



BACKGROUND ANALYSIS 06/04/2006

## THE ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIM BROTHERS

### *Chronicle of a Barbarism Foretold*

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Against the background of terrorist violence of the last five years, the exploits of the **Zarqawi group** in Iraq, the arrival in power of **Hammas** in Palestine, the electoral successes of Islamists in Egypt have finally attracted the attention of observers to the **Association of Muslims Brothers and its politico-military offshoots: the Jamaa Islamiyyah (Islamic groups) more often known by their local or adopted names** (Islamic Jihad, GIA, GICM, Al Qaeda, Zarqawi group etc). The belated discovery by the Western media of a **movement that had been making its presence felt since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in most political developments in the Arab and Muslim world, and whose name is synonymous with exclusion, violence, isolation and confrontation with the rest of the world.**

Fuelled by the internal contradictions of the Muslim developing world, by the inequalities and injustices of the North-South relationship, able to profit from the political, economic and social disorder affecting Muslim communities, the

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**Brotherhood has become – especially after the collapse of the Communist bloc – the only transnational actor capable of managing and turning the political and social differences of the Muslim world to its advantage.**

Founded in 1928 in Ismailia in Egypt by the educator **Hassan al-Banna** (grandfather of the well-known **Tariq Ramadan**) **who himself had no religious background or legitimacy**, the Brotherhood initially – along the lines of a number of modernist Muslim theoreticians (Jamaleddin al-Afghani, Mohammad Abdu, Rashid Rida) wished to become the reform movement of an Islam in retreat whose followers had been unable to keep up with changes in the modern world, and as a result placed under the foreign domination of predatory colonial powers. But, **rather than forming a basis in modernity and flexibility, Hassan al-Banna made the resolute choice to go with reaction and confrontation.**

The **basic political principle of the founders of the Brotherhood** arose from a simple – if not simplistic – syllogism:

- **Islam had known an unrivalled glory and influence during the Golden Age of its founding ancestors (salaf);**
- **However all of its innovative interpretations and developments only led to ruin and servitude;**
- **Therefore, the answer is to begin again with a slate clean of all these innovations, and return to the origins of Islam, imitating the founders (tabligh) especially in the literal reading of the revealed texts, in order to rediscover the Golden Age.**

In Egypt, then under British control via a monarchy of Albanian origin set up by the former Ottoman occupier, the first faltering steps of electoral democracy were taken, by the installation of a parliament. **The example of the Brotherhood immediately found favour with a number of intermediate elites themselves excluded from power and privilege – especially of a monetary sort – who signed up because they otherwise had none of the qualities needed to gain or exercise power democratically.** That was mainly the **most conservative and least dynamic fringe of trade, crafts, middling civil servants, teachers and some professionals.** The Islamic theocratic order put forward by the Brotherhood, ruled to the letter by legal sources dating back fifteen centuries, would permit these natural administrators of society an **over-arching and comfortable legitimacy where there was no need to do battle or to win arguments, unlike the elective democratic model offered by the West.**

In fact, **from its inception the Brotherhood replicated the systems of extreme right throughout the world, as well as their ways of operating: xenophobia, exclusion, the rejection of any scientific approach, insults and anathemas and physical violence.** Hassan el-Banna was executed in 1949 for his part in the assassination of the Egyptian prime minister.

The Muslim Brotherhood, associated with the fight against the British presence and the creation of the State of Israel, looked forward to reaping the rewards of its position from 1952, with the arrival in power of **General Neguib**, a sympathiser from the outset. Their haste in wishing to eliminate **Gamal Abdel Nasser**, the real organiser of the coup yet considered too unreliable, earned them a vigorous response

from him, as he took power from Neguib and ordered a policy of merciless repression against the Brotherhood.

The repression was marked by a legal ban on the Brotherhood in 1954, permanent persecutions and trials and the execution of several of their leaders, among them **Sayyid Qutb** in 1966, the ideologist of a new radicalism and **spiritual father of the activists of today**.

**The Brotherhood's modern strategy was shaped by the repression it suffered**, along lines it was never to depart from: **clandestinity, duplicity, exclusion, violence, pragmatism and opportunism**. Taking refuge in clandestinity, the Brotherhood abandoned all more vulnerable forms of pyramidal or hierarchical organisational structures. **Ideological direction emerges informally and consensually by a college of elders, while operational management is in the hands of the very decentralised secret organisation *Tanzim as-Sirri***. Whether political or military, the subversive actions of the Brotherhood are left to the initiative of each basic cell. **Their actions follow no short-term concrete tactical plan: the only requirement is that they form part of the long-term strategy of taking power by any means available**. And this strategy rests on the two fundamental pillars formalised by Sayyid Qutb: **breaking the ties between the people of the Muslim world and their rulers on the one hand, and splitting Muslims off from the rest of the world on the other, the better to take power without the risk of outside intervention**. Any initiative which moves in these directions, whether legal or illegal, peaceful or violent, overt or covert, is acceptable and integrated into the plan which will bring the leaders of the Brotherhood to the power and to the benefits they consider their own.

**What could have remained a subversive populist movement restricted to Egyptian public life instead saw itself spread across the Arab and Muslim world through a series of favourable historical circumstances**. The first wave of repression suffered by the militants in the 1950s-1960s forced many of them into exile. This first diaspora took place in a period of political and economic decolonisation in many Arab and Muslim countries keen, out of a sense of national identity, to promote their own language and cultural values. They were however on the whole lacking in the human resources to pursue such a policy (teachers, historians, clerics) as the occupying powers had naturally discouraged any form of education in these areas. The exiled Brotherhood militants provided in many cases the perfect cadre for the implementation such policies – as was the case in the **Maghreb, Sudan, the Gulf states, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria** (in particular to the benefit of the brief Egypto-Syrian union of 1958-62).

The receiving countries rapidly became anxious at the propaganda and recruitment efforts of the new zealots. **While some made accommodations with them with more or less good grace (Jordan, Sudan) others like Syria, Iraq and Libya rapidly took the road of repression, thus feeding the Brotherhood diaspora with various new nationalities, even as the movement extended to the Indian sub-continent, to Indonesia and the east coast of Africa. In Pakistan, the Brotherhood met with ultra-religious nationalists of the Deobandist school who harboured a hatred for India and rancour at Partition and their exodus**. The cocktail was later to prove an explosive one.

For, while the doctrines of the Brotherhood were by this time more or less fixed, they were still missing an essential influential element: the financial means to allow them to buy consciences, to build up a clientele, to train and maintain militants, to raise up the masses against those in power by investing in the education and social action too often neglected in the developing countries or among minorities emigrated to the West. These means were to come mainly and massively from **Saudi Arabia**. The Saud family built its political legitimacy on its stewardship of the holy places of Islam, which it usurped in 1926 from the Hashemites. Its power is therefore under threat on two fronts. It lives in fear as much of a democratic and secularising current as of an Islamising pressure which would lay claim to more respect for fundamental values. And while the Saudis have the revenues from oil to allow them to operate this "*double containment*" they also lack the human resources necessary to such a policy. The Brotherhood's network, by now worldwide, would provide (but not without some reluctance on the Saudis' part) with this determining element in the form of political, religious, and cultural structures for the control of Islam the world over, while organising subversion in countries judged a threat to the endurance of Saudi power.

**Initially concentrated on secularising or proto-democratic Muslim countries (Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Yemen and Turkey) the Brotherhood's subversive efforts rapidly extended to monarchies rivalling the Saud dynasty – Jordan and Morocco.**

But the real extension of their influence on a world scale came with the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1978. **The emergence in Tehran of a real opposition to the religious legitimacy of the Saudis led the latter to try to put into place an international system of orientation and control of Islam, operated through NGOs and associations, for which the *Brotherhood* acted as a matrix.** Money was no object following the oil-price hike of 1973, and was pumped into regions where Islam was not well-embedded, opening the door to Iranian influence – essentially Africa and **immigrant Muslim communities in the West**. Penetration was made easier by the economic crisis which hit the West and the first oil-price shock led to poverty, exclusion and even rejection among these emigrant communities.

**Traditionally placed under the joint – but rather superficial – control of country of origin and host country, these communities proved to be permeable to the populist identity discourse of the Brotherhood, which took majority control of local representations (*UOIF* in France) in a decade or so. They had three objectives: to prove their capacities for mobilisation to their Saudi sponsors; to constitute a mass for manoeuvre against the regimes in countries of origin; and to make Islam hateful to Westerners in order to preclude any tendency they may have to intervene in the Muslim world.**

In the decade between 1980-1990, the Brotherhood added a military capacity to its ideological and financial ones. It owes that development to the shared desire of Nato and Arabia to foster local resistance networks to counter Iranian influence and bring about the exhaustion of the Soviet Union in the quagmire of Afghanistan. While the members of the Brotherhood already dispersed throughout the region in question had already organised good ideological links with local populations, helped by

Pakistani fundamentalism and deep Saudi pockets, they had little experience of operational organisation and armed struggle. But that problem would soon be solved.

**From 1981**, strengthened by the popular support their social and protest actions had earned them, the **Brotherhood thought themselves able finally to take power in Cairo by eliminating President Sadat. But having failed to ensure the existence of a sufficiently hard core of support within the Army and the security services, their attempt failed, and more than 300 members of the Brotherhood, including virtually the entire Secret Organisation, were arrested, tried and sentenced.** Around 50 of them were sentenced to death and quickly executed. The others, sentenced to prison sentences of various lengths, were gradually freed at the demand of Saudi charity organisations and American welfare groups.

**Among those liberated** who rushed to leave Egypt was **Sheikh Omar Abd-el-Rahman**, organiser of the first bomb attack on the World Trade Center in New York, and **Ayman Zawahiri**, the brains of what was to become **Al Qaeda**, as well as a hundred or so operational members who spread rapidly out among the various theatres of military operations in order to train, shape and direct troops. Through their exploits – real and mythical – particularly in Afghanistan and later in Bosnia and Chechnya, they helped legitimise and enlarge the credibility and prestige of the Brotherhood in the Muslim world and its communities abroad, as well as its strategies, ideology and methods, to the point where no other form of thinking or acting within Islam any longer seemed possible.

**Beyond this period of equipment, which benefited the US and Saudi Arabia, the Brotherhood, comfortably financed and now with a solid operational capacity, took over its own strategy and management from the beginning of the 1990s.** The party line remained immutable: to cut the Muslim world off from the rest of the planet in order to be better placed to take over power at any cost. The wave of fundamentalist terrorism that struck the West as much as those "impious" Muslim regimes starting in 1998, the deployment of militants on all the borders of the Muslim world, the permanent pseudo-racial agitation carried out by emigrated Muslim communities in the West, were all part of that strategy. Faced with the risk of seeing the disappearance of the financial support they received from the petro-monarchies, and the loss of American military support, the Brotherhood went looking within the Muslim masses for the support necessary to the development of their influence and their image. That called for spectacular actions and strong media coverage for those actions, which led to the wave of suicide attacks worldwide seen in the years 1998-2005, the engagement of Hamas in a bitter battle with Israel, and the anti-Western and anti-Shiite offensive of the Zarqawi group in Iraq. That list is not exhaustive, and the expanding cycle of violence will end for no other reason than the Brotherhood's long-awaited grasp of power in a certain number of Muslim countries – preferably the richest.

The "**democratic conversion**" of **Mohammad Mehdi Akef**, grand master of the Brotherhood in Egypt, the **vituperative comments by Ayman Zawahiri** on the Egyptian and Jordanian Brothers and their support for the democratic process, the **apparent moderated discourse of Tariq Ramadan** towards the European institutions **should not fool anyone. 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.**

**From the 1930s, Hassan el-Banna and many of the first members of the Brotherhood offered their services to the Abwehr.** Apart from the resistance to the British presence in Egypt, **Hassan el-Banna's commitment was a result of a real admiration for Hitler and the Nazi regime.** In 1942, at the side of **Haj Amin el-Husseini**, grand Mufti of Jerusalem and long-standing Brother, he encouraged Bosnian, Albanian and North African Muslims to join the *SS Handschar, Kama and Skanderbeg* divisions created specially for them.

**In its history, strategy and tactics, the Brotherhood is related to the worst fascist movements:** 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 galvanise 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.

**Even if it has had the foresight to kit itself out in the costume of "Muslims," the Association of Brothers has no more to do with Islam than the various fascist movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had to do with basic European values or with Christianity. It simply took religion hostage and confiscated it for its own ends. 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. Like all fascists, the Brotherhood exists only to satisfy the appetites and fantasies of its leaders.**