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## **THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN EGYPT. THE IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL REGIME**

*by Hala Mustafa*

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**ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI**

There are many theories concerning the analysis of violent militancy among contemporary Islamicist groups as a socio-political phenomenon. We shall focus on the theory of "Modernization" in our attempt to analyse this phenomenon that has had an important impact challenging the regimes of the Arabo-Islamic World.

Modernization theory presents a useful analytical frame of the transitional phase that the Arabo-Islamic World is experiencing. The political system in Egypt is prone to the changes that accompany the transitional period, and that was most pronounced in the 1970s, when far-reaching political and social changes took place. These changes generated many problems. Many political analysis see the emergence of militant Islamicist groups as a result of the failures and inadequacies of the political system, and especially where it concerns over-seeing the modernization process. In other words such analysts view the phenomenon as a rejection of the modernization process and of the regime which oversees it.

Michael C. Hudson in his study on Islam and Political Development, sees the phenomenon of religious revivalism in the political arena as a rejectionist backlash against modernization. Here it is seen as "negative development" which is based on Western standards of modernization such as the secularization of the political system which is assumed to be of critical importance in political development. This is therefore a backlash against the modernization viewpoint.<sup>(1)</sup>

Many political scientists have put forward a number of theories for the analysis of the special problematic of the relationship between Islam as the principal system and point of departure for Arabo-Islamic Societies on the one hand and secularism as a fundamental principle of modern political development. Some see the possibility of gradual transition from traditionalism to modernism. This paradigm was put forward by Donald Smith in his comparative study of Islam and the changes in values with those of the fulfilment of needs in contemporary secular societies.

In an important 1963 study entitled the Politics of Social Change in North African and the Middle East Manfred

Halpern points out the two-fold consequences of modernization. On the one hand religion and traditional values are compromised under the weight of the modernization process and by the demands of the "new middle classes" as Halpern calls them. He assumes that the new middle class spearheaded the modernization process. On the other hand Halpern acknowledges that there might be another reaction against the modernization process whereby the stage is set for the emergence of social movements that are all-encompassing in nature and which reflect, according to Halpern, a certain degree of social frustration, and a determination to confront certain aspects of the modernization process headlong. From this perspective Halpern views the "popular" religious movements as he describes them as a reaction to modernization, and that from a social point of view it reflects the crisis of the middle classes.

Halpern presented a distinct analysis of the middle classes in the Middle Eastern countries where he assumed that power leads automatically to wealth, rather than wealth leading to power. Daniel Bill and L. Binder likewise supported Halpern's view. According to this viewpoint, the middle classes in the Middle East did not emerge

after the modernization process as in the West. Instead in the Middle East seized power before establishing its social position, and therefore it used power not to defend its interests and property, but rather to acquire wealth and property. Unlike in the West, the Middle Eastern middle classes had no vested interest in defending the status quo, but rather in recreating new systems to further their own interests. Berger agrees and sees the above stated theory as the reason for explanations of the middle class crisis in these societies undergoing the modernization process.<sup>(2)</sup>

In the context of treating this crisis James P. Piscatori put down the reasons for "Islamic revivalism" as a crisis of values which many Arab and Islamic societies experience. This in his view has had an impact on the economic, social and political life of these societies which in turn led to the adoption of traditional symbolism and especially religious symbolism. Piscatori emphasizes in this context on the urbanization process and the attendant contradictions between the city and the rural areas, especially in the sphere of values. The rural areas are especially conservative and are governed by traditional values. But matters are complicated when the rural folk

immigrate to the urban centres where there are contradictory value systems.<sup>(3)</sup>

R. Hair Dackmejian raises the issue of legitimacy to analyse crisis. Modernization according to Dackmejian engenders a crisis of legitimacy which he emphasizes is the major factors in the construction of the "modern state". The contemporary militant Islamicist groups' proliferation says Dackmejian could be interpreted as a reaction to the inability of political development to create a legitimate political system.<sup>(4)</sup> In his analysis of the crisis of legitimacy Piscatori emphasises the institutional weakness of the political systems in The Arabo-Islamic World. It is this institutional weakness that has meant that religion has emerged as the primary depositor of the value system and of tradition, and by extension the major source of legitimacy in society. This is so in terms of the political legitimization of the ruling regime or of the opposition to it. Both would attempt to justify their existence by emphasising their political legitimization based on their religious credentials. This was particularly so with the social protest movements with an overtly religious colouration. Piscatori also pinpointed the "identity crisis", which Daniel Bell calls the new form of "unifying" the individual's present with that of his group and with history.

Such an analysis ascertains that the contemporary Islamicist groups express a desire to search for their roots and identity by referring to the past and to history.<sup>(5)</sup>

In this context the issue of identity encompasses special symbolic importance and gives the individual spiritual, cultural and social identity. It gives the individual a sense of belongingness which goes beyond the confines of the geographical boundaries of the nation-state in which he lives in. But as Saad El-Din Ibrahim points out, this symbolic, spiritual and cultural function of identity becomes less important as the state becomes more assertive and as the ruling regime fulfills the aspiration of the nationals by accelerating economic development and fulfilling the basic needs of its nationals.

Therefore a number of societies at the early stages of the modernization process undergo a redefinition of their identity. This theory could explain certain aspects of the phenomenon of religious protest which engulfed Egypt in the 1970s onwards, and which was embodied in the militant Islamicist groups. In light of the rapid successive changes experienced in Egypt and which were accelerated by the nature of the policies adopted by the ruling regime.

The post-October 1973 War period of Sadat's rule of Egypt: witnessed important changes at the social, political, and economic levels, both internally and externally. 1974 represents the symbolic watershed year as it witnessed the beginning of the Open Door economic policy embodied in Law 43 of 1974 which was a radical departure from the past. This trend was reinforced with the law organizing the formation of political parties in 1976. These changes reflected the departure from the command economy to the market economy, as well as a change from one-party rule to multi-party political pluralism.

The changes in laws and legislation echoed efforts for the redistribution of wealth and power in the society such changes were accompanied by conflicts and power struggles especially in the tense early phase. This reflected the tensions of the Egyptian middle classes who traditionally constituted the main source of political vitality and social dynamism. From the middle classes emerged both the political opposition to the regime as well as the main support base of the regime. It was after all the class most affected by the new policies initiated by Sadat in the second half of the 1970's decade. This was especially



pronounced with the lower middle classes, and which did not benefit relative to the upper middle classes from Sadat's new policies. The lower middle classes were an area of instability and anxiety. There was much dissatisfaction with the regimes performance in the political and economic spheres, which did not fulfill the aspirations or even the least expectations of the lower middle classes in the early phases of the implementation of these policies.

In this context militant political Islamic organizations emerged as an expression of social protest that was related to the frustration of the lower middle class. This protest was characterised by social tensions, insecurity lack of self-esteem and definition due to constantly changing circumstances and lack of social stability. It is for this reason that members of the militant Islamic groups belonging to the lower middle classes, who have crossed over from the rural underclasses, to the urban lower middle classes are far more ready for political mobilization. (6)

At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood's opposition to the Sadat regime did not take a violent form. Instead, it was more of political pressure in order to force the regime to make concessions which could serve

the Brotherhood's long-term interests. It could be said that the strategy followed by the Muslim Brothers in its confrontation with the regime occurred on two levels. The first was strategic and pertinent to long-term objectives of the Brotherhood. These objectives are illustrated in the establishment of an Islamic states and an Islamic social system which is based on the application of the Islamic Shariah, to replace the current secular legal system. The second was tactical, relating to the means of achieving the long-term objective. These means were based on the legitimate political channels and mechanisms to pressure the regime and focused on popular and social areas in order to condition the social consciousness of the masses to become more receptive to the Brotherhood's way of thinking.<sup>(7)</sup>

Relations between Sadat and the Brotherhood in the earlier phases of his rule were characterised by cooperation. Nevertheless the underlying tensions began to surface thereafter. Both parties exhibited antagonism when the Brotherhood sided with the opposition over Sadat's policies. The Sadat regime attempted to contain the opposition at first, but then it began to question its political stance towards them, which ultimately led to the estrangement between them in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

When Mubarak came to power, he followed Sadat's liberal orientation, but there is still a long way to go for the democratic transformation. This depends on the strength of the political institutions and on the widening of the scope of the decision-making process and of more political participation. Hence it is possible to consider the period from the beginning of the 1980s till now, as a transitional one in the course of the Egyptian political system, which has not fully matured yet.

The most enduring characteristic of the transitional period is that the political system still holds on to many of the earlier characteristic features that it inherited from the Nasserist period, despite the many political changes introduced in both Mubarak's and Sadat's period. The Egyptian political system is still characterized by its traditional authoritarian nature embodied in the state and its institutions. At the head of the state system are the institutions of the executive presidency, the bureaucratic system and the army. This contrasted with the relative weakness of the civil society. In each case personal and patronage relations play an important role in safeguarding and articulating interests. This

nature, or characteristic, of the Egyptian political system presented the liberal and democratic transitional process with extreme pressures.<sup>(8)</sup> The criteria for change were the Western standards, but the traditional factors remained predominant, and thrived inspite of the modernizing factors and indeed overshadowed them. The political culture is still governed by traditional values. These are characterized by the reinforcement of the values of obedience and patronage. There was also a linkage between religion and politics, and the reliance on the traditional sources of political legitimacy. Chief among these latter being religion, and not constitutional rationalism which is determined by the regime's performance and its achievements. According to the traditional set up social standing is determined by the class and family backgrounds which was reflected in the respective institutions and organizations that remained weak and failed to attain the needed character of the adopted modern setting. They, therefore, did not participate in the principal channels of political activism. They were bypassed by the democratic transformation of the 1980s. Instead they remained in essence based on the traditional setting. The reconstruction of the organization and political institutions that took place in the 1970s. They

were not modernized, instead there was a reconstruction of the traditional structures. Similarly, the organization that the regime set up in a quasi-political party structure emerged from the single political organization; namely the Arab Socialist Union of the 1960s, and were transformed into a multi-party system in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the transformation was not thorough enough. They were not independent political organizations which freely undertook their effective role as participating in political mobilization. They were not in step with the nature of the changes that the process of democratic transformation demanded.<sup>(9)</sup>

Because of the weakness of the official political institutions in the Egyptian political system, the understanding of such a system does not begin with analysing the political constitutional institutions, but rather through analyzing the relations and reactions prevalent between the various forces of the political arena, as well as the aims of the ruling elite.

Here it is important to note that the ruling political elite still bears much resemblance to the ruling elite of July 1952, both in terms of its political and social backgrounds. There are similarities in the ideological

make-up and rhetoric. The ideological expression of the ruling elite did not reflect a homogeneous ideological thought and there was, and is, no clear political vision.

Such characteristics negatively influenced the liberalization and democratization experiment in the 1980s. It also weakened the party political life, and it cultivated the conservative influences. At both the political and social level the traditional nature of the political culture articulated by the ruling elite. Even though these characteristics of Egyptian political culture were not directly related to the orientations of political Islamic fundamentalism, nevertheless it provided the ideal so it for its growth.

In the first years of his rule Mubarak attempted to push forward the pace of liberalization process, which had suffered a setback crisis in the latter years of Sadat's rule. All opposition strands faced severe or heavy-handed repression in September 1981. Mubarak's attempts at advancing the liberalization process emerged at two levels. The first was a marked sense of ease with the political pluralist process. This was accompanied with greater freedom of speech, and especially freedom of the

press. The second was the relative expansion in the rights of political parties and associations to organize. However, this did not reach the level of their active participation in the decision-making process. This liberalization process reflected positively on the relations between Mubarak and the political opposition. Mubarak (especially during his early period in office 1981-1987) attempted to reincorporate some of the opposition political forces, and which were excluded from political participation during the earlier periods of Nasser and Sadat. Mubarak's first priority was to create a broad base of comprehensive national unity. He aimed at bringing together all the various political orientations, strands and moderate political forces including leftists, liberals and moderate Islamicists so as to confront the militant Islamicists forces. The latter constituted the major threat to the regime after the assassination of Sadat. (10)

- II -

The Islamicist forces have adopted a conceptualization of democracy that differs radically from the western concept of democracy. Nevertheless, this does not mean that some Islamicist forces do not take a realistic political stance. This is especially so with the Muslim Brotherhood. Their stance became apparent with the multi-party pluralist experiment and the democratization process. The moderate Islamicist forces utilized the opportunity to participate in the political arena through working behind the scenes in cooperation with the existing political parties. They bypassed laws prohibiting them being organized into political parties, and that prohibited religious-based political parties.

This political realism is in line with the political strategy adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood after their return to the political arena in the 1970s. Their ultimate aim was the establishment of a "theocracy" in a peaceful and gradual fashion. Their major method was to penetrate the socio-political formations and structures, so as to exact change from within. The translation of this strategy into practice began with their alliance with Al-Wafd Party



in 1984, which was followed by their alliance with the Liberal and Labour Parties under the banner of "Islamic Alliance" in 1987.

a- The Alliance of the Wafd and the Brotherhood:

Despite the legal impediments which meant that the Muslim Brotherhood could not form an independent political party, they however, were involved in the parliamentary elections of May 1984 under the umbrella of the Wafd Party. They won 57 seats in parliament out of 448 (15 percent of parliamentary representations). A number of factors led both the Wafd and the Brotherhood to conclude an alliance in the parliamentary elections despite the historical animosity between them. Chief among these factors was the fact that the electoral legalities at the time which stipulated that a party had to secure at least 8 percent of the electoral votes in the country for it to be represented in parliament. The political pragmatism of this alliance was made for electoral interests. There were a number of other factors, which led to the co-operation between the Brotherhood and the Wafd. The Wafd aspired to lead the political opposition in the early years of Mubarak's rule. At the time the political climate was

favourable to the Wafd since it had the backing of the authorities since it was the best candidate to ensure a balance of power between the leftist and the Islamicist opposition.

Before that the alliance made it possible for the two groups to participate in the political process, especially as they were both marginalized in the post-1952 period.<sup>(11)</sup> However, the alliance was not based on an ideological foundation. It was merely a tactical alliance and not one based on solid ground. The most important point about this alliance was that while it gave the advantage to the Brotherhood making it possible for them to participate in the political process and in parliamentary proceedings, it had a detrimental effect on the Wafd and made it look like it diluted somewhat its secular character. Meanwhile internal squabbles erupted relating to the Wafd's alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood which had long been one of its major foes.

b- The Islamic Alliance:-

This alliance was formed in 1987 between the Labour and the Liberal parties and the Muslim Brotherhood. The alliance was proclaimed shortly before the parliamentary

elections held in that year. Once again the main reasons for the alliance was in order to secure a better position in the elections. The alliance also reflected the coincidence of interests between the three parties concerned. Moreover the alliance was their best chance of securing representation in parliament. A quick glance at the realities of the day reveal that these were the major causes of the alliance.<sup>(12)</sup>

The Socialist Labour Party was formed by a government decree in 1978, when the late President Sadat wanted to redraw the party political map of Egypt, after he abolished the People's Consultative Assembly (Parliament). With the disappearance of the Arab Socialist Union of Egypt in that year and the formation of the National Democratic Party headed by none other than Sadat himself. The role of the Socialist Labour Party was curtailed from the beginning. The party was headed by Ibrahim Shukry, one of the old leaders of "Young Egypt". It appears that the powers that he had saw to it that a new party be formed that would play the role of an opposition party instead of the Liberal Party which was created for much the same purpose. The Liberal party was unable to fulfill its role as a credible opposition because of its perceived closeness

to the regime (government). The only other political party was the leftist Alliance (Taggamu) party. It was therefore regarded as necessary to form a new opposition party. The government facilitated its formation and assisted politically in the founding of the Socialist Labour Party. In the 1979 elections the party won 23 seats, which meant that it became the major opposition party within parliament. However, the political practice of the Socialist Labour Party metamorphosed into a new phase of political activism. It did fall ultimately foul of the regime and was subject to the ruthless repression of the regime's heavy-handed clamp down on all opposition groups in September 1981.

The Socialist Labour Party returned to continue its political activities as part of the new order after Sadat's assassination. However, it lost its position as the major opposition political party. The leftist Alliance (Taggamu) and the Wafd headed the list of opposition parties. The greatest setback was at the parliamentary elections that took place in May 27, 1984. The new electoral rules deemed that only parties with over 8 percent of the electoral vote could be represented in parliament. The Socialist Labour Party therefore lost all parliamentary representation

and was supplanted in parliament by its historically rival the Wafd Party which had alligned itself with the Muslim Brotherhood. It was at that turning point that the idea of the Socialist Labour Party searching for new allies first circulated. When the 1987 elections came it was considered a logical step to align itself with any political force willing to conclude an alliance with the Socialist Labour Party. The party's original idea was to form a broad alliance of all political opposition forces and ideological orientations including Marxists, Liberals, Nasserists and the Muslim Brotherhood, and other Islamicist groups. However, in the end the new alliance comprised the Socialist Labour Party, the Liberals and the Muslim Brothers.

According to the electoral laws the Muslim Brotherhood could not participate in the parliamentary process as long as it was not allowed to be registered as a political party. Therefore its alliance with political parties was the only way in which it was to participate in the parliamentary process, especially after the falling through of its alliance with the Wafd Party, which was initially set up for the same purpose. The Liberal Party also had a great interest in participating as a member

of the "Islamic Alliance". Without it, it would have been impossible for the Liberals to enter parliament.

Actually, the "Young Egypt" Movement, the predecessor of the Labour Party, was one of the most uncertain of political groups in Egypt before 1952. Its ideological orientations were composed of various strands moulded together. These different ideological strands of Egyptian nationalism included the Islamicist strand, and the socialist orientation, which made it lack a coherent conceptual or ideological orientation. What is important to note in this respect is that it was an early attempt to combine both the Islamicist and socialist ideologies. The group saw Islam as a "progressive" and revolutionary ideology against colonialism, corruption and social malaise. Islam was seen as an alternative to the capitalist system. As long as Islam barred interest, it was seen as being against capitalism. In this context interest, accrued by the financial institutions, which were seen as the backbone of the capitalist system was prohibited by Islam. Therefore "Islam" and "Socialism" were seen as complementary in the fight against capitalism. However, this particular brand of ideological orientation espoused by "Young Egypt". The movement lost its direction in the 1950s

when Young Egypt linked the nationalist revolutionary phase with the "socialist revolution". At any rate the pact between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Labour Party enhanced the latters' credentials. The Muslim Brotherhood was seen as the legitimate representative of Islam. It was therefore in an exalted position above the other political parties.<sup>(13)</sup> Hence any co-operation with the Muslim Brotherhood for the advancement of political goals did ultimately serve the needs of the group's original ideals.

The activities of the Islamicist trend (represented in the main by the Muslim Brotherhood) was not restricted in the 1980s by the infiltration of political parties. Rather it extended to the penetration of numerous organizations, institutions and associations, representing non-governmental organizations, or the institutions of civil society.

The labour unions were the most prominent of these institutions that witnessed an increasing infiltration by the Islamicists in the Mid-1980s, through its members participation in the primary and branch elections which took place in the 1980s and which resulted in the

Islamicists winning most seats on the board of governors of many a professional association.

In the Medical Associations elections of 1988, as well as the Engineers' Association and the Pharmacists' Association Elections that took place in the late 1980s the Islamicist swept the board clean. These successes extended in the 1990s to include one of the most important associations in Egypt, namely, the Lawyers Union.

However, it must be noted that this strong presence of the Islamicists in the professional associations contrasted with their weak role in the labour unions, where leftist groups still constituted the main forces. The latter were popular as they focused their attention on labour problems and especially those dealing with wages and salaries as well as the relations with the employers and management, as well as the economic interest groups such as the commercial chambers, businessmen's associations and industrialists' associations, where compromise considerations other pressures are impressed upon the decision makers in the shape of pressure groups in order to realize economic goals and that define their economic activities. As such these labour unions did not present a suitable climate for the activities of the Islamicists.



As for the professional associations where the Islamicists scored remarkable successes, they reflected the social base of the Islamicists themselves. These are the broad section of middle classes and lower middle classes in the urban centres. Furthermore, the Islamicists saw their provision of social services as an important element in recruiting young professionals who are the aspirants of social mobility. In this context, the analysis of the phenomenon of the infiltration of the Islamicists of professional associations, which became one of the most important features of the 1980s, has to take into consideration the socio-political and economic changes. Also the nature of the transitional stage itself which assisted and was conducive to the growth of certain political forces but workers to the detriment of others. There are a number of political factors that affected the role in which the Islamicists played in infiltrating the professional association which are as follows:-

- The weakness of the political parties and the lessening of their ability to organize. The weakening of their capacity for class mobilization and their inability to articulate the masses' interests inevitably led to the increased success of the

Islamicists within the professional associations. It is for this reason that the professional association became politicized. The Islamicists were the major group that benefited from this new trend. The Islamicists concentrated their political activities in the arena of professional associations for two reasons: First, they were legally prohibited from forming political organizations or parties; and secondly, this guaranteed them more independence in functioning.

- The general weakness of the political institutions, their characterization by the "faux pas" of traditionalism, and their almost total subjugation to the state as of 1952 were contributing factors to their stagnation. (14) All these characteristics made the official political institutions suffer a negative image, lack of effectiveness and the weakness of their participation in decision-making. We cannot ignore the capacity of the old organizational and mobilizational skills of the Islamicist groups. They relied on "religion" as a major instrument of mobilization and recruitment. They also linked these elements with the call to participate in the

political process as a religious duty. They even considered voting to be a witnessing (Shahadah) of God's works. Their slogan "Islam is the Solution (to the country's problems)" was used extensively during elections. Since religion is strongly entrenched in the Egyptian conservative society and traditional culture (both political culture and society at large), their methods were very effective in mobilizing the masses. Those observers of the electoral process in the professional institutions and associations noticed the extreme polarization between the two powers; namely the ruling National Democratic Party and the Islamicists. The National Democratic Party assisted its members to hold leading positions. The Islamicists focused on gaining the largest number of seats within the governing bodies of the professional associations. This led to the Islamicists avoidance of open clashes with the authorities. Moreover, their infiltration of the seats in the associations' governing bodies was a wise strategy for the gradual control of the associations.

-III-

If the Muslim Brothers' opposition to the Sadat regime was expressed through political legal institutions and media channels (especially through the Al-Da'awah and Al-Atissam magazines), then the 1970s witnessed a new form of Islamic opposition, more militant and more rejectionist in particular as far as the political system is concerned. It was therefore more of a threat to the regime. These were the militant Islamicist groups which emerged outside the official scope of the Muslim Brothers, and which used violence as the main feature of their opposition.

Before we look into these groups' we must make reference to two points: The first is that despite the fact that the growth of these militant Islamicist groups outside the context of the Muslim Brothers, yet the Brotherhood remained the mother organisation from which sprung the various splinter militant groups. Many of the members of these groups were originally members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Many spent years in prison because they belonged to the Brotherhood. This therefore was the time when the embryonic formation of the new militant Islamicist groups took place. Moreover, it was during

this period that the writings of Sayed Qutb, the leading theoretician of the militant Islamicist groups and their mentor first started to circulate widely among many Brotherhood members. Qutb's writing's such as "In the Shade of Qur'an", and "Sign posts" were among the most important sources or points of reference which influenced the Islamicist groups that emerged in the 1970s. Furthermore, it had an important impact in the organizational and conceptual changes that took place within the Islamicist movement, and the emergence of the militant groups that focused their activities around the concepts of "Islamic Jihad", "Divine government", and "The Jahiliyya (or ignorant and sinful) society". All these concepts comprised the central theme in the writings of Sayed Qutb. The militant Islamicist groups translated the concepts and theories in the form of social and political violence. This new phenomenon was the most dangerous new social and political factor to appear in the 1970s. It has continued until this day.

The second observation is connected to the structure of political Islam, where violence comprises an integral part of it. Militancy is derived from the divine injunctions and admonitions.( 15 )

The analytical study of early Islamic political history reveals that the phenomenon of violence was a primary traditional instrument of political activism used by the various factions and groups. They took their cue from certain verses of the Quran and the sunnah. Many historians trace back the emergence of historical political Islam to the period of the first split between Ali Ibn Abu Taleb and Muaweya Ibn Abu Sufian. Since that date, and with Muaweya's success in seizing power and establishing the Umayyid state, institutionalizing a monarchic system Islam experienced the groups that opposed the government of the day, and that plot to overthrow it by force. Many historians view political violence as originating with the Shiahs, who supported Ali Ibn Abu Taleb, as they lost the "Khilafah" or rule by consensus, and hence factions proliferated, and advocated violence as a means of ousting the ruler. This was the basis of the "Khawarij's" ideology. ( )

Others view violence as originating with the Muaweya camp when he usurped the Khilafah by force. This however is not the precise historical date of the emergence of the phenomenon of violence in Islam history. Here it must be noted that there are two important factors. Firstly, the

phenomenon of political violence in "Islam" was not new. On the contrary it was always connected with the social and political climate which often paved the way for its emergence. Violence originated basically because of political intrigue and power struggles, and not because of purely religious factors<sup>(\*)</sup>. It is in this context that the concept of "Takfir", was commonly used by the different warring factions. This phenomenon continued throughout the different periods of the Islamic state. It surfaced and then subsided successively according to the strength or weakness of the state up until the end of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1929. Political and religious violence emerged once again with the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the late 1920s, and especially with the formation of its armed wing better known as the "secret organisation", or the "special organization",

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(\*) Al-Mawardi urged Muslims to go beyond practicing the tennets of the faith and to reconcile between these two poles: the world and the heavens, or the mundane and the eternal (see Dr. Fahmy Gada'an: The Basis of Progress in Islamic Thinking in the Modern Arab World). Beirut, Arab Studies Publishing and Research, 1979, pp. 50-67.

which was responsible for the incidents of violence and political assassinations which were carried out by the group in the 1940s and which was a well known phenomenon in the Egyptian political arena before 1952. ( )

Finally the phenomenon of political contemporary violence as espoused by the various militant Islamic fundamentalist groups (jamaat) became particularly prevalent in the 1970s and that is still with us at present. Besides the fact that these groups were profoundly influenced by the writings of the Muslim Brothers, and especially as concerns the theoretical frameworks of Hassan El Banna and Sayed Qutb, it is well worth mentioning that they were also inspired greatly by the concepts of two important Islamicist thinkers. The first being the Pakistani Abu Al Aalaa Al-Mawdudi and the second is the Iranian Ali Shariati. These are all conceptual sources that bring closer the thought of the militant Islamicist Groups (gamaat) to that of the "Khawarej". ( )

Despite the fact that there are many militant groups, they all share common characteristics, which can be summarized thus:-



1- There is a similarity in the social background of such groups. Most members belong to the lower middle classes and are of rural backgrounds. They belong by and large to the same age group, and a majority of them are students.

2- Despite differences in the organizational structures and pyramid-like relations between the leaders and the rank-and file in all the groups nevertheless the organizational make-up at the level of executive activism remained very similar. These were composed in the main of small cells which were suitable to the secret nature of their operations. These tightly-knit groups were useful for facilitating the groups mobility and the avoidance of widespread arrests by the security forces.

3- There were many common links and organizational networking between the various Islamicist groups and organizations. Despite the difficulty in ascertaining exactly the ties and relationship between the different groups nevertheless it is certain that there was a considerable degree of networking and common membership between a number of these groups. This is clear in the case of the Technical Militarist groups some of whose members surfaced later as members of the Muslims' Group

which emerged five years later. Other members of the former group were later to form Al-Jihad Group. Finally, many of the groups' leaders can be traced back to the Muslim Brotherhood. (\*)

Perhaps the interlinkages and networking among the various Islamicist groups pointed to the changes that grew naturally among members. It also reflects the role that the prisons played in terms of the re-organization and restructuring of these groups. Prisons were meeting places where members discussed the various issues at stake and revised their strategies, after each devastating strike by the security forces. This shows the embryonic structures of the Islamicist groups of the 1970s to have been formalized in prison cells which also included the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood of the 1960s. One could conclude that former Muslim Brothers formed new groups as soon as they left prison. They followed different political methods than that of the Muslim Brothers. The case of Shukry Mostafa the founder of the Muslims' Group is a prominent example of such a course of development. Members of other groups experienced similar changes of method and strategy within the prison cells, as pointed out earlier.

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(\*) According to statements by some of the Technical Militarist members.

4- Finally the recruitment methods of these groups was based primarily on common houses of worship as well as friendship and blood relations. While the latter into are restricted, the first method, worship, in the mosques was the most effective recruitment method on a rank and file basis.

These groups view democracy as fundamentally different from the Islamicist conceptual framework and methodology. Democracy stands in sharp contradiction to Islam according to these groups. This position is based on a number of foundations as expressed in their literature. These are as follows:-

- Democracy gives authority to the people, but only God should have authority.
- The people become the source of legislative, executive and judicial authority which contradicts Islam which upholds the Shariah as the supreme source of legitimate authority.
- The freedoms granted by democracy to the masses without restrictions or obligations contradicts to concept of liberty in Islam which stipulates that the laws of religion must not be sidestepped or

contradicted in speech or action. There is no such thing as unlimited freedom in Islam, especially as concerns aspirations or actions that contradict God's Shariah (legislation) and religion.

- Democracy lays the foundation of multi-party pluralism, which differs radically from the message of Islam. That is because political parties stem from a plurality of ideologies in society, while government in an Islamic state is not fought over by rival ideologies. In a Muslim society there are only two parties: The Party of God and the Party of Satan, which is not allowed to exist.
- Democracy makes citizenship the basis of equality and not religion, which contradicts the spirit of Islam and its teachings where there can never be equality between a Muslim and an unbeliever. ( )

It therefore becomes clear that the principles of the radical Islamicist groups' posturing rejects the political activism through legitimate political channels. Likewise it rejects the political multi-party pluralist experiment. They are critical of the "pragmatic" policies of the Muslim Brotherhood, and reject their strategy of gradual change and of working through the established

social and political institutions. Here we might point on that the radical Islamicist groups' stance vis-a-vis the democratic question is coloured by their stance vis-a-vis the west. They regard democracy as a product of western thought, and western culture. They see themselves as engaged in a historical struggle against the West. The groups' documents reveal that they see the struggle with the West as of a special significance, and a priority in the context of the struggle between Islam and the Jahiliyya (Evil and Ignorance). The final triumph of Islam is not possible unless the West's Jahiliyya is thwarted.( ) Western culture is defined as materialistic, pagan and Jahili. The West's ideology is evil and the principles it upholds are false according to the Islamicist groups. All the Western talk about human rights, international peace, liberty, fraternity and equality are calculations used to deceive the nations of the World and are Western devices to advance further the Jahiliyya.( )

The militant Islamic fundamentalist groups see the West's interest in the Middle East as an invasion of the Muslim Heartlands, aimed at the restructuring of the values of the people of the region through American (cultural and political) hegemony. This directly threatens

the essence of Muslim identity. ( ) The documents of these groups insist that there is much Western pressure for propping up the political regime in Egypt and encouraging it to eliminate the Islamists in the country. ( ) Here it has to be pointed out that these Islamicist groups' rejection of the values of Western culture did not interfere with their willingness to exploit the enormous financial resources of the West. This is clear in the writings of Sayed Qutb (a major mentor of the Islamicists). The documents refer to the Muslims as having contributed to Western cultural advancement, and therefore the "death sentence can not be issued to eliminate the Western material culture". What is necessary is for Western material culture to be subservient to divine authority which protects it from its immoral excesses. Islam and divine values must tame Western culture. A number of observations have to be made about the Islamicists position vis-a-vis Western culture, and these can be summarized as follows:-

- Religion was considered to be the main focus of the struggle for cultural supremacy with the West. This power struggle takes on the nature of one between "Islam" and "Christianity", and hence it focuses on the historical background of the "crusades".

- It puts down the defeat of Islam in confronting Western aggression and advancement to the collapse of the Islamic Caliphate symbolized by its abolishment in Turkey in 1924.
  
- The West's support of secular and democratic forces in Islamic nations is a Western plot to dominate (culturally, economically and politically) the Muslim Heartlands, and to ensure that they are subservient to, and dependent on the West. This dependency of the Muslim Heartlands is the direct cause of Muslim nations' backwardness. Therefore the struggle against the local political forces and political (pro-Western) establishment is nothing but a phase in the wider struggle between the Islamicists and the West. These militant Islamicist groups, as their documents testify, are antagonistic of Western cultural values. They differentiate between the technological advancement of the West and the cultural values and mores which are seen as a direct threat and as a challenge to Islamic cultural values. This position ignores the view that the West's scientific, technical and material advancement is based on Western cultural and conceptual framework (or philosophical foundations).

Mubarak's strategy was limited in its dealings with the Islamicist opposition by two basic aims: The first was the creation of a balance of power between the secularist opposition that was curtailed during Sadat's period and the Islamicist opposition. The second aim was the attempt to divide the Islamicist opposition into two competing segments, namely the moderate Islamicist segment and the radical or militant Islamicist groups. (

The translation of this strategy at the first level meant that into practice the leadership of the secularist Al-Wafd Party to participate in the parliamentary elections of 1984, even after Al-Wafd's alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood. At the second level the Muslim Brotherhood was allowed to participate in political activities giving it a greater albeit indirect niche in the political process. The Brotherhood was not allowed to organize as an independent political party, neither were they allowed to reclaim their public legitimacy as a religious association. Instead the Muslim Brotherhood was given the green light to participate in local and parliamentary elections from within the established political parties. The Muslim Brothers were therefore



represented in the parliament, with the right to freely air their views and opinions through the various political party papers. The main aim of this strategy was to marginalize the militant wing of the Islamicist opposition (the radical fundamentalist groups), which refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the regime and the ruler. ( )

This strategy gambled on the weakening of the Islamicist opposition, utilizing a policy of "divide and rule", dividing the various strands among the Islamicists. Perhaps this strategy did succeed in containing the Islamicist opposition during the first years of Mubarak's rule. It nevertheless failed in the second period. Three facts demonstrated this failure.

First: The failure to create a balance between the secularist and Islamicist opposition. The Wafd's alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood did not result in the containment of the Islamicists. On the contrary it resulted in the retreat of the secular elements in face of the advancement of the Islamicist forces. This was clearly evident during the 1987 elections when the Muslim Brotherhood spearheaded the political opposition with their alliance with the Labour and Liberal parties under the banner

"Islamic Alliance". At the time they formed the greatest parliamentary opposition.

Second: The return of political violence in 1985 and the increase in the activities of the radical and militant Islamicist groups.

Third: The success of Islamicist organizations in not only penetrating political party set-ups, but also in infiltrating many of civil societies institutions, such as professional associations, voluntary organizations, plus a rise in their investment and economic activities.

The reasons for the failure of the regime's strategy of containing the Islamicists are many. The following are the most important:

- The difficulty of attempting to divide one segment of the Islamicist Movement from the others. Every Islamicist strand has its own tactics, but all have the same objective which is the establishment of an Islamic state. Some Islamicist groups work through the established political order using legitimate means and channels to force the regime to implement the Islamic Shariah laws. This was followed by the Muslim

Brotherhood. Other groups such as the militant Islamicists aim at over-throwing the regime using violence. But all Islamicist groups aim at realizing the same objectives.

- The Islamicist forces were the only political forces which practiced their political activities clandestinely sheltering behind the other political parties. The Islamicists did not enjoy the freedom to participate in party politiking legitimately, and as such Islamicists were the only forces whose credibility was not tested from a practical point of view. While all other political groups' images were tarnished the Islamicists presented themselves as "clean" and "untarnished" with political corruption like the other political forces. They challenged the others from a moral standpoint.
- The Islamicists attained an enormous capacity for political mobilization, because of their reliance on religion, as well as their mastering of the organizational structures necessary for mass mobilization.
- The Islamicists benefited from the weakness of the secular opposition in the political arena of party

politics that began in the 1970s. Such secularist forces as the Wafd which enjoyed considerable popularity between 1923-32 until it was banned in the aftermath of the 1952 Revolution. The Wafd suffered a severe blow not only from at the political level as an established political party, but also because of the dismantlement of its social base through the policies of nationalization pursued in the 1960s. The Egyptian bourgeoisie that emerged in the 1970's. Was not a secularist one as before, but rather a conservative one. The Egyptian bourgeoisie was a mix of conservative right wing elements of rural backgrounds as well as a section of the Muslim Brothers who accrued wealth working as immigrants in the oil rich Gulf states in the 1960's. The Egyptian bourgeoisie also included a segment of the urban bourgeoisie. Hence the political presence of this new bourgeoisie was not metamorphosed into a secular political party.

- Finally, the weakness of the political parties that emerged with the multi-party pluralist experiment in the 1970s. Their weaknesses were both at an ideological and organizational level. This led ultimately to the loss of the political parties political effectiveness,

and their ability to politically mobilize the masses. The attendant political vacuum was exploited by the Islamicist movement.

The relative democratic experience that Egypt has witnessed since the mid-1970s, enabled the forces of political Islam to take advantage of the political pluralist setting and create a niche for itself. The Islamicists expressed themselves relatively freely as they took up the mantle of the disgruntled elements of society, and as the mouthpiece of the underdog. The Islamicists voiced their opinions and their anger quite freely, and the Islamicists' activists were able to work relatively unperturbed, communicating openly with the masses. The cultural element played an important role in highlighting the dynamism of Islamicist forces in society at large, since the society was itself fundamentally conservative. In fact, the introduction of new ideas remained rather problematic. For despite the fact that the protest element dominated the Islamicists discourse, and characterised its ascendance during the past two decades, the overriding orientation of political Islam continued to be that of the mother movement, namely the Muslim Brotherhood, which was characterized by political moderation and compromise.

Notwithstanding the turbulent internal schisms that the Muslim Brotherhood suffered, its leadership insisted on preserving the movement's political pragmatism.

The Muslim Brotherhood translated its desire to preserve its political pragmatic character into practice by participating in the political processes of the 1970s and 1980s. However, what was offered the Muslim Brotherhood was less than the ambitions the movement had yearned for, but the Brotherhood accepted what little was allowed it in terms of political participation in the new pluralism through democratic channels. The Brotherhood became ever more active in the political parties, in parliament, in trade unions and professional associations, and in society at large. However the Brotherhood still held on to its main objective which was to participate fully in the pluralist process as a fully-fledged political party. This was inevitably denied it by the powers that be. The hope of participating more directly in the decision-making process eluded the Muslim Brotherhood, which in turn refused to be totally incorporated into the political parties that it came to align itself with on tactical grounds, by preserving its own unique nature and outlook. Therefore the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in

the political process did not lead to their assimilation in the new pluralist set up, and more importantly it did not lead to a true rapprochement with the ruling regime.

The lack of rapprochement between the Muslim Brotherhood and the ruling regime boiled down to the fact that the social groups that the Muslim Brotherhood represented did not participate fully in the political process which reflected on the fundamental weaknesses of the Brotherhood. Despite the successes of the Muslim Brotherhood in terms of political participation throughout the past two decades, nevertheless, it is important to note that its successes were rather limited. This relative success was reflected in a wave of mass popularity, but it did not mean that the ideas of the movement itself developed. In other words the preoccupation of the Brotherhood with achieving its political ambitions had a negative impact on its contribution to the intellectual rejuvenation in society at large. Furthermore because of its political orientation there was no attendant working out of a comprehensive conceptual framework whereby the vast changes in the different aspects of life in the country were not taken into account. The Brotherhood remained as a most traditionalist movement, extremely conservative in character completely rejecting

the notion of entertaining any new ideas. Its political pragmatism was not reflected in a conceptual pragmatism or moderation whereby it could compromise with the other new conceptual frameworks, ideas and ideological orientations that were coming to the fore in society at large. Most importantly, the Brotherhood was incapable of accepting fully the concept of political pluralism because it clashed fundamentally with the essence of the Brotherhoods totalitarian nature.



### Conclusion

Mubarak's strategy of confronting the Islamicist opposition did not represent a radical departure from the strategy of his predecessor. However, it was moulded in the context of the new policy of political liberalization, and relative political openness; focusing on allowing greater scope for the freedom of expression, greater mobility and giving more room for manouvering for the political opposition in general. This contrasted with the repression of the opposition that took place during Sadat's latter years in power. These widescale political arrests under Sadat represented something of a watershed in the Egyptian political system. Things reached boiling point and a crisis ensued. Mubarak attempted to contain this crisis as a priority when he took over the regims of power. He worked hard at containing the crisis situation so as not to allow it to errape into total chaos which might have led to the collapse of the regime. However he has carefull not to radically change the political, legal or constitutional system. Therefore there were no radical changes as far as the democratic transformation was concerned. In other words there was a sense of

continuity rather than change in the political experiment. Only subtle details changed.

In this context Mubarak's strategy in facing the Islamicist opposition depended on wooing the moderate political Islamicist wing, namely the Muslim Brotherhood. The basis of this policy was the new electoral law of 1984 which gave the Brothers the chance to participate in the political life legally under the cover of alligning itself with various political parties, according to the multi-party political system.

The 1980s resulted in very few repercussions in this strategy. The Islamicist political opposition was not contained, rather and in an indirect manner the Islamicist forces became ever more powerful and were given the chance to infiltrate the existing political party set up, the professional associations, and were even represented in parliament. Moreover, their social standing and economic activities increased dramatically. Likewise they exerted even greater pressures on the government to apply the Shariah laws and for what could be called the "Islamization" of the society. This last new demand in particular was a great challenge to the

regime since the second article of the Egyptian Constitution, acknowledges the Islamic Shariah as the major source of legislation in the country. This fact strengthened the hand of the Islamicists and weakened the position of the government. The Islamicists attempted to show the government in a compromising position, by appearing to prolong the period before the full implementation of the Shariah, and by attempting to side step the issue of implementing the Shariah altogether. There is no doubt that the text of the constitution, which Mubarak inherited from his predecessor, and which could not be changed, put the regime in a critically embarrassing position full of contradictions.

Concerning the failure of the Mubarak strategy of containing the Islamicist Opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood especially, despite repeated political concessions, the regime attempted to take some legal steps in containing the situation. In an attempt to contain the opposition and restrict its political activities, the regime began in the early 1990s to change the electoral laws pertaining to political parties. This was first put into practice in the April 1990 People's Assembly elections. The Islamicist forces boycotted the elections, and so did most other

political parties with the notable exception of the leftist Taggamu (or Alliance) Party. Similarly, the 1990s witnessed the promulgation in 1992 of a new law pertaining to elections within the professional associations, where the new law specified that there must be at least a 50 percent attendance for the elections to be acceptable. Moreover, the elections had to be supervised by the judiciary. There is no doubt that the increase in the participation in professional association's elections caused indirectly a kind of balance of forces in the confrontation with the Islamicists, who were capable of mobilizing many of its sympathizers and recruiting them during elections. They therefore have a lesser chance of gaining most seats in the professional associations when the other political forces are lukewarm about participating in these professional associations' elections and when their members do not attend in large numbers. In other words when attendance is low their chances are enhanced. In contrast to the strategy the regime employed in the 1980s and which failed to politically isolate the radical Islamicist groups. Nor did it succeed in overcoming the phenomenon of violence. As of the mid-1980s Egypt witnessed a marked escalation of the violence initiated by the militant

fundamentalist groups. By the early 1990s the militant Islamicists' violence became the greatest challenge to the political and social stability of the country. The major features of violence in the 1980s and 1990s were as follows:-

- Political assassinations were on the rise. There were assassination attempts on the lives of two of the former interior ministries Hassan Abu Pasha and Al-Nabawy Ismail, as well as the attempt on the life of Makram Mohamed Ahmed the Editor-in-Chief of one of the Cairene weekly magazine in 1987. The former People's Assembly Speaker Rifaat Al-Mahgoub was assassinated in 1990. Meanwhile a number of intellectuals were likewise assassinated such as the writer Farag Fuda in 1992 who was a defiant spokes person for the cause of secularism. Farag Fuda participated in the first public debate between the advocates of secularism and Islamic fundamentalism a few months before his assassination.
- The 1980s and early 1990s also witnessed a marked increase in violence perpetuated against the Christian Copts. This included the burning of their churches, attacks on their properties and the random killing of

Copts. This was especially prevalent in Upper Egypt, where the Copts have traditionally been concentrated geographically, but violence against Copts also spread to certain parts of Cairo.

- Violence in the 1980s spread to include the social sphere where the Islamic fundamentalist groups attacked repeatedly liquor stores, video shops, and in some areas forced women to wear the hijab (Islamic dress). They likewise intervened to separate men from women in the universities and stopped certain activities like fine arts and theatre.
- There has been in the past few years a concerted attack by Islamicists on police and security forces. A large number of policemen have been killed. There has been a marked rise in the incidence of armed clashes with the police and security forces. These incidents of violence perpetrated by the radical Islamic fundamentalist groups reveal their increased capabilities, organizational skills and advanced training. Moreover it also revealed that they were well supplied with weapons. Perhaps this could be accounted for by external support for the militant Islamicist groups. There is suspicion

that Iran plays a critical role in the support of such groups through Sudan. Also there is the recognition of the indirect role played by Saudi Arabia, who has in the past wooed a number of the groups' members and recruited them to participate in the Afghan civil war of the late 1980s. The Arab-Afghan war veterans are considered to be among the most active and best trained of the militant Islamicists in Egypt.

- From a geographical perspective the 1980s and the 1990s experienced a sharp increase in the area of intensive activities of the militant Islamicist groups. However the center of the activities of the radical groups remained in Upper Egypt. The most notorious and powerfull of the radical Islamicist groups popularly known as the ("Gamaa Al-Islamiyya") "Islamic Group" or "Muslim Group" is based in Upper Egypt. Upper Egypt still represents a geographical, social and cultural specificity that is particularly favourable to the activities of the militant Islamic groups. The region is especially backward, and its geography impedes the comprehensive control of the security forces over it. It is therefore the primary epicenter

for the incidence of violence. However the militant groups are also found in the peripheral shanty towns, with similar characteristics to Upper Egypt, such as the slum of Embaba.

- The Ahliya "Native" Mosques continue to be one of major factors contributing to the militant Islamicist groups' proliferation. Such mosques are the main breeding grounds for the Islamic fundamentalists. It is in such mosques that the groups recruit new members and mobilize their supporters. These mosques are also the centres where the militant ideology is propagated and radical ideas are circulated. Such mosques have been increasingly founded on a haphazard basis, and are proliferating on such a scale that it is difficult for the authorities to keep a close watch on developments, or to control their growth.

The regime has upgraded its security arrangements in face of the Islamicists' onslaught in the past few years. Here one can make two observations regarding the current situation of confronting the radical Islamicist groups: Firstly, the regime has not resorted to tackling the economic problems of the country, nor has it explored changing (challenging) the dominant



cultural attributes that appear to be the main cause of the proliferation of the Islamicist ideology.

Instead the regime has focused on stepping up security and on excessive reliance on the Muslim Brotherhood as a moderating influence in containing the radical Islamicist threat.

The failure of the first strategy has not changed substantially the regime's policy of confronting the militant Islamicist challenge. It has instead relied on the traditional policy of using the official religious institution to contain the radical Islamicists. This latter policy has not in turn led to the containment and control of the problematic phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalist proliferation. On the contrary, it has led to the increased hegemony of this ideology over the political and intellectual life of the country. In other words the religious element and the religious criteria has ironically emerged as the dominant animating factor in society. The political experience of the 1980s, in turn has shifted further away from secularism which is considered a keystone of the democratic transformation. The regime has attempted to face the Islamicists on their own turf, but without much success.

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