

**Change through Debate –
Egypt's Counterterrorism Strategy towards the Gamaa Islamia**

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Introduction

“We renounced violence only after years of self searching and analysis of what we have accomplished throughout that period. We were wrong”¹.

Counterterrorist strategies in the age of “absolute”² terrorism face a dilemma. They seek to deter future attacks by focusing predominantly on military means. Effective deterrence is thereby pre-conditioned by the rationality of the potentially deterred, who becomes aware of the immense costs of his terrorist action overweighing the possible benefits. Absolute terrorists are, however, classified by William Zartman et. al as irrational. If this holds true, military countermeasures are pre-destined to fail. According to Zartman irrationality also precludes negotiations. This paper contrarily argues that the alternative of debate with “irrational” terrorists is not only possible, but also constructive. Egypt’s counterterrorism strategy towards the Gamaa Islamia is a case in point.

Before the Egyptian government turned to debate it followed a militant approach. This approach failed because despite the government crackdown, Gamaa’s members continued attacking Egypt’s security and government officials as well as the tourism industry. Gamaa members were involved in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981 and the speaker of Egyptian parliament in 1990³. The peak of their violent campaign was reached in 1997 when more than sixty foreign tourists and local tour guides were massacred in Luxor. Although this attack was not authorised nor commissioned by Gamaa’s leadership, but conducted by few rogue members from the organisation, international community for the first time felt directly threatened by an organisation already labelled as terrorist in Europe and the US⁴. Overall, 95% of violence in Egypt in 1980s and 1990s was blamed on Gamaa Islamia⁵.

The Egyptian government resorted to military means and arrested thousands of Gamaa’s members. Those who were not executed or arrested were either killed in shootouts with security forces, left for Afghanistan to fight the Soviets, or sought refuge all over the world, including the United States and Western Europe⁶. Despite thousands of arrests, dozens of executions and long term prison sentences, the campaign of violence did not cease, but actually intensified even further. Emergency laws imposed once again after the assassination of President Sadat⁷ allowed the security forces to detain thousands of Islamists without court order or judicial supervision. Police and the military had free hand in devising

¹ Gamaa Islamia members that we spoke to have openly admitted that tragic mistakes were made in the course of their violent campaign against the government.

² According to William Zartman “Absolute terrorists are those whose action is non-instrumentalist, a self-contained act that is completed when it has occurred and is not a means to obtain some other goal”. See: William Zartman 2003: Negotiating with Terrorists, International Negotiation 8: 443-450.

³ In 1992, a leading secularist figure and author in Egypt was killed by Gamaa Islamia for his views contradicted their ideology and promoted the idea of a secular Egyptian state.

⁴ GI is till this day on UN, US and EU list of terrorist organisation

⁵ Diaan Rashwan in <http://www.ahram.org.eg/acpss/eng/ahram/2004/7/5/EGYP92.HTM>

⁶ Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman who planned the WTC attack in 1993 is a senior member of Gamaa Islamia sentenced to death in absentia in Egypt

⁷ Emergency laws in Egypt were lifted only once, 18 months prior Sadat’s assassination, and were introduced for the first time when Gamal Abdel Naser took over the government in a military coup in mid 1950s.

the security strategy the way it seemed most suitable to the circumstances. And yet, despite their effort, jailed Gamaa Islamia leadership found ways to communicate with their members outside prisons. The attempted assassination against President Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995 was coordinated by the Gamaa Islamia⁸, most of whose members were already in jails. The government, strongly supported by security forces, used all possible means at its disposal to fight Islamists. Extra judicial arrests, military tribunals, arrests without warrants and prison stays without trials, torture and finally executions failed to deter and scare Islamists away.

All the available evidence so far leads us to classify Gamaa Islamia as an absolute terrorist organisation without a rational mindset and hope of ever changing their ideology and goals. The military approach Egyptian government chose in dealing with not only the Gamaa Islamia but all violent Jihadi groups in Egypt was welcomed and supported from all over the world. Nevertheless, it did not bring about the desired results security forces and the government had hoped for. On the contrary. The campaign of violence and terrorist attacks continued unabated. But if military measures against irrational terrorists are pre-destined to fail, alternative approaches become important.

The Egyptian government eventually sought an alternative with the result that the Gamaa Islamia announced in 1997 that it is unconditionally renouncing and immediately halting all acts of violence against the state⁹. It is to cease all of its attempts in overthrowing the government and will dedicate itself to peaceful coexistence with its former arch enemies. While the belief that Gamaa's leadership merely surrendered to the government's demands as a result of severe pressure was widespread, the fact is that the cease-fire was not declared spontaneously. On the contrary, it came about as a result of multiple factors, one of them being the approach Egyptian security and justice officials developed as part of the nation's counter-terrorism strategy nowadays being applied in Saudi Arabia and Yemen: ideological transformation. Islamic scholars, who offered their services to the government, entered into religious and political debates with the imprisoned Gamaa Islamia members in order to persuade them to give up on violence. What torture and harsh prison sentences often failed to achieve, dialogue and debate managed to accomplish. As a result of the debates, the Gamaa Islamia leadership published 15 books while in prison officially renouncing violence and giving the reasons for their change of strategy.¹⁰

The transformation of the Gamaa Islamia was against all expectations. And it is, indeed, puzzling. Because according to William Zartman, negotiations are only possible with instrumental terrorists. In this instrumental understanding of negotiations the tangible goal turns into the bargaining chip. "Absolute terrorists [on the other hand] are those whose action is non-instrumentalist, a self-contained act that is completed when it has occurred and is not a means to obtain some other goal".¹¹ The Gamaa Islamia did not achieve any tangible goal through change. After their transformation they stayed in prison for almost another decade. They did not press for the release of any member. They did not obtain recognition. They

⁸ <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=990CE3DF133BF930A3575BC0A963958260>

⁹ Montaser Al Zayyat p32

¹⁰ These debates within prisons led to revisions of their ideology and it was an effort that proceeded on two parallel tracks. First, the group involved assesses its doctrine and actions in a profoundly critical manner. Secondly, it formulates a new doctrinal and ideological approach, one that makes a clear break from the past and provides guidance for the future¹⁰. Gamaa Islamia in their publications cite religious texts and verses from Koran in which they interpret ideological shift through purely religious perspective. Throughout the books and during interviews, the importance of these debates is very much emphasized. Egyptian government openly encouraged and facilitated Gamaa's leaders' communications with their followers in prisons throughout the country and abroad¹⁰. Egyptian officials provided the necessary logistics and transported the leaders to prisons throughout the country in order to encourage further debates.¹⁰

¹¹ William Zartman 2003: Negotiating with Terrorists, International Negotiation 8: 443-450.

were forbidden to speak to journalists or academics. Yet, they changed. According to Amr El Choubaki “they lost the fight against the government. They lost, they are finished.”¹² But why would a group that “lost” transform radically “from a Jihadi group to a social political Islamic group...change their ideas radically vis a vis multi-partism and other aspects, stop violence, and even scrutinize their ideas of the past”?¹³

While Zartman et. al argue that negotiations are impossible with terrorists lacking tangible goals and can even encourage these absolute terrorists, this paper argues that the goal becomes only visible through negotiation itself. Negotiations with absolute terrorists are therefore not only possible, but also constructive. It was debate that commenced what its representative Montasser Al Zayyat¹⁴ describes as the Gamaa Islamia’s “inner search stage”.¹⁵ It was debate that opened the group to the perspective that “Jihad is neither the goal nor the intent...[but] the way”.¹⁶ And it was debate that made them conclude that “violence and killings did not bring the desired results”.¹⁷

The paper’s first part will introduce the theoretical approach based on which the second part will sketch out the group’s “inner search” for a goal. This empirical second part is based on field interviews with former group members in Cairo in summer 2006 as well as on the translation and evaluation of the group’s written work collected during this field research. Ultimately the third part will discuss a potential goal of the Gamaa Islamia based on a combination of the previous theoretical and empirical findings.

The Theoretical Approach

¹² Interview with Amr El Choubaki in Cairo in Summer 2006; Amr El Choubaki is expert at the Al Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo

¹³ Interview with Diaa Rashwan

¹⁴ Montasser al Zayyat is a famous Egyptian lawyer defending Islamists and he is also the representative of the peace initiative of the Gamaa Islamia; in an Asharq Al Awsat Interview with Montasser ALZayat he gives the following answers: (Asharq Al-Awsat) If you could turn the clock back, would you follow the same road? (Al-Zayyat) Definitely, especially as I have gone through difficult experiences in my life. After joining the Islamist movement, I had a hunger to study Sharia, in addition to my organizational activities. There were some suspicions that aroused about the study of law, and hence I stopped my studies for years until I was arrested after the assassination of (Egyptian President Anwar) Al-Sadat, and my trial in the case of belonging to the Jihad Organization in 1981. As I was in solitary confinement being tortured in Al-Qal’ah Prison, I was longing for a visit by a lawyer, and then I understood the importance of studying law and working as a lawyer. I completed my studies while I was in prison, and as soon as I was released, I started to practice as a lawyer. I moved from behind bars to the defense rostrum, and I found in it wider horizons, jihad through the word, a call, and a vocation. (Al-Zayyat) I am the son of the reality in which I live. I will let you know that I have learned a great deal. Since I was arrested in 1982 I have been representing my brothers in the negotiations in prison (he is referring to the Gamaa Islamia); this is how I acquired experience. In the world of religious or political organizations and groups, you can easily discover the infiltrations. The thing that bestows credibility most in the missions I performed is openness; I do in daylight what others do secretly. Secretiveness is ambiguity and suspicion. As a lawyer and representative of thousands of detainees and people charged in cases of violence, I deal with the security organizations as legitimate institutions of the state in order to fulfill the interests and requests of those I legally represent. Taken from: Asharq Al-Awsat Interviews Controversial Egyptian Lawyer Muntasir al-Zayyat, by Mohammed Al Shafey on Monday 19 June 2006

¹⁵ Interview with Montasser Al Zayyat in Cairo in summer 2006

¹⁶ quote from their books

¹⁷ Interview with Montasser Al Zayyat in Cairo in summer 2006

The clandestine nature of terrorism, which severely limits our knowledge thereof, has inspired some intriguing reflections leading us to wonder: is there any chance to subtract meaningful research? Surely speaking for many, Bili Melmann, for example, introduces his article “The terrorist in fiction” with the following quote of Kaliyev: “Peut-on parler de l’action terrorist sans y prendre part?”¹⁸ As this question alludes, we face some serious obstacles when studying terrorism, starting from the inaccessibility of the field, obscured further by the endless definitional struggle until facing the odds that we might merely be guessing. These odds are multiplied when analyzing absolute terrorism. It’s lack of a tangible goal further clouds our already hazy understanding of what “they” really want.

According to the International Negotiation Journal’s edition on Negotiating with Terrorists “revolutionary absolute [terrorists] are nonnegotiable adversaries”.¹⁹ In contrast to traditional terrorists who employ terror “as a use of others’ lives as exchange currency for other goals”²⁰, absolute terrorists are characterized by unlimited cause, means and ends²¹: “When the cause is world social and political revolution, it becomes an unattainable millennial dream used to justify total indiscriminate tactics.”²² The absolute terrorists’ cause becomes unlimited as they strive for overthrowing the “given social system and build[ing] a new world image of their dreams”.²³ Such a broad purpose eludes constructive negotiations. Their commitment is namely not only confined to their own unlimited cause. They also want to force everybody else to accept their demands, values and way of life. The absolute terrorists’ means become unlimited as they are more prone to cause death and destruction. While traditional terrorists tend to win support which in turn gives them an incentive to narrow their violence, absolutists do not face these constraints. And the absolute terrorists’ ends become unlimited as their demands are “immediate, unconditional and universal”.²⁴ They are therefore usually reluctant to engage in political dialogue.²⁵ Radical and impossible demands turn their goals intangible.

This lack of tangible goals is aggravated when war means turn into war ends. Thus, Iklé elaborates in ‘Every War Must End’ that the efforts and preparations for war themselves become war purposes contributing to the focus on means rather than ends.”²⁶ This is further crystallized by Herfried Muenkler, who defines a dead-end in terrorist strategy as: “the danger of corruption of the ends through the means.”²⁷ He clarifies this corruption in his

¹⁸ Translation: Can one speak of the terrorist act without taking part in it?

¹⁹ William Zartman 2003: Negotiating with Terrorists, International Negotiation 8: 443-450.

²⁰ Richard E. Hayes, Stacey R. Kaminski and Steven M. Beres 2003: Negotiating the Non-Negotiable: Dealing with Absolute Terrorists; International Negotiation 8: 451-467.

²¹ The concept of unlimited means to unlimited ends by Martha Crenshaw stands in contrast to Clausewitz to whom absolute warfare is an ideal type which can never be reached. No matter how extreme terrorism is, it is never absolute. The clue must therefore be to find the moderating element. Accordingly, Bruce Clarke emphasizes Clausewitz’ introduction of the tension between objectives and means. Clausewitz, so Clarke, “points out that for limited ends only limited means should be necessary.” And also Peter Sederberg emphasizes the importance of limitation. To him the acknowledgement of limited objectives and limited means corresponds with the acceptance that the conflict will end through a political process, because “only if war ... is construed in totalitarianistic terms ... [is] the possibility of conciliation precluded.” But as soon as the protagonists to a conflict recognize that they are struggling for limited ends with limited means, they tacitly acknowledge that this conflict will terminate through a political process involving some kind of accommodation.

²² William Zartman 2003: Negotiating with Terrorists, International Negotiation 8: 443-450.

²³ William Zartman 2003: Negotiating with Terrorists, International Negotiation 8: 443-450.

²⁴ Richard E. Hayes, Stacey R. Kaminski and Steven M. Beres 2003: Negotiating the Non-Negotiable: Dealing with Absolute Terrorists; International Negotiation 8: 451-467.

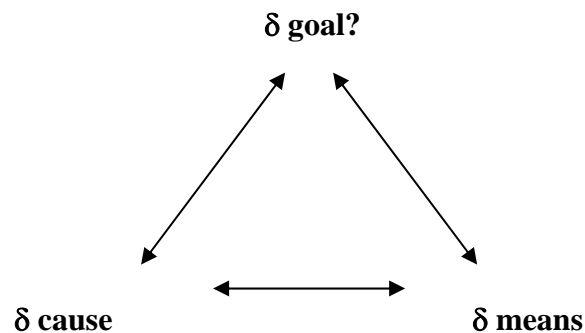
²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Fred Charles Iklé 1991: Every War Must End, New York: Colombia University Press, p. 14.

²⁷ Herfried Muenkler 1992: Gewalt und Ordnung, Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, p. 172.

book on the transformation of war: “The grammar of violence has become independent from political-ideological premises...one can talk of a replacement of the primacy of politics by a primacy of strategy...”²⁸. This primacy of strategy occurs especially during the phase of origin of revolutionary movements, in which “military aims and political ends are absolute and therefore identical just as military and political leadership are not differentiable.”²⁹ Instead military action in this phase of origin can be characterized as “symbolic, uncoordinated and an end in itself...lacking an instrumental character.”³⁰

This paper argues that the goal of a group becomes visible through communications itself. Negotiations with absolute terrorists are therefore not only possible, but also constructive.³¹ Because it is in negotiations that we can observe the group – their cause, goals and means. It is in negotiations that the group is forced to establish itself as an actor. It has to choose representatives who negotiate for the group. It has to concretize its demands in a tangible way. And it also has to reveal its armed potential. Investigating communications with terrorist groups does allow us to analyze the interaction of the three (now observable) elements – cause, goal and means. How the changes of the cause, the end and the mean interact becomes important if we attempt to make missing elements visible. We are able to conclusively infer upon and observe invisible elements when we know how the visible elements are interacting:



(this paper’s author designed the diagram in which δ stands for change and the arrows for interaction)

This might sound awkwardly abstract. What is concretely meant is that talking to terrorists can give us a clue on their motivations by studying the interrelations of their cause and means. But how, if the concrete goal constitutes (as the argument of this paper goes) result rather than condition of negotiations? Through listening and talking. Through listening and talking the corruption of the end through the means - in short: the group’s radicalization - becomes traceable. And we find this trace by analyzing the interaction of cause and means. If

²⁸ Herfried Muenkler 2006: *Der Wandel des Krieges*, Goettingen: Velbrueck Wissenschaft, p. 234.

²⁹ Christopher Daase 2001: *Terrorismus - Begriffe, Theorien und Gegenstrategien*, Die Friedenswarte 76(2001)1: p. 55-79.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Here the book of Jayne Seminare Docherty “Learning Lessons from Waco” is very insightful. She describes the rational approach by the FBI towards the barricaded subjects as follows: “the police try to identify the barricaded subject’s aspiration frame. For this process to work, the barricaded subject must make demands...by isolating the subject and controlling his or her environment...the police negotiator becomes the only person through whom the barricaded subject can achieve his or her aspirations.” Interestingly Jayne Docherty describes how this approach totally failed because the police negotiators failed to understand that the Branch Davidians “just wanted to talk” and could not be motivated by tangible incentives. This is also insightful when applied to debating with “absolute” terrorists. See Jayne Seminar Docherty 2001: *Learning Lessons from Waco*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p. 231 ff.

we figure out how the goal disappeared (became corrupted through cause and means) in the first place, we can uncover it through inversion of argument. If turning radicalisation upside down leads to the concretization of the goal and hence moderation – than it holds true that we should not exclude terrorists without tangible goals from negotiations from the very beginning. On the contrary, talking to “them” would then imply that it is their turn to put the cards on the table.

The Transformation of the Gamaa Islamia

The Beginnings:

In the 1970s young Egyptian students joined a group which called itself Gamaa Islamia. While many youngsters entered the Muslim Brotherhood especially in the north, this more radical group emerged in the southern regions.³² More than three decades later members of the Gamaa Islamia sit in prison or are set free under the supervision of the Egyptian government. This supervision entails restriction of travel, public speech and preaching in mosques. The Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand, holds 88 seats in parliament. It's vice president Prof. Habib clearly describes the reasons for the group's recent success:³³

“the first reason is the history of the Muslim Brotherhood which was Jihad against British occupation and also a struggle for the liberation of Palestine and also for the justice for the Egyptian people. The second reason is that the brothers promoted moderate Islam – on the people's level away from violence and away from terrorism which is the nature of the Egyptian people³⁴. The third reason is that the Muslim Brotherhood paid a price of a lot of lives and heroes for their cause. And they are always fighting for peaceful democracy in Egypt. The fourth reason is the dedication of its

³² Interview with Diaa Rashwan

³³ in the national elections for the lower house parliament in November 2005 the Muslim Brothers won 88 seats as independent candidates (the group as a whole is not allowed to participate), this success has to be seen against the background that the Moslim Brotherhood, so several interview partners, received a lot of protestation votes

³⁴ the moderate nature of the Egyptian people is also stressed by Dr. Abdelaty Mohamed in an interview in Cairo July 2006: “The phenomenon of fundamentalism in Egypt is very new, is very strange...very strange for its history. At the second half of the 70 for certain political reasons and encouraged by the regional environment to become more strong – but actually GI and Jihad , the fundamentalists, have no roots in the minds of the Egyptians. Fundamentalism is a change in Egypt. Egypt and its regional environment has problems. It (Egypt) was weak economically and a new generation came. Our intellectual influence had been weakened. So it was an economic collapse...and also from the leader...a new generation is coming now...we need the Gulf states...Egyptians were leaving Egypt...most of our young generation went for work to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the Emirates...there they have been taught to be fundamentalists...that's why I told you fundamentalism is very strange in our literature...it has come from Saudi Arabia, Libanon, Palestine...people who were working in these country needing money...were listening to leaders in these countries...and they came back to Egypt transforming this thinking and attitude...in a moment our country was very weak and can accept anything... very strange for us....but it happened in the 70s and 80s”

members to freedom and democracy and all despite torture in prison and the fifth reason is that it provides education and health services to the poor.”³⁵

These five reasons share a focus on the people. That there is, however, a fine line between ‘people’s level’ and populism is emphasized by the human rights lawyer Gamal Eid who stresses that the Muslim Brothers are indeed exploiting people as they have the means to do so and camouflage their extremism behind a call for democracy.³⁶ A certain mistrust and scepticism about the Brotherhood’s real intentions is henceforth present especially among secular circles. This mistrust is not without ground. The Muslim Brother’s stance towards extremist group’s violence is ambiguous at best. Thus, they missed out on several occasions to take a strong position against extremism. This lenient approach in turn might indirectly encourage violence.³⁷ Either way, one cannot deny their popularity. The Muslim Brothers “are in touch with the people and address social needs – that is their formula”³⁸. They follow the so – called da’wa which aims at social change through a bottom-up approach.³⁹ The Brotherhood “accepts the society and the regime, but they want to change it over a long time by peaceful ways.”⁴⁰ One can not help but notice the contradiction in this quote. To accept something but being intent to change it at the same time sounds mutually exclusive. It can, however, be the recipe for democratic transformation. Without diving deeper into an analysis of the Brotherhood’s real motivations, the emphasis shall here be on their choice of non-violent methods. This is relevant insofar as the Muslim Brotherhood can be labelled as the cradle for following movements (which often deviated from their moderate⁴¹ heritage). And

³⁵ Interview with Prof. Habib in Cairo in summer 2006, Prof. Habib is vice president of the Egyptian Moslim Brotherhood.

³⁶ Interview with the Human Rights Lawyer Gamal Eid in Cairo in summer 2006, Gamal Eid is also the Executive Director of “The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information”; According to Gamail Eid, the MB is so succesful because “they have the means, money and are exploiting people by telling them that they are not extremists.” On the question why the MB returned to the slogan “Islam is the Key solution” Gamail Eid answered that “it is just for attracting ordinary people around them. We are the minority (secularists). So Islam is the solution for attracting the majority.”

³⁷ Dr. Abdelaty Mohamed for example states the following in an interview: “till now they (the MB) did not announce any strong position against the two societies (Jihad and Gamaa Islamia) e.g. in their literature...they never helped the government against these people.. indirectly they encourage these people. Why they do this? Because they say we are in the same position against the government. Whatever we are: GI or MB or Jihad, we are all in the end in one place...and the government is in another one, If we disagree with these other violent societies...ok we disagree with them, but if we do this directly, if we confront them we help the government...that could be a present to the government... ..they can not work against us and we are in the end in the same position. This is actually a very, very bad position from the MB. And I think they are responsible for violence for a very long time. If they had a strong position against violence from the very beginning...but this violent environment helps their interests, they benefit.”

³⁸ Interview with Hugh Roberts in Cairo in summer 2006, Hugh Roberts is expert for the Middle East of the International Crisis Group.

³⁹ Montasser Al Zayyat 2002: *The Road to Al-Qaeda*, Cairo: Dar Misr al-Mahrusa, p. xiv: “the term da’wa means literally “calling” and refers to the practice of Muslims calling others to the right path, or a life guided by Islamic orthodoxy. Based on an Islamic principles that advises Muslims to begin social change with themselves, these activists work to live a good life, and to spread their ideas through their communities, hoping eventually to create an Islamic state by transforming the population at large into a pious community.”

⁴⁰ Interview with Dr. Abdelaty Mohamed.

⁴¹ the choice of the term “moderate” is seen in relation to more extreme groups as the Gamaa Islamia, during interviews the Brotherhood was mainly perceived as moderate by the interviewees who emphasized that the MB can absolutely not be compared to terrorist groups; Abdelaty Mohamed gives a good differentiation between MB, Gamaa Islamia and Jihad: “Jihad concentrates on violence by force and by destroying the country and the regime itself – to change the society by force, more rigid than GI; GI is convinced we need to change the society

in fact the Gamaa Islamia was linked to the Brotherhood from the very beginning. Actually, the Gamaa Islamia used to be a moderate society.⁴² This view is also expressed by Montasser Al Zayyat: “In the beginning the Gamaa Islamia was not violent nor was it using violence. It was the closest thing to the Muslim Brotherhood. It was a people’s group, using da’wa and mosques to spread its cause.”⁴³ This closeness to the Brotherhood is further confirmed by Abdel Moneim Abul Futuh who founded the predecessor circle of the later Gamaa Islamia at Cairo University⁴⁴:

“Salafist and Jihadist tendencies coloured the way we viewed the Brotherhood. Viewed through our revolutionary lens, the Brotherhood did not seem at the time to be close to our vision....We decided to put our reservations aside and realised that we could work under their umbrella. Perhaps, had we not joined the Brotherhood, my generation would have turned into Ayman El-Zawahiris and Bin Ladens. The wing of the Islamic group which took up arms against the state was precisely the group that did not join the ranks of the Brotherhood.”⁴⁵

This quote makes an interesting point. The Muslim Brotherhood might in fact have a moderating potential in spite of its widespread perception as the fundament of radicalism. It is their focus on the people that has probably prevented the group from becoming as extremist as other Islamist movements of the time turned out. A case in point, the Gamaa Islamia could not hold on to public support but radicalized ever further.⁴⁶ And it was

and the regime, but by many ways – including violence; The MB is accepting the society and the regime, but they need to change it for a very, very long time by peaceful ways”

⁴² Interview with Dr. Abdelaty Mohamed

⁴³ Interview with Montasser Al Zayyat.

⁴⁴ “In 1970 Abul-Futuh enrolled in Cairo University's Faculty of Medicine, entering a phase that still shapes his political choices. At the time the campus was dominated by leftist politics. Students' unions were all run by leftists who reinforced their presence through debates initiated on wallpapers which, to Abul-Futuh's shock, sometimes carried anti-Islamic writings."It was a shock for someone like me to see writings that defamed the Prophet's saying. He began to explore ways to counter such writings. Quran reading circles were formed and scholars and Ulemma were invited to give lectures on campus. Abul-Futuh and his comrades, who had begun to network with students from universities across the country, felt they were far more in tune with the general public than their leftist colleagues, and as such they should be more widely represented on campuses. Abul-Futuh's small circle quickly grew. A key moment occurred when the group decided to run in Students' Union elections. In 1972 they scored a landslide victory, winning control of five out of six Students' Union committees. The group changed its name from Al-Gamaa Al-Deeneya (the religious group) to Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya (the Islamic group)."There was nothing planned in this at all. It came about as a product of the rivalry between the leftists and those who were religious. We thought those who occupied union posts were working to mute our voices and the union was not representative of a large number of students. It was campus politics coloured with the jealousy of youth." taken from Al Ahram Weekly Online: Abdel-Moneim Abul Futuh: A different kind of syndicalims, written by Omayma Abdel Latif, found on <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/743/profile.htm>

⁴⁵ Al Ahram Weekly Online: Abdel-Moneim Abul Futuh: A different kind of syndicalims, written by Omayma Abdel Latif, found on <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/743/profile.htm>

⁴⁶ According to Abdelaty Mohamed “The GI changed to violence under pressure of Jihad”; According to Montasser Al Zayyat the reasons for the group’s radicalisation are as follows: “First it used peaceful means, but it was the result of government’s treatment and behavior towards GI, so GI responded with violence. GI was growing stronger and government wanted to slow it down. What the government did to them was to put women and children into prisons and used them as hostages, arrested and acted against the law towards GI, and killed prominent

especially the late 1970s that saw an emerging atmosphere of violence⁴⁷ which correlated with Sadat's signature of the peace treaty with Israel: "Egypt since Camp David has renounced its independence in the military sphere. This had consequences internally - consequences for the perception of the legitimacy of the Egyptian government. Egypt has become permanently vulnerable about the critiques of its legitimacy."⁴⁸ This atmosphere of violence was nurtured by the intellectual justification for extremism – mainly by the ideas of Sayyid Qutb⁴⁹. To Sayyid Qutb⁵⁰ Muslims live not in an Islamic world, but in Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic ignorance): "the Muslim community has long ago vanished from existence...The Muslim community vanished at the moment the laws of God became suspended on earth."⁵¹ The government which does not apply Islamic law but suspended the law of God on earth has to be fought in the consequence.⁵² When Qutb was executed for his radical views by Nasser's government in 1966, he turned into a martyr for many young Egyptians. His book "Milestones" had a significant impact on the later members of the Gamaa Islamia. It laid the foundation for Islamic extremists striving for re-islamization. While thus the "Muslim Brotherhood wants to re-organize, Jihadi groups want to re-islamize society."⁵³ This re-islamization remained, however, very intangible. Accordingly, Sayyid Qutb never provides any examples of how particular pieces of 'divine' legislation are superior to equivalent kinds of 'man-made' law. Qutb's imperatives are mostly framed in metaphors and remain inconcrete. This leaves one wondering about his ideas' practical implementation. Indeed, reading Qutb gives a whole new understanding of what is meant by necessary differences in interpretation. Interestingly, when researchers of the International

leader of GI without any legal support. In 1990, GI killed speaker of the parliament and began responding to gvt's acts."

⁴⁷ Interview with Prof. Emad Shahin in Cairo in summer 2006, Emad Shahin is Associate Professor for Political Science at the American University in Cairo and currently Visiting Associate Professor at the department of Government at Havard.

⁴⁸ Interview with Hugh Roberts; Diaa Rashwan describes the relationship between Sadat and the Islamists as follows: "Originally, the Gamma Islamia was a legal entity, like a student union at the Egyptian universities. At this time we have committees in the facultys of the universities. One of these committees was called the religious committee – the Islamic community. This committee was allowed to be played by students in 1979. At this time we saw that the new Islamists, the young students in the second half of the 70ies joined this committed and called themselves Gamma Islamia. this commiteed existed from the south to Cairo to Alexandria. at the same time we saw the MB – very strong activities. and this activism encouraged many students to join the Muslims Brothers – especially in the North- in the Southern regions there was a different kind – this religious group – they were more radical – they did not join the MB except for a few. they did not accepts the MB, they were more radicals, in the second half of the 70ies there was a kind of division between Islamist Students – the majority in Cairo, Alexandria wanted to be part of the MB. in the South there was the self-called Gamaa Islamia. Sadat had good relations with all kinds of Islamists – with MB, with more radical Islamists in the South. He wanted to balance leftists. And this encouragement does not mean that he created the Islamists, but he encouraged it. They had more opportunities. He encouraged them until his visit to Israel, from this time big problems started with all kinds of Islamist and also the other Egyptian forces. The relations from this visit to Israel to all forces worsened."

⁴⁹ Interview with Emad Shahin

⁵⁰ Qutb (1906-1966) was an Egyptian government bureaucrat, author, literary critic and finally an Islamic political leader, but is most famous as an Islamist theoretician. He grew up in British-occupied Egypt and was imprisoned and executed in Nasser's independent Egypt. Though he came from a pious rural background, he studied Western literature extensively and wrote literary criticism as well as poetry, short stories and articles. Qutb spent two years in America (which he loathed) and came back a determined fundamentalist. For more information see e. g.: www.youngmuslims.ca

⁵¹ Sayyid Qutb 1964: Milestones.

⁵² Interview with Amr El Choubaki

⁵³ Interview with Diaa Rashwan

Journal of Middle East Studies interviewed members of militant Islamic groups in Egypt in 1980 they were surprised how difficult it was for these members to frame what they envisioned in concrete terms.⁵⁴

The conclusive end to the purpose of re-islamizing society and fighting the unbelieving regime is to topple the government: "If you like to clear the stairway you begin from the top not from down...so you have to remove this government, hence the violence. The only way to change the regime is to engage in violence, because you can only dream of changing through democratic vote."⁵⁵ The Gamaa Islamia has constantly focused on fighting the "near enemy"⁵⁶ with the goal to assume power in Egypt and to re-islamize the Egyptian society afterwards – a top-down approach. It stands therewith in contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood which discovered that multi-partism is useful and not against Islam. According to Prof. Habib, Islam is henceforth not in contradiction to democracy: "We are in favour of democracy, separation of power, multi-partism and multiculturalism. People should have a say on who should govern them."⁵⁷ The Gamaa Islamia, on the other hand, was against multi-partism and eventually published a book against it in 1985.⁵⁸ The differentiation between "social political groups" and Jihadi Islamists is further specified by Diaa Rashwan: "Social political groups have a program inspite of Islamic Sharia. They want to reorganize society and adapt Islamic Sharia to such re-organisation – for example to multi-partism."⁵⁹ The Gamaa Islamia, however, wanted the law of the book, not the parliament which did not represent God nor Sharia.⁶⁰ What exactly was meant by this law of the book has, however, never been specified by the group. It remained unclear what should actually replace multi-partism. They never elaborated on their goal which was confined to toppling the government. In fact, Jihad had become the goal: "Thus people act out of anger, self-respect etc. it does not mean that they have a clear vision. They are just saying no way. They never had a project. The Gamaa Islamia never had a project."⁶¹ This violence, which climaxed in the Luxor

⁵⁴ International Journal of Middle East Studies 1980: Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Notes and Preliminary Findings, in: Saad Eddin Ibrahim (ed.) 2002: Egypt, Islam and Democracy, Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press.(however, they did not interview members of the Gamaa Islamia)

⁵⁵ Interview with Emad Shahin

⁵⁶ "At least we can take it as given that Al-Qaeda belongs to that stream of international militant Islamist movements that espouse jihad against what they perceive as the external enemies to Islam and the Muslim people. In this it differs from such domestically grown jihadist movements, as the Gama'a Islamiya and Jihad Organisation in Egypt, which targeted the regime within their own country. The focus on the "remote" as opposed to the "near" enemy, as Al-Qaeda members have put it, combines with another fundamental principle to form the effective substance of its battle cry. This principle is expressed in the exhortation to all people of the Islamic world to work together to liberate all parts of Dar Al-Islam (home of peace) from foreign occupation and to support any Muslim people in their wars against foreign aggressors. These two ideas combined in practice for the first time in modern Islamic history during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 when various regional and international powers--the US above all--sought to incite tens of thousands of Muslim youths to go that country to fight the communist invaders. Never before had the call of jihad been used so concertedly to recruit Muslims from around the Islamic world to defend a remote Muslim country against foreign aggression. Information taken from Diaa Rashwan 2005: Remote Targets and Near Ones too, Al-Ahram Weekly Online, found on <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/740/op44.htm>

⁵⁷ Interview with Prof. Habib, as stated earlier this call for democracy by the Brotherhood is not digested easily by many who mistrust the Brothers real intentions

⁵⁸ Interview with Diaa Rashwan

⁵⁹ Interview with Diaa Rashwan

⁶⁰ Interview with Montasser Al Zayyat

⁶¹ Interview with Hugh Roberts

massacre in 1997⁶², further distanced the Gamaa Islamia from the population which felt that the violence was not going anywhere. On the contrary. With tourism being the main source of income for many, the increasing attacks on visiting foreigners turned the population against the group.⁶³ Soon, the Gamaa Islamia found itself isolated and without the support it enjoyed in the beginning.

With unlimited cause, ends and means the Gamaa Islamia can be defined (in the beginnings) as absolute terrorism. How Jihad turned into the very goal of the group is furthermore exemplary for the corruption of the goals through the means.

The Transformation:

At the end of the 70s and especially after the murder of Sadat in 1981 the Egyptian government went on a major offensive against the Gamaa Islamia: “It was really very nasty what happened here. Nothing like Algeria, I mean Islamic Algeria. A nightmare, This was done very nasty. How many people were killed here. I mean. Violence works. Here the Gamaa Islamia and the regime were shooting at each other...it was fairly straightforward and a lot of people were put into prison.”⁶⁴

Torture did not work to stop the ongoing violence because of persistent communication channels between members in and outside prison. Consequently the government motivated intellectual exchange with and among the group under the presence of Muslim scholars. Years of debates with religious figures took place motivating the leaders inside prison to review their literature.⁶⁵ Based on these reviews the Gamaa Islamia held deep theological conversations among themselves for years, re-interpreting religious texts and changing their mind. According to Montasser Al Zayyat, who represents his “brothers” in the negotiations in prison: “They had disputes and arguments from within the group. In the beginning, they had only one opinion and idea and refused to accept other opinions. In prison, they were exposed to other ideas and teachings and began accepting different opinions. It had to do with knowledge and experience. After 20 years, they matured, read, and understood the book properly.”⁶⁶ The government on the other hand welcomed this initiative and told the group: “go to the library, listen to us, we can send you people, peacefully.”⁶⁷ It also allowed the group’s leaders to tour the prisons in order to communicate their new approach to other members. Albeit never officially admitted, the in-group debate of the Gamaa Islamia was a result of negotiations with and concessions of the government. These concessions included not only a certain awareness of the futility of torture, but also the provision of access to communication channels as literature, education and exchange with religious scholars.

The transformation of the Gamaa Islamia motivated Ayman Al Zawahiri to do everything possible in order to sabotage this move towards peace. Thus, he claimed several times that members of the group moved not to peace but joined Al Qaeda or that they have become government agents. These claims were repeatedly rejected by the Gamaa Islamia. Montasser Al Zayyat’s book “The Road to Al Qaeda” is also a reply to Zawahiri’s accusations and an interesting read on this debate.⁶⁸ The argument in favour of or against the

⁶² This massacre took place inspite of the coincident initiative of peace because of miscommunications and disagreement between some more radical members and the leadership, which did not approve this attack.

⁶³ Interview with Hugh Roberts

⁶⁴ Interview with Hugh Roberts

⁶⁵ Interview with Dr. Abdelaty Mohamed

⁶⁶ Interview with Montasser Al Zayyat

⁶⁷ Interview with Dr. Abdelaty Mohamed

⁶⁸ Zawahiri did not shy back to use all kinds of tricks for his sabotage. Thus he motivated for example one of the group’s leaders Taha (in the US) to sign a petition to free Palestine. Later he

group's genuine transformation after all mirrors if one believes in the possibility of change through debate or not.

The communication channels within prison motivated the transformation of the Gamaa Islamia group as a whole. While this change of mind was primarily spurred by the group's leaders, the debates within in prison allowed these historic leaders of the group to communicate their new approach to the other members.⁶⁹ They officially renounced violence and have since then made several statements⁷⁰ on their ceasefire initiative and appeared on TV and radio channels to promote their peaceful approach.⁷¹ Most interestingly, the debates within prison resulted in the publication of several books on the group's ideological revisions. In "Initiative for Stopping Violence"⁷² they adopt what they call a "realist vision":

"It is wrong to take positions and adopt provisions and opinions without considering the reality... It is obvious that in the fight between Islamic groups and the police, neither one can benefit. The state also cannot benefit from the lasting violence. However, the biggest benefactor in the struggle within Egypt are the enemies of Egypt and Islam. They are the ones who will make political and financial gains at the expense of Egyptian people's blood. Enemies use these events for their own personal interests..."⁷³

What reads like a revised conspiracy theory is also the insight that force, after all, is counterproductive. It might seem curious that it is a conspirational twist that engineered the groups' change of mind. It is telling, however. The decision to halt armed operations was spurred by one of the group's leaders Khaled Ibrahim in 1996 who called for ceasing them for one year in order to prepare for confronting Israel.⁷⁴ This ceasefire turned into a lasting initiative. The enemies which benefit "at the expense of Egyptian people's blood" are specified as Israel, the US and the West as well as secularists. What does not appear a convincing move towards peace is nevertheless representative of a general mood in Egypt. Even Diaa Rashwan doubts Bin Laden's involvement in the September 11th attack and writes with an obvious hint to potential geostrategic interests of the US: "To whose advantage, then, would an attack on Afghanistan be?"⁷⁵ That (not only) the average Egyptian does not believe that the powerful US could still not find Bin Laden has a straightforward explanation according to Mark Sedgwick: "In a modern Western society there is a fairly close overlap between the view one finds on TV and press and private conversations. In a society with a controlled press there is a mismatch between the explanation you find in the newspaper and

sold this signature as a confirmation of the whole Gamaa Islamia that they joined the "Islamic Front for Combating Jews and Crusaders" (Later to be Al Qaeda). Montasser Al Zayyat who sat together in prison with Zawahiri describes in his book "The Road to Al Qaeda" how Zawahiri steadily tried to intermingle in the affairs of the Gamaa Islamia.

⁶⁹ the relatively hierarchical organisation of the group fostered the communication and acceptance of the ceasefire initiative. However, some – especially younger members – might have not followed the initiative, the group as a whole did, however, undergo a deep transformation.

⁷⁰ See for example article by Abdel Moneim Said on Al Ahram Weekly Online where he describes the statements made by the group during a public appearance.

⁷¹ As far as this is allowed by the government

⁷² These books have been collected during field research in Cairo, they are quite rare and are only available in Arabic

⁷³ Gamaa Islamia 2002: Initiative of Stopping Violence, Cairo: Islamic Turath Bookshop, p. 35ff.

⁷⁴ see Montasser Al Zayyat 2002: The Road to Al Qaeda, Cairo: Dar Misr al-Mahrusa, p. 73 ff.

⁷⁵ Diaa Rashwan 2001: A War over Resources, Al Ahram Weekly Online, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg>

what you privately believe...”.⁷⁶ This mismatch is symptomatic of the chronic lack of democracy and its strong side-effect on feeling powerless. Indeed, the idea of democracy is often seen as the very trigger of this powerlessness, given that current Egyptian politics are sold as being democratic – an explanation for a certain unpopularity of democracy in the country.

Apparently, the Gamaa Islamia did not change their cause of confronting the “enemies of Islam” substantially. What they changed are their methods:

“It is known that Jihad does not need to be rushed into and there is no requirement for the unnecessary bloodshed and the loss of life and the killing of the souls... Jihad is not only the violence. It is also the time of prayer. It is about making friends, supporting family, and contributing to the welfare of the society.”⁷⁷

The Gamaa Islamia re-interpreted Jihad. Their transformed concept no longer stands for violent defense. In fact, they perceived an inherent contradiction between violence and the purpose of Islam. After their turn-about, they started arguing against those advocating violent means by analogically uncovering their incoherent reasoning:

“But there are some people who have opposing opinion regarding Jihad. They claim that Jihad is the duty of all Muslims without any regard for consequences. Jihad is no different than any other of the five pillars of Islam without which it is not possible to enter heaven. So Jihad is a prerequisite for going to heaven. And how can someone enter heaven if he does not fight or become martyr in the name of Islam and Allah. However, the Koran clearly states that only those who are healthy and financially able are obliged to go to Hajj, thus not making it a mandatory task for all Muslims. Also, the sick, the weak, the young and pregnant are exempt from fasting, thus having also exceptions to the rule...”⁷⁸

Further in their books, they stretch this exception from the rule of violent Jihad to the rule itself. And while absolute terrorists want to force everybody else to accept their demands, values and way of life, the Gamaa Islamia has come to accept other’s demands, values and ways of life. Did the violent approach isolate them from the population, their transformation became an accomplished move to get back in touch with the demands, values and ways of life of society, in essence the absence of violence:

“Attacking and killing stands against God’s wish, and those who kill defenseless individuals will only infuriate God, as it is against Islamic values to commit such crimes. Copts and tourists are civilians who should not have been targeted....Doing harm to tourists, either killing them or robbing them is against God’s wish and is “haram”. [=forbidden] If in case someone has violated and insulted our culture through ignorance, through lack of awareness or on purpose, he should

⁷⁶ Interview with Mark Sedgwick

⁷⁷ Gamaa Islamia 2002: Shedding the light on mistakes in Jihad, Cairo: Islamic Turath Bookshop, p. 43 ff.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

not be harmed physically either. We should only deprive that individual of our hospitality and ask him to leave the country and go back home.”⁷⁹

If the corruption of the ends through the means defines a dead-end in terrorist strategy, intense debate led the Gamaa Islamia to reverse out. They realized that violent Jihad had corrupted the goal. It had replaced the primacy of politics. A change of direction led the group to conclude that:

“Jihad is neither the goal nor the intent. Jihad is the way to raise the banner of religion and god’s word. And if Jihad can’t achieve that, it is forbidden.”⁸⁰

This insight set off the group’s search for an end to replace the primacy of violence. The search for a goal formulated in positive terms (instead of merely toppling the government) takes further shape when considering the following statement by former Gamaa Islamia member Safwat Abdel Ghani in an interview: “We realized that if we were in power we would have to share it anyway. It is like flying an airplane. If you do not communicate with the others, you crash.”⁸¹ Released from prison Safwat Abdel Ghani is now writing his PhD on Islam and democracy. The Gamaa Islamia eventually accepted multi-partism. Thus, in 1998 and ‘99, they issued two demands to establish a political party. Both times their demands were refused. “De facto they tried to have a political party, but it was more a symbolic attempt to confirm that they were serious in their change of mind. When you accept multi-partism it is part of the transformation into a social-political group. The Gamaa Islamia transformed as it happened very often in Islamic Society. According to such a transformation, multi-partism is a part of the political agenda. To ask people to give them their votes and to accept that some people get votes and some not – that is a progress.”⁸² The group’s progress has, however, to be taken with caution. According to Montasser Al Zayyat the Gamaa Islamia is “still in an inner search stage”.⁸³ What they will come to find, remains to be seen. It is noteworthy, however, that their issued demands for establishing a political party demonstrate how they seem to overhaul the government, which is currently turning into a hereditary monarchy.

Discussion

In the theoretical part of this paper it was claimed that the goal becomes visible as we investigate and communicate with the respective group and study the interrelation between cause, ends and means. Understanding how means and cause are interrelated opens the possibility to visualize a tangible goal. Because it is this interrelation that can give us a hint on how the end disappeared in the first place. It must be possible to trace the corruption of the end through absolute means and cause. The search for this interrelation of means and

⁷⁹ Gamaa Islamia 2002: Initiative of Stopping Violence, Cairo: Islamic Turath Bookshop, p. 92.

⁸⁰ Gamaa Islamia 2002: Initiative of Stopping Violence, Cairo: Islamic Turath Bookshop, p. 45.

⁸¹ Interview with Safwat Abdel Ghani in Cairo in summer 2006, Safwat Abdel Ghani was one of the commanders of the military wing of the Gamaa Islamia and was involved in the murder of the speaker of parliament 1990

⁸² Interview with Diaa Rashwan

⁸³ Interview with Montasser Al Zayat

cause leads us to ask for the drivers of the group's radicalization - in short: What makes an extremist? Dr. Abdelaty Mohamed gives a very concrete reply to this question naming three reasons for Islamic fundamentalism:

“Theoretically and practically I believe that in our Islamic history, Islamic fundamentalism appears for 3 basic reasons: If there is an occupation; If there is a threat for religion; If there is injustice...If you find anyone of them you have to expect Islamic fundamentalism and violence. This is a conclusion as a model or a rule from our history. Whatever you believe in Europe or US, the Muslim is one, one culture, one message in the world.... if you live in Germany and you see people being killed in Gaza you become more fundamentalist...because we as a nation are being hurt, treated unjust...this is the secret to our feelings.”⁸⁴

This quote clarifies the cause. It does not clarify the means. It remains astonishing that individual radicalisation in the Middle East is reaching levels unknown in other regions. It is no secret that there are millions of people who fail to feel for the victims of suicide bombers. On the contrary. Most of those who commit suicide missions are depicted as martyrs whose names are learned and heroic stories told of⁸⁵. Moral support for suicide bombers in the Middle East is growing even among the moderate, secular majority of the population⁸⁶. In their opinion, suicide bombers become *munadilin*, Arabic for those who struggle for justice and freedom. But how does the cause translate into individual radicalisation in the Middle East? The following quote by Hugh Roberts, expert for the Middle East of the International Crisis Group, pinpoints the connection between “occupation” on the one hand and individual radicalisation on the other:

“The doctrine of Jihad was a response to Camp David. Not a response to the lack of democracy. The response was to the non done responsibility by the Egyptian government to act Jihad when Jihad was necessary. There is therefore an individual obligation of every Muslim to conduct Jihad. In Islam there are 5 pillars, 5 individual responsibilities (pilgrimage etc.), Jihad is not an individual obligation - that was their innovation. Now this is a response to this situation – nothing to do with democracy! But with Camp David.”⁸⁷

Hugh Roberts brings the connection between the cause - the occupation in Palestine – and violent means – individual Jihad - to the point: Jihad turned into an individual obligation when the government failed to “act Jihad when Jihad was necessary”. Does this violent response, however, have “nothing to do with [the lack of] democracy”? Hugh Roberts does here somehow contradict himself. Because in fact he is concluding that the government reaction to Camp David turned the ruling elite illegitimate in the eyes of Jihadi terrorists. And is it not this reaction of inventing Jihad as an individual obligation that is a reaction to

⁸⁴ Interview with Dr. Abdelaty Mohamed

⁸⁵ Andoni Lamis “Searching for Answers; Gaza’s Suicide Bombers”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol26 No4 (Summer 1997), 33-45. Author tells a story of a daily life in a Palestinian refugee camp. Lamis also interviews families of suicide bombers who share different views on the issue of undiminishing support for suicide bombers among the Palestinian population.

⁸⁶ Carroll Doherty (Ed), The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press “A Year After Iraq War - Mistrust Of America In Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists” March 2004, www.people-press.org

⁸⁷ Interview with Hugh Roberts

their misrepresentation in the government? Of course, one might argue that these terrorists' perception is representative of only a few misguided individuals who would never find a political channel in a democracy. Not only does the actual lack of democracy in Egypt, however, turn the evidence for this view into an unprovable counterfactual. The following different view by Amr El Choubaki from the Al Ahram Centre also makes an excellent point why there are reasons to believe otherwise:

“It is very interesting – to the Arabs we only have one problem – Palestine, there is nothing wrong with the regime. And the Americans only blame the internal problems. More interesting to me is, however, their interrelation. We have a drought – who expresses our anger against American politics? Only the terrorists. There is not a whole population terrorist. Al Qaeda is a very small minority. But we have a large population which supports the terrorists, because their choice is between regime and nothing.”⁸⁸

This quote by an Egyptian expert on extremism in the Middle East surely has more weight than our wishful thinking. And El Choubaki does stretch, that “Al Qaeda is a very small minority”. More importantly he does, however, mention the widespread support for terrorism. The excellent point in this statement is according to this paper's author the hint on how the end disappeared in the first place. The statement makes it indeed possible to trace the corruption of the end through absolute means and cause. Therewith the relation between cause, end and means takes concrete shape: Individual Jihad became means and goal because of the lack of representation. To topple the government (which did not “act Jihad when Jihad was necessary”) was, in turn, supposed to drive the fight for the cause of occupation in Palestine. The Gamaa Islamia wanted to topple the Egyptian government (the near enemy) as a first step to reach the broader cause. The statement by Amr El Choubaki stresses the relation between fighting the near enemy which did not act Jihad and the broader cause. Without representation the people's “choice is between regime and nothing”. That the [Egyptian] government is following the strategy of de-politising society⁸⁹ does not help this lack of representation. Instead, a feeling of powerlessness nurtures the soil for a conspirational atmosphere. Similarly to Amr El Choubaki Hugh Roberts therefore doubts that there is much of a choice:

“What are the choices? The choices are to lay down, to drop out of politics . To say I have my 6 children....But when they see television at night... and the people that are being killed are Muslims. So when all people feel bad about what is happening all the time, it is inevitable that a certain small percentage of the young man are going to feel motivated to do something. The trouble is they do not know what do to. They have no political channel for them.”⁹⁰

Political channels have been absent since the government has implemented the emergency law, which has been since always - so it seems. Ironically enough, the government frames its current repression within the war on terror. While representation might therefore seem a far away wish, the concept of democracy does nevertheless evoke contradictory feelings in the Middle East. It is often perceived as a Western model to be imposed. The different measures with which Western countries carrot or stick democratic development in the region only helps this impression of democracy as a tool. Unsurprising, the question for the role of

⁸⁸ Interview with Amr El Choubaki

⁸⁹ Interview with Hugh Roberts

⁹⁰ Interview with Hugh Roberts

democracy turned out to be a very sensitive one during interviews. Diaa Rashwan for example took the following position:

“I believe we have to have a part of this Islam in our political life ... There is a lot of hypocrisy, for example the question why is the multi-wifism (polygamy) prohibited in the West – is it a political standard or a religious one? It is your culture, but you give it another face now. It is also our right to have our culture! I lived in France for many times, e.g. in Germany you collect tax for the church, in France – that would be mad. ...Because of your history you have your own model. If you want one to copy from you, copy for yourself first.”⁹¹

Without this part of Islam in political life there is a felt threat of Westernization. And what would really happen if Islamists were in power? While the absolute character of terrorism, the extremism, turns means and ends identical, it is moderation that is correlated with the differentiation between means and goals. This correlation is conditioned by representation. If the goal becomes democracy, another word for the people’s power, moderation is inevitable. Part of this moderation is the specification of goals. Accordingly, Mark Sedgwick’s answer to the consequence of Islamist movements coming to power is that they would have to develop concrete political answers:

“Well, if you are in the opposition you only have to criticize. If you are in power you have the responsibility. And the great slogan “Islam is the key solution” is great if you are an opposition movement....The economic, the environmental. You name any problem. Is Islam the solution to environmental problems? Is it a solution on how to privatize inefficient state industry? What is the view of Islam in reforming the customs?”⁹²

Coming close to the people implies coming close to a reality which is not only moderate but - taking the word literally – moderated. And moderating between different views constitutes not merely the scaffold for building democratic consensus. It is, so the central argument here, also the recipe to cook down extremism. Debating with terrorists, is therefore not only possible, but also constructive. Because it is the lack of communication channels which makes absolute terrorism. Without an outlet the situation remains explosive. The effect of democracy, in turn, is described by Prof. Emad Shahin from the American University of Cairo as follows:

“One impact of democracy is moderating. The process itself provides not to go to extremes, because one loses numbers. ...And what would be the excuse for violent groups to use arms? We surely do not have proper channels of expression. Getting a vote in politics jeopardized your security - you might get into prison.”⁹³

⁹¹ Interview with Diaa Rashwan

⁹² Interview with Mark Sedgwick; And also Amr El Choubaki perceives their political participation as constructive: “Because we must treat the Muslim Brotherhood like a political party. Because that will oblige them to speak and behave like political actor with a political program – very clear and more detailed. Now they are very general, very vague, they do not need to present details, because they are not a legal party.”⁹²

⁹³ Interview with Emad Shahin

In the books on their transformation the Gamaa Islamia sketch out their “inner search.” Part of this search seems a reach out to come closer to the people and an opening to multi-partism. Representation, a stake in what is happening and how the state reacts to the international situation, is lacking in Egypt. Consequently the group turned to individual Jihad. What started off as a violent reaction to the mismatch between the international (or here: the cause) and the individual (or here: the means) has turned into a concrete step for bridging this gap – a call for representation (or here: the goal).⁹⁴

CONCLUSION

To Zartman et. al negotiations are only possible with instrumental terrorists. This differentiation between rational and irrational terrorists is however not only in the eye of the beholder.⁹⁵ It is also not open to the process of a terrorist group’s transformation. The aim of this paper was to figure out what determines the choice between radical and moderate beliefs and more importantly how radical beliefs transform into moderate ones through debate. The Gamaa Islamia might not have “civic and pacific experience. They have no other experience than violence and stopping violence.” But is it true that “to start to convince somebody after 25 years to be a democratic group – it is too late”?⁹⁶ Did not the Gamaa Islamia prove the opposite? To many people Jihadi Islamists are not the actual problem, but the environment which allows their transformation or not. To many people the question is if the West really wants democracy or if it is trying to change hearts and minds. Thus, the universal perception in Egypt is that Mubarak is in power because Washington wants him to be in power.⁹⁷ And indeed there are some serious reasons to believe this way, because “Do you think America is just going to say: oh yeah, that is democracy. If the Muslim Brotherhood would win an election here, that would be an amazing crisis. Politically and internationally.”⁹⁸ Therefore, to Muslim Brother Prof. Habib it seems clear: “Egypt is helping the US – that’s why the US is turning its head to what is happening in Egypt right now, it turns a blind eye to its problems and this is why the government does whatever it wants. The international system talks about the idea of democracy and the protection of the human rights – if it is in there interest that we have democracy we will have democracy...if it is not in their interest ...we won’t.”

Apparently, “Egypt is not at all like it is written in the literature”.⁹⁹ There are no democratic transitions, but some minor reforms at best - with one step forward and two steps back. Maybe “politics in Egypt is not a popularity contest.”¹⁰⁰ But if Al Qaeda would really cease to exist if there was democracy in the Middle East¹⁰¹, the stakes are high enough. And what else is debating with terrorists all about if not setting the democratic principle of dialogue to test? Because if “all terrorists are hostage-takers and all are their own victims”¹⁰², their ransom ultimately becomes the ransom for society.

If a terrorist group namely transforms in the process of negotiations in which it has to put it’s cards on the table, it is these negotiations that allow us to differentiate between more and less “hopeless cases” and not before. Therewith negotiations can also be a measure to

⁹⁴ And therewith (hopefully) a move towards moderation

⁹⁵ Peter Neumann 2007: Negotiating with Terrorists, in: Foreign Affairs Jan/Feb2007, 86, p. 128-138.

⁹⁶ Interview with Amr El Choubaki

⁹⁷ Interview with Mark Sedgwick

⁹⁸ Interview with Hugh Roberts

⁹⁹ Interview with Emad Shahin

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Hugh Roberts

¹⁰¹ Interview with Gamal Eid

¹⁰² William Zartman 2003: Negotiating with Terrorists, International Negotiation 8: 443-450.

figure out who is open to negotiation and transformation and who really does not want to negotiate as for example the attitude of Ayman Al Zawahiri towards the Gamaa Islamia's peace process¹⁰³ suggests. The "victim", so the limitation here, has, at least, have to have the will to be freed.

¹⁰³ at times even Al Qaeda has however expressed a willingness to negotiate