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**THE MUSLIM BROTHERS IN EGYPT:
THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND AN ISLAMIC DICTATORSHIP**

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RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN STUDIES**(RIEAS)****RESEARCH PAPER****No. 114****OCTOBER****2007****THE MUSLIM BROTHERS IN EGYPT:
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After the Great Depression of the 1930s, Egypt had to suffer from British colonialism and a treaty in 1936 that prevented its independence. Then, the Second World War viewed an afflux of foreign troops, unwelcome by Muslims on “their” soils. Problems were accentuated with the migration from rural areas to cities, and finally social discontents due to inflation and unemployment. The middle class and lower middle class were the most adversely affected by those developments in the 1930s and 1940s, and did not have much prospect to believe in a better future. The Muslim Brothers were a response to this growing discontent. The fact that Egyptians are religious was also a major help. A leader of the Technical Military Academy, a radical Islamic group, believed “that the Egyptians are basically the most religious of all Islamic peoples. They were so before Islam, from the time of Pharaohs. They have continued to be very religious. Egypt would therefore be a good base to start the world Muslim revival.”¹

The Muslim Brothers are faithful to their principle: setting an Islamic state under the shari’a. The main issue, that divides scholars, is whether the Muslim Brothers “non-violence”

¹ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), p. 9

is a strategy or a tactic. Parliamentary politics, penetrating civil society, Islamic business and finance, and social institutions are the pillars of their new move. Some of those activities existed before their tactical shift, some were created or accentuated. What is also of great interest, and is not often asked by scholars, is what kind of reforms would be implemented if they were to grasp power. Renouncing violence to take power does not imply an Islamic state more moderate.

Creation of the Muslim Brothers and early fights with the regime.

Hassan al-Banna created the Muslim Brothers² in 1928 in Ismailiyya, a Western enclave administered by French interests and guarded by the British army. This movement became very popular in the 1930s and 1940s. The bulk of the Muslim Brothers' supporters and propagandists came from the Wafd party.³ Hassan al-Banna's thought was influenced by the Salafis, "as can be seen from the fact that upon Rida's death in 1935 al-Banna inherited *al-Manar* and published it until 1940."⁴ Islamist groups already existed in Egypt. The ideological antecedents of the Muslim Brothers were Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'abdu, and Rashid Rida. The movement had its own spiritual authorities and did not recognize those of the state. Their society was a complete "ummah" modelled on the original community of the Prophet. They elected a "council (shura) who advised the supreme leader (imam), or guide (murshid)."⁵ They did not recognize al-Azhar (the leading institution for Sunni learning in the Islamic world) because it has been under state control since the nineteenth century, to legitimise the ruler.

At its birth, the Muslim Brothers called for a shari'a based society. This would imply that there is no separation between the state and religion. Brothers rejected the Western domination, Western society, and Western culture. Nevertheless, in 1939 the program was not clearly defined. Al-Banna suggested that if one desired he might: "describe the Muslim Brothers as (1) a Salafite call, (2) a way based on the prophetic model behaviour, (3) a sufi reality...; (4) a political association...; (5) an education society...; (6) an economic company...; (7) and a collective thought."⁶ He should have added the determination to end foreign domination.

² Also called Muslim brotherhood, Muslim Brethren, or Ikhwan.

³ Adnan A. Musallan, *From Secularism to Jihad* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), p. 17

⁴ Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1997), p. 156

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156

⁶ Zohurul Bari, *Re-Emergence of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt* (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1995), p. 24

The reject of Western ideas implied the reject of capitalism, socialism, and communism. An Islamic economic program was nonetheless difficult to propose. Al-Banna based his thought on the problems of the vast majority of Egyptians, which were poor people. Besides, the movement asked for economic reforms such as the nationalisation (“Egyptianisation”) of natural resources and financial institutions, the abolition of usury, a reform of the tax system, a redistribution of land, labor reforms, industrialization, and the institution of Zakat as the basis of social security. The Muslim Brothers had several companies such as the Company of the Muslim Brothers for Spinning and Weaving, the Arab Company for Works, the Company for Agricultural Reform and the Company for Islamic Dealings.⁷ Such as Young Egypt or the Communists, the Muslim Brothers raised the issue of inequalities among Egyptians.

The Muslim Brothers had a vast network that was going far beyond some companies, mosques, and schools. To extend its influence and its supports, it opened several clinics and sports clubs. The improvement of social standards of poor Egyptians was at the core of the Muslim Brothers’ program. Numerous Egyptians appreciated the work of the organization. It was the basis not only to attract people but also to foster a benevolent image, whether or not Egyptians considered Allah as the center of their lives. This was possible because the state did not provide welfare benefits and public education for all.

Al-Banna was also fascinated by Hitler. Both hated Jews, democracy, and Western culture. When the war broke out, the Muslim Brothers promised they would rise up and help General Rommel and make sure to kill the Allies in Egypt.⁸ The Muslim Brothers representative of Palestine, the grand Mufti of Jerusalem (al-Husayni), worked for the Third Reich during the war and played a major role in the recruitment of the SS Arab division that will be known as the “SS Handjar.”⁹ The “Himmler to Mufti telegram” of November 1943 attested the alliance between Nazi Germany and the Mufti: “the firm foundation of the natural alliance that exists between the National Socialist Greater Germany and the freedom-loving Muslims of the whole world.”¹⁰ The Muslim Brothers were not prosecuted after the war despite the participation of the Mufti and “freedom-loving Muslims” in the Holocaust.

In the second half of the 1930s, the Muslim Brothers were strongly engaged to help the Palestinians. They raised and channelled funds to fight the Jews, and intensified contacts

⁷ Ibid., p. 27

⁸ <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=15344>

⁹ Paul Landeau, *Le sabre et le Coran: Tariq Ramadan et les Frères musulmans a la conquête de l'Europe* (Paris : Editions du Roché, 2005), p. 20-28

¹⁰ Himmler to Mufti Telegram 1943: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Himmler_to_Mufti_telegram_1943.png

with religious leaders in Palestine. Banna was interned from 1941 to February 1942 due to his “critic” of the British presence. The secret apparatus of the Muslim Brothers bombed British clubs during the Second World War and assassinated Egyptian officials. In 1945, the Palestinian question became even more explosive, and the Muslim Brothers were organizing violent demonstrations against the Jews. Military training centers were set up to send volunteers in Palestine to fight “Zionism.”

The Muslim Brothers infiltrated the armed forces throughout the 1940s, and had their voice heard among the Free Officers. Free officers used the Muslim Brothers to gain influence, religious supports, but broke with them because they rejected the fanaticism of the religious movement and wanted to create a “supra-partisan” group.¹¹ The Free Officers appropriated the support of most of its constituency. The Muslim Brothers were unable to implement an Islamic society due to the Egyptian power structure. Then, “the idea of an immediate violent transformation became credible and attractive to the most ideologically committed members.”¹² Nasser proposed three ministerial positions to the Muslim Brothers but the religious movement refused.¹³

The 1948 defeat against Israel made acute the fear of the Egyptian government to be overthrown by a Muslim Brothers conspiracy. To prevent any trouble, Nuqrashi’s cabinet dissolved the movement. Nuqrashi was finally assassinated in December 1948, probably by a Muslim Brother. The repression of the movement was intensified, and thousands of members were jailed.¹⁴ Furthermore, the leader of the movement, Hassan al-Banna, died in February 1949, assassinated by the political police. The Muslim Brothers “kept a low profile politically until the early 1940s and early 1950s. It took the movement more than ten years to develop organizationally before its first confrontation with the regime.”¹⁵ In more radical groups, the time lapse before challenging the regime is generally much shorter.

Once outlawed, the society nevertheless survived. Salih al Ashmawi and Hassan Isma`il al Huadaybi became the main new leaders. Some members were released from jail following the Wafd victory in the elections. In 1951, justice recognized that the main charge against the organisation (conspiracy to overthrow the government) was unfounded. Also in

¹¹ Tewfif Aclimandos, « Officiers et Frères Musulmans : 1945-1948 », in CEDEJ (Centre d’Etudes et de Documentation Economiques, Juridiques et Sociales), *L’Egypte Dans le Siècle* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 2003)

¹² Ann M. Lesch, “The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Reform or Revolution?”, in Matthew C. Moen and Lowell S. Gustafson, *The Religious Challenge to the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 185

¹³ Bari, p. 44

¹⁴ Musallan, p. 131

¹⁵ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), p. 24

1951, the Muslim Brothers registered as an association for the first time.¹⁶ In May 1952, the society declared its existence and resumed its welfare program. Members were nevertheless divided on the question of whether al-Hudaybi should step down as the General Guide. Supports to Nasser decreased when Muslim Brothers understood that he was playing on the movement internal differences and was against the independence of the organization.

The Muslim Brothers hatred doctrine engendered new fights with the regime.

Sayyid Qutb's relation with the Brothers grew in the early 1950s when he regularly contributed to their publications, including al-Da`wah (*The Call*) and *al Muslimun (The Muslims)*.¹⁷ In those publications, he developed a harsh criticism against the British occupation of Egypt. He even called Muslims to form Kata'ib al-fida' (Sacrifice Battalions) to fight the British. After publishing in the Muslim Brothers press, he became a supporter of the movement once they fought guerrilla warfare in the Suez Canal area against the British in 1951. Finally, he joined the movement and became its leading ideologue.

The Muslim Brothers were the civil organ of the 1952 revolution. Yet the Muslim Brothers refused the invitation of the Revolutionary Council to participate in the government. The Muslim Brothers asked for a constitution based on Islam. Critics were growing once the government allowed the British to re-enter Egypt whenever the area was threatened, and let them keep some troops at the Suez Canal.

The Muslim Brothers, charged of conspiracy to overthrow the government and terrorism, were declared illegal in the early 1950s. In 1954, only two years after the military coup in July 1952, Nasser had been able to destroy the Muslim Brothers, suppress organized political groupings, and with the elimination of General Naguib, became the undisputed ruler of Egypt. The Muslim Brothers were destroyed because Nasser did not allow religion to be a challenger to his nationalism. Nasser had the possibility to do so because the Muslim Brothers miscalculated their power and challenged his rule without the sufficient power to do so. When a gunman tried to assassinate Nasser on October 26, 1954, the failed attempt was said to be the responsibility of the Muslim Brothers secret apparatus. Thousands were arrested. The movement was dissolved and decapitated a second time. The Free Officers with the Egyptian "victory" in 1956 and the nationalisation of the Suez Canal almost gave the *coup de grace* to the Muslim Brothers (after arrests, torture, and executions). Government members appeared

¹⁶ Ann M. Lesch, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Reform or Revolution?", in Matthew C. Moen and Lowell S. Gustafson, *The Religious Challenge to the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 185

¹⁷ Musallan, p. 130, Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism* (Beirut: American University in Beirut, 1995), p. 31

as heroes and, so, debilitated the social base of the Muslim Brothers. If the organisation was not dead, at least, it was no more a threat to the government.

Numerous Muslim Brothers were jailed in Tura, in Cairo's suburb.¹⁸ In 1957, 21 of them were killed in their cells. The Muslim Brothers, nevertheless did not stop their fight, and rebuilt their networks once out of jail. Some members, however, decided to accommodate Nasserism due to his social reform program, the building of the Aswan High Dam, the nationalization of the Suez Canal, and his showdown against France, Great Britain, and Israel in 1956.¹⁹ This group established itself as the New Muslim Brothers in 1958. Others (the central trend) did not embrace Nasserism and wanted shari'a more than anything else. They decided to propagate Islam through education.

The organization grew and became popular among the youths that were keen to follow the writings of Sayyid Qutb (notably *Signposts on the Road*). This leading Islamic thinker, jailed in 1954, claimed that Egypt had fallen into a "jahili" (ignorant) condition, resembling the period prior to Islam. Nasser was the enemy²⁰ but the organization was divided on the question "how should we take power?" Qutb wrote about the limits of the Islamic education program in an era of persecution. He and his young followers were for violence because peaceful change was not possible. On the other hand, Zaynab al Ghazali and some older members were for education until the vast majority of people understand their best interests. Qutb was released at the end of 1964, shortening his fifteen years sentence, after the president of Iraq interceded on his behalf.²¹ Once out of prison, he assumed the intellectual leadership of the movement. Some members even did not believe in Qutb's concept of societies (jama'at) of believers who would put pressure on other people to convert them to the "true" Islamic society. They wanted immediate revenge on the government.

The division in the political strategy, however, was not the main problem of the Muslim Brothers. First, Nasser did not succeed in his foreign policy (failure in Yemen) and also in his domestic policy in 1965 (failure of the ever growing administration). The Muslim Brothers were the ideal scapegoat. Second, the "race" in the intelligence services to "discover" a "plot" against the Raïs to gain the support of the leader precipitated a new repression against the organization.²² The movement beefed up by avoiding fighting the establishment as long as they would not be strong enough to challenge it. The training period

¹⁸ Gilles Kepel, *Le Prophète et le Pharaon* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984), p. 32

¹⁹ Ann M. Lesch, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Reform or Revolution?", in Moen and Gustafson, p. 187

²⁰ The adulation of Nasser was criticized by Qutb who considered it "takfir" (unbelief)

²¹ Jeffrey T. Kenney, *Muslim Rebels : Kharijites and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 92

²² Kepel, p. 35

was set at thirteen years, as long as Mohammed's preaching in Mecca. The goal was "to get 75 percent Muslims into the Muslim Brothers' fold before the political establishment would be challenged."²³ If less than 25 percent of the population was not convinced by the Muslim Brothers, the training would evolve. Sayyid Qutb was in charge of this program of reconstruction. The strategy was nonetheless less conciliatory than one should think since Qutb was ready to excommunicate Muslims that were not radical enough. The state of ignorance (the lack of moral integrity), "jahiliya", was denounced by the preacher, even if numerous members of the government were practising Muslims and received the approval of numerous Muslim organisations. The government, due to the re-establishment of the organization's network, decided to nip in the bud a potential adversary. The movement was not strong enough to challenge the government and get crushed in 1965. All the new leaders were executed, including Sayyid Qutb and Ibdel Fattah Isma'il.

The organization used the image of "martyrdom" that those repressions carried out in the following years. The Muslim Brothers were reminding their members that they were not recognized in law and had already paid a harsh price for repeated criticism vis-à-vis the government. The Muslim Brothers did not want any more "dissents" with the ruler and only worked at broadening its bases. Hudaybi's policy of "Preachers, not Judges" was the new motto. He rejected "Takfir", the act of declaring another Muslim an apostate. The government faced the challenge of openness to the Muslim Brothers too balance the extremists, but was not allowing the former to run for elections.

The Arab defeat in 1967 engendered a wave of religiosity in Egypt.

The failure of Egyptian armies in June 1967 caused a profound trauma. Faith filled Egyptians during this difficult time. The Muslim Brothers warnings against Nasser and Egypt dependence on the atheist Soviet Union were becoming a popular idea. Nasser died in 1970, and Anwar Sadat took power. He called himself a "believing" president.²⁴ Would that be enough for the Muslim Brothers?

Anwar Sadat revived the Muslim Brothers to balance the power of communists and other leftist groups. This policy of leniency revived radical Islamists who performed numerous acts of violence in the 1970s and 1980s. In the new constitution, Sadat made not only Islam the religion of the state but also added that the principles of shari'a are a major source of law. Shaykh Muhammad al Ghazali, ideologue of the Muslim Brothers and Director

²³ Bari, p. 59

²⁴ Ann M. Lesch, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Reform or Revolution?", in Moen and Gustafson, p. 190

General of Islamic Preaching in the Ministry of Awqaf, wanted a complete islamization of the constitution and, so, the shari'a as the sole source of the Egyptian law.

Sadat permitted *Al Da'wa* (1976 to September 1981) to be re-printed. This magazine was used by reformists of the movement to explain their ideas to the Egyptian population. Writings were mainly used by the Muslim Brothers expelled in 1953 because they were for collaboration with the new regime. Those members claimed Banna's heritage, but did not have the socio-political base of the organization crushed in 1954. They were "neo Muslim Brothers."²⁵ More orthodox Muslim Brothers were found at the *Jama'at al ikhwan al muslimin*.

The neo Muslim Brothers had four main enemies: Jews, Crusade, Communism, and atheism.²⁶ Jews "cannot be trust" and should be "exterminated."²⁷ Sadat peace treaty with Israel was unacceptable for *Al Da'wa*. Crusade (Christians) were "mostly bad", but not all of them. This was useful to denigrate the Western World but put a threat to Egyptian national unity because of the Copt community. Communism was atheist, and so, an enemy of Islam. Moscow, capital of atheism, was a symbol for the Muslim Brothers because it was from there that Nasser pronounced his speech in 1965 against the organization. Finally, atheism is against Islam as a state religion, and so against Muslims. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was seen as the example not to follow. Nevertheless, these themes were not accepted by all members of the organization because it underlined almost exclusively enemies of Islam as foreign and not in Egyptian society.

The Muslim Brothers became a mass movement in the late 1970s, even if it was not legal. The Egyptian public embraced religion as an answer to their never ending economic and social problems: "the disruption of the nationalist narrative which had its origins in the general crisis of the mid 1960s along with the socio-political transformations of the 1970s provided the context for the emergence of the field of religion as the domain of articulating the ideological challenge to the dominant social forces."²⁸ But people main reason to be part of the Muslim Brothers or very sympathetic to the movement was the demand for the implementation of shari'a and the opposition to the peace with Israel. The Muslim Brothers' handicap was a lack of vigorous leadership because the General Guide was elected on the basis of seniority in age.

²⁵ Kepel, p. 105

²⁶ Ibid., p. 108

²⁷ Ibid., p. 108-114

²⁸ Salwa Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt: Discursive Struggle* (Montréal: The Inter-University Consortium for Arab Studies, 1994), p. 17

In 1977, the Muslim Brothers were strong enough to “denounce, protest, and oppose”²⁹ the politics of the Egyptian government. Umar al-Tilmisani, the General Guide of the Muslim Brothers, asserted that Jews “are alien usurpers who have no right on the lands on which they have established Tel Aviv and built the Knesset.”³⁰ Furthermore, the Islamic revolution in Iran was praised by the Muslim Brothers. Indeed, the Muslim Brothers refused Sadat’s proposal to the Shah to take refuge in Egypt, portraying him as the tyrant of Iran.”

The food riots in 1977 “gave the Muslim Brothers an opportunity to launch its sharpest attack on Sadat’s regime since the Muslim Brothers’ latest reappearance on the political landscape.”³¹ On socioeconomic issue, the Muslim Brothers’ policy is nearly identical to those of the secular left. Its proposals were not different and included “self reliance, nationalization of major utilities and production enterprises, and taxation of the wealthy through Zakat for welfare subsidy for the poor’s basic needs.”³² They even allowed secular leftists to publish some articles in their newspaper to discredit Sadat’s policy and undermine his support.

Sadat’s new ideological orientation did not fit with the Muslim Brothers (and Islamic radicals) agenda. Open Door Economic Policy (Infitah), democratization, alliance with the West, and conciliation with Israel were felt as un-Islamic. Capitalism, the West, and Israel were everything that Muslim groups hated and wanted to annihilate. Since its creation the Muslim Brothers were against “the never ending crusade of the West” and the “Evil” Jew. About democracy, they asked for more and considered the path to democratization too timid. The signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978 and the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979 were not accepted by radical Islamists. Sadat assassination by an army officer owing allegiance to an extremist Islamic group was not a trauma for the population: “the delirium that greeted the death of Nasser, who had lost wars and allowed his country to become invaded by a foreign occupier, was matched by indifference for the death of a leader who had brought peace to the country and regained the conquered territories.”

The Islamization of Egyptian society was tremendous during the 1970s and 1980s, partly the result of the numerous Islamic schools, clinics, printers, transportation companies, sport clubs, and other Islamic organizations built in the second half of the century. Almost all aspects of life were touched by religion, from how one dress, to eat, and to interact with the opposite gender. In 1979, however, another step was taken with the development of Islamic

²⁹ Bari, p. 111

³⁰ Ibid., p. 111

³¹ Eddin Ibrahim, p. 41

³² Ibid., p. 41

banks on a much larger scale. Funds from oil rich countries poured in the non state banking and finance system. A counter-culture, Islam, was promoted, and seen as the only barrier against the depravation of the West. This movement is often referred as “the Islamic awakening.”³³ There is not a single way to apply the shari’a, and, so, not a unified political Islam. What the “whole Islamic movement shares, however, is the belief in the existence of Islamic solutions and the view that the Egyptian government and state are majors obstacles to the realization of these goals.”³⁴

The Muslim Brothers try to appear as the main political opponent to the regime

Numerous groups “split” from the Muslim Brothers to follow the Brothers main ideologue, Qutb. The Society of Muslims (Takfir wal-Hijra) and the Society of Struggle (Jama’at al-Jihad) were two radical groups that did not follow the same strategy to gain power. The former never challenged the state. On the opposite, the latter was challenging the regime with violent means. This opposition between radicals and moderates never disappeared totally and is still a challenge today. The difference in strategy divided socialists worldwide after the October Revolution. The same divide was seen in Islamic movements, and members of the Muslim Brothers. Should shari’a be applied now, and so, should a vanguard stage a coup or a revolution? The Society of Struggle was founded in 1979 by Muhammad Abd al Salam Faraj, a former Muslim Brother “who was disillusioned by its passivity.”³⁵ The Society of Muslims was led by Shukri Mustafa, a Muslim Brother.

The debate on whether the Muslim Brothers would accept multiparty democracy or accord legitimacy solely to Islamic groups that support the shari’a is still a major issue. Furthermore, the slogan “Islam is the solution” had never been clearly explained. The common answer is “God promised that if the people followed the correct path, he would open the door of prosperity.”³⁶ What will be the tolerance for non-believers or Christians in Egypt?

Radical zeal was encouraged by the oil embargo in 1973, funds from oil producer countries, and the Islamic revolution in Iran. On the other hand, political repression crushed radical movements from times to times. Radical strategies were correlated to services to the population, such as social warfare. Repressions made resentment against the government even more acute.

³³ Skovgaard-Petersen, p. 222

³⁴ Ibid., p. 225

³⁵ David Zeidan, “Radical Islam in Egypt”, in Barry Rubin, *Revolutionaries and Reformers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 13

³⁶ Ann M. Lesch, “The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Reform or Revolution?”, in Moen and Gustafson, p. 200

In the late 1970s, the Muslim Brothers decided to enter party politics. Unable to do so, the official reason being that religious allegiance would cause a rift with the Copts; the movement formed an alliance with the opposition party New Wafd. In 1984, this coalition won 15 percent of the votes. This opposition to the National Democratic Party was weak, partly due to the different interests and histories of both movements. The Wafd was a traditional secular party, built on the remnants of the nationalist Wafd party, and traditionally supported by the Copts.

Sadat policies were not only criticised by the Muslim Brothers, but also by secular people. In September 1981, to prevent more trouble, Sadat resorted to large scale arrests of the opposition. Fifteen hundreds people, from secular opponents to the head of the Muslims Brothers, were jailed. A month later, he was assassinated by some Islamic extremists from *Al-Jihad*. The emergence of those extremist groups has pushed the government to negotiate with more moderate groups such as the Muslim Brothers (even if the organization is not officially legal), mainly because they finally “denounced” extremism. This posture made their supports and respectability grew. The “street”, far less moderate than the government, supports the Muslim Brothers, especially on their social works, religious agenda, and powerful stances against Israel and the West.

The Muslim Brothers had much more in common with the Socialist Labour Party. Both were anti-capitalist, and talked about Islamic social values. A rapprochement with the Liberals’ party made possible a coalition Labour/Liberals/Muslim Brothers known as the Islamic Alliance. The spiritual guide of the Muslim Brothers, Tilimsani died and was replaced by Muhammad Hamid abu ‘n-Nasr to avoid tearing the Muslim Brothers apart of the alliance. In 1987, the Islamic Alliance obtained 17 percent of the votes. Their campaign “Islam is the solution” and “apply the shari’a” brought Islam as the number one issue in the 1984 and 1987 elections, and almost all parties adopted Islamic rhetoric.³⁷ The Alliance succeeded at imposing its agenda on the campaign and was winning the “war of ideas.” Nevertheless, once in parliament, they did not succeed to push the application of the shari’a to the extent they wished and, so, boycotted the November 1990 election to protest. The boycott was not limited to the Muslim Brothers but include the whole Islamic Alliance and the Wafd party. All did not trust the Minister of Interior who had the authority over the elections. The government viewed the Islamist members of parliament as members of the Labor party, but the minister of interior, Zaki Badr, stated that the Muslim Brothers presence in the campaign was

³⁷ Skovgaard-Petersen, p. 210

unconstitutional and illegal because the movement was not registered as a society or a political party.³⁸

During the late 1980s, Muslim Brothers representatives in the parliament were influential in questions regarding religion, the media, and education. The fact that they lost their representation in parliament in the early 1990s, during the Gulf War, was a real danger. The Muslim Brothers were depicted by extremists as a movement sold out to the government. To make matters worse, the Liberals left the Islamic Alliance. In the 1992 local elections, they were losing votes to the Liberals and to the extremists. They get only 8 percent of the votes.

There is no political party for the Muslim Brothers to avoid a “Lebanon type” religious strife. Mubarak’s effort to contain the Islamists is uneasy: he agrees to let them have a minimal access to the political arena but without the possibility to compete fairly as a political party. He fears that the Muslim Brothers challenge the authority and legitimacy of the military and the bureaucracy (the backbone of the regime). This situation engendered violence in the past from the Islamists and a crackdown by the authorities. Nevertheless, the basis of the Muslim Brothers is wider than in the past, and it is not sure for the government that this policy could succeed anymore.

Some members of the Muslim Brothers tried to create a political party based on youth, (Hizb al-Wasat). This party was not authorized by the commission³⁹ but this decision was nonetheless helpful for the Muslim Brothers because the movement was divided on the interest to create a youth party.⁴⁰ Salah Abu Isma’il, the Muslim Brothers faction’s leader in the Wafd and later the Liberal Party, warned: “a new party would have to accept the Camp David treaties and declare itself ‘non-religious.’ Under these conditions, a Muslim Brotherhood party would be pointless.”⁴¹ While “continuing to debate whether the movement should remain a missionary, social and religious society or become a political party, the adherents of these two main ideological currents seem to be happy with the fact that it is, in reality, both.”⁴² Yet, the whole movement could, to put in jeopardy even more the credibility of the regime, apply for the status of party. The commission would have trouble to refuse such a powerful movement to compete in the elections without losing supports.

³⁸ Ann M. Lesch, “The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Reform or Revolution?”, in Moen and Gustafson, p. 199

³⁹ Composed of the President of the Senate, some ministers and some heads of tribunals designated by the President.

⁴⁰ Sarah Ben Néfissa and Alâ’ Al-dîn Arafat, *Vote et Démocratie dans l’Égypte Contemporaine* (Paris : IRD Editions, 2005), p. 53

⁴¹ Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 128

⁴² Israel Elad-Altman, *The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood After the 2005 Elections*, Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Hudson Institute, 2006, p. 17

Elections in 2000 emphasized that the People's Assembly has been elected by 6 million electors in a country of officially 27 million potential electors.⁴³ Corruption and fraud made politics an exercise for the government that is not followed anymore by the population. Participation attained 25% in 2000, and 27% for the constitutional reforms in 2007. A growing discontent is debilitating Egypt from the inside. The Muslim Brothers might use the population discontent to merge opponents to the regime under a simple slogan, "Islam is the solution."

Are the Muslim Brothers reformists?

How to implement the shari'a? If in the mid 1980s, Abu Isma'il called for "the immediate enforcement of the shari'a, without any delay and excuses"⁴⁴ the MB position evolved towards gradualism. Pakistan has eliminated all forms of usurious transactions and has transformed all the banking institutions, including the foreign ones, into Islamic transactions. According to the Muslim Brothers, Egypt should follow the same path.

The Muslim Brothers are for an Islamic government (radical) but would like to implement an Islamic society by peaceful means. On this basis, the movement is considered radical-moderate. How is it possible to evaluate the degree of moderation of this movement?

"Moderate Muslims face a cruel choice. They can either suffer corrupt and oppressive regimes or they can support groups that advocate violence. There is very little middle ground between the two extremes."⁴⁵ Is there really a difference between a moderate and a radical, when both want an Islamic society based on the shari'a? Furthermore, they do not want to establish a Muslim society in Egypt only, but wherever Muslims are predominant in a first time, and on a longer term basis, where their number is rapidly growing such as in Europe. Their dream is a gigantic Ummah. The last step in the Muslim Brothers' chain is "mastering the world with Islam."⁴⁶ *The Project*⁴⁷, a document written by the Muslim Brothers, is a comprehensive strategy for the coming decades to expand Islam throughout the world. The infiltration of Western society is taking place and Islam will expand by deception and not necessarily by violence.

The strategy for the conquest of Christian countries is to push Muslims to ask for more political rights, gain economic influence, and by their numbers, represent an edge to put some

⁴³ Ben Néfissa and Al-dîn Arafat, p. 262

⁴⁴ Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, p. 133

⁴⁵ Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *At the Heart of Terror* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), p. 40

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43

⁴⁷ Sylvain Besson, *La Conquête de l'Occident: Le Projet Secret des Islamistes* (Paris: Seuil, 2005)

pressure on governments. Building mosques, Muslim schools, and Muslim organisations are a step already taken in European countries and the United States. The “Union des Organisations Islamiques de France”, a Muslim Brothers linked-organization in France, is for example a council that deals directly with the French government in order to promote Muslim interests. “Positive discrimination” and state-financed mosques are no longer taboos in France. Germany is also threatened. It is even the first target, according to some scholars, in the Islamization of Europe.⁴⁸

The Muslim Brothers encompass vast arrays of groups, branches, and militants in more than eighty countries.⁴⁹ Their core is in Egypt, but the organisation is also very powerful in neighbouring Arab countries with Sunni populations. The number of members is very difficult to estimate due to the opacity of groups that do not brand themselves “Muslim Brothers” but belong to its network, and because they are outlawed in some countries. Some branches, such as the Hamas in Palestine, are terrorist organizations.

For long, the Muslim Brothers (in Egypt) tried persuasion in order to reform Islam from within and attract more members. They also do not threaten (anymore) leaders that claim to be Muslim (those who recognize that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammed is his Messenger) and try to lead them back to “the right path.” They do not judge, because only God can do so. Nevertheless, moderation is not heard anymore where Muslims are fighting non Muslims such as in Chechnya, Palestine, or Kashmir. Jihad is used in this case in its radical sense: “the obligation to declare war upon the non-believers.” Furthermore, the United States is “the embodiment of evil”, such as “Zionists” and in a lesser extent Europeans. This position “helps the leadership retain legitimacy in face of some harsh criticism.”⁵⁰

Teaching and preaching represents a great part of the Muslim Brothers strategy to convert people to its cause. But “teaching and preaching cover for a broad range of political activities that would otherwise be banned. No one is fooled, but the Brotherhood benefits from the ambiguity.”⁵¹ Providing charity and welfare to the needy provides a good image and permits to recruit and level funds. The Muslim Brothers offer also true services for the poor notably through food, clothes, and medicine free of charge for the needy. The organization provides services not or almost not provided by the state. In this case, it is even more difficult to criticise the organisation, or even to shut it down, without antagonizing the population who

⁴⁸ Lorenzo Vidino, *The Muslim Brotherhood's Conquest of Europe*, *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2005

⁴⁹ <http://www.ikhwan.tv/Home.asp?zPage=Systems&System=PressR&Press=Show&Lang=E&ID=3989>

⁵⁰ Israel Elad-Altman, *The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood After the 2005 Elections*, *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Hudson Institute, 2006, p. 18

⁵¹ Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, p. 44

benefits from those services. This is a classic “trick” played by all groups, including terrorist groups.

Finally, the Muslim Brothers are able to perform political activism on the Egyptian government: pressuring for laws that are in accordance with Islamic laws. The Muslim Brothers successes since 2000 are visible each time they have the right to compete. Letting Egyptians having a free vote might bring to power an Islamic government. A parallel with Algeria comes to mind. The rise of the GIA (and its Islamist agenda) was stopped by the military government during the elections in 1991, at the price of a protracted warfare for the next decade.

The Muslim Brothers do not define democracy the same way than Westerns do. The organization “only accepts to participate in such a system because more benefit will be achieved if they do...Ikhwan (the Muslim Brothers) accept personal freedom within the limits of Islam.”⁵² Alain Chouet, former head of the Security Intelligence Service of the DGSE (the French General Directorate of External Security), warns about the “democratic conversion” of Mohammad Mehdi Akef, grand master of the Brothers in Egypt, and the apparent moderated discourse of the Muslim Brothers: “Like every fascist movement on the trail of power, the Brotherhood has achieved perfect fluency in double speak. They are able to command all the possible means of accession to the control of the masses, and to power.”⁵³

The electoral process is only a small part of the edge that the organisation have in its political activism. By the mid 1990s, the Muslim Brothers were “in control of sixteen of Egypt’s eighteen main professional associations including those for lawyers, teachers, engineers, and reporters.”⁵⁴ By this way, they were able to put pressure on the government, and get things done, such as benefits for their members. Credibility and sympathy is also given to the organisation every time the government is trying to crack the organization. Finally, the control of powerful student associations insures them with a strong political voice, keen to demonstrate and put pressure on the government. The Muslim Brothers have the power to inflame the streets and blockade the country, appealing to those organizations and the mosque. Among the (more than) 50 000 mosques in Egypt, 32 000 are government mosques. All the others are controlled by the Muslim Brothers or more radical groups.⁵⁵ Preaching and teaching in those mosques are not always “politically correct.”

⁵² Ibid., p. 46

⁵³ Alain Chouet, *Who are the Muslim Brothers?* <http://www.freemuslims.org/document.php?id=76>

⁵⁴ Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, p. 46

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 180

The growing influence of the Muslim Brothers in the military and security services is also a major challenge for the regime that relies on the military for its survival. The Muslim Brothers are building a strong “fifth column.” The Muslim Brothers are pragmatic, they condemn violence, because it gives Islam a bad image, kill innocents, and is not helpful to achieve their goal. But they have the power to use violence if needed.

Are the Muslim Brothers a counter weight to the more radicals (and a potential ally) or a deceptive façade?

“Unlike bin Laden and the Taliban, the Muslims Brothers cannot be bombed. There is no clear target. The Muslim Brothers are everywhere.”⁵⁶ Sending troops to occupy places where the organization is active would also be a failure because almost all the Islamic world would have to be occupied. The Muslim Brothers are too strong to be faced directly. Tracking the associations by laws is very difficult and mainly works at home, not abroad. Some claim that an alliance with the organization would divide them. It is very risky, nonetheless, and they might divide and conquer you as much as you want to do so.

The Muslim Brothers accepted violence as a strategy in the past and can come back to it if need be. Furthermore, the society they are promising is a totally alien concept to what Westerners consider moderate, democratic, and similar to our values. Their non-violence is only a tactic to gain power but should not overshadow the strategy. And even non-violence is a dividing issue among the Muslim Brothers, not only internationally, but also in Egypt. “Moderates” support violence not only to gain power but against all those who are on “Muslim territories.” They are moderate (only) compare to the more radicals.

The motto of the movement gives some clues about the “philosophy” of the Muslim Brothers: "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."⁵⁷ Is Jihad used for “personal efforts” or war against non-Muslims? The “questions and answers page” on the Muslim Brothers website refers to this interrogation by saying: “All Ikhwan [Muslim Brothers] support violence against Kafir armies. But about civilians Ikhwan are actually divided on this issue, the moderate majority of Ikhwan denounces violence against civilians; the hard line minority supports violence against civilians. But generally speaking most of Ikhwan denounce violence

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 77

⁵⁷ <http://www.ummah.net/ikhwan/>; The Muslim Brothers Movement, Homepage

against civilians.”⁵⁸ The two swords are no more on the logo of the Muslim Brothers (in Egypt), but violence is still at the core of the movement.

The coming succession of President Hosni Mubarak would permit the Muslim Brothers to assert even more its agenda. The Muslim Brothers General Guide Muhammad Mahdi ‘Akif indicated that the Muslim Brothers are not ready to take power. Yet, for some members, the victory of the Hamas in Palestine, and good results obtained by the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, made this assertion outdated. A growing number of people are demanding the implementation of an Islamic system.

Deputy General Guide Mohammad Al-Sayyid Habib explained what will happen if the Muslim Brothers take charge of the government. He indicated that Muslims would not be ruled (anymore) by non-Muslims. Copts, despite some declarations of enjoying “the full rights of citizenship”, would probably have to endure a secondary status: “people of the pact” (dhimmis). The double language (Taqiyya) on this issue is related on the Muslim Brothers’ web sites: articles have a different content depending of the languages, English articles are more lenient and promote “benevolence” and “reform and moderation”.⁵⁹ On the Arabic web site, Mahdi Akaf, the leader of the Muslim Brothers, said that “the jihad will lead to smashing Western civilization and replacing it with Islam which will dominate the world.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, if Muslims cannot achieve this objective in the future, Mahdi Akaf stated: “Muslims are obliged to continue the jihad that will cause the collapse of Western civilization and the ascendance of the Muslim civilization on its ruins.”⁶¹ The Muslim Brothers policy towards other minorities is following a similar pattern. Deputies from the Muslim Brothers said that the Baha’is (a faith created in 19th century Persia) were apostates who should be killed.⁶²

The Islamic state would be a dictatorship, a dictatorship of the pious. People would have no right to do what they wish because God has specified what is right or wrong. As Abu al-Nasr, one of the Muslim Brothers’ leaders, claimed: “Islam maintains that the difference between right and wrong is quite clear, that everyone must obey the rules of Islam and God’s law, not man’s choice.”⁶³ Furthermore, Women and non-Muslims would lose rights they currently enjoy. Among other things, Egypt would face “purges, repression, banning of

⁵⁸ <http://www.ummah.net/ikhwan/questions.html>

⁵⁹ Elad-Altman, p. 7; Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke, *The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood*, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2007

⁶⁰ Rachel Ehrenfeld and Alyssa A. Lappen, *The Muslim Brotherhood’s Propaganda Offensive*, American Thinker, April 2007: http://www.americanthinker.com/2007/04/the_muslim_brotherhoods_propag.html

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Elad-Altman, p. 8

⁶³ Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, p. 146

political parties, closing of newspapers and theatres, burning of books, the end of tourism and Western style entertainment, and major changes in the school system.”⁶⁴

The Muslim Brothers are often portrayed as moderates but the truth is that they are much closer to fascists than moderates. Alain Chouet explained why it is so: “the same appetite for power and profit, the same petty bourgeois recruitment, the same ideological basis founded on identity myths excluding all those who do not share them, the same pragmatic duplicity, the same terrorist violence magnified to galvanize militants and shock opponents, the same political assassinations, the same hatred for democracy –even though it can be used to arrive in power only to destroy it afterwards, the same hijacking of democratic procedures, the same historic evolution studded with failed coups, successful terrorism, paid service to the powerful, exploitation of the misery and the fears of the most disadvantaged and disdainful sacrifice of the rank-and-file militant.”⁶⁵ He correctly concludes: “the mistake, for Muslims as much as for Westerners would be to play their game and treat them as a valid representative of Islam, and a political or social mediator.”⁶⁶

Conclusion

There are three distinct phases in the life of the Muslim Brothers as a social movement: from its creation in the late 1920s to the late 1940s, it was a period of advocacy and state building. At the end of this period the numbers of members grew, and so the Muslim Brothers from the end of the 1940s to the 1960s were often confronting the state, first the monarchy, and then, Nasser. The Muslim Brothers leaders were jailed, tortured, and killed. The third phase, from 1970s to Mubarak is the “non-violent struggle” of the Muslim Brothers. This decision caused several splits in the movement because some members do want violent confrontation with the regime.

Mustafa Mashhour, before becoming Deputy General Guide of the Muslim Brothers, explained that radical youth might hurt the Islamic cause. He underlined that “Quran is our constitution”⁶⁷ and claimed that “jihad” had to be launched for “the removal of aggression and damage to which Muslims were subjected by the enemies of God” and “for the establishment of Islamic State and consolidation of this religion.”⁶⁸ Indeed, the real difference between the youth radicals and the Muslim Brothers was on the tactic to achieve their

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 145

⁶⁵ Chouet, <http://www.freemuslims.org/document.php?id=76>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Bari, p. 144

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 144

common objective, an Islamic state. At its creation, the Muslim Brothers were already claiming that “the Quran is our constitution”, and “Islam is religion and state.”⁶⁹ After several repressions, the movement adopted a far more cautious approach, but did not reject its ultimate goal: an Islamic dictatorship. Moderation is only a tactical move and must not fool Muslims and Westerners. The Muslim Brothers push their religious agenda and are going to succeed and transform Egypt completely. They have already pressed the secular regime toward more Islamism, and the coup de grace, with the establishment of the shari’a, is coming. Non-Muslims would then become second-class citizens.

A war with Iran, more fights in Palestine, a Western intervention in Darfur (in the Islamic Republic of Sudan) perceived as a Crusade, a radical Muslim take over in Pakistan: there are many international events that might trigger a Muslim revolution in Egypt under the aegis of the Muslim Brothers. The Muslim Brothers international network is also working to spread Islam worldwide, and depending of the states, through violence, political pressure, denial and deception, and above all the credulity of their targets.

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⁶⁹ Skovgaard-Petersen, p. 156

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