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Muslim Brotherhood Parties

in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region

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Policy Brief

Among concerned parties from Washington to Brussels, from political leaders to government officials, an intense debate is being waged on how to handle the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). A strategy of engaging the MB has recently been gaining currency, and official meetings have taken place in both Europe and the US. The issue is not limited to foreign relations but has domestic implications as well, especially for Europe. Indeed, the MB has a strong presence in Europe, and its influence on Europe's Muslims cannot be underestimated. In order to arrive at an informed opinion on the MB, we will look at its history, its ideology and its vision of the West, and at three branches of the MB in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.

1 The History of the Muslim Brotherhood

The end of the 1920s found the Muslim world in total disarray due to the expansion of European colonialism and, even more importantly, the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate and its replacement by a secular republic in Turkey in 1924. *Al-Ikhwan al-muslimun*, also known simply as the Ikhwan or the Muslim Brotherhood, was founded in 1928 by an unassuming Egyptian schoolteacher, Hassan al-Banna. The creation of the MB was to some extent a response to these two events, an attempt to fill the void and reunite the *ummah* (the Muslim nation).¹

¹ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 56.

Interestingly, the MB, a Sunni organisation, did not view itself as a political party but rather as a grassroots political movement engaged in mass mobilisation. Thus in order to gain access to the largest possible target audience, the MB created local branches and divisions for adults, youth and women. The MB also built schools, hospitals, factories and welfare societies, and distributed food so that it could attract a large following. This greatly helped al-Banna draw on the support of the small Egyptian bourgeoisie while enjoying very good relations with the Egyptian King Farouk, who saw the MB as a counterweight to Arab secular nationalists.² The organisation gained in popularity by the day: indeed, from just six members at the start, the MB grew to 1,000 members in 1933, then 20,000 in 1937, 200,000 in 1943, 500,000 in 1945 and close to 2 million in 1951.³

The MB is strongly hierarchical in structure, with numerous elaborate layers. At the top of the organisation sits the General Guide. The Arabic term, *al-Murshid al-Aamm*, indeed means ‘General Guide’, which differs considerably from ‘chairman’, the much more Western and neutral English translation used by the MB. This difference is itself sufficient to provide food for thought.

Amad Abdu Chaboune, the first Egyptian imam to be elected as a MB Member of Parliament, explained that if the government were to dismantle the first level of the organisation—that is, the level made up of leaders well known to the public—there would always be the second, third, fourth layers and so on, down to the last member of the Brotherhood.⁴ Indeed, from the beginning, the MB created numerous tiny cells—with no more than five members—and this made it almost impossible to dismantle.⁵

The MB also had its own army and was the only effective resistance force against the British occupation of Egypt.⁶ Political violence started to increase in the late 1940s, and the MB paramilitary branch took part in it by perpetrating terrorist acts.⁷ In fact, this secret apparatus, which was approved by al-Banna, was behind the bombings of two Cairo movie theatres and the assassination of members of government, among other events.⁸ In 1949 al-Banna was murdered. Gamal Abdel Nasser seized power in a coup in 1952. Allies at first, Nasser and the MB later became competitors. Then, after an assassination attempt on Nasser in 1954, allegedly by a member of the MB, the regime first dissolved the MB and then imprisoned many of its leaders. Most of them were executed, including, in 1966, its most influential thinker, Saïd Qutb. Other MB leaders were able to flee. Most ended up in Saudi Arabia, but others found their way to Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Maghreb and Europe.

Because of this forced exile, the MB started the MB International for the purpose of worldwide expansion. The MB began spreading its ideology, building financial,



2 Ibid., 58.

3 Olivier Carré and Michel Seurat, *Les frères musulmans* (1928–1982) (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983), 221–2.

4 Ibid.

5 Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 30.

6 Ibid., 29.

7 Kepel, *Jihad*, 59.

8 Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 30.

educational and social networks, and in this way gained influence. Its approach has always been pragmatic in character: while all branches have the same ultimate goals, they use different tactics according to the country in which they are located. Sometimes the policies of one branch contradict those of another; sometimes branches do not use the MB label for legal or strategic reasons, and hence some of their members do not actually acknowledge their membership to the Brotherhood. This has contributed to the organisation's strength up to the present time. As a result, the MB is today the most influential Islamist movement in the world. With close to 70 'official' representative organisations throughout the world, according to its Deputy Guide Mohamed Habib,⁹ the MB has a truly global reach. The MB has an international leadership that tells the group when, for example, to challenge an established regime or go into hiding. In countries where the regime is non-violent, the MB is non-violent as well. Where the regime is violent, the MB responds in kind.

After Nasser's death in 1970, the MB faced a major identity crisis, which ultimately led to a split between adherents of the Qutb school, who were pushing for very radical actions, and those who belonged to the more traditional camp, who wanted to follow the modus operandi in place since the late 1920s.

Since the 1980s the MB that emerged from this crisis has had a difficult time deciding whether or not to participate in national elections. This issue has been highly divisive, not only among the leadership but also for the base. This two-fold strategy of carrying out *dawa* (missionary work) and being involved in political activity has been splitting the MB. Indeed the two are not compatible: how does one expect to reconcile the goal of establishing an Islamic state that does not accept non-Muslims with being a 'democratic' political party?



⁹ Dominique Hennequin and Emmanuel Razavi, 'Les VRP de la Charia', Arte TV, 9 February 2008.

2 The Main Aspects of the MB Ideology

For al-Banna, the way to reunite the *ummah* was to put Islam at the centre of life. It was he who coined the term 'Islamist' to describe this vision. The MB's overall strategy was, and remains, one of 'Islamising' society, little by little and from the grass roots up, with the ultimate goal of one day seizing power.

In keeping with this strategy, the MB's motto, which al-Banna supplied, is 'Islam is the solution, the Koran is our Constitution, Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our Leader, Jihad is our way, dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.' Al-Banna viewed Islam as the superior religion. He once wrote, 'It is the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated, to impose its law on all nations, and to extend its power to the entire planet.'¹⁰

The MB's expressed goals include the establishment of the Sharia (Islamic law), liberating Muslim lands from foreign occupation and spreading Islam around the globe through *dawa*. Saïd Qutb, clearly the most prominent figure of the MB, went further. At the beginning of his book *Milestones*, he wrote, 'Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice. At this crucial and bewildering juncture, the turn of Islam and the Muslim community's turn has arrived.'¹¹ For him, humanity had only a tiny hope of redemption, and this required the total rejection of Western values and a complete return to a pure, primitive Islam.

The MB and Terrorism

The MB claims to condemn violence, but one of its branches, Hamas, is considered a terrorist organisation by the EU and the US, among others. This is no surprise, since al-Banna posited that jihad was a pillar of faith and an obligation for every Muslim. For him, dying as a martyr was the ultimate reward. He wrote, 'It [the *ummah*] should be able to raise the flag of Jihad and the call towards Allah until the entire world benefits from the teachings of Islam.'¹² This violent side of the MB, given expression by al-Banna and Qutb, can also explain the influence of the MB on current Islamist terror groups, including al-Qaeda.¹³ Most of the leadership of al-Qaeda, as well as its main inspiration, Abdullah Azzam, started out as members of the MB: Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. The latter told American officials that he was attracted to violent jihad after attending MB youth camps.¹⁴

At the age of 14 or 15, Osama bin Laden himself joined the MB through an after-school Islamic study group.¹⁵ Bin Laden used his MB connections to join the jihad in



10 Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 29.

11 Saïd Qutb, *Milestones*, (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1990), 5.

12 Saeed Hawwa, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, (Kuwait International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1985), 43.

13 Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 30.

14 *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

15 Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 144.

Afghanistan.¹⁶ He formally broke with the MB over a tactical issue: Azzam wanted to recruit elite members while bin Laden was in favour of welcoming everybody without exception.¹⁷

The ideological link between the MB and al-Qaeda is far from broken, as can be seen in the following statement by Mohamed Akif, the MB's General Guide until January 2010, about Osama bin Laden: 'Most certainly he is a Mujahid. I do not doubt his sincerity in resisting occupation for the sake of God Almighty'. Regarding al-Qaeda, Akif added, 'Al-Qaeda as an ideology and organization came as a result of injustice and corruption. Yes, I support its activities against the occupier, but not against the people.'¹⁸

The MB's View of the West

After his forced exile from Egypt under Nasser, Saïd Ramadan, one of the MB's top leaders and al-Banna's son-in-law, was picked by the Saudis to head the World Muslim League, the Saudi Kingdom's propaganda vehicle for spreading Wahhabism worldwide. Ramadan moved to Europe and in 1961 settled in Switzerland, where he implemented the plan to spread radical Islam on the European continent. Since then the MB has been very active in Europe, building local branches in each major European country. The MB has had a significant impact on young Muslims living in European city suburbs, instilling the concept of the *ummah* and of a Muslim identity. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi—the spiritual guide of the MB and chairman of the Dublin-based European Council for Fatwa and Research—presents himself as the religious leader of Europe's Muslims and regularly issues *fatwas* (religious edicts) for them. For al-Qaradawi, the presence of a large Muslim population in the West represents a major opportunity: 'the Islamic presence' in the West is necessary 'to defend the causes of the Muslim Nation and the Islam land against the antagonism and disinformation of anti-Islamic movements.'¹⁹

Indeed, Western Muslim communities are called to work towards reforming their host countries. Al-Qaradawi stated in 1995, 'We will conquer Europe, we will conquer America not by the sword but by our Dawa.'²⁰ The former MB General Guide, Akif, has recently said much the same: 'I have complete faith that Islam will invade Europe and America because Islam has logic and a mission.'²¹ Al-Qaradawi and Akif were simply repeating the tenets of the MB's plan to infiltrate the West. Evidence of this plan came to light in November 2001, when, at the house of Yusuf Nada, a top figure of the MB, Swiss authorities stumbled upon a fascinating document that has become known simply as 'The Project'. Dated 1 December 1982, the document is a roadmap for installing Islamic regimes in the West through propaganda, preaching and, if necessary, war.²² Among the many steps in the implementation of 'The Project' is the



16 Ibid., 250.

17 Ibid., 335.

18 Interview with Mohamed Akif, *Ilaf WWW-TEXT*, 23 May 2008.

19 Sylvain Besson, *La conquête de l'occident: Le projet secret des islamistes* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 83.

20 Yusuf al-Qaradawi, MAYA Conference, Toledo, Ohio, 1995.

21 *Ikhwanonline*, January 2004.

22 Besson, *La conquête de l'occident*, 17.

establishment of a parallel society where the group is above the individual, divine authority above human liberty and the sacred text above secular law. According to a European intelligence official, ‘The Project is going to be a real danger in ten years: one will witness the emergence of a parallel system, the creation of “Muslim Parliaments”. Then the slow destruction of our institutions will begin.’²³

Until investigative journalist Sylvain Besson printed the text of ‘The Project’ in his book *La conquête de l’occident: Le projet secret des islamistes* (The Conquest of the West: The Secret Project of the Islamists), only a few top Western counter-terrorism experts had access to it. Among them was Juan Zarate, formerly the White House’s Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism. Zarate sees in ‘The Project’ the ‘master plan’ of the Muslim Brothers, a will to ‘expand their political ideology’, which provides effective support for radical Islamism. When interviewed by Besson, Zarate added, ‘The Muslim Brotherhood is a group which worries us not because it deals with philosophical or ideological ideas but because it defends the use of violence against civilians.’²⁴

One of the main points of ‘The Project’ is that the Islamic *dawa* should continually be developed and that support should be given to all the movements engaged in jihad in the Muslim world.²⁵ Akif called on young jihadis to focus on ‘the real enemy of the ummah, the enemy which occupies, kills, desecrates and plunders... in al-Quds, in Baghdad and in Kabul.’²⁶ Hence, some of this MB propaganda has recently led young European Muslims to fight coalition troops in Iraq.

‘The Project’ also stresses that it is vital to ‘keep the Jihad state of mind in the ummah.’²⁷ The main targets are the Muslim communities situated in the West. In fact, the MB’s goal is to radicalise moderate elements by pointing out the supposed Islamophobia of the West. And this is where the real danger lies. ‘The Project’ makes it clear that the MB would like to become the indispensable interlocutor with Western governments not only when it comes to issues related to Islam, but also those on foreign policy.

A document similar to ‘The Project’, but geared specifically towards the US, came to light during the trial of the Holy Land Foundation in Texas in 2007. A memo written in 1991 by MB figure Mohamed Akram, it advocates the following: ‘The Brotherhood must understand that all their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying Western civilization from within and sabotaging their miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that is eliminated and God’s religion is made victorious over all religions.’²⁸ None of the accused denied the authenticity of the memo.

While the MB claims publicly to be in favour of dialogue with the West, its tenets are completely against the Western democratic system and Western values.



23 Ibid., 38.

24 Ibid., 39.

25 Ibid., 27.

26 *Ikhwanonline*, 24 May 2007.

27 Besson, *La conquête de l’occident*, 202.

28 Mohamed Akram, ‘An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America,’ 22 May 1991, available at http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/HLF/Akram_GeneralStrategicGoal.pdf.

3 The MB in Egypt

The history of the Egyptian MB cannot really be dissociated from that of the MB as a whole. Indeed, the General Guide of the Egyptian MB is also the head of the global MB organisation.

After the dissolution of the movement in 1954, the harsh repression by the Nasser regime and the exile period, it took awhile for the Egyptian branch to rebound. Interestingly, it was the Anwar al-Sadat regime that helped the MB return in the mid-1970s. Sadat wanted to use the MB to counter leftist forces. He viewed the MB favourably, tolerating its relentless expansion through recruitment and penetration of Egyptian society. But it was not until the mid-1980s that the MB decided to run in elections, a decision that is still today hotly debated within the organisation. Three options have been envisaged: first, creating a political party separate from the MB's *dawa* activity; second, transforming the MB solely into a political party; and third, maintaining the status quo.

In 1995 a split occurred within the organisation when a group of younger members, expressing their disagreement with a no-change policy, left to start a new political party called *Hizb al-Wasat* (the Centre Party), an organisation that was unauthorised. The MB itself is currently banned in Egypt but is nonetheless tolerated. The Mubarak regime has clamped down on the MB, trying to deny it any political role. Numerous and frequent arrests of MB leaders have taken place, especially around election time. Over 350 MB members are currently in jail.²⁹

A few years ago, seeing that its policy of accommodating the Mubarak regime had not been a success, the MB decided to take a more proactive stance. It moved towards a more pragmatic agenda that included joining forces with other political movements. In order to be credible, the MB advocated values that were quite foreign to it at that point: respect for public freedoms, sovereignty of the people and support of human rights, including rights for women and members of the Coptic Church. But at the same time, the MB's programme included the imposition of the Sharia, as demonstrated by its March 2004 Reform Initiative: 'Our only hope to achieve progress in all aspects of life is by returning to our religion and implementing our sharia. We have a clear mission: working to put in place Allah's Law.' The Reform Initiative also specifically states that only a Muslim man can become president of Egypt, in effect banning Copts and women from the top job.³⁰ This does not appear very democratic for an organisation claiming to defend, at least in Egypt, freedom, justice and the rights of religious minorities.³¹

The MB's strategy was successful: in the 2005 legislative elections, they won 20% of the seats while running in only a third of the seats being contested. The



²⁹ *New York Times*, 14 March 2010.

³⁰ Amr Hamzawy and Nathan J. Brown, 'The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: Islamist Participation in a Closing Political Environment', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2010, 11.

³¹ Interview with Mohamed Habib, First Deputy General Guide, *Islamonline*, 16 August 2007.

decision to do so was made so as not to antagonise the regime, since a two-thirds majority is required to make any constitutional changes. The MB became the largest opposition force in the country, even though its candidates were running as independents. It has used its newfound clout in the Parliament to slowly advocate its ideas. It has been astute enough to avoid touching on measures that would be seen as advancing the imposition of the Sharia and therefore be opposed by a large portion of the population. Nevertheless, the MB has tried to include religious elements in economic affairs by pushing for Islamic banking, for instance.³² At the same time it has positioned itself as the defender of the people, expressing the frustration of Egyptian citizens. It will come as no surprise that the MB has denounced the corruption and inefficiency of the government while pushing for human rights, liberty and justice.

What is surprising is that on the foreign affairs front, the MB has decided on a number of occasions to ignore the long-standing antagonism between Sunnis and Shiites. For instance, when it came to the war in Iraq, the MB called on Sunnis and Shiites to join forces to combat the occupying enemy. And Hezbollah was widely supported by the MB during the 2006 Lebanon War. Indeed, Akif, joining the Hezbollah– Hamas– Syria– Iran axis, went so far as to say that he was prepared to send 10,000 mujahedeens to fight alongside Hezbollah against Israel.³³

The Egyptian MB claims to follow a path of non-violence, and its former General Guide Mohamed Akif has stated that violence should not be used when the regime is likely to win the battle against the MB.³⁴ Akif also made the point that the population needs to be ready before an Islamist regime can be established. This precondition had not been fulfilled in countries such as Sudan, Afghanistan or Somalia, where Islamist regimes had been put in place.³⁵ In the autumn of 2009, Akif announced his retirement as General Guide, a first for the MB since all previous General Guides had kept the title until their death.³⁶ The new General Guide elected by the MB Council in January 2010, Mohamed Badie, is by all accounts a very conservative figure. His election clearly underlines the defeat of the reformist wing within the MB. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that at the January 2010 Council election, two prominent reformists lost their seats.³⁷

Nonetheless, Badie would like to keep the two factions in the organisation: ‘Those who sincerely work for their God, religion and country must be as one unit, despite having different opinions’.³⁸ But Hossam Tammam, the editor of *Islam Online*, does not believe this: ‘Now all the leadership belongs to the conservative wing. It will make mistakes that will increase the gap with other political forces.’³⁹ Badie confirmed that



32 Hamzawy and Brown, ‘The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’, 26.

33 *Al Sharq al-Awsat*, 21 August 2006.

34 Interview with Mohamed Akif, *Al-Araby*, 2007.

35 *Al Watan*, 27 March 2007.

36 *Le Figaro*, 18 January 2010.

37 Hamzawy and Brown, ‘The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’, 32.

38 Quoted in ‘Conservatives dominate Brotherhood leadership’, *BBC News* (Online), 10 February 2010.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8505832.stm>.

39 Ibid.

the MB would be running in the Egyptian legislative elections in October 2010. He also attacked President Mubarak directly:

I call on President Mubarak to step down as head of the National Democratic Party, to be a father to all Egyptians, and set up a transitional government to hold fair elections away from the influence of executive powers... He should give people the right to choose for once in his life. Do it, President Mubarak, to return prestige to Egypt.⁴⁰

At the same time, claiming to represent a 'moderate' Islam, Badie explained that when the MB was not allowed to spread this moderate Islam, terrorism surfaced in Egypt.⁴¹ Whether this was a veiled threat, only time will tell.

In any case, the Mubarak regime did not wait long to clamp down on the MB. On 8 February 2010 the authorities arrested 16 members of the MB, including top leaders Mahmoud Ezzat, the deputy leader, and Essam al-Arian, its former spokesman.⁴² They are accused of trying to set up training camps for staging attacks.⁴³

It would appear that, because of Mubarak's advanced age and the uncertainty as to who will succeed him, the Egyptian MB is currently biding its time, waiting for Mubarak to leave the stage before taking its next step. The next few months are going to be critical for the future of the MB in Egypt.



40 Ibid.

41 *Le Figaro*, 9 February 2010.

42 Ibid.

43 Reuters, 10 February 2010.

4 The MB in Jordan

The Jordanian MB was founded in 1946 with the same goals as its parent organisation and the blessing of the Jordanian royal family. The MB was in a way a ‘defender of the throne’, giving the regime a religious legitimacy.⁴⁴ This is why, as early as the 1950s, the Jordanian regime formed an alliance with the MB—with which it had a common enemy, Nasser’s Egypt—making the MB the only legal political organisation in the country. Because of its support for the regime during the Palestinian revolt of the early 1970s, the MB was allowed to thrive, and it developed a wide network of social associations. Interestingly, the health network it built up was destined not only for poor people—who would be grateful to the MB—but also for the middle class, who paid for the services it provided. This in turn allowed the Brotherhood to build financial empires.⁴⁵ The MB also had ministers in various Jordanian governments. This lasted until the 1980s when the MB became the largest opposition force vis-à-vis the Jordanian monarchy, winning about 40% of the seats in the 1989 legislative elections. The MB had by then succumbed to the Qutb trend, radicalising itself and drawing closer to its sister organisation Hamas.

Unlike the Egyptian branch, the Jordanian MB decided, in 1992, to split its *dawa* activity from its political wing by starting a political party called the Islamic Action Front (IAF). Within a few years, the IAF dominated the student movement, trade unions and professional organisations. The IAF’s political programme mirrors that of the MB as a whole: it includes imposing the Sharia everywhere and fighting against westernisation, as well as a strong emphasis on waging jihad against the ‘Zionist enemy’ and helping the Palestinians. The last-mentioned items are not surprising given that about 60% of the Jordanian population are of Palestinian origin. And as the Palestinian leadership was growing more powerful within the Jordanian MB, the radicalisation intensified and several of its Jordanian members left the organisation, disagreeing with the new direction. When King Abdullah acceded to the throne after his father’s death in 1999, he closed down Hamas’s Amman office (which was located within the offices of the Jordanian MB), expelled its leader Khaled Meshaal and went after Hamas’s most radical elements.⁴⁶ This has not stopped the very close relationship between Hamas and the MB from thriving. For example, the 2003 IAF electoral list was imposed by Hamas;⁴⁷ the IAF Secretary General Zaki Bani Irshid used to be the accountant of Hamas in Jordan; and some trade unions controlled by the MB currently give a portion of their budget to Hamas.⁴⁸

Recently both the MB and the IAF have been very sanguine, contesting the regime’s policies and even the regime itself. They have even gone as far as attacking the king himself for allying himself with what they consider enemies of Islam, namely the US and Israel.⁴⁹ Relations deteriorated quickly after the December 2005 terrorist attacks in Amman, which were organised by the Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-



44 Kepel, *Jihad*, 516.

45 Ibid., 519.

46 Ibid., 525.

47 *Al Hayat*, 9 June 2006.

48 *Al Hayat*, 19 April 2006.

49 IAF’s official website, available at <http://www.jabha.net>.

Zarqawi, and after the Hamas win in the 2006 Palestinian territories election. This emboldened their Jordanian brothers to proclaim that they were going to follow Hamas's example and that they were ready for power.⁵⁰ They added that the MB represented the people while the Jordanian government had never been elected.

The Jordanian government worried about the impact on the Jordanian scene of the latest manoeuvres of Khaled Meshaal, the head of the radical wing of Hamas, who was based in Damascus and supported by Syria and Iran. The kingdom was clearly at risk of being destabilised by Meshaal: weapons seized in Jordan in April 2006 came from Hamas's leadership in Damascus.⁵¹

Hence the government and the MB were on a collision course. The tipping point occurred immediately after al-Zarqawi was killed by US forces in June 2006. Four MB Members of Parliament went to pay their condolences to al-Zarqawi's family, and one of them went as far as calling al-Zarqawi a martyr. After this incident, the MB refused to apologise, and the four MPs were arrested and then released a few months later. In any case the face-off was on. The regime passed a law in September 2006 limiting the MB's reach, specifically in mosques. The regime targeted the MB's social wing by taking over its main social welfare vehicle, the Islamic Centre Association.⁵² It also focused on fighting the MB's ideology, which incited violence. For instance, at a conference that was held in Amman in May 2006 and included about 50 religious scholars, some participants emphasised that the MB's ideology did not represent moderate Islam but rather a very radical view.

The IAF responded in July 2007 by boycotting municipal elections, debating at length whether or not it should do the same for the November 2007 legislative elections. In the end the MB ran but won only seven seats—compared to the 17 it had won in the previous election. One of the probable reasons for this very poor showing is that the radicalisation of the movement and its closeness to Hamas did not go over well with Jordanian voters. Moreover, the 2005 Iraq-related Amman terror attacks and the al-Zarqawi incident made Jordanian citizens realise that, for Islamist terrorists, there was ultimately no difference between killing American, Israeli, Iraqi or Jordanian citizens.

In the past year, an interesting trend seems to have been taking shape: the crisis within both the MB and the IAF regarding their relation to Hamas is out in the open. In May 2009 the executive office of the IAF, composed of men very close to Hamas, resigned after pressure was applied by more moderate elements.⁵³ Then in November, four moderate members from the executive office of the MB tendered their resignations because they disagreed with the hard line taken by some. Interestingly, their resignations were refused.⁵⁴ The fight between the two factions is very much ongoing, deeply dividing the leadership of an organisation clearly losing ground.

The Jordanian and Egyptian branches of the MB appear to be facing some of the same identity challenges as they intensify their opposition to their respective home regimes.



⁵⁰ *Ikhwanonline*, 13 May 2006.

⁵¹ *Al Hayat*, 20 March 2007.

⁵² *Al Sabil*, 29 July 2006.

⁵³ *The Jordan Times*, 10 May 2009.

⁵⁴ *The Jordan Times*, 1 November 2009.

5 The MB in Morocco

The MB is represented in Morocco by the Justice and Development Party (PJD, Parti de la Justice et du Développement). The PJD was born in 1998 when the Mouvement Populaire Démocratique Constitutionnel, a coalition of numerous small Islamist organisations, changed its name. The party immediately decided to participate in elections and to respect the monarchy and Morocco's political system. The PJD believes that by abiding by the rules, it can change the system from the inside, but at the same time its members are viewed by some of its target audience as being 'the Islamists of the king'.⁵⁵

In the 2002 legislative elections, even though the PJD agreed to run in only 57 of the 91 districts, it won 42 of the 325 seats, becoming the third largest political force in the country.⁵⁶ But this victory was short lived. After the multiple terrorist attacks against Western and Jewish targets in Casablanca on 16 May 2003—attacks that killed 45 people—many political leaders and commentators were quick to point out that the PJD had been spreading hatred against Jews and Westerners, as well as against Muslims who, in their eyes, were not true to their religion. Most political leaders and King Mohammed VI favoured banning the PJD because of their incitement of violence and hatred. Interestingly, it was the US ambassador who pressured the King, successfully, to give up this idea.⁵⁷ Furthermore, allegations have been made linking PJD officials to terror. For example, Younes Ousalah, the treasurer of a local section of the PJD, was arrested on suspicion of having had prior knowledge of the deadly 2003 terror attacks. In September 2006 a terrorist cell was dismantled that had been headed by Hassan Khattab, a man who, according to *Alahadath Almaghribia*, had been initiated into Islamism by the PJD's own secretary general, Abdelilah Benkirane. In 2008 the largest terror network ever dismantled in Morocco included Alaa Badella Maa El Ainin, a top PJD member who was in charge of issues involving the Western Sahara.⁵⁸

In light of this turn of events, the PJD decided to let the storm pass and buy itself a new respectability. It purged itself of some of its radical public figures, such as its parliamentary leader, Al Mostafa Ramid.⁵⁹ Ramid had defended several alleged extremists arrested for terrorism after May 2003.⁶⁰ The PJD also carefully avoided any comparison to the MB.

The strategy was successful, and in Morocco's 2007 legislative elections, the PJD won 46 seats. That was just four seats more than in 2002, but this time the party had doubled the number of candidates running. Moreover, most of the PJD leaders had been aiming for 70 to 80 seats—and this was a conservative goal. The



55 Nicolas Beau and Catherine Graciet, *Quand le Maroc sera islamiste* (When Morocco Will Be Islamist) (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 81.

56 Ibid., 81–2.

57 *Tel Quel*, 21 May 2005.

58 *Tel Quel*, 23 February 2008.

59 *El Watan*, 6 May 2007.

60 Beau and Graciet, *Quand le Maroc sera islamiste*, 84.

PJD had been projected to win 47% of the vote, according to a poll by the International Republican Institute. Many people in the West had been expecting a landslide victory for the PJD. It is notable that the day after the elections, some in the Spanish press even sounded disappointed by the PJD's performance. This poor showing can in large part be explained by the fact that the PJD was experiencing an identity problem. Its members wanted to present themselves as moderates, comparing themselves to the Turkish AKP and even to the German Christian Democrats. They emphasised the issue of moderation so much—essentially in order to charm the West—that they lost their appeal to their base. They were neither Islamic enough nor democratic enough for Moroccan voters. In addition, before the election, the PJD had experienced internal dissent between its classical and moderate Islamist members. Many people asked themselves whether they should run or not. This is the classical MB dilemma, as we saw in the discussion of both its Egyptian and Jordanian branches. Participating in elections alienated many from the PJD's more conservative base. In fact, there are worrisome signs of a radicalisation within Moroccan society. Just one statistic sums this up: according to a January 2006 study done by *L'Economiste*, only 18% of Moroccans aged 16 to 29 considered al-Qaeda a terrorist group.

In the June 2009 local elections, the PJD garnered only about 6% of the votes. To put things in perspective, however, it should be mentioned that it ran for only 8,000 seats, which represented about 29% of the approximately 27,000 seats being contested. The PJD wisely targeted the cities, where it was quite popular, and it was actually quite successful since it finished first in towns with over 35,000 inhabitants. More importantly, the PJD finished first in Rabat, the kingdom's capital, and in Casablanca, the economic capital. With its political alliances the PJD is in one way or another in the driver's seat in Rabat, Casablanca and Kenitra. In the meantime, the PJD has joined forces with the Socialist Party, the USFP, and has as a result lost its 'pariah' label. The PJD has accomplished an amazing turnaround from being a pariah in 2003 to being a more than respectable and quite influential political party.

Commentators in the West have time and time again described the PJD as being a 'moderate' party. It is true that PJD officials appear to be moderate: they look very elegant and very Western, and they always start their speeches with discussions on universal values, democracy, respect for freedom, and so on. But then they go on to promote retrograde values and to attack women and their opponents. For example, in a pre-election meeting in September 2007, two of the PJD leaders stated that they wanted to 'cut the heads of the deprived.' Moreover, the PJD, like all other branches of the MB, is favourable to the imposition, albeit gradual, of the Sharia.⁶¹ Therefore, the PJD often gets involved in moral issues. It views itself as the defender of good morality in Moroccan society. In the field of culture, the PJD often vehemently denounces Western influence on Moroccan society,⁶² and it has repeatedly called for the closing of foreign cultural centres. On campuses it



61 Julien Lariège, 'Le Parti de la Justice et du Développement', *Cahiers de l'Orient* 2004, 2nd Quarter, 75.

62 Ibid., 77.

sometimes threatens both students and professors who attend screenings of ‘immoral’ films. Moreover, the PJD uses its unofficial newspaper *At-Tajdid* (The Renewal) to reveal its true nature. Very conveniently, it pretends it has nothing to do with *At-Tajdid* while the newspaper’s directors are important PJD board members. *At-Tajdid* routinely expresses extremist views especially regarding moral issues and foreign policy. By being organised in this way, the moderate side—represented by the PJD itself—remains politically correct while its various arms can set forth hard-core Islamist policies. For example, *At-Tajdid* explained the December 2004 tsunami that affected Asian countries as a punishment sent by God because the victims were not true Muslims. The paper even implied that Morocco might be next for the same reason. Again, during the 2005 PJD convention, one of the speakers said that Hurricane Katrina was a gift of heaven. Furthermore, 16 May 2005, the second anniversary of the 2003 terrorist attacks on Western and Jewish targets in Casablanca, was commemorated by the entire Moroccan press except *At-Tajdid*, which, for its part, went so far as to claim that the attacks were ‘a conspiracy against the Islamist movement.’ *At-Tajdid* has even expressed doubts about the existence of the Salafiya Jihadia, one of the main terrorist organisations behind the 2003 bombings in Morocco, referring to the group cryptically as ‘what some call the Salafiya Jihadia.’ Mohamed Brini, editor of the daily *Al Ahdath Al Maghribia* and an expert on *At-Tajdid*, says that *At-Tajdid* has never fully condemned any terrorist act, but instead has often attempted to downplay terrorist incidents while making excuses for the perpetrators.⁶³ After Hamas’s victory in the Palestinian elections in January 2006, *At-Tajdid* wrote, ‘The victory of Hamas is the result of God’s will... Hamas’ victory is the beginning of the Palestinian people’s salvation.’⁶⁴ The noted researcher and Islamologist Saïd Elakhal explained to the daily *Aujourd’hui Le Maroc* that Hamas and the PJD have exactly the same ideology.⁶⁵ This should not come as a surprise, since they are both branches of the MB.

A particularity of the Moroccan branch of the MB is the importance it places on the EU. Close to 10% of the Moroccan population live in Europe and are potential electors of the PJD. The PJD therefore strives to represent European Muslims through organisations not openly linked to it. For instance, several top officials from the National Federation of Muslims of France (Fédération Nationale des Musulmans de France) are members or at least supporters of the PJD. The PJD wants to appear respectable and would like to become a legitimate partner of the EU and its Member States. It has organised several trips to the continent to meet with leading politicians. What is striking is that the PJD constantly makes vehement attacks against Europe and its society while at the same time wanting to be recognised by and in dialogue with the EU. Indeed, the PJD never misses an opportunity to vilify the US and Europe and call for ‘resistance’, whether in the Palestinian territories (the PJD is unwavering in its support for its sister organisation Hamas) or in Iraq. For instance, after a PJD MP visited Iraq in 2003, he unequivocally called for jihad:



63 *Aujourd’hui Le Maroc*, 13 August 2004

64 *Aujourd’hui Le Maroc*, 3 February 2006

65 *Aujourd’hui Le Maroc*, 3 February 2006

66 *Maroc Hebdo International*, 4-10 April 2003.

‘That thousands of Arabs volunteer to die in the jihad warms my heart. To give one’s life to God is an act of faith that expresses itself through jihad.’⁶⁶

In light of this, calling the PJD a moderate party would seem to stretch the truth. At this point, it is more a party that says one thing and does something quite different.

6 Conclusion

Apart from Hamas's success in the 2006 Palestinian elections, the MB has not garnered the electoral wins everybody, including the organisation itself, expected. In light of what we have seen in Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, it would appear that, by having a contradictory message, the MB is losing some its electorate. Being in the opposition provides many advantages, but people aspire to vote for a party with a realistic and feasible programme, not just slogans. This is a possible explanation for the MB's loss of popularity. All the same, the Islamists are little by little gaining ground, controlling cities and penetrating the core of some Arab societies. In most countries the MB is not really in a rush to seize power: it believes that time is on its side.

Recently administrations from Washington to London have frequently followed a strategy of engaging non-violent Islamists such as the MB. Their rationale is that by empowering Islamists of this kind, one would weaken the jihadists. But in the end both groups have the same goal, even if their tactics differ. When engaging the MB, EU actors should know who their interlocutors are, where they are coming from ideologically and what they really think of the West. One should not take everything at face value.

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