
The Advance of the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK

MICHAEL WHINE

SINCE ITS FORMAL ARRIVAL IN THE UK NINE YEARS AGO, the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al Islami—MB) has grown from having no organizational presence to being perhaps the most dynamic influence within the British Muslim population. It has done so by seizing the initiative on issues of concern to Muslims, whereas more moderate activists have dithered or failed to act effectively.

In 1996, the first representative of the MB in Britain, Kamal el-Helbawy, an Egyptian, was able to say that “there are not many members here, but many Muslims in Britain intellectually support the aims of the Muslim Brotherhood.”¹ He added that at that time, the object of the MB in Britain was only to disseminate information on Islam, Islamic issues and movements, and to rectify the distortions and misunderstandings created by “different forces against Islam.”

In September 1999, the MB opened a “global information centre” in London. A press notice published in *Muslim News* stated that it would “specialize in promoting the perspectives and stances of the Muslim Brotherhood, and [communicate] between Islamic movements and the global mass media.”²

The Arab Expatriates

London had been named “Londonistan” by the French security services during the 1990s, when they became alarmed and frustrated by the growing presence of Algerian Islamists who used London as a rear base from which to conduct their terrorist campaign against France. They were mostly, but by no means all, members of the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armeé—GIA). France sought the extradition of some of them in connection with the bombings that terrorized Parisians during the 1980s. The British authorities took the view, however, that they should be granted asylum, provided they had committed no crimes on British soil. Since extradition requests take many years to work their way through the British courts, and since defendants are granted the right to appeal to a higher court at every

stage in the process, the French authorities openly voiced their dismay.

Among the Arab Islamist ideologues who had been granted asylum—and in some cases, the indefinite right to stay, or even British citizenship—was Rashid Gannouchi, the leader of the Tunisian *an Nahda* party who had left Tunisia on completion of a prison sentence for terrorism offences, and members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. Another leader was the Syrian expatriate Omar Fostock (aka. Omar Bakri Mohammed—OBM), who with another Syrian expatriate, Farid Kassim, founded a branch of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (Islamic Liberation Party—HT) in 1986. He had arrived in Britain, after being expelled from Saudi Arabia, to where he claims he had fled after the late President Assad's crackdown on the MB. In Saudi Arabia he claims that he was active in another group with a similar ideology, *Al-Muhajiroun* (The Emigrants—AM).

HT was founded by Shaykh Taqi Uddin Al Nabahani, an Islamic court judge, in Jerusalem in 1953, after he had left the Palestinian branch of the MB. HT follows a similar ideology as the MB, but Nabahani promoted the resurrection of the Islamic Caliphate, which had been destroyed in 1924 on the dissolution of the Turkish Empire, as the main priority. He believed that Muslims may only live in a Muslim state governed by Sharia law. This goal takes precedence over all others and explains why, for example, HT's members have generally refrained from campaigning on other Islamist and MB issues, and been criticized for so doing. Nabahani had also been much influenced by Haj Amin Al Husseini, then living in exile in Egypt, and as a consequence had introduced an even greater element of anti-Semitism into HT ideology than it had inherited from the post-war MB leadership under Said Qutb.

HT first began public activity among Arab students studying at the colleges of London University, notably Imperial College and Queen Mary College. It rapidly gained notoriety within student circles for its anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist, anti-Hindu, anti-Sikh and homophobic campaigning. However, most of its activity was focused on moderate Muslim students. HT's confrontational stance led to it being banned by the National Union of Students in 1994, and eventually, after numerous complaints from the Union of Jewish Students and the Board of Deputies of British Jews, to the publication of guidelines against religious coercion for all university heads, by their umbrella body, the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (later renamed Universities UK).³

OBM's publicity-seeking stunts, however, drew criticism from the HT leadership based in Jordan and Lebanon. In 1996 he left the party with the majority of its active members to form AM. In doing so he joined up with

Shaykh Mohammed Al Mas'ari, the Saudi Islamist exile whose own high-profile activities led to his split from the Campaign for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), a group that Al Mas'ari had co-founded with Saad Al Fagih, a fellow Saudi. As a consequence of CDLR's criticism of the Saudi royal family, the British Government sought to extradite Mas'ari to the Caribbean. But he had successfully appealed his case, and was eventually allowed to stay.

Although publicly shunned by many Muslim community leaders, OBM and Mas'ari have maintained links to MB and *Salafi* group leaders and activists. In particular, they have cooperated in the recruitment of young Muslims for jihad training in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Chechnya. Initially, this may have been done by sending volunteers on the aid convoys to Bosnia, where they were recruited and dispatched onward for terrorism training.⁴

After the 1996 split, HT resumed its more normal mode of operation focused on clandestine recruitment, usually on a one-to-one basis, and building the organization. Following its ban on campus activity in 1994 and again in 1995 (the NUS ban was to be repeated again in 2004), HT developed the use of front names and indeed barely slowed its pace of activity as it was able to successfully hoodwink most university administrations and the National Union of Students. Among its front names have been the Muslim Current Affairs Society, the Young Liberating Party, the Islamic Front, the 1924 Committee, and the New World Society.⁵

The Internationalization of the Brotherhood

The repression by the Egyptian authorities which followed the attempted assassination of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and their suppression in Iraq and Syria, prompted many MB leaders to flee to Saudi Arabia; some also fled to Europe, primarily to Germany. As a consequence, and to maintain links, an international council was created in 1982, but later developments in the 1980s and 1990s spurred a more effective international liaison.

The Palestinian branch recreated itself in 1987 as Hamas, and the need arose to secure funding for its social and terrorist activity. The deportation by Saudi Arabia of MB leaders in 2002, the arrests of many leaders in Egypt in 2003, the eclipse of MB scholar Hasan al-Turabi in the Sudan, and the transfer to London of part of its public relations machinery all prompted a greater need for coordination. This all came about against a backdrop of concern over the ageing leadership in Egypt, and indeed for the future of the Brotherhood itself.

Central to the regeneration efforts at the international level is Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Egyptian scholar living in exile in Qatar. Qaradawi's high profile and leadership role is maintained by his popular weekly satellite

television programme on Al Jazeera and the judicious use of two web sites: www.islamonline.net and www.qaradawi.net, through which he issues guidance to MB members, and millions of other Muslims. To some, Qaradawi is seen as a leading moderate, at least in the sense that he helped to instigate the condemnation of the 9/11 attack signed by prominent Islamist leaders and published in the London-based *al Quds al Arabi* newspaper, and for his regular criticism of the *Wahabi*-influenced obscurantism and rigidity that guides the *salafi* wing of the Islamist movement. But in another sense, Qaradawi is also the leader of the MB's activist wing moving the MB beyond the immediate control of the ageing leadership by virtue of his religious leadership of *Hamas*. Specifically, he has been active in raising money for it by his founding chairmanship of the Union for Good charity (*I'tilafu Al Khayr*—Union for Good and *Aathlaf Al Hin*—the Charity Coalition) and issuing *fatwas* that support the use of suicide bombings against Israel and Coalition forces in Iraq, including justifying the use of women and children for these missions.⁶

Another issue which may be prompting the internationalization of the MB is the action taken to freeze the assets and close the operation of its bank, Bank Al Taqwa, in the wake of the Al Qaeda attack on the US. This leaves it without its main financial arm and without the benefit of a funding mechanism. A review of the shareholders' list of the bank provides a list of its international leadership and senior membership, and it is reasonable to assume that the size of the shareholding is some indicator of the individual's seniority within the organisation.⁷

As a consequence of the above, the MB convened a conference in the Gulf in late 2004, out of which emerged the World Council of Muslim Clerics (aka. The International Association of Muslim Scholars.) Attending the meeting were Qaradawi, Muhammad Mahdi Akef, the elected General Guide, and Mahmad Izzat, the Secretary of the Brotherhood who were both allowed to leave Egypt for the purpose.⁸

Reports from the conference suggest that the MB is refocusing some of its activity on international growth and moving away from violence. This may be for two reasons. Firstly, the organization intends to evangelize among Europe's growing Muslim population (thought to be at least 16 million). Here, it is instructive to note that many Muslim leaders now refer to Europe not as a land of war (*Dar al-Harb*) but as Muslim territory (*Dar al-Islam*), within which *Sharia* law should prevail.

Secondly, the MB leadership sees the necessity of confronting the *salafi* trends within Europe, which have, in part, led to its becoming a command and control center and recruitment arena for terrorism elsewhere. At the same

time, Europe has also become a target for terrorism after the successful attack in Madrid (March 2004) and the foiled attacks in Strasbourg (December 1999) and Germany (September 2003). This is no longer al Qaeda-directed terrorism but rather the product of the emerging *salafi jihadi* ideology that promotes individual acts of terrorism by local groups acting in accordance with a larger strategy of attacking American and Israeli targets, as well as countries supporting the Coalition in Iraq, but without any central direction.

As the MB renounces salafi-driven violence and focuses on recruitment in Europe, it also seeks accommodation with the Arab states that formerly persecuted its members. The Gulf Conference had been preceded by the release from prison of approximately 300 Syrian members who had been incarcerated since the 1980s. Their release followed meetings between President Assad, Qaradawi and Sudanese and Jordanian MB leaders.⁹ Shortly thereafter, the MB's Syrian branch released a "political programme" in London, in which they renounced violence and declared their willingness to participate in political life.¹⁰ At the same time, the MB's Iraqi branch announced that it was coming to terms with the situation in Iraq and intended to participate in the electoral process.¹¹

The French scholar Gilles Kepel notes that there are two opposing trends within European Islam. The first includes both *wahabi salafi* and *tablighi* influences which reject European identity and cultural norms and promote either secession or terrorism. The second allows the creation of a dynamic Muslim community blending what Europe has to offer with Islam and adherence to *Sharia*, and allowing the building of bridges with the Middle East and South East Asia. This is the trend best exemplified by Geneva-based Tariq Ramadan, grandson of the MB founder Hassan al-Banna.¹²

Europe, however, has pre-existing trans-continental institutions which serve to advance MB ideologies. The Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE), known in France as the Union des Organisations Islamiques de l'Europe (UOIE) acts as the main vehicle. The FIOE is headquartered at Markfield, Leicestershire, which is also the UK center for the Pakistan Islamist movement, *Jamaat e Islami*. In this fashion, the two organizations have advanced the ideological link made between them after the Second World War by Said Qutb and Mawlana Maududi. The trustees of the FIOE include Ahmed Jaballah, director of the European Institute for Human Science, and Ahmed al-Rawi. Two associated entities are the European Trust and the European Council for Fatwa and Research, the members of which are the MB leadership in Europe and the Arab world, and include Qaradawi, Rashid Gannouchi, al-Rawi and Shaykh Faisal Mawlawi (Lebanon's MB leader).

All these linked bodies should be seen both as a challenge to the ageing Egyptian-based MB leadership, and as an attempt to extend MB influence in Europe, by the most prominent activists within the organization and by those who are not constrained by the circumscribed atmosphere that exists within most Arab states.

In a November 2002 interview the then acting General Guide Ma'mun al-Hudaybi admitted this problem and pointed towards the future when he stated:

The International Organisation of the Brotherhood is not something that is trivial, it is a symbol that has value and importance. Nevertheless there are some things it could have done even though it was not able to meet. But we must be realistic. This organisation will not govern a state someday. This is something that is not coming.....we do not have anyone from the state (Egypt) with whom we can talk. If only they would create a channel between us and them. We have often called for this, but it has not happened.¹³

It is for this reason perhaps that the World Council of Muslim Clerics is headquartered in Dublin and that its first meeting took place in London, in July 2004.

The Growth of the MB in Britain

Two issues gave impetus to the growth of the MB in Britain: Muslim opposition to the second Gulf War and the Islamist campaign for Palestine.

The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), which is in effect the MB of Britain, was founded in 1997 by Arab migrants, some of whom had been MB leaders in their countries of origin. Their activism has revolutionized the impact of political Islam in Britain, shifting it to a more anti-Western, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic outlook.

The public first became aware of the MAB in April 2002 when it organized a large pro-Palestinian rally in central London. One Islamist website promoted the event as "the Muslim Brotherhood launch biggest Palestine rally in the UK."¹⁴ At the rally, some demonstrators signified their approval for terrorism by dressing as suicide bombers; others carried placards that had been downloaded from the MAB website equating Israel with Nazi Germany.

Kemal Al Helbawy, the founding president of the MAB, was a speaker at the rally. Other MAB leaders include Mohammed Sawalha, a former Hamas military commander, and Azzam Tamimi, a former official spokesman for the Jordanian MB and director of the Islamic Action Front's parliamentary office

in Amman. From 1989 to 1992, Tamimi had edited *Al Ribat*, the Jordanian MB weekly paper. A fourth prominent MAB leader at the event was Anas Al Tikriti, the son of the Iraqi MB leader Osama Al Tikriti.

Their existing infrastructure was augmented by the transfer of the “political office” of the Syrian MB branch, from Amman to London, in 2000.¹⁵ The MAB hosted numerous meetings for visiting MB leaders, including Qaradawi and Anwar Al Awlaki, the Yemeni leader and former Imam at the San Diego and Falls Church, Virginia mosques, and who was described by a US House Intelligence Committee member as “more than a coincidental figure in the 9/11 plot.”¹⁶

Opposition to the second Gulf War provided the opening that the MAB needed to move to center stage. It had already established its growing presence within the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the representative Muslim body, and indeed had been subjected to internally-imposed limits in order to avoid undue MB influence within the MCB. But, its involvement in the Stop the War Coalition, led by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Communist Party of Britain, gave it real power. The anti-war coalition organized a series of rallies in 2003 that proved to be Britain’s biggest ever political demonstrations. The MAB influence resulted in the slogan “Don’t attack Iraq/Free Palestine,” thereby conflating two different issues, but seen by Islamists as part of their joint concern. Complaints by some demonstrators that anti-Semitic leaflets and placards equating the Star of David with the Nazi swastika on the first rally had no place on an anti-war demonstration were initially brushed aside by the organizers, but appear to have had some effect as they did not reappear on the subsequent rallies.

In this manner though, the MAB took over, in part, the leadership of both the anti-war lobby and the pro-Palestinian lobby, and should be contrasted with earlier, much less effective Islamist campaigns to ban Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*. Having forged this alliance with the non-Muslim Left, the MAB went on to build another tactical alliance with George Galloway and his RESPECT Party, campaigning for withdrawal from Iraq and against Labour Party foreign policy. Staffed mainly by the SWP and other hard left groups, but attracting votes from the substantial (Asian) Muslim population, it won a parliamentary seat in Bethnal Green for Galloway, who unseated the Jewish black MP Oona King, and also established itself as a genuine force in some other seats.

RESPECT’s performance in each of the twenty-six constituencies contested was directly related to the number and proportion of Muslim voters in that seat. Their best five results came in seats that were ranked by the MCB as being in the top ten constituencies in the country, according to the size of

their Muslim electorate. By the time of the General Election, however, the MAB's close association with the Labour Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, had drawn them away from any formal association with RESPECT, preferring instead to focus their efforts on supporting anti-war elements within the Labour Party.

MAB influence on Livingstone provides a case book example of political manipulation. Ostensibly a Labour Party member, albeit a maverick one with a lifetime's association with the far left and a capacity for annoying those in power by his public support for terrorists he deems to be freedom fighters (as with his embrace of the IRA when a Member of Parliament), Livingstone hosted the annual meeting of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, and Qaradawi, its leader, in July 2004, in City Hall. Despite public criticism from a coalition of diverse interests, including many Greater London Assembly members, the Jewish community, Hindu, Sikh and gay organizations, he went on to host and promote other MAB interests. Among these was a press conference where he was the only speaker to mention the French *hijab* (headscarf) ban, which was the subject of the session. Neither Al Tikriti nor Qaradawi mentioned the ban; both concentrated instead on promoting the leadership role that the Fatwa Council and its members play in relations between Muslims and the rest of society.

It is clear from the transcript of the conference that its substantive purpose was to promote Qaradawi and the Fatwa Council, and that the headscarf ban debate and the use of the Mayor was just a means to this end.¹⁷

In another move to secure their presence in the UK, the MAB also took over the management of the North London Central Mosque in Finsbury Park in February 2005. The Mosque itself had formerly been taken over by Abu Hamza al-Masri, and used by him as a center for preaching jihad and for recruitment for terrorism. This now gives them a new base from which to operate. It should also be noted that the MB has additional connections to the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales at Lampeter, thereby giving it an influence within tertiary education.

In so doing, the MB could be said to have reached a degree of maturity, the lack of which had been lamented by Helbawi in an important interview in *Le Monde Diplomatique*. In this he had lamented that "the international organization isn't an organization at all, it's just a coordinating body. It needs to work openly and meet with public figures; as it is only the secret services that know when its main figures come and go. There's no proper research center anywhere in the West, or a TV channel. We need to create a global forum for dialogue and to increase our activities."¹⁸

What differentiates the *modus operandi* of the MB and the MAB from other Islamist organizations is their establishment of corporate structures underpinning their finances, and extending their reach within other communal structures. Their attitude is exemplified by the slogan “Thinking Globally, Acting Locally,” which is used on MAB banners and publications.

The MB now operates through a series of interlocking companies managed by those listed above, and others, of Palestinian, Syrian, Libyan, Somali, Iraqi and Egyptian origin. These entities include: the MAB itself, the Muslim Welfare Trust, Interpal (listed by the US Treasury as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity), the Palestine Return Centre, the Institute of Islamic Political Thought (of which Tamimi is Director), Mashreq Media Services (which publish the Hamas newspaper *Filisteen Al Muslima*), Palestine Times (the English language pro-Hamas paper), the Centre for International Policy Studies, and others.

The creation of such a large scale, interdependent financial infrastructure to resource public, educational and media activity spread across the UK and Ireland suggests a long term strategy designed to keep it safe from Arab states’ (and American and Israeli) investigations. Indeed, it was in anticipation of this, and as a consequence particularly of US investigations of their funding structure, that Israeli commentator Uhud Yaari noted that “there may be an effort to set up new centers in Europe.”¹⁹

Conclusions

MB ideology in the 21st century should not be seen as monolithic. Rather, it presents a spectrum ranging from the extremes of Salafi jihadists committed to the violent removal of Western influences and presence in Muslim lands (and there is disagreement as to how far this extends: is it the Arab world or does it extend as far as the Muslim expansion in the thirteenth century and to the extension of *Dar al-Islam* by violence if necessary), to the modernizing ideas of Tariq Ramadan and others who seek a Europeanized version of Islam that nevertheless remains separated, evangelical and living according to Sharia within European society.

What is apparent is that the MB is making determined and successful efforts to influence Britain’s diverse Muslim population and many of its communal organizations. In doing so they are representing themselves as middle of the road, though they are not. They are influencing and taking the lead in representing Muslim “political” interests, as opposed to the existing organizations such as the MCB and the councils of mosques which have focused on ‘faith’ issues. The MB have recognized the political power of Muslim demog-

raphy and have begun to exploit the fear of that power among politicians, but have not yet managed to actually mobilize the Muslim vote. This they clearly aim to accomplish in due course.

NOTES

1. *The Voice of the Arab World*, Vol 2 No 28, London, Summer 1996
 2. *Muslim News*, London, 29 September 1999
 3. Extremism and intolerance on campus, Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom, London, July 1998
 4. For a more complete analysis of AM ideology see: Al-Muhajiroun: The Portal for Britain's suicide terrorists, Michael Whine, International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, Herzliya, May 2003, www.ict.org/articles
 5. "The Mode of Operation of Hizb ut Tahrir in an Open Society," Michael Whine, February 2004, International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, Herzliya, www.ict.org/articles
 6. Qaradawi's role is briefly but succinctly described in "Qaradawi and the World Association of Muslim Clerics: The New Platform of the Muslim Brotherhood," Reuven Paz, The Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM), Vol 2, No 4, Herzliya, November 2004
 7. List of Ordinary Shareholders and List of Redeemable Shareholders at 31 December 1999, Bank Al-Taqwa Ltd, (formerly registered at) 10 Deveaux Street, PO Box N-4877, Nassau, Bahamas
 8. A partial list of those attending, together with the suggestion that the Egyptian authorities prompted the meeting, was published in *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, London, 11 November 2004, source: BBC Monitoring, 15 November 2004
 9. Syria said taking 'positive steps' towards Muslim Brotherhood, *Al Hayat*, 12 October 2004, source: BBC Monitoring, 14 October 2004
 10. Syrian Muslim Brotherhood to release 'political programme' in London, *Al Quds Al Arabi*, London, 15 December 2004, source: BBC Monitoring, 16 December 2004
 11. Interview with Muhammad Mahdi Akef, General Guide of the MB, *Al Wafd*, Cairo, 8 October 2004, source: BBC Monitoring, 9 October 2004
 12. "The Battle for Europe," Chapter 7, *The War for Muslim Minds*, Gilles Kepel, Harvard University Press, 2004
 13. UK Arabic paper interviews Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood acting general guide, *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, London, 15 November 2002, source: BBC Monitoring, 16 November 2002
 14. "Muslim Brotherhood launch biggest Palestine rally in the UK," Insha Allah, Islamic Human Rights Commission website, 13 April 2002
 15. "Muslim Brotherhood moves its bureau from Amman to London," *Jordan Times*, 8 February 2000, source: BBC Monitoring, 8 February 2000
- "Syrian Muslim Brotherhood lead on move to London, ties with Jordan counterpart," *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, 12 July 2000, source: BBC Monitoring, 13 July 2000

16. "FBI sets up shop in Yemen," *Time*, 9 August 2003; Failure to Communicate, *Newsweek*, 4 August 2003
17. News Transcript of the Press Conference, The Inaugural Session of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, www.mabonline.net
18. A row in the family, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2000, www.monde-diplomatique.fr/en/2000/04/03tanzion
19. America the Free, Ehud Yaari, *The Jerusalem Report*, 25 February 1993

ADDENDA

1. The High Court decision upholding the right of a Luton schoolgirl to wear the full length jilbab was overturned on appeal by the House of Lords in March 2005. (Part 1, page 55)
2. The government withdrew the clauses from its police bill which would have banned incitement to religious hatred in April 2005, just prior to calling the General Election. In May, following the Election it announced its intention to present the draft legislation to Parliament again. (Part 1, page 55)