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MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD ORGANIZATIONS IN AMERICA:
GOALS, IDEOLOGIES, AND STRATEGIES

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A story is illustrative of many of the dynamics I am going to address. It is the story of Abdul Rahman Alamoudi, an Eritrean-born biochemist, a member of the upper class in his country, who came to the United States in 1980 for graduate school at Boston University. After earning his degree, he moved to Washington, D.C. and became involved in several mainstream Muslim organizations. He began to develop an impressive network of contacts within the upper echelons of the U.S. political establishment. In 1990, Mr. Alamoudi co-founded the American Muslim Council and soon became a regular visitor to the White House, establishing good relationships with both Republican and Democratic administrations. He held frequent meetings in Congress, and even managed to lobby Congress successfully to host the first opening invocation from an Islamic leader in Congress.

The Department of Defense put Mr. Alamoudi in the powerful position of training and vetting the imams who attend to the religious needs of Muslims in the military. His organization was praised by the FBI as the most mainstream Muslim group in the United States. The State Department appointed Mr. Alamoudi as Goodwill Ambassador, asking him to travel throughout the world representing American Muslims. Washington's establishment clearly considered Mr. Alamoudi a successful representative and moderate Muslim leader who could be a spokesman and model for the American Muslim community.

In 2003, however, an unexpected discovery during a routine customs inspection at London's Heathrow Airport undid Alamoudi's accomplishments. He was found to have concealed more than \$300,000 in a suitcase. The investigation that followed revealed that Alamoudi had been smuggling cash from Libya illegally since 1995. That specific amount of money was intended to support a murky plot linked to al Qaeda to assassinate Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah. A year later, Mr. Alamoudi pled guilty to all charges and is currently serving a 23-year sentence in jail. The investigation also showed that Alamoudi had financial dealings with Hamas and al Qaeda, among other organizations.

Interestingly, to many people in Washington, Alamoudi's ties did not come as a complete shock. Since 1990, in fact, law

enforcement had been monitoring Alamoudi's links to suspected terrorist elements in the United States and abroad. In addition, over the years, Alamoudi often made comments that displayed his sympathy and ties for Islamist groups banned in the United States. Once Mr. Alamoudi was on the phone with an interlocutor and said that the 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassies in East Africa were to be condemned, but only because "Many African Muslims had died and not a single American had died." But Alamoudi also expressed his political views in public venues. In October 2000, speaking at Washington's Lafayette Park, only a block from the White House, Alamoudi proudly proclaimed, "Hear that, Bill Clinton, we're all supporters of Hamas. I wish they added that I'm also a supporter of Hezbollah."

Now, the case of Alamoudi and the American Muslim Council (AMC) raises several questions. In 1996, AMC claimed to have 5,000 members, out of a population of American Muslims it estimated quite generously to be seven million. (The numbers in reality were actually much lower than that.) How could the head of an organization that by its own calculations represented no more than .07 percent of the American Muslim population, whose leadership had never been elected by the Muslim community, and whose leaders were known to the intelligence community as tied to terrorist groups, become the de facto spokesman for the American Muslim community for Washington's establishment?

The height of Mr. Alamoudi's fall makes his case unique. But the issues raised by this story are not limited to him. It tells us about three interrelated issues. First, there is the nature and the modus operandi of the Muslim Brotherhood globally and here in the United States. The second issue relates to the organizational dynamics of the Muslim community here in the United States. And finally, there is the issue of the U.S. government's attitudes regarding the Muslim community and the Muslim Brotherhood—two very different issues.

THE NATURE OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest and most influential Islamist movement. It was founded in Egypt in 1928. And, like most of the grassroots movements that appeared in Egypt at the time, it was strongly opposed to colonial rule and advocated Egyptian independence. But while most of the movements that opposed British colonialism at the time in Egypt took from Western ideologies, the Brotherhood based its discourse on Islam. Creating what would become the model of generations of Islamists, the Brotherhood saw in Islam the answer to Western military, political, economic, and cultural influence over the Muslim world.

Hassan al-Banna, the Brotherhood's founder, viewed Islam as a complete, all-embracing system governing all aspects of life—both private and public. For him, Islam was not just "empty acts of frustration, but politics, society, economy, law and culture." Solutions to all problems of Egypt and more broadly of the entire Muslim community world-wide could be found in this system, according to the Brotherhood.

In its ideology, the Brotherhood was looking at a mythical past as a solution for its current problems. Yet its modus operandi was very modern, and used many methods of modern political movements to both spread its ideas and mobilize support. The Brotherhood sought bottom-up Islamization of society for the creation an Islamic state, through proselytizing, spreading the ideas of the group, and convincing people to buy into this interpretation of Islamism

If grassroots Islamization was the main method that the Brotherhood used from the beginning, it must also be said that violence was part of the original equation. From the 1930s and 1940s, the Brotherhood used violence against its opponents, whether the British, the Jewish community or the Egyptian government. For decades, the Brotherhood was subjected to very harsh persecution by the Egyptian government. The worst time was in the 1960s, at the hands of Gamal Abdel Nasser. This time included torture camps, executions, and, for the lucky ones, deportations.

THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

This heavy suffering at the hands of Nasser led to three developments. First, one wing of the Brotherhood decided to embrace violence completely. Proselytizing was impossible. The Brotherhood had to use violence to overthrow the Egyptian regime and any other regime that was not Islamic enough. So when we hear that the Muslim Brothers are the forefathers of al Qaeda, it is a simplification, but it's partially true. The belief that only violence can achieve the goal of creating an Islamic state has its origin in the thinking of Brotherhood theoretician Sayyid Qutb in the 1960s.

Second, a wing of the Brotherhood in the 1960s decided that violence wasn't going to achieve any success. The Brotherhood was too weak to confront Nasser and the Egyptian regime. Only grassroots activities—"bottom-up Islamization"—was the way forward. The Brotherhood we see today in Egypt, participating in elections, comes from this wing of the Brotherhood. They decided to find a modus vivendi with the Egyptian regime, although technically outlawed for decades in Egypt. Nevertheless, they participated in political life and most importantly in social life, providing social services and working on this bottom-up Islamization.

Finally, the third development, that took place the 1960s, was that some members migrated to other countries. Rather than

opting for violence, or participation in the system, they chose to leave Egypt for other countries. Many went to the Arab Gulf, to Saudi Arabia and other countries where they held leading positions in government and the education system. But quite a few actually came to the West and received political asylum, whether in Europe or in North America.

Today, groups in more than 80 countries trace their origins to the Muslim Brotherhood and have adopted different forms and tactics according to the environment in which they operate. In a country like Jordan, they can participate in elections. This has been true for a long time so they are a political party. In Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood has been outlawed for many decades and survives underground. And the Brotherhood in Syria may well be reemerging. In the Palestinian territories, it took a peculiar turn and became Hamas. Entities belonging to this global movement succeeded based on an informal but very sophisticated network—with personal, financial, organizational, and most importantly ideological ties. There is a global Muslim Brotherhood in which organizations work according to a common vision but with operational independence.

Every branch, in every country, is free to choose its tactics and goals independently. There are consultations and constant communication but there is independence. It is not a monolithic organization. As noted, this global movement has a presence in the West—including the United States. The formation of these networks in the United States, as in most Western countries, follows a similar pattern. The small number of Brotherhood refugees who escaped persecution in Egypt and Syria, and other countries, and came to the West started interacting with more students from upper-middle class of their home countries. These latter students came to the United States and to Europe to study as graduate students like Mr. Alamoudi in European and American universities.

These small milieus formed in the 1960s and '70s bore immediate fruit, as they formed the first Muslim organizations in Europe and North America. In the United States, the Muslim Student Association was created in 1963 at the University of Illinois. The West's freedoms allowed the Brotherhood to do what was prohibited back home. Their activism soon attracted other Muslim students and small numbers of Muslim immigrants who had had no contact with Brotherhood ideology in their home countries. It is important to note that the first Brothers coming to America or to Europe were not part of a concerted plot to Islamize the West. Yet, the small organizations that spontaneously formed in the 1960s and '70s soon developed beyond the most optimistic expectations of their founders.

Today, thanks to ideological flexibility, unrelenting activism, and access to large funding, the networks originally established by the Brotherhood have grown exponentially. Although their membership has remained small, the "Western Brothers" have shown an enormous ability to monopolize the Islamic discourse, making their interpretation of Islam and political events the most readily available. Moreover, in many countries, the Western Brothers have positioned themselves at the forefront of the competition to be the main interlocutors of local establishments. Mr. Alamoudi is a good example. It is apparent that no other competing Islamic movement has the visibility, the political influence, and the access to Western elites that the Western Brothers have obtained over the last 20 years.

AMERICAN BROTHERHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

In the United States, the nucleus that started with the Muslim Student Association in the 1960s spawned a myriad of organizations like the Islamic Association of North America (ISNA) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). Each has its own magazine, website, annual conference, and regional branches. But their unity is shown by common financial sources, interlocking board of directors, and occasional participation in common initiatives. The few hundred individuals who run them form a small social network united by family, business and most importantly ideological ties.

Affluent, well-connected, highly educated and motivated, they are a clique of leaders with few followers but ample clout. They are often the people U.S. authorities reach out to when seeking to engage the Muslim community, as the story of Mr. Alamoudi showed. They are not the only ones. It is not a monopoly, but certainly something close to it. Why is this? I think it's a combination of three reasons. The first is organizational skills. They are visible, vocal, and they lobby. They have offices a few blocks from Capitol Hill; and are Washington based. And they are very active.

Secondly, competing Islamic organizations don't share these strengths. The American Muslim community tends to be very well integrated. Most live in suburbs, scattered throughout a huge country. They are extremely divided in terms of ethnicity and origin. Most American Muslims do not have affiliations. Some might belong to mosques, but simply at the local level. They have little reason or incentive to organize at the national level. Islamists do because they have a political agenda. So it's fair to say that a well-organized minority has managed to position itself as the unappointed, yet *de facto*, voice of a largely unorganized and silent majority. These organized minorities have views and positions that are not necessarily shared by most of the people they claim to represent.

Third, the Brotherhood organizations have this quasi-monopoly with access to government due to dynamics inside the U.S. government.

We cannot really speak of the Muslim Brotherhood in America if we seek to identify offshoots of any Middle Eastern branch

of the Brotherhood, whether Egyptian or any other. There is no “Muslim Komintern,” with Cairo in the place of Moscow, as one scholar has expressed it. The organizations here have historical, organizational, and most importantly ideologically ties to the Middle East but they are independent. I think we should take a non-formalistic approach. In the United States we have organizations with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. As such, we can call them American or Western Brotherhood organizations.

Over the last 20-30 years, these organizations have significantly readjusted their tactics and goals. The Brotherhood is a pragmatic movement that would not blindly apply what the Brotherhood and its founder had prescribed for Egypt in 1930 to modern London or Philadelphia. Undoubtedly, Western offshoots of the Brotherhood support the formation of Islamic states in the Middle East. But their goals for the West are different. Critics argue that Western Brotherhood organizations have the goal of establishing Sharia Law in the West. I do believe that the prospect looms in their imagination. But introducing Sharia in the West is hardly the Western Brothers’ goal at this stage.

Pragmatic and keenly aware of what they can and cannot do, the Brothers’ priorities lay elsewhere. And foremost among their goals is the preservation of an Islamic identity among American and Western Muslims in general. But unlike some other conservative Muslim organizations, like Salafis for example, Brotherhood organizations seek to strengthen the Islamic identity of Western Muslim not by isolating them from mainstream society. What they advocate is a sort of conservatism without isolation, an openness without melting, which of course, is not an easy task.

The second goal that is common to all of these organizations is to be designated as official representatives of the Muslim community of their country. Despite their unrelenting activism and access to ample resources, the Brothers have not been able to create a mass movement and attract the allegiance of large numbers of American Muslims. The majority of U.S. Muslims either rejects or simply ignore the message coming from Brotherhood organizations. So the Brothers understand that a preferential relationship with American elites could provide them with financial and political capital, and legitimacy. This would allow them to significantly expand their reach and influence inside the community. They would be the ones, like Mr. Alamoudi, who would be in charge of appointing imams in the prison system, and in the military. They would be the ones the media would call when seeking the “Muslim opinion,” if there is such a thing. They would, in some cases, receive subsidies to administer different social services. This is a more common practice in Europe than in the United States.

So making a clever political calculation, Western Brotherhood organizations are seeking to be recognized as representatives of the Muslim community in order to actually become it. And, of course, they would use this position of preferential access to government to lobby government on anything that has to do with Islam, whether it is domestic or foreign policy.

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT DIVIDE: THE OPTIMISTS VS. THE PESSIMISTS

There is a divide within the policymaking community that mirrors the divide we see when it comes to the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist movements overseas. So, we have two extremes—the optimists and the pessimists. On one hand, we see the optimists who argue that Western Brotherhood organizations are essentially a socially conservative force that encourages the integration of Muslim communities, offers a model in which Muslims can live there faithfully and maintain a strong Islamic identity while becoming actively engaged citizens. So, according to optimists, governments should not view these organizations with suspicion, but rather harness their grassroots activities and cooperate with them on common issues, including terrorism and radicalization.

Pessimists, on the other hand, see a much more sinister nature in the Western Brotherhood. In this view, Western Brotherhood organizations are engaged in a slow but steady social engineering program aimed at Islamizing Western Muslim populations. Ultimately, they will compete with Western governments for their allegiance. The fact that these organizations are not engaging in violence but participate actively in the democratic process is seen simply as a cold calculation on their part. According to pessimists, officials of Brotherhood-linked organizations have understood that infiltrating the system rather than attacking it head on is the best way to get what they want. After all, the tactics used by al Qaeda are not really going to work here. Instead, a slow, steady infiltration of the system will. And the pessimists see significant evidence pointing to duplicity in the tactics of Brotherhood organizations. It might be useful to make a comparison to the tactics used by the Communist party in the United States, 50-plus years ago. In fact, one significant example comes from Philadelphia.

Some may be familiar with the largest terrorism financing case in American history. It was a case tried four years ago in Texas against a charity called the Holy Land Foundation. This charity was collecting millions of dollars allegedly for orphans in the Palestinian territories, but in reality for Hamas. The money was clearly going to finance terrorist operations in the Palestinian territories and in Israel. During that trial, the Department of Justice introduced ample evidence of the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood behind this charity and their activities inside the United States. Some of the most interesting documents come from a meeting at a Marriott Hotel, close to the Philadelphia International Airport. There, about 20 top Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood officials met in 1993. This was right after the Oslo Agreements had been signed. They talked about how their organization could continue their activities as they knew Hamas was about to be designated as a terrorist organization. This meeting had been bugged by the FBI. It’s a fantastic spy story because the FBI has the tapes of everything

these individuals said during the meeting. It's a fascinating read. Those gathered were debating their two conflicting directions: supporting Hamas but at the same time not looking to Americans as if they were supporting terrorism. Obviously, they faced a difficult situation. But they argued that the Brotherhood in the United States should have opted for a two-pronged approach that differentiated between its internal and external strategy.

Within the Muslim community, the group vowed to maintain its support for Hamas by collecting funds, hence the formation of the charity the Holy Land Foundation. Yet, at the same time, they sought to spread hatred of Israel and Jews among the American-Muslim community. And one participant was intercepted as saying, "We don't want the children of the American-Muslim community, who are raised here in our Islamic schools, to grow up surrendering to the issue of peace with the Jews." Participants discussed how to camouflage such views to the American public and influence policies and opinions. As one attendee argued, "This can be achieved by infiltrating the American media outlets, universities, and research centers, by working with Islamic political organizations and the sympathetic ones." One participant agreed that hiding the group's real aims when dealing with the American public was a necessary tactic. "I swear by Allah that war is deception. Deceive, camouflage, pretend that you're leaving while you're walking that way." Another stressed the importance of tailoring the discourse to the American sensitivity. He said, "Let's not hoist a large Islamic flag." And he argued that organizations should have nice sounding names, like Holy Land Foundation.

The one document that the pessimists have really used is an internal memorandum that was also introduced as evidence by the Department of Justice during the trial. It was written by a senior member of the Brotherhood in the United States, and in one of its points stated, "The process of settlement in America of the Muslim Brotherhood is a civilization, Jihadist process, with all the word means. The Brothers must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and sabotaging its miserable house by their hands."

THE U.S.-EUROPEAN DIVIDE

There is a divide between the United States and Europe when it comes to government. The FBI and the Central Intelligence Agency in the United States tend to be neutral regarding these organizations. The Europeans tend to be very vocal about their concerns. The Dutch Domestic Intelligence writes,

Not all Muslim Brothers or their sympathizers are recognizable as such. They do not always reveal their religious loyalties, an ultra-orthodox agenda to outsiders. Apparently moderate in their attitude toward Western society, they certainly have no violent intent. But they are trying to pave the way for ultra-orthodox Islam to play a greater role in the Western world. This is accomplished by exercising religious influence over Muslim immigrant communities and by forging good relations, with relevant opinion leaders—politicians, civil servants, mainstream social organizations, known Islamic clerics, academics, journalists and so on. This policy of engagement has been more noticeable in recent years and might herald a liberalization of the movement's ideas. It presents itself as a widely supported advocate and legitimate representative of the Islamic community. But the ultimate aim, though never stated openly, is to create then implant and expand an ultra-orthodox Muslim block inside Western Europe.

Pretty tough words. They come from a government entity and Dutch Intelligence is quite well respected. But in the Netherlands, as in any other Western country, including the United States, there is no common assessment. There is no white paper coming from the top and telling all branches of government, all agencies, and all government officials how to identify, assess and engage Brotherhood organizations. Positions swing erratically from the optimist to the pessimist point of view based on personal views, which in many cases are not informed by facts. And for a variety of reasons, politics also comes into play often, as you can imagine, creating a very chaotic situation.

THE CASE OF CAIR

In the United States, this chaotic dynamic is exemplified by the FBI's relationship with CAIR. This organization is arguably the most visible and controversial of the U.S.-based organizations that trace their origins to the Muslim Brotherhood. Opinions about CAIR could not be more divided within the FBI. On the one hand, we have FBI officials who have gone on record and publicly thanked CAIR for its role in "keeping the nation safe" and praising it for "its commitment to maintaining a dialogue leading to the frank and honest exchange of ideas." In 2006, the Washington, D.C. FBI sent CAIR a commendation letter praising it for its "dedication in representing the heart of the Muslim-American community." These officials are optimists. At the same time, top officials in the FBI, individuals like Steve Pomerantz, who was the former Assistant Director and former Chief of Counterterrorism at the FBI, has publicly stated that:

It is clear from a review of CAIR statements and activities that one of its goals is to further the agenda of radical Islamic terrorist groups by providing political support. By masquerading as a mainstream public affairs organization, CAIR has taken the lead in trying to mislead the public about the terrorists and their feelings of militant Islamic movements.

In the wake of the Holy Land Foundation terrorism financing trial in 2008, the FBI formally cut its ties to CAIR.

I'm singling out the FBI, but I could take examples from other organizations within the U.S. government—and within any Western government. The FBI specifically, unlike the Dutch Intelligence Agency mentioned earlier, has a very narrow mandate. The FBI looks at criminal cases. If you are breaking the law, the FBI opens a file on you and they are extremely tough. However, if you're not breaking the law, they don't look at you.

The Dutch Intelligence Agency has a broader mandate. It reviews all kinds of threats to society. It has a broader institutional mandate and approach. While Western Brotherhood organizations may not be engaged in criminal activities, they might have an agenda that is in the long term subversive. But in the United States, there is no agency that really looks at organizations that can be seen as subversive. By mandate the FBI doesn't look at anything that is not specifically a threat to national security. Several European intelligence agencies do look beyond national security threats and take a broader view. In the FBI, it is either black or white—criminal or good. In European intelligence, there is a gray area.

There is also the fact that CAIR, specifically when it comes to terrorism, plays games. In some cases they are extremely uncooperative. The hearings of Rep. Peter King in March 2011 were, of course, very controversial. Yet they highlighted one very interesting story of a Somali community leader in Minneapolis. Al Shabab, the al Qaeda affiliate from Somalia, has been targeting the Somali community in Minneapolis. Some 20 American Muslims of Somali descent have been going to Somalia to fight, and a few have actually died fighting there. So this community leader who testified before Congressman King's panel recounted how, when he reached out to the FBI to work with them, to stop this recruitment taking place in the community, CAIR and the other organizations ostracized him and started a smear campaign against him.

At the same time, we have had cases in which CAIR has been cooperative with the FBI. There was the case of five kids from Northern Virginia who went to Pakistan to obtain training from al Qaeda affiliates there. CAIR was contacted by individuals in the Muslim community and CAIR went to the FBI. Put yourselves in the FBI Director's shoes: you don't want to burn bridges with CAIR. Consequently, there is a kind of understanding that as much as they are not the ideal partners for the FBI when engaging the Muslim community, they are a necessary one.

U.S. POLICY TOWARD BROTHERHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

How should governments interact with this organization? First, the issue is very complex. Conceptualizing a movement that mixes politics and religion, particularly a religion about which most policymakers know very little, is extremely complicated. There is a lot of sensitivity in the United States, in particular, but in the West generally, about dealing with religion from a political point of view. Moreover, in some cases Brotherhood organizations display the kind of moderation and pro-integration stance that Western governments are so desperately seeking in their Muslim interlocutors. In other cases, it is apparent that they harbor an agenda and embrace values that are opposed to those of a Western liberal democracy. So policymakers understandably find themselves in a bind. Again, we go back to the pessimists and optimists, and what the extremes of the debate suggest.

Many pessimists call for policies that would exclude Western Brotherhood organizations from any engagement. They consider the Brotherhood deceitful actors seeking to destroy the same freedoms that have allowed them to flourish. Critics argue that these organizations should be marginalized or even outlawed. In this view, they are considered the political wing of a global Islamist insurgency. I think that, while this position highlights some troubling aspects of the Western Brotherhood organization's nature and agenda, this position is unrealistic and arguably dangerous. Western Brotherhood organizations do represent a cross section of the Muslim community. If the government's aim is to hear all voices, it makes little sense to exclude an important one. Talking only to those Muslim leaders whose positions square with the government's is not a constructive policy. When these groups act outside of the law, as when they provide financial support to organizations designated as terrorists, like in the case of the Holy Land Foundation, they should be prosecuted. However, since most of their activities are within the law, these organizations are a reality that cannot be ignored and should be engaged.

Now the optimists argue that Western Brotherhood organizations are reliable partners that should be engaged in order to favor integration and stem radicalization. This approach is also very problematic. There is ample evidence showing that the aims of the Western Brothers do not necessarily correspond to those stated in public. So assigning an almost monopolistic control of the community to a handful of self-appointed leaders, whose aims are at best unclear, seems naive. I think there's a better way.

ENGAGE BUT DON'T EMPOWER

There is a preferred way that lies in between the optimist and the pessimist approach. It is what I call "engage but don't empower." This approach is developing to some degree in Europe; in the United States only to a lesser degree. It involves three steps. First, understanding that assigning a monopolistic control of the community to these organizations is mistaken. The

Muslim community is extremely diverse. Speaking only to the most visible and vocal self-appointed representatives, the lowest hanging fruits, is a mistaken policy. Governments should be proactive and seek out many other organizations, many other voices, which might not have the structure, the sophistication that Brotherhood organizations possess. Yet they represent important cross sections of the community. So the activism and visibility of Brotherhood organizations should not be mistaken for universal representativeness.

Secondly, we need a more refined approach. There are indeed advantages in not isolating Western Brotherhood organizations. Although nobody can really predict the long-term developments, engagement could lead to a moderation of the movement. That is the approach taken for example in France. Isolation, in contrast could have negative repercussions, further radicalizing the movement and also allowing it to use the “martyr card” in the community. But this engagement needs to be based on a firm understanding of the history, characteristics, connections, modus operandi, and most importantly, aims of Brotherhood organizations. So only an informed engagement can lead to a realistic and constructive approach.

I think many policymakers are increasingly aware of the difference between engagement and empowerment. So establishing a permanent dialogue, and even occasionally limited forms of partnership with Western Brotherhood organizations, can produce some positive outcomes—particularly in the security field. I know that’s controversial. Striking the right balance between engagement and empowerment is not easy, but necessary not to give an undue advantage to these organizations.

Finally, as we look ahead, no organization is static and Brotherhood networks are evolving. The networks that were created some 40-50 years ago have changed with time. The first generation of pioneers, who created these networks, is slowly being replaced by a second generation of Western-born activists who will inevitably add their perspectives in guiding these organizations. So, today the debate is more moderate, more in line with Western attitudes and sentiments. These organizations’ language is increasingly striking a chord with Western interlocutors. Is a genuine change taking place inside these organizations? Some scholars, especially French scholars, would argue that these organizations are like the Euro-Communists: in the 1950s they wanted a dictatorship of the Proletariat, they wanted to turn France into a Communist country linked to Moscow; yet, by the 1970s, they just desired fair wages and a good, cushy 35-hour-a-week work week. They were no longer dreaming of a Communist state. Some scholars argue this is what is going to happen with these organizations. They no longer want to implement that civilizational Jihad that the pioneers of these organizations talked about. They are just going to be a socially conservative force. Other people contend that this pro-democracy, pro-integration statement of the new generation is just a carefully devised smokescreen for the movement’s more nefarious aims.

Only time will tell what’s going to happen with these organizations. It is likely that, in this milieu, some of the organizations will go in one direction and others in a different direction. But for the time being, I think, given this uncertainty, a policy of cautious and informed engagement appears to be the most appropriate.

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