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By

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This review is from: Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam Is Reshaping the World (Kindle Edition)

The scholarship in book is – searching for morally neutral words - extremely shoddy, well below what one would expect from a Brookings scholar. I hope my erstwhile classmate Strobe Talbott (director of Brookings) is listening. In spite of its exhaustive footnotes, anyone who knows this material immediately recognizes Hamid’s book as dissimulation – lying by omission. It’s depressing to think that Brookings would host this sort of thing.

The Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928 is called the “mother of all Islamist movements” (p.6). It plays the “long game” with a “politics of stages”: “...since the state couldn’t simply force people to become more religious the groundwork had to be laid, and that could only happen when enough Egyptians experienced a change of heart. If the masses were ready and willing to embrace the Brotherhood’s message, then— and only then— could there be a serious discussion of the next step: a change in government or even regime.” (Hamid, p. 90). This paraphrases al-Banna’s first three stages in his *Epitre aux Jeunes*. (<http://www.islamophile.org/spip/Epitre-aux-Jeunes-par-Hasan-Al.html>). There are seven stages, what about the other four? The author who expands on the two sword theory of the 11th century Catholic Church surely knows the stages of his centrally themed Muslim Brotherhood long game? Maybe these other stages are not relevant for understanding people’s distrust of the Brotherhood? Here they are, reader decide:

“4. Subsequently we want a Muslim government whose members will lead the people under Islamic guidance, as, in the past, did Abou Bakr and Omar, disciples of the Prophet, may he rest in peace. That is also why we will not accept any form of government not based on Islamic foundations and not true to Islamic principles...

5. We want next to reassemble all those who are part of Islam and that Western policies have made a point of keeping separate and which European cupidity has misled and sealed off within national borders. ...Thus Egypt, Syria, Hidjaz, Yemen, Tripoli, Tunisia, Algeria, Marrakech, and wherever

there lives a Muslim who recites the words "There is no God but God himself"— all of these territories belong to our great nation...

6. We want the Islamic flag to be hoisted once again on high, fluttering in the wind, in all those lands that have had the good fortune to harbor Islam for a certain period of time Thus Andalusia, Sicily, the Balkans, the Italian coast, as well as the islands of the Mediterranean, are all of them Muslim Mediterranean colonies and they must return to the Islamic fold. The Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea must once again become Muslim seas, as they once were...

7. We want, after that and with that, to disseminate our Islamic message to the entire world, to reach people wherever they may be, to spread our message to the four corners of the globe, and overcome the tyrants until the day when agitation ceases and religion is entirely devoted to God..." (Fourest, Caroline. Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan (Kindle Locations 491-513). Encounter Books. Kindle Edition.)

"...agitation ceases and religion is entirely devoted to god" echoes the Koranic verses: "And kill them wherever you find them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out. And Al-Fitnah is worse than killing.... And fight them until there is no more Fitnah (disbelief and worshiping of others along with Allah) and (all and every kind of) worship is for Allah (Alone)" (2:191,193 Mohsin Khan transl.)

Has the Brotherhood changed? I'll spare you all but one passage from the Brother Qutb [The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society](#): "As Islam works for peace, it is not satisfied with a cheap peace that applies only to the area where people of the Muslim faith happen to live. Islam aims to achieve the sort of peace which insures that all submission is made to God alone. This means that all people submit themselves to God, and none of them takes others for their lords. (p.49, 50). Idem the Brotherhood's 1991 "Strategic Plan for North America": "The Ikhwan [Brotherhood] must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and 'sabotaging' its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and God's religion is made victorious over all other religions".

(<https://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/20.pdf>).

Below are excerpts from the Muslim Brotherhood's 1982 manifesto "The Project," by Sa'id Ramadan, the son in law of Hassan al Banna and father of Frere Tariq Ramadan. The Project was distributed to Muslim Brothers around the world who were ordered to guard its content from outsiders. In 2001 a copy of The Project was discovered during a police raid of a senior Muslim

Brotherhood financier's home in Switzerland. A long list of "to do's" include the following relating to Jihad (www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/687.pdf):

- "To make contact with all new movements engaged in jihad, everywhere on the planet, and with Muslim minorities, and to create links as needed to establish and support collaboration.
- To maintain jihad and awakening throughout the Ummah.
- To build bridges between movements engaged in jihad in the Muslim world, and between Muslim minorities, and to support them insofar as possible within a framework of collaboration.
- To collect sufficient funds for the perpetuation of jihad.
- To conduct a study of the situation of Muslims and the enemy in occupied Palestine.
- To create jihadi cells in Palestine, and support them in order that they cover all of occupied Palestine.
- To create a link between the mujahadin in Palestine and those throughout the Islamic world.
- To nourish a sentiment of rancor with respect to the Jews and refuse all coexistence."

Hamid says that the Brotherhood in the 1960's disavowed Qutb's "most controversial ideas"; (p.125), but in private documents there is very little daylight between al-Banna, Qutb, Ramadan (1982) and the Strategic Plan for North America (1991). None of this is worthy of Hamid's notice.

And then Sharia. Modern Muslim writers often bob and weave about what this 'constantly evolving' Sharia entails. Negative interpretations of sharia and the Koran are distortions of malevolent critics. Hamid refers to sharia incessantly but never says what it is. Sharia is not whatever Muslim writers imagine it to be, it is the consensus of the certified Islamic juridical scholars regarding codes of conduct derived from the Koran and the Hadiths. The locus classicus for classical Sharia law is "[Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law](#)". Its 1991 English translation is certified by the Imam of the Mosque of Darwish Pasha, Damascus, the Mufti of the Jordanian Armed Forces, Dr. al-Alwani of the Islamic Fiqh Academy at Jedda, and by al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy. Apparently unknown to Hamid, and certainly unknown to gullible readers, it represents the consensus of 75% of the scholars of all main schools for the first 700 odd years of Islam, festooned with scholarly and Koranic references.

Before wading in, recall the 1948 Geneva Convention on the Prevention and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide: "In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national ethnic racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group...". Classical sharia explicitly commands genocide ("As for subsequent times, [after Mohammad's death] there are two possible states in respect to non-Muslims. The first is when they are in their own countries, in which case jihad is a communal obligation ... The second is when non-Muslims invade a Muslim country or near to one, in which case jihad is personally obligatory" p. 600-603), murdering apostates ("Leaving Islam is the ugliest form of unbelief (kufr) and the worst....When a person who has reached puberty and is sane voluntarily apostatizes from Islam, he deserves to be killed" p.595), genital mutilation ("Circumcision is obligatory" p.59) and racism ("Allah has chosen the Arabs above others" p.523). It prohibits "trying to solve ultimate questions about man, God, life after death and so forth, without the divinely revealed guidance of the Koran and sunna "(p.14), gender equality ("nor is it lawful or valid for a Muslim woman to be married to anyone besides a Muslim", p. 529) ". It condones forced marriages, sex with minors ("Whenever the bride is a virgin, the father or father's father may marry her to someone without her permission, though it is recommended to ask her permission if she has reached puberty. A virgin's silence is considered as permission" p. 522) and slavery ("When a child or a woman is taken captive, they become slaves by the fact of capture, and the woman's previous marriage is immediately annulled." p. 604). This is not the distorted interpretation of Muslim baiters, it is the received view of classical Islamic jurisprudence, the majority view of scholars who devoted their lives to studying the Koran and Hadiths. Did they all get it all wrong? We can't laugh this off as medieval backwardness. A large majority of Muslims still believe it. For example, on June 14, 1995 Cairo's Court of Appeals declared Linguist Abu Zayd an apostate inter alia for his questioning the permissibility of owning slave girls, a principle considered "religiously proven without doubt" (page 16 of the judicial opinion). Court of Appeals head Judge 'Abd al- 'Alim Musa told an Egyptian magazine a month after the ruling that Muslims are required to believe in spirits, devils, and the throne of God (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasr_Abu_Zayd). Hamid –unlike the courageous and saintly Mahmood Taha – prefers not to talk about it. Hamid states (without reference) that in the Prophet's time, Islam was "calling the faithful to free slaves" (p.54). The Prophet owned at least fifty nine slaves at one stage or another, including sexual slaves. (K.S.,. Lal The origins of Muslim slave system" in Muslim Slave System in India, New Delhi, Aditya Prakasham, 1994, pp. 9 - 16).

Hamid agonizes over the problem of theodicy: Why does god allow evil? He

can better agonize over another problem: Why is god evil? or perhaps, Why do we worship evil gods? It is the question of authority. The authority of the erstwhile "Oriental Despot" comes down to: Serve me and you will be rewarded beyond measure, oppose me and you will be crushed. Good / evil is simply what the Despot decrees, there is no independent criterion, no Platonic "eye of the soul" empowered to judge right or wrong for itself. Murder, rape, genocide, pedophilia, racism, hatred of unbelievers are all OK if god says so. Believers cannot disavow perpetual war against all unbelievers until they find a 14th century cleric who issued a fatwa to that effect (see the 2010 Mardin declaration <http://www.alhabibali.com/en/news/the-mardin-declaration/>). They are not empowered to render moral judgments for themselves. "Islamic exceptionalism" seems to mean that we must accommodate some degree of religious backwardness and immorality because so many Muslims believe in it. Allah, Assad, Mubarak and increasingly Erdogan are all oriental despots. There is little to choose between them, none accepts the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/687.pdf). People in the Middle East simply have no good choices. To create good choices they must open the eyes of their souls and view the Declaration of Human Rights as a desideratum rather than as a concession.

Hamid's dissimulations are being overtaken by the events in Wuerzberg, Nice, Paris, Istanbul, Brussels, not to mention the horrors in the Middle East. The Islam he chooses not to discuss is revealing itself. He and his footnotes will be swept aside.