Century Foundation Capstone:

How Does Power Affect Islamist Ideology?

**Project Title**

How does power affect the ideology and behavior of Islamist groups?

A Comparative Policy Analysis

**Client Organization**

[The Century Foundation](http://www.tcf.org/), a non-partisan think tank based in New York City that studies, among other things, the challenge of “restoring America’s international credibility as an effective and cooperative leader in responding to global security and economic dangers.”

**Client Project Director Contact Information**

[Michael Wahid Hanna](http://www.tcf.org/about.asp?pgid=staff&staffid=63), fellow and program officer

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**Background**

Mr. Hanna currently runs a Century Foundation initiative to find a regional solution for the Afghan conflict, bringing together influential interlocutors from all the major organizations and governments involved in Afghanistan and trying to create workable solutions to pass on to the political echelon. He also has researched and written extensively about Iraq, Israel-Palestine and Egypt.

From The Century Foundation’s [website](http://www.tcf.org/about.asp):

The Century Foundation, founded in 1919 by the progressive businessman Edward A. Filene, is a nonprofit public policy research institution committed to the belief that a mix of effective government, open democracy, and free markets is the most effective solution to the major challenges facing the United States. Our staff, fellows, and contract authors produce publications and participate in events that (1) explain and analyze public issues in plain language, (2) provide facts and opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of different policy strategies, and (3) develop and call attention to distinctive ideas that can work.

The Century Foundation’s long history of providing reliable and insightful analysis, as well as our decades of experience in convening bipartisan, diverse task forces and working groups, particularly distinguishes us from other think tanks. Political forces have swung dramatically during the passing decades and surely will again in the future. But our commitment to offering reason and facts in the pursuit of national progress endures.

**Objective**

The goal of this project is to fill a void in the literature for policy makers on possible ways to moderate Islamist groups, drawing on the experiences of Islamist movements that have taken municipal power in a wide variety of contexts. These disparate cases have yet to be compared, and little writing has explored the nexus of municipal governance and Islamist ideology.

We will be to analyze the lessons learned from the ascension of Islamist groups to municipal power in several different contexts, and to compile some clear recommendations for US policy makers who wish to encourage nonviolence and political moderation.

An extensive body of data has emerged over the last decades concerning the behavior and ideology of Islamist groups that have won local power and deliver public goods and services to their constituents and to a broader community. This body of information includes government reports, think tank reports, academic studies, journal articles, and in some cases, journalism.

Most writing has focused on Hamas, to the exclusion of the other Islamist movements that have acquired a growing share of local (and sometimes national) power, especially in Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, the Gulf, and the Palestinian territories. Very little work has synthesized the very narrow studies done by some scholars and organizations. Very little work has tried to describe the lower grass-roots or town-hall level practice of Islamist groups.

Now that Islamist groups have proved their staying power, policy makers are looking for policy tools to moderate change. We can help provide an understanding of what the transition to Islamist governance might mean.

There is currently a dearth of literature that looks broadly at the question of how governing – in particular at the local or municipal level – affects Islamist movements and their ideology. Our findings will be of acute interest to many communities of policy-makers:

* State department officials working on democracy promotion and human rights
* Regional officers working on countries where Islamist parties have become indelible players in the political scene (Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, Jordan, West Bank/Gaza, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, etc.)
* Defense Department officials handling policy in areas dominated by Islamists, and concerned about strategic relationships with states that host potent Islamist movements
* Counter-terrorism officials who believe there’s a link between poor governance, authoritarianism and the rise of violent *takfiri* Salafists

The purpose of this project would be to select four or five exemplary case studies from different contexts, and then to compile a thorough narrative of each case. The team will then make a comparative analysis, from which it will draw lessons learned and recommendations that can guide US policy makers whose goal is to promote nonviolence and political moderation.

The central research questions are:

* How does political Islam accommodate itself to power?
* What factors correlate with an increase in extremism? What factors correlate with an increase in moderation?
* How does wielding local power affect the national ideology of Islamist movements?
* In cases where movements have moderated upon taking power, what were the mechanics by which they moderated?
* Are there outside levers that actors such as the United States can affect?

Case studies will be chosen by the team in conjunction with the client, and will probably include one region or municipality from each of the following areas:

* Shia Southern Iraq
* Jordan
* Turkey
* West Bank/Gaza
* Southern Lebanon
* Pakistan
* The Gulf – Kuwait, Qatar or Bahrain

The student team will work closely with the New York-based client to select appropriate cases and then find and compile the documentary evidence to assemble the case studies.

The final product will be a concise policy memorandum, no more than 20 pages in length, geared toward recommending concrete steps that policy makers can take based on the case study analysis. The research team will present the memorandum at a session at the New York headquarters of The Century Foundation.

**Tasks**

Initial sessions will run as a seminar in close conjunction with the client and faculty adviser, to lay the groundwork in Islamism, political ideology and policy-making goals. Team members will be expected to read the assigned readings before we meet so we can develop a strong common framework.

The research team will select the case studies during the first few weeks, in conjunction with the client. The team will conduct extensive research for the case studies, and then spend considerable time as a team analyzing the results, assessing lessons learned, and crafting recommendations for policy makers. *The overwhelming majority of the work will be executed as a team.* Some subgroups within the team might take responsibility for collecting research to bring back to the entire group, but the bulk of the work will revolve around the group’s ability to synthesize multiple cases, analyze them collectively, and proffer succinct recommendations that are based on multiple cases.

**Deliverables and Timetable**

January 2009: Workshop begins

Feb. 1: Detailed work plan

By end of February: Case studies selected, research underway

March 1: Mid-term briefing to client. Students complete and submit preliminary reports

March 10: Mid-term assessments from instructor to students

By middle of March: Students complete case study research, begin collaborative process of analyzing results, determining lessons learned, crafting recommendations

Mid-April: Draft report to Century Foundation, adviser

April: Capstone presentations at SIPA

End of April/first week of May: Client presentation in New York. Final paper submitted to client five days before presentation.

**Requirements**

Students must be able to devote at least four hours a week to meeting as a group – once during the scheduled class time and one other time when the adviser will not be present. *During the final six weeks of the project two weekly group meetings will be necessary.* Students should make sure their schedule allows such flexibility and that they are sufficiently interested in the research question to devote time to it.

Teamwork and work ethic are the vital ingredients of success. We are looking for a combination of complimentary skills and experience. Each student ought to have a cross section of the listed skills, as well as proficiency in English.

* Independent research, investigation, interviewing
* Legal work, rights analysis
* Archival research (FRUS, National Archives)
* Clear persuasive writing
* Policy analysis. Experience with Department of State, Congress, Executive Branch
* Regional expertise
* Foreign languages, especially languages useful for our case studies: Arabic, Dari, Pashtu, Urdu, Turkish.

**Logistics**

Client plans to meet with students as a group at least once a month, and more often as needed. Client will be available as needed by telephone and email and will take part in bimonthly teleconferences with group. Most research will be conducted by phone and using remote resources

**Readings**

Please read these overview articles before our first team meeting.

International Crisis Group, “[Understanding Islamism](http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/037-understanding-islamism.aspx),” Middle East/North Africa Report No. 37, March 2, 2005

Malise Ruthven, “[The Big Muslim Problem!](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/dec/17/the-big-muslim-problem/?pagination=false)” The New York Review of Books, December 17, 2009.

Mahmood Mamdani, “[Whither Political Islam](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/60445/mahmood-mamdani/whither-political-islam)?” Foreign Affairs, January/February 2005.

Shadi Hamid, [Resolving America’s Islamist Dilemma: Lessons from South and Southeast Asia,](http://www.tcf.org/list.asp?type=PB&pubid=668) The Century Foundation, 10/30/2008

Hassan Abbas, "[Inside Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province: The Political Landscape of the Insurgency](http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/20086/inside_pakistans_northwest_frontier_province.html)," New America Foundation, April 2010.

*Crisis Group reports on Turkey, Egypt, Hamas, ISCI, Hezbollah, Jordan, and North Africa:*

[Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints](file://localhost/en/regions/europe/turkey-cyprus/turkey/203-turkey-and-the-middle-east-ambitions-and-constraints.aspx), Europe Report N°203, 7 Apr 2010

[Egypt's Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?](file://localhost/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/egypt/076-egypts-muslim-brothers-confrontation-or-integration.aspx), Middle East/North Africa Report N°76, 18 Jun 2008

[Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas](file://localhost/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/072-ruling-palestine-I-gaza-under-hamas.aspx), Middle East Report N°73, 13 Mar 2008

[Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council](file://localhost/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-syria-lebanon/iraq/070-shiite-politics-in-iraq-the-role-of-the-supreme-council.aspx), Middle East Report N°70, 15 Nov 2007

[Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis](file://localhost/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/069-hizbollah-and-the-lebanese-crisis.aspx), Middle East Report N°69, 10 Oct 2007

[The Challenge of Political Reform: Jordanian Democratisation and Regional Instability](file://localhost/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iran-gulf/jordan/B010-the-challenge-of-political-reform-jordanian-democratisation-and-regional-instability.aspx), Middle East Briefing N°10, 8 Oct 2003

[Islamism in North Africa I: The Legacies of History](file://localhost/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/B012-islamism-in-north-africa-1-the-legacies-of-history.aspx), Middle East/North Africa Briefing N°12, 20 Apr 2004

*Other background materials*

Michael Emerson and Richard Youngs, editors. [Political Islam and European Foreign Policy: Perspectives from Muslim Democrats of the Mediterranean](http://www.ceps.eu/book/political-islam-and-european-foreign-policy-perspectives-muslim-democrats-mediterranean). Foreign and Security Policy CEPS Paperbacks. 28 November 2007, Pages: 199. [Free download]

Noah Feldman. The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State (Council on Foreign Relations). Princeton University Press (March 3, 2008).

Gilles Kepel. Beyond Terror and Martyrdom. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (November 20, 2008)

---------------. Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (March 31, 2003)

Olivier Roy. Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah (CERI Series in Comparative Politics and International Studies). Columbia University Press, 2006.

-------------. *The Failure of Political Islam,* Harvard 1994.

Malise Ruthven. [The Rise of the Muslim Terrorists.](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/may/29/the-rise-of-the-muslim-terrorists/?pagination=false) The New York Review of Books. May 29, 2008.

--------------------. [The Islamic Optimist.](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2007/aug/16/the-islamic-optimist/?pagination=false) The New York Review of Books. August 16, 2007.