

"The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West," Lorenzo Vidino, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010)

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***The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West.* By Lorenzo Vidino. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare, Bruce Hoffman, Series Editor. ISBN 978-0-231-15126-9. 326 pages. \$29.50.**

Lorenzo Vidino's latest book sheds much-needed light on an increasingly important front in the War on Terror. Specifically, what are we as a nation to make of the growing number of Muslims who also live, work, and worship their faith in American communities? The recent controversy over the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque" highlighted both the general sense of uncertainty and the heights of hysteria and hyperbole that cloud reasonable discussion of this subject.

Vidino brings an impressive array of credentials to his task. A widely-read scholar who has worked at several of the world's top think tanks and academic programs, Vidino takes a very difficult and complex subject in *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* and rationally identifies its key issues while providing an excellent overview for the non-expert.

The book begins with the cautionary tale of Abdurahman Alamoudi, an American Muslim leader who was well on his way to becoming the go-to for anyone and everyone in Washington who needed a contact with the Muslim community. A dynamic, adept player in Washington political circles, he kept up a string of events and conferences. The Department of Defense eventually turned to Alamoudi to train and vet imams who would serve as chaplains in the military. Then, largely by chance, Alamoudi was found to have been working with groups plotting to assassinate Saudi Crown Prince Abdallah, among other activities which included funneling money to terrorist organizations. Alamoudi pled guilty and was sentenced to twenty-three years in prison.

There are few better examples of the problem this book seeks to describe: how do the United States and its security and law enforcement communities engage the Muslim community? Who really speaks for American Muslims, what is their agenda, and can we trust them? History is replete with cautionary tales that go in the opposite direction of the case of Mr. Alamoudi; the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, and the excesses of counter-espionage by the British Security Service during World War I, for instance.

Vidino continues with an eye-opening history of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al Ikhwan al Muslimeen*) and its Egyptian origins. The recent revolution in Egypt makes this section particularly relevant given the prominent place of the Muslim Brotherhood in the protests and subsequent negotiations. This short but informative chapter describes the religious underpinnings of the Brotherhood and their evolution from a conservative Islamist organization that occasionally resorted to violence, to their renunciation of such tactics. It also describes how the Brotherhood spread throughout the Middle East and into Europe, each branch developing its own brand of policy and activism based on the character of the country where the members found themselves. In describing the first Muslim Brotherhood members to arrive in America, Vidino points out that these Muslims came to America in order to seek religious freedom, something they could not enjoy in the repressive regimes they left behind in their native countries.

The book then embarks on a discussion of the complex organization of the Muslim Brotherhood in the United States. To summarize, the Muslim Brotherhood or "New Brothers" as they have come to be called, is not a single unified organization. Instead we find a tangled weave of smaller organizations, each with its own specific audience and agenda and no one governing body. However, the Muslim Brotherhood has successfully made itself the organization that law enforcement, the Defense Department, Congress, and the media turn to when they want to get the "Muslim view" on a given topic, in spite of the fact that most of the organizational apparatus is directed by a few hundred individuals, who each sit on multiple committees and head several organizations.

Vidino explains that the Muslim Brotherhood achieved such access to the U.S. Government by taking on the trappings and features of a complex bureaucracy, giving official Washington a beast it could relate to. In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood is not representative of western Muslims; studies show that only about ten to twelve percent of American Muslims identify with any Muslim group and that most consider themselves "cultural" or "sociological" Muslims (p. 10). What the "New Brothers" do represent is an ideology and an ambition to one day unify American Muslims as a body, committed to a more conservative brand of Islam than is generally practiced. The idealized future scenario anticipated by some Muslim Brotherhood adherents is that in time—perhaps centuries from now—the natural moral superiority of Islam will win over the population of the United States, making it a Muslim country by conversion.

But the questions remain. Can a religious doctrine that is also deeply political and in some forms diametrically opposed to democratic values

and western jurisprudence truly assimilate into a western society? What do we really know about the aims of such a complex organization built around a religion that so few of our policymakers understand? How can westerners start to engage the rest of Islam, that vast sea of religious thought outside the theology of the Muslim Brotherhood, but which is not part of the national dialogue because they do not have a complex bureaucracy that can interface with federal and state governments? One thing is clear: eliminating any threat of domestic Islamist terrorism demands engagement on as broad a spectrum of the Muslim community as possible.

Much will depend on how well we as a nation communicate the message that American Muslims are Americans first. Creating undue cause for grievance will create many of the problems seen in European nations, where the assimilation of Muslims into the local population has been slower and more haphazard. Vidino marshals evidence that time is on the side of the optimists, particularly as second- and third-generation Muslims are increasingly disinterested in religious traditions as understood by their elders. Vidino's discussion of the question of democracy is especially illuminating. Most Muslims are not nearly as doctrinaire as alarmists claim, and one must also bear in mind that several terrorist acts in the United States were forestalled with help from the Muslim community.

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