establishing an Islamic state. In Tunisia, he theorized, the change should come about by working within the political system, and the use of violence was condemned. The MTI's stated purpose was the recreation of an Islamic society, however, it noted that an Islamic society must not be imposed but must be built gradually through participation in institutions that can be reformed. It also stated that it did not seek a monopoly on political expression--that would only replace one dictatorship with another. [Ref. 30, pp. 611-12]

When Ghannouchi was set free in 1984 the movement had changed perceptibly; its leadership had partly lost control to a number of splinter groups that espoused more violent solutions. In 1985, the MTI's official position stated that the Sharia may not

contain the answer to every modern problem and needed to be redefined to give it a contemporary Islamic meaning.[Ref.30, pg. 612]

## E. BOURGUIBA'S CHALLENGE

President Bourguiba became increasingly convinced that the Islamists were a threat to his regime and increased his attempts to suppress their activities. In July 1986, four Islamists were sentenced to death and about 22 others were imprisoned for a series of offenses. Dozens of arrests were reported by human rights organizations following clashes between Islamists and left-wing students at the University of Tunis in early 1987. In early March 1987, Ghannouchi was arrested on charges of violence and collusion with foreign powers to overthrow the government. Later in the month, Tunisia severed relations with Iran charging it with, among other things, attempting to overthrow Bourguiba. On this pretext, a wave of arrests of Islamists ensued. These actions were condemned by the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH). There were also a number of arrests following clashes between students and police at the University of Tunis. [Ref. 14, pg. 853]

In May, the government approved the creation of the Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Public Liberty, as a rival to the LTDH, which the government accused of being pro-MTI.

In June, 37 Islamists, most students, were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of between two and six years for taking part in illegal demonstrations in April and for defaming Bourguiba. In the same month, security forces announced the arrests of members of two radical Islamic groups, alleged to have plotted acts of sabotage. Tunisian state-sponsored newspapers published photographs of weapons, alleged to have been discovered near Tunis, to support the government's theory of an Iranian-backed conspiracy to overthrow Bourguiba. The MTI denied the allegations and accused the police of torturing MTI prisoners. In August, 13 foreign tourists were injured by bomb explosions at the resorts of Monastir and Sousse, and the government promptly insisted that the MTI was responsible. Six young Tunisians later confessed on television to planting the bombs, and stated that they were members of the MTI. They alleged that the bombings were part of an operation to damage Tunisia's dependence on tourism. [Ref 14., pg. 853]

Ghannouchi's October 1987 trial was an embarrassment for the government in part because Ghannouchi's interrogation and subsequent defense presented a very different image of the movement's activities and political program than that held by the government. The MTI appeared to have been split over the question of legitimate access to political participation. This split spawned a

small clandestine wing that perpetrated acts of terror against the state for which the state believed the entire movement responsible. According to Ghannouchi's testimony these extremists did not represent the rank-and-file who resolutely pursued its objectives within the limits of the promised pluralization of the political process. Ghannouchi's defense convincingly laid the blame for the radicalization of the MTI squarely on Bourguiba who, in obstinately refusing to acknowledge the indigenous roots of the movement's grievances, attempted to portray its activities as Iranian interference in Tunisian internal affairs.

The trials failed to produce any evidence that the MTI was revolutionary and subversive, had used violence against the regime, had operated clandestinely, or had, for that matter, bombed hotels in the Tunisian Sahel. The leniency of the sentences handed down enraged Bourguiba who ordered a retrial for early November. Prime Minister Ben Ali was credited with recognizing the complexity of the Islamist complaints and the gravity of their threats. On November 7, 1987, he removed the ill and aging Bourguiba from office. [Ref. 31, pp. 588-9]

# VI. THE NEW REPUBLIC

## A. BEN ALI

Born in Monastir in September 1936, ben Ali joined the army after leaving school. He was among the first class of commissioned officers who provided leadership for the new national army after independence. In the course of his military training, he attended Saint-Cyr and the French Artillery School at Chalons-sur-Marne. He continued his studies in artillery at Fort Bliss, Texas, graduated from the Intelligence and Military Security course at Fort Holabird, Maryland, and eventually earned a degree in electrical engineering.

Ben Ali served as director of military security for 16 years. In 1974 he was transferred to Rabat where he worked as a military attache until 1977 when he was assigned to the position of director of national security. During the UGTT labor crisis of 1978, he coordinated the police and military response. In 1980, ben Ali was named Tunisian ambassador to Warsaw. Recalled in 1984, in the aftermath of the infamous bread riots, he had, by then, been promoted to brigadier general and reassumed the post of national security director. In October of 1984, Bourguiba elevated him to the position of secretary of state for national defense and then, in April 1986, to minister of the interior. In 1987, six weeks before he was

deposed, Bourguiba appointed ben Ali prime minister. [Ref. 31, pp. 593-4]

## B. THE PROMISES

In his statement on the morning of November 7, 1987, following the removal of Bourguiba, the new president announced his plans for Tunisia.

> "Compatriots, our people have attained a level of vigilance and maturity that permits all sons and factions to participate constructively in the running of their affairs under the aegis of a republican regime that respects the institutions and provides the prerequisites for a responsible democracy based on the sovereignty of the people, as provided by the Constitution.
>
> The Constitution needs some review. This had been confirmed today. There is no room for a life presidency, nor for automatic succession in which the people are not involved. Our people deserve developed and organized political activities which truly rely on a plurality of political parties and popular organizations....
>
> We will take care to insure the sanctity of the law. There is no room for repression and injustice...."
>
> [Ref. 34, pg. 23]

The MTI issued a statement in support of ben Ali, welcoming Bourguiba's removal from office as a positive and historic act that ended what it called "a period of despotism in Tunisia," and said the removal had come in time to save Tunisia from a slow and continuing deterioration [Ref 34, pg. 26]. In an interview on November 10,

Abdelfattah Mourou, a lawyer and secretary general of the MTI, again commended ben Ali's actions and the movement's continued support for democracy, but admitted a reluctance to immediately participate in the political process:

> "Our target at present is not a complete Islamic program, but to contribute to a conscious guidance of the Tunisian people, because we believe that political practice comes after education. At present we do not wish to come forward and participate in elections. We do not seek parliamentary seats or seats of government. What we want is to help enlighten the Tunisian people so that they might take their affairs into their own hands and not allow another despot to try to impose his tyranny for another 30 years. After that comes the matter of programs, proposals, and participation in elections. We do not want to take part in any elections which might be rigged or in which votes could be bought and sold. What we want is honest elections in the public interest. This requires the education and enlightenment of the public. We will contribute to that." [Ref. 44, pg. 21]

An indication that ben Ali's changes might be limited came in an interview on November 12, 1987, given by Foreign Affairs Minister Mahmoud Mestiri in which he expanded on the new government's plans. "We envisage multipartyism and political plurality." Asked whether or not this included the Islamic fundamentalists, he replied that:

> "...they are not a political grouping, they are a religious grouping. The policies of 'Bourguibaism' are not finished, and we will continue to follow the path which Bourguiba himself outlined, but at the same time

rectifying the negative aspects that came apparent towards the end." [Ref. 35, pp. 34-5]

Nine days after the coup, ben Ali again addressed the nation. He expressed his pleasure at the response Tunisians had given him and the need for their continued support. He restated his promises of political liberalization.

> "All of us know that our country, prior to [7 November], was experiencing a crisis manifested by a lack of confidence in the present and future. This crisis was caused by the danger of collapse and fragmentation that continually threatened the state...and by the closed prospects for everyone and their loss of every hope for the desired changes....
>
> ...I pledge to you anew that we will be faithful to our commitments, and that the government...will implement the contents of our statement.... Youth, who are the beating heart of the nation, will particularly possess the fundamental and effective role in building the future of Tunisia, politically, economically, socially, and culturally, under the auspices of harmony, solidarity, and concord." [Ref.38]

Within weeks the new government had moved decisively ahead in its efforts to remove some of the aberrations of the Bourguiba period that had seriously weakened the claims of enlightened rule it had put forward in its struggle with the Islamists. The constitution was changed to eliminate the president-for-life provision and limited the presidency to three five-year consecutive terms. Legislation was enacted to limit the length of time a person could

be held in police custody without the authority of the public prosecutor to four days and the State Security Court was abolished. Approximately 2500 detainees, including MTI members, were immediately released and publication of opposition newspapers was permitted (although the government maintained control over television and radio). The PSD was renamed the Constitutional Democratic Assembly (RCD) and Tunisia became the first Arab nation to ratify the U.N. convention against torture and other inhumane or degrading treatment.

## C. SIGNS OF REVERSAL

Even as pluralism was being introduced, and Western news media were announcing the "new era" in Tunisia, there were signs that the old pattern of personal rule was reestablishing itself. By early 1988, there were concerns within the government over whether or not ben Ali had been successful in reviving the legitimacy of the RCD. The president's entourage was very troubled about the lack of information about the state of mind of the Tunisian electorate, since political polling had never been permitted. By-elections held in December and January had only confirmed their fears. On December 20, municipal elections in Ksar Hellal saw the RCD defeated for the first time. Elections in Gafsa in January

required machine intervention to ensure the experience was not repeated. [Ref. 45, pg.18]

In April, the National Assembly passed the law authorizing political parties. Reversing the former requirement for a minimum of five per cent of the vote, authorization was now to be granted unless the government objected (with reasons given) within a period of two months. The new law prohibited parties based on "religion, language, race or region" and required acceptance of the principles of "human rights and the accomplishments of the nation". A number of parties, old and new, lined up to be recognized. The exception was the MTI which did not apply for recognition as a party throughout 1988. [Ref. 45, pg. 21]

Within the year, further reversals were taking place. A press code adopted in 1988 required printers to deposit copies with the information, interior, and justice ministries of all newspapers and other publications prepared in Tunisia. Political tracts were also required to be submitted for approval. State control of Tunisian television slanted coverage in favor of the government and the 1988 Law of the Mosques allowed only government appointed personnel to lead activities in the mosques without permission from the Prime Minister's office. [Ref. 42] A new electoral code approved in July 1988 required all candidates to appear on a slate and obtain

exclusive support of seventy-five voters within the district of contest. Small parties like the PUP and the RSP found it difficult, if not impossible to meet these requirements. [Ref. 45, pg. 37]

In an apparent effort to discredit the Islamic movement, ben Ali put forward three conditions for the legalization of the Islamic movement: first, they had to change the name of their party and take out any Islamic connotation, secondly, they had to announce that they do not speak for Islam since all Tunisians are Moslems, and thirdly, they had to accept the Personal Status Code promulgated under Bourguiba which, in part, defined the rights of women. The Islamic movement, led by Ghannouchi who had been released from prison in May 1988 and granted amnesty, accepted all three conditions and changed the movement's name to al Nahdah (Rebirth or Renaissance). [Ref. 43, pg.6]

The signing of the National Pact, in November 1988, by all social, political and professional groups, set out guidelines on the country's political future. Its main target was the Islamists. As ben Ali put it:

> "In order to promote a consensus-based democracy, we have called upon the different political trends as well as the social and professional organizations of the country to adhere to a 'National Pact'.... This Pact constitutes a set of principles and values commonly accepted and considered by all Tunisians to be the foundations of the model of society we aspire to build."
>
> [Ref. 40, pg. 2]

At the signing ceremony of the National Pact, the president announced that presidential and parliamentary elections would be held in April 1989. However, opposition figures complained in private that, in the wake of the signing of the Pact, any criticism of government policies was now rejected as unpatriotic and as detracting from the spirit of the 7 November movement. [Ref. 41, pg. 134]

If it had been in the interest of the new government's legitimacy to extend civil and political liberties, it was also an astute political strategy to make allies of erstwhile critics. As the former minister of interior and the person administratively responsible for security forces engaged in torture and custodial ill treatment under Bourguiba, ben Ali had frequently been a target of criticism by Tunisian human rights activists. As president, ben Ali appointed two founding members of the independent and respected League of Human Rights to his new cabinet in July 1988; and a cabinet reshuffle in April 1989 put three LTDH members in charge of Health, Youth and Sports, Culture and Information, and Education and Social Affairs, positions which, in reality, involved no real power. However, through these symbolic gestures, ben Ali's positional strength was benefitted in two ways. While these moves were interpreted as statements of intent to reform the polity, they

served the simultaneous purpose of coopting potential opponents and quieting regime critics. [Ref. 70, pg. 37]

## D. APRIL 1989, THE TURNING POINT

At a news conference held by Interior Minister Chedli Neffati following the April 2, 1989 elections, it was announced that "the Tunisian people elected President Zine El Abidine ben Ali with a majority of 99.27 percent". In the parliamentary elections, voter participation was declared to be 76.46 percent and the RCD received 80.84 percent of the vote thereby winning all 141 seats in the House of Representatives. [Ref. 46, pg. 12]

The following day, the French newspaper, Le Monde, challenged the government's figures:

> "As far as we could tell during a tour of around 15 polling stations in Tunis and the surrounding district, this mobilization did not take place. The lines waiting at the two ballot boxes--one for the presidential election, the other for the parliamentary election--seemed sparse. The numerous polling stations (12,000 in the whole country) partly explains this impression. But figures gathered at local level gave pause for thought. In Tunis, in a polling station reserved for women, less than one third of the registered voters had voted 90 minutes before voting ended. The proportion was 50 percent for the men." [Ref. 47, pg. 17]

One of the opposition parties, the Democratic Socialist Movement (MDS), withdrew its observers a few hours after voting

started claiming irregularities. The biggest irregularities were the failure to register 1.3 million eligible voters (out of an estimated 4 million eligible voters) and an apparently systematic effort to discourage registration by young first-time voters in the cities, out of fear that they might swell the totals of the Islamic candidates. [Ref. 49]. Further, of the 2.7 million voters actually registered, only 2.1 million actually voted. [Ref. 45, pg. 24]

Even before the election ended, the director of political affairs at the Interior Ministry held a press conference to protest these accusations and to condemn alleged pressure and violence used by the Islamic movement against the RCD's candidates. He admitted the existence of some blunders which could be attributed to local RCD cadres, but he said that the MDS' attitude "stems from insincerity and undermines the democratic process." [Ref. 47, pg. 18]

The Islamists were reported to have won more than 13 percent of most of the votes cast, and in Tunis and its suburbs, a much higher percentage. In February 1989, the Islamists had applied for but been denied recognition as a legal political party. Even so, they had carried out an active campaign throughout the country. [Ref. 48, pg. 15]

As Independents, the Islamists drew on at least three sources. First, traditional Islam was represented by Sheikh Mohamed Lakhoua

and Ali Lasram, both descendants of conservative families where the imamate, or magistrature, was passed from father to son. Second, espousing a more liberal and open Islam were modern notables from the bar like Maitre Hila, or businessmen like Radhi Kchok, unafraid to develop a less conventional discourse. Hila even went as far as to regret that there was no female Islamist candidate, "since men and women are equals." The third type of Islamicist candidate was the radical militant, untarnished and uncompromising, spokesman of the *mustadhafin* (underprivileged). As the leading candidate for the independents in Sfax, Maitre Abdelaziz Loukil, among other things, declared polygamy a sacred right in Islam, not to be transgressed by law. [Ref. 69, pg. 202]

The outcome of the April elections constituted another setback for ben Ali. It indicated for the first time, and with reasonable clarity, the strength of the Islamist movement in Tunisia. After having denied for several months that the Islamists represented a viable political alternative, their strength at the elections contradicted much of what ben Ali had argued. Ghannouchi, on the other hand, left the country in protest soon after the elections condemning the government's refusal to recognize al Nahdah as a political party and Mourou assumed the leadership of al Nahdah. [Ref. 41, pg. 135-6]

While the government gave the impression that its reason for controlling the democratic process was due to concerns over the Islamic movement, it was moving against all opponents. In September 1989, the unrecognized Communist Workers party circulated a press release protesting the nighttime arrest of four Gafsa residents charged with belonging to an unrecognized party, defaming the head of state, and distributing tracts. It was reported that the door of one detainee's home was broken down; she was beaten and forced by police to abandon her infant of four months.

In another report, Professor Jelloud Azzouna, secretary-general of the PUP, was arrested in July 1989 for having published an article denouncing vigilante members of the police accused of vandalizing the cars of PUP leaders. At his August trial, his lawyer unsuccessfully argued the need for a separation of presidential policy from the personage of the president and was herself arrested for presenting evidence of links between the vandals and security police. She was incarcerated and charged with spreading false news, inciting unrest, and defaming the public security forces. Although she was released four days later following considerable public pressure, Azzouna received a one-year prison sentence. [Ref. 70, pg. 40]

In September, 1989, ben Ali was quoted in an interview:

> "In conformity with the provisions of the Constitution, early presidential and legislative elections were held April 2, 1989. All political trends took part in these elections, which were held in total freedom and openness.
>
> Freedom of expression and association was bolstered. Amendments liberalizing the Press Code were adopted in order to enable the news media to fulfill the function which is theirs in a free and democratic society.
>
> ...We are fully aware that the establishment of a genuine democracy is a long-term effort. But the process of change is underway. And it is irreversible. We are determined to press ahead with our quest for the institutionalization of democracy and the establishment of pluralism in a context of freedom, stability and national concord." [Ref. 40, pp. 1-2]

## E. RETURN TO REPRESSION

The Islamists increased their activities in protest of the government. In January 1990, demonstrators clashed with police over the state's removal of an Imam from their mosque who supported the Islamist movement. Eight people were reportedly sentenced to eight months imprisonment and another eight got suspended sentences. [Ref.50, pg. 7]

In February, following clashes with police, 600 students from several universities were taken into custody for "interrogation." The conflict arose after students protested about libraries with no

books, overcrowded hostels, and a heavy police presence. With purported guidance by al Nahdah, the students had also demanded an end to secular education and the removal of the education minister. Approximately half of the students had their exemption from military service revoked and were carted off to barracks, but were later released. [Ref. 51, pg. 81] Inducting the students was a peculiar response on the part of the government considering that the Islamists had promised earlier not to recruit from within the military.

During this same period, Ghannouchi visited the U.S. giving approximately 50 lectures at major universities and research institutions. At Georgetown University on February 7, 1990, he pointed out the need for cooperation between the East and the West:

> "Islam is committed to restoring to humanity its common sense. The dichotomies between East and West make no sense. The fallacy of West is West and East is East, and never the two shall meet, is now proven false beyond any conceivable doubt.
>
> The terms of East and West are abstract concepts which do not represent the reality. The West cannot be all rationality, democracy, science, etc., and the East cannot be all superstition, despotism and backwardness. All positive and negative factors exist in varying degrees in West and East.
>
> What we need is continued and sustained opportunities for the meeting of minds, a sincere and honest dialogue, for cooperation in all fields of human achievement and excellence, for sparing humanity from

racism, poverty, pollution, drug abuse and wars."[Ref. 52, pg. 6]

The government was apparently concerned that municipal elections, due to be held in June 1990, should be viewed as a serious move toward multi-party democracy. In January, Prime Minister Karoui invited opposition leaders for discussions on the amendment of the electoral code and access to the media. However, the discussions were boycotted by three of the recognized opposition parties and al Nahdah, and little progress was made. In February, the government introduced a form of partial proportional representation, which would effectively allocate the opposition a third of the seats. Four political groups, including al Nahdah, protested that this would apply only to municipal and not to general elections, and continued to propose a boycott. In April the opposition produced a joint manifesto, which demanded an end to the RCD's monopoly of power. In May 1990 the electoral law was amended to introduce a form of proportional representation in the forthcoming municipal elections. The winning party was to gain only 50% of the seats, while the remaining seats were to be divided between all the parties according to the number of votes received. However, the six legal opposition groups and al Nahdah boycotted the elections on the grounds that they were neither free or fair. [Ref. 14, pg. 856]

In the June elections, the RCD reported that it had won 99 percent of the vote. This did little, however, to improve ben Ali's position in the eyes of Tunisians and Ghannouchi predicted that:

> "The government's intransigence will lead to bloodshed unless ben Ali follows through on pledges...to recognize the aspirations of youth, to open the media to real freedom, to allow a genuine multiparty system and to allow the Islamic party and other opposition forces to be legal. Instead of following through on these pledges, the government has begun to openly harrass us." [Ref. 53, pg. 27]

To a large degree, observers both within and outside Tunisia continued to accept ben Ali's claim of stemming the spread of Islam as the justification for controlling political reforms. Neighboring Algeria had also held elections in which the Algerian Islamists participated as a recognized political group. Mohammed Moaada, head of the opposition party, Movement for Social Democracy (MDS), said, "In Algeria, they held real elections. For us, it was the opposite. If we do not solve the Islamic problem, the political process stays in an impasse." Ali Laridh, spokesman for al Nahdah, stated that what happened in Algeria "will give us a lot more moral and political support. The results, he said, showed "that the best way to deal with the Islamists is to integrate them in a peaceful development of society. Otherwise society will develop in different ways and there will be an explosion." [Ref. 54]

But within Tunisia, there were also increasingly mixed feelings over ben Ali's intentions to pursue democracy and his handling of the Islamists. A number felt that the government should recognize al Nahdah and engage it in debate over economic and social rather than ideological and cultural issues to determine the movement's true platform and curb its popularity. Some felt that ben Ali was genuinely committed to democracy, pointing out that ben Ali had appointed several opposition leaders to posts within the government. They felt that blocks to ben Ali's democratic reforms were coming from member within the government who were acting contrary to ben Ali's goals. Yet others pointed out that the government's failure to recognize al Nahdah raised strong doubts about ben Ali's dedication to democracy. [Ref. 61]

Secretary of state for religious affairs, Ali Chebbi, defended the government's position saying that recognizing a religious party was "as good as saying that some Tunisians are more Muslim that others, simply because of the political party they support. That is unacceptable." Mr. Chebbi added that Tunisia, even though officially a Muslim country, recognized the freedom of religious practice. "The state has no place interfering in the individual's convictions. But the state must intervene when a segment of the population attempts to impose their beliefs on others." [Ref. 61]

Reports of governmental and police repression continued. Newspaper publications were suspended or banned for criticizing the government and the publishers arrested for such charges as "defaming the president" and "inciting the public to riot". Detainees were being held incognito well beyond the limits originally promised by ben Ali and the military court was reinstated. In September 1990, Amnesty International reported its concerns:

> "The organization recalls that during the last years of the government of President Bourguiba its concerns included arbitrary arrests, the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience, widespread use of torture, unfair trials, cruel and inhumane prison conditions and the death penalty. However, the organization remains seriously concerned at a number of violations of human rights, including torture and the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience, which are still taking place. It is also concerned at the Tunisian Government's apparent unwillingness to recognize and investigate such abuses...and the failure of the government to take measures to prevent continuing torture." [Ref. 55, pg. 2]

In November 1990, ben Ali announced the creation of a national commission on human rights and basic freedoms but said human rights activists should not protect people who broke the law. Referring to complaints of human rights abuses, he was reported to say, "It is strange to criticize the application of the law to those who practice violence, incite disturbances and damage public and private property." [Ref. 56, pg. 7]

It was reported that the Gulf crisis had prompted a split in al Nahdah. While Ghannouchi favored supporting Iraq, Mourou advocated condemnation and the split caused the party to suspend all political and religious activities. [Ref. 57, pg.151] Al Nahdah's apparent disintegration came after months of growing violence blamed on the fundamentalists, including an attack on a local office of the RCD which resulted in a night-watchman dying of burns after being set on fire. Another night-watchman was badly burned, and two people inside the office stabbed. Mass arrests followed. As many as 800 people (according to sources within the movement) were picked up, including most of al Nahdah's leadership not already in jail or exile. Only three members of its executive committee were left at liberty and on 8 March they announced that they had frozen their membership of and activities in al Nahdah because of fundamentalist violence which they rejected. [Ref. 64, pg. 16] It would seem that the government had successfully broken the movement and could return to its stated goals of political reforms. But such was not the case.

The May 18-24, 1991, issue of The Economist published a searing criticism of ben Ali:

"Since last September Tunis has turned into a battleground between Islamic militants and a tough regime. After a violent clash on May 8th, when at least two students (some say six) were shot dead by the police, the government this week set up a commission to investigate the unrest.

The commission is to report to President Zine el-Abedine ben Ali next month. If it were allowed to, the commission might place much of the blame on the president himself. When this ex-secret policeman had Tunisia's octogenarian ruler, Habib Bourguiba, declared senile in November 1987, he promised a 'new era' of democracy...Since then, Mr. ben Ali,...has done little to persuade Tunisians that he is any less of an autocrat....

Having split [al Nahdah] and won over his secular opponents, the president may feel that events justify his policies...But Mr. ben Ali's Tunisia is a disappointment. There is no real democracy and no press freedom. The students' deaths prompted hardly a whisper of criticism inside or outside the government-controlled media...

Deprived of the restraint once exercised by leaders operating in the open, the fundamentalist movement is threatening to spin out of control. 'Now that we have martyrs,' say the students, 'we must pursue our struggle'." [Ref. 63, pg. 47-8]

In Tunisia, the magazine was seized from all the newsstands [Ref. 60, pg. 16] John P. Entelis, Professor of Political Science at Fordham University noted:

> "Probably nothing so captures the country's current decaying political situation than the communique condemning the police killings issued out of Paris on May 10, 1991, by nine political opponents of the regime including such ideologically diverse figures as Mohamed Mzali, Ahmed Ben Salah, and Rachid Ghannouchi. That ben Ali has been able to 'unite,' however temporarily, a laissez-faire capitalist, a militant socialist, and a Muslim fundamentalist speaks volumes to the decline of ben Ali's system of rule." [Ref. 71, pg. 12]

In any society there will be contests between public and private interest; and the telling evidence about predominant structures, particularly for newly implemented liberalizing measures, comes not in routine, noncontroversial dealings between state and citizen but in situations where the state must exercise restraint in order to allow the citizen free exercise of rights or where the state may at the least have nothing to gain in extending rights to the citizen. [Ref. 70, pg. 38] This evidence was particularly blatant in the government's attempt to subvert individual rights under the guise of stopping an Islamic "plot" to overthrow the government.

At the end of May, Interior Minister Abdallah Kallel, outlined a plan by the Islamists to seize power by force and set up a theocratic state. The plan consisted of: 1) distribution of anti-government tracts; 2) demonstrations; 3) violent attacks on symbols of

authority; 4) unrest in schools and universities; 5) as anarchy spreads, calls for a popular insurrection. Once the army had been deployed on the streets to restore order, fundamentalist agents in the armed forces were to take control of the ministries and other key points and seize power.

Of the 300 men Mr. Kallel reported to have been arrested, 100 were from the army. The others included policemen and customs officers as well as civilians. Journalists were shown a video tape of a military man giving details of various meetings with al Nahdah military figures. Mr. Kallel gave an outline of al Nahdah's organizational structure, including its secret, military wing, with chapter and verse on dates and places of key meetings. The captured weapons on display consisted mainly of knives, iron bars, chains and the materials for making petrol bombs. [Ref 68, pg. 14]

In June 1991, Tunisia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, visited the U.S. In an interview, he claimed ben Ali was sincere in his promises and had accomplished a great deal. It was the Islamists who were creating the problem.

> "We hear some say that in three years in power, President ben Ali did not deliver much. The truth is that in these three years we delivered more far-reaching reforms than in any period of Tunisia's history. President ben Ali is truly committed to democracy. His record is here to prove the point....

> The so-called Islamists themselves were allowed to publish a newspaper....Their political activity was very much tolerated in the country. It was generally hoped that, through these measures, they would express themselves clearly and convincingly on the issues of the day and progressively coax themselves into the mainstream....
>
> For some reason, they thought it more expedient to muscle their way through and to target symbols of the state through religious dogma and random violence, so as to create a "revolutionary atmosphere" and establish a theocracy, thus reshaping the country's social model, with their anti-democratic means....
>
> With the same firmness that it deals with outlaws, the state will not tolerate any human rights abuses. All allegations of such abuses will not be taken lightly by the government. As emphasized by the president himself, any complaint will be investigated and no effort shall be spared towards the protection of human rights. The recently created Higher Commission for Human rights and Basic Freedoms is another manifestation of President ben Ali's determination in this field and an illustration of his unwavering commitment to uphold the law and protect the rights of citizens against abuses. Faithful to its traditions of tolerance and moderation, Tunisia will move ahead, under the leadership of President ben Ali, on the path of democracy, development, and stability." [Ref. 59, pp.50-1]

If by now it was apparent that the media had given ben Ali more credit than he deserved, some of the witnesses giving testimony at the House of Representatives hearing on Human Rights in the Maghreb and Mauritania (held a few days after Ben Yahia's visit) continued to cloud the picture. Ambassador James K. Bishop, Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau for Human Rights and

Humanitarian Affairs, characterized Tunisia as "a pluralistic democracy, although all 141 members of its National Assembly are members of the RCD", due to opposition members boycotting elections "charging...that the RCD had unfairly structured the electoral code to ensure its success at the polls." Ambassador Bishop's subsequent testimony on human rights violations and press restrictions and harassment of journalists in Tunisia directly contradicted his original statement that Tunisia was a "pluralistic democracy". [Ref. 60, pp. 10, 16]

Professor Mary-Jane Deeb, Department of Government, School of Public Affairs, at the American University, stated that "The [Tunisian] government policy since [the removal of Bourguiba] has been one of compromise rather than one of confrontation with the Islamists." Professor Deeb's testimony cited incidents of violence and reports of plots which the Tunisian government blamed on the Islamists and pointed out that in Tunisia, as well as in Algeria, "a large number of organizations have voiced their opposition to the tactics used by some of the members of [al Nahdah]" including the other opposition groups. [Ref. 60, pp. 55-7, 44]

John Ruedy, Associate Professor of Middle East and North African History at Georgetown University, questioned whether or not the decision to open the system had come too late. He pointed out

that by the time the Tunisian and Algerian governments acted, the Islamists were already the most cohesive and popular opposition movements in the two countries.

> "Now, Rashid [Ghannouchi] of the Tunisian [al Nahdah] and Abbassi Madani of the FIS in Algeria have pledged that their parties will play by the rules of the game, and that they will respect their countries' constitutional arrangements. It is not for me to question their sincerity, but the nature of the programs they espouse and a sampling of the internal debate of these movements does lead one to question whether once in power, either the [al Nahdah] or the FIS would continue to maintain the pluralistic arrangements that brought them here.
>
> There is little, in fact, in Islamic history to suggest that political diversity is a value deeply treasured by Muslims or that personal freedoms at least nominally guaranteed by existing constitutions would be protected.
>
> Islam, as you know, prescribes a rather narrow path, the Sharia, which is thought by Muslims to be the surest path both to earthly and spiritual salvation.... The violence to which certain elements of [al Nahdah] in Tunisia have had recourse since the middle 1980s...calls into question the solidity of the [al Nahdah's] commitment to the existing legal framework.
>
> ...the existence of fundamentalism as the strongest contender for [the regime's] power calls into question the ability of the regimes to secure more than a temporary opening of the system. Pluralism, many people fear, would constitute a short-lived mechanism for transferring power permanently to the Islamists." Ref. 60, pp. 70-1]

In her testimony, Holly Burkhalter, Washington Director, Human Rights Watch, noted the rising number of political cases, cases of political imprisonment, and deaths in detention through torture. She stated that there had been three deaths in custody the previous year, and two deaths within the last month or so. No proper investigation of them was made. In discussions, she added:

> "I know in your opening statement, both the Chairmen described this phenomenon [the Islamic movement] as a threat to human rights... I would like to note that the main opposition political party in Tunisia, the "Renaissance Party or [al Nahdah],...is one of the most moderate of the Islamic movements in the region, and it has for 10 years been trying to get legal recognition so that it can function as a normal legitimate political party like any other political party.
>
> It has never been given legal recognition and, thus, the members of the party are operating illegally when they try to speak openly or organize themselves. Their publications are closed down, as you noted in your questioning. There is really no opportunity for these citizens to participate peacefully in the political life of their country. I would say that the government's increasingly heavy-handed response to the very legitimate political aspirations of its population, not just the Islamic party but other critics of the government, that is the real threat to human rights in this country. It seems to me...that when human beings are deprived of the right to participate peacefully and when their peaceful advocates are tortured and sometimes killed in detention and many thousands are rounded up and students are shot, etc., that that activity on the part of the government encourages violence and encourages increasing tensions that you are actually indeed seeing in Tunisia." [Ref. 60, pp. 22-3]

James O'Dea, Director of the Washington Office of Amnesty International, concurred with Ms Burkhalter:

> "...we have the gravest concerns about the situation in Tunisia...as we have heard, at least 2000 people remain detained. People have been taken from their homes at night...The situation is deteriorating and we need to move quickly to stop the terrible deterioration in Tunisia.
>
> I think it is worth noting that Islamists received 18 percent of the vote in 1989, and that President Ben Ali's claim that the Islamists are not democratic has to be looked at. The [al Nahdah] movement has said at least publicly that it wishes to join the democratic process, and it is critical, if the Tunisian situation is to be recovered, that he and his government staunchly defend civil and political rights which can never be abrogated in the name of defending democracy...he has got to defend democracy and defend their right to enter the democratic process." [Ref. 60, pp. 78-9]

The hearings were only one of a number of criticisms on Tunisia's human rights violations and ben Ali moved quickly to counter them. The government announced an enquiry into the allegations of abuses, in apparent response to the urgings of Amnesty International and the Tunisian Human Rights League. If the allegations were substantiated, the appointed head of the enquiry, Rachid Driss, an elder statesman and chairman of ben Ali's own consultative council on human rights, was to recommend ways and means of preventing any recurrence. The Tunisian League announced it was now authorized to visit detention centers. [Ref. 65, pp. 13-4]

In July 1991, Tunisia's and Egypt's Interior Ministers met in Tunis to sign an unprecedented security pact on joint action against those who "threaten state security." The pact included training for officials and the exchange of information on Islamist organizations.

On July 11, 1991, President Mitterrand visited ben Ali to "show support" and on July 12, ben Ali underlined the Islamists' international network, telling the Paris daily *Le Monde* that there was not a shadow of doubt about the existence of a "Fundamentalist International." He noted that Islamists use "terror, violence and crime" to obtain their goal of a "theocratic state." He said that Islamist activities were coordinated from Sudan and added that he had "irrefutable proof, particularly videocassettes of the subversive meeting" of international Islamists in Khartoum in May. [Ref. 58, pg. 2]

"We don't have a religious problem in Tunisia", Ghannouchi stated in an interview in September 1991. "It's a political problem between the people and the elite. And we are now in an advanced state of confrontation between dictatorship and democratic dreams". Ghannouchi denied there had been a split in the movement.

> "There are no dissidents in our party. A few of my brothers have left [al Nahdah] due to pressure from the Ministry of the Interior and under threat of prison. Abdel Fatah Mourou and four or five people involved in starting Esh Shaab [as a moderate alternative to al Nahdah] have achieved nothing, as ben Ali will not have anything to do with even moderate or dissident Islamists." [Ref. 66, pp.19-20]

In late September, 1991, Tunisian Republic Radio announced the government's discovery of an assassination plot against ben Ali by the Islamists. In a meeting, Interior Minister Kallel had announced the plot noting that this had come at a time,

> "...when President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was engaged in his persistent work of examining large and diversified files concerning the homeland and citizens in order to build a democratic state founded on freedoms, justice, and human rights, as well as making the Tunisian citizen happy and helping him in his daily life with support and care...." [Ref. 76]

Throughout the meeting, Kallel portrayed the movement as a powerful, international network. He stated that a few of the conspirators had escaped to Algeria where they are using Algeria "as a base from which to launch the attempt to carry out these vile acts." And,

> "The plotters...thought about obtaining a U.S.-made Stinger missile. They preferred this type to other missiles, given its precision in hitting its target.... Mohamed Chammam undertook to provide this weapon due to his strong connections with the circles of the Afghan mojahedin. He was also to train the team charged with the field execution of the operation." [Ref. 76]

Minister Kallel announced that another cache of qualitatively more advanced weapons, including pistols fitted with silencers, rifles, hand grenades and time-bombs, had been discovered in a new hideout in Sfax. He indicated that the plot, "...which according to material and absolute evidence implicate[s] the so-called [al Nahdah] Movement [and] emphasizes the deeply-rooted nature of this movement...." Following the minister's statement, videos were shown of four men, referred to as terrorists, confessing to the plot. [Ref. 76, pp. 10-12]

Between July and late October 1991, five more people died from torture while in confinement [Ref. 67]. In October, three reported Islamists were executed for the attack on the RCD office [Ref. 75, pg. 7].

The military takeover in Algeria in January 1992 after a significant win by Islamists in the elections, was praised by ben Ali. In a message of congratulations to Mr. Mohamed Boudiaf, chairman of the Higher State Council of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, ben Ali's relief was apparent:

> "I am pleased, on the occasion of your assuming the chairmanship of the Higher State Council of the fraternal Algerian Republic, to address to you and to the brother members of the council the most sincere congratulations, hoping that God Almighty will make you successful in your lofty tasks in these critical and decisive circumstances through which your dear homeland is passing." [Ref. 77. pg. 20]

Neither the Islamists nor democracy were specifically mentioned by ben Ali in his statement.

In February, 1992, Ghannouchi accused the Tunisian government of running a police state. In an interview, he asserted that "a fine line separates Islamic activity from political activity, often an unnecessary distinction, as both are invariably seen to constitute criminal acts." He stated that the Tunisian government's only official body ever to investigate allegations of torture in Tunisia was composed entirely of men appointed by ben Ali himself in July 1991 and the report was unlikely to be published officially. Leaked passages, however, told of numerous cases of death by torture and the widespread incidence of rape inflicted on the wives of arrested Islamic party militants. Amnesty International was pressing for the findings to be made public.

Ghannouchi challenged the government's meaning of "the freedom of women in Tunisia." Bourguiba's 1981 law prohibiting women from wearing hejab [veils] to work, school or university, had

resulted in thousands of women abandoning their work and studies. This freedom, he said, was, "the freedom not to be Muslim."

Asked to elaborate upon al Nahdah's commitment to democracy, Ghannouchi said it is "a way to solve political problems in a peaceful way." He added that the Muslim interpretation of democracy provides opportunities for ideas to be expressed and establishes a platform for political participation. He proposed informed debate in mosques, the media and the education system. "Our problem" he said, "is not with certain laws but with the absence of law." [Ref. 78, pg. 23]

In March, Tunisian secretary of state Fathi Houidi, denounced a "damning" report by Amnesty International on continuing human rights violations. The report observed that, rather than halting these practices, the government appeared to be encouraging them.

> "[The] President...set up a Tunisian commission to conduct an inquiry into this matter, and it published a report. It discovered a certain number of regrettable mistakes but it also concluded that these regrettable mistakes were not part of a policy but rather were isolated acts. An investigation followed, and the people in question will stand trial. Well, who could be made to believe that despite everything in the Tunisia of change, the Tunisia of human rights, the practice of torture is tolerated or encouraged, as the report says? Who could be made to believe that in the Tunisia of today there could be 8,000 prisoners of conscience?" [Ref. 79, pp. 18-19]

# VII. CONCLUSION

Tunisia is perhaps distinctive in its high degree of historical continuity which has linked the present order (the successive forms of the Destourian Party) with the Constitution of 1861. This has indicated a certain awareness that the fundamental issue at hand was one of nation- or state-building and that the involvement of France was a complicating factor in that process. [Ref. 17, pg. 24]

Bourguiba's regime became politically, however, in spite of significant reforms in other areas, little more than a replacement for the former colonial power. The use of force, perfected during the Protectorate, became the main tool for maintaining power. As the person responsible for implementing the use of force, ben Ali continues to ensure governmental power remains in the hands of a small group of elites. Just as the Protectorate used the label "communism" to justify its handling of the nationalists, Ben Ali has so far successfully played on both Western and other Arab leaders' fears of Islamic "fundamentalism" to maintain at least their tacit support.

As John L. Esposito, Director, Center for International Studies, College of the Holy Cross puts it:

"Whether the word democracy is used or not, almost all Muslims today react to it as one of the universal conditions of the modern world. To this extent, it has become part of the Muslim political thought and discourse. This fact must be appreciated by American policymakers....

Government suppression, directly or indirectly supported by Western powers, can radicalize moderates, transforming reformers into violent revolutionaries. At present the most likely candidate for such problems is Tunisia.... To the extent that governments prevent participation in elections, limit self-determination or crackdown and imprison political activists, violence and instability become likely....

The assumption that the mixing of religion and politics necessarily and inevitably leads to fanaticism and extremism has been a major factor in concluding that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Failure to differentiate between Islamic movements, that is, between those that are moderate and those that are radical (violent) and extremist is simplistic and counterproductive. The American government does not equate the actions of Jewish or Christian extremist leaders or groups with Judaism and Christianity as a whole. Similarly, the American government does not condemn the mixing of religion and politics in Israel, Poland, Eastern Europe or Latin America. A comparable level of discrimination is absent when dealing with Islam." [Ref. 62, pp. 9-12]

Having authored a number of books on his interpretations of Islam, some analysts have alleged that Ghannouchi's shift in philosophy over the years toward a more progressive position is nothing more than political pandering. In January 1992, shortly

after the military stopped the democratic process in Algeria, Ghannouchi wrote:

> "The operation aimed at excluding the Islamists from the democratic process is justified by the accusation that if they come to power they will eliminate democracy--a strange justification which leads to a contradiction: suspend democracy in order to protect it, although in countries where there is a lot of talk about democracy it is nonexistent and tens of thousands of people are in jail.
>
> But what guarantees are there that, once in power, the Islamists will not discard democracy? Whatever guarantees and concessions they give will always be interpreted as tactical moves so as to consolidate their grip on power. The fact is, though, that there are several objective factors which will make it impossible for any party to impose dictatorship.
>
> ...the modern education of most of the leaders of the Islamist movement, the variety of ethical, cultural, and political forces in the Muslim world, and the complexity of inter-state relations--especially in the light of the current international developments--will not allow any particular side to impose an autocratic, isolationist rule unless it seeks to follow a suicidal course.
>
> Even if one assumes that the Islamic movement is extremist, as everyone claims, excluding it from the democratic process will only impel it towards extremism, which is likely to kill democratic experiment altogether. After all, democracy is not only a method of government, but also a philosophy of education; the West itself did not fight left-wing and right-wing extremism by excluding them from it.

> Can anyone deny the role of Savak and the West's support for the Shah's repressive policy in the explosion of popular anger in Iran and in the appearance of what is called fundamentalism? Can anyone imagine what repression of the Islamic movement in Tunisia and elsewhere leads to in the way of deterioration of relations in the region and with Europe?" [Ref. 72, pg. 5]

The political unrest in Tunisia presents a clear dilema for foreign policymakers. If the goal of maintaining stability is a priority, this requires supporting a repressive and unpopular regime at the risk of future instability. If encouraging democracy is a priority, inherent risks include the possible development of a new government which might be less cooperative than the current regime. In Tunisian, however, the Islamic movement has been described as one of the most moderate movements and has stated its awareness of the need for cooperation between the East and the West.

The Western concern over mixing religion and politics considers only the Western understanding of the meaning of politics and the role of religion. In the West, politics is understood to be the science or art of government. While the law is considered separate from religious beliefs, Judeo/Christian religious principles have provided the moral basis of constitutional law.

In Islam, "politics" commonly means a set of ideas and institutions dealing with power, or "who gets what, when and how"

[Ref. 17, pg. 3]. In the process of secularization, Islam, which provided the moral framework for political responsibility, was rejected. In these governments, there is often little or no separation between the institutions of government and the persona of the leader(s). Non-radical Islamic movements, such as the one in Tunisia, are trying to recreate the moral and legal framework for responsible, non-personalistic (i.e., democratic) governmental institutions.

What makes Tunisia unique and important, is its "unimportance". If stability in Tunisia has relatively little direct importance to the U.S., this factor would appear to open the way for greater emphasis on democracy and human rights. Tunisia presents an opportunity for the creation of a model of an Islamic/democratic government, the implications of which, however, are not limited to Tunisia. Without the U.S. directly challenging other governments in the region, such a government could serve to put pressure on countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt to open up and reform their own political institutions. Fostering the development of representative governments based on a combination of Islamic and democratic principles would appear to be the most effective way of ensuring long-term stability in the Middle East.

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## APPENDIX A - POLITICAL STRUCTURE

| | |
|---|---|
| Official Name: | Republic of Tunisia |
| Legal system: | based on the constitution of 1959; amended on 12 July 1988. |
| Legislature: | National Assembly of 141 members elected for a five year term by universal suffrage. Every citizen who has had Tunisian nationality for at least five years and who has attained 20 years of age has the right to vote. Parties must be officially recognized before they can contest elections.The National Assembly shall hold two sessions every year, each session lastingnot more than three months. Additional meetings may be held at the demand of the President or of a majorityof the deputies. |
| Last election: | April 2, 1989 |
| Next election: | 1994 |
| Head of state: | President, elected by universal sufferage for a maximum of three five year terms. Is both Head of State and Head of the Executive. Must not be less than 40 years of age/not more than 70. Also the Commander-in-Chief of the military and makes both civil and military appointments. If the presidency falls vacant for any reason before the end of a president's term of office, the President of the National Assembly shall take charge of affairs of the state for a period of 45 to 60 days. At the end of this period, a presidential election shall be held. The President of the National Assembly is not eligible to be a presidential candidate. |
| Executive: | Council of Ministers presided over by head of state who is also head of executive. Should the council of ministers not receive the support of the National Assembly it may be dissolved by the president and elections for a new assembly held. If censured by new Assembly, the Government must resign. |

## APPENDIX B - POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN TUNISIA

RCD (Constitutional Democratic Raily), founded 1934 as the Neo-Destour Party, following a split in the Destour (Constitution) Party; Neo-Destour Party achieved Tunisian independence from France in 1956; renamed Parti Socialiste Destourien in 1964 (PSD); adopted present name in February 1988.

MDS (Democratic Socialist Movement), in favor of a pluralist political system; participated in 1981 election and was officially recognized in November 1983, Secretary General Muhammad Moaada.

MUP (Popular Unity Movement), supports radical reform; split into two factions, one led by Ahmad Ben Salah, living in exile until 1988, the other became the PUP (see below).

PUP (Popular Unity Party), leader Muhammad Bel Hadj Amor.

PCT (Tunisian Communist Party), founded 1939, suspended 1963-81, Secretary General Muhammad Harmel.

Hizb al-Nahdah (Renaissance Party), formerly Movement of the Islamic Way (MTI), banned in 1981, candidates stood in the 1989 elections as independents, leader Rachid Gannouchi, in exile, current leader, Ali Laaridh, former Secretary General Abd al-Fatha Mourou has split from party and is reportedly attempting to establish a more moderate party .

RSP (Rassemblement Socialist Progressiste), founded in 1983; officially recognized 1988; leftist; Secretary General Nejib Cheebi.

UDU (Union Democratique Unioniste), officially recognized 1988, supports Arab unity, Secretary General Abderrahmane Tlill.

(Sources for Appendixes A and B: The Economist Intelligence Unit, The Middle East and North Africa, Europa Publications)

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