

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MPAC'S ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY: A PRIMER

Throughout the 1980s there was a perceived need in the American-Muslim community to become more involved in the American political scene by developing political action committees. In response, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) was founded in 1986 in Los Angeles as the Muslim Political Action Committee¹ of the Islamic Center of Southern California (ICSC).² After working in concert with the ICSC for a few years, MPAC declared its independence in 1988 and was renamed the Muslim Public Affairs Council. Although now independent, MPAC remains intertwined with the ICSC, as demonstrated by its shared leadership and membership.³

Perhaps more important than an overlap in personnel, MPAC and ICSC also share a common Islamist ideology. This ideology can be traced back to the organizations' principle founders Dr. Maher Hathout⁴ and Dr. Sabri el Farra.⁵ Although we will discuss the biographies of each of these men and their relationships with MPAC and the ICSC at length, *infra*, it is important to begin this story where the stories of so many modern day Islamist organizations began—with the Muslim Brotherhood.

A. The Muslim Brotherhood

In 1928, Hassan al Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood (“MB”), a rigidly conservative and highly secretive Egyptian-based organization dedicated to resurrecting a Muslim

¹ Muslim Public Affairs Council, “MPAC Timeline,” available at <http://www.mpac.org/about/timeline> (last accessed Nov. 2, 2009). MPAC changed its name to the Muslim Public Affairs Council in 1988 and was officially incorporated on February 8, 1990. *Id.*

² ICSC was officially incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization in 1953. Although it moved several times in its early days, the ICSC came to 434 South Vermont Avenue in 1971-72 and has been there ever since. *See* Mohammad Yacoob, “Brief History of the Islamic Center of Southern California (1952-1972),” *Islamic Center of Southern California Newsletter*, (Winter 2006), at 3. *See also*, Ron Kelley, “Muslims in Los Angeles,” *Muslim Communities in North America*, Albany, ed., Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994 at 134-68. Today, the ICSC has approximately 1,000 members but boasts of outreach that affects more than 10,000 Muslim families. *See* Pat McDonnell Twair, “In Memoriam: Dr. Sabri el Farra (1934-2000),” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (June 2002) at 59, 86, available at http://www.wrmea.com/archives/June_2000/0006059.html. In addition to serving as a Mosque, the ICSC is also an umbrella organization, collaborating with over 30 other local mosques, and has become a very large, active, and influential organization in Southern California. *Id.*

³ *See* Appendix A (detailing the cross-over between the MPAC and the ICSC).

⁴ Laurie Goldstein, “Influential American Muslims Temper Their Tone,” *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 2001.

⁵ Mohammad Yacoob, “Brief History of the Islamic Center of Southern California (1952-1972),” *Islamic Center of Southern California Newsletter*, (Winter 2006), at 3. Dr. el Farra served on ICSC’s Advisory Council from 1966-71, and became its chairman in 1971. *Id.* Dr. el Farra has connections to Yasser Arafat, formerly of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and served as ICSC Chairman for many years. *See* Pat McDonnell Twair, “In Memoriam: Dr. Sabri el Farra (1934-2000),” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (June 2002) at 59, 86, available at http://www.wrmea.com/archives/June_2000/0006059.html (explaining that his family was from Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip, that he studied with Yasser Arafat of the PLO in Cairo in the 1950’s, and that “over the years the two have maintained close ties”).

empire.⁶ According to al Banna, “it is the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated, to impose its law on all nations and to extend its power to the entire planet.”⁷ Building upon that theme, al Banna gave the group the motto it still uses today:

“God is our purpose, the Prophet our leader, the Quran our Constitution, jihad our way, and dying for God our Supreme Objective.”⁸

The MB is well recognized as the ideological underpinning for all modern Islamic terrorist organizations.⁹ When discussing Hamas, al Qaida, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, former National Security Council Counter-Terrorism Adviser Richard Clarke testified, “the common link here is the extremist Muslim Brotherhood—all of these organizations are descendents of the membership and ideology of the Muslim Brothers.”¹⁰ Despite the violent ideology espoused by the MB, at least one of the founders of MPAC began his “career,” by studying with and following the teachings of al Banna and other MB leaders.

B. MPAC’s “Founding Fathers”

Although their rhetoric may have tempered over the years, it is important to recognize that the founders of MPAC and ICSC share a common ideology with the MB. In the cases of Maher Hathout and Mohamed Fathi Osman, these connections can be traced back to their youth. Consequently, we now examine the upbringing of each of them in turn, attempting to glean from their past some insight into the philosophies underpinning MPAC.

1. Dr. Maher Hathout

Maher Hathout has served as a senior advisor to MPAC¹¹ and, with his brother Hassan, helped found the Islamic Center of Southern California (ICSC) based upon the teachings that were enshrined in them from their upbringing with the MB.¹² In recounting their childhood and involvement in the MB, Hassan explained that Maher had grown up and followed a similar path:

“It was no wonder that my brother Maher (ten years younger) grew up a bird of the same feather, even after I left the country. At a certain time of our political history, martial courts lavished jail sentences for Muslim activism even for giving a

⁶ See Neil MacFarquhar, “Egyptian Group Patiently Pursues Dream of Islamic State,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 2002.

⁷ Fereydoun, Hoveyda, *The Broken Crescent*, (Westport, CT: Praegar Publishers, 2002), at 56.

⁸ Muslim Brotherhood Homepage, available at <http://www.ummah.org.uk/ikhwan/index.html> (last accessed Aug. 23, 2004).

⁹ See e.g., The 9/11 Commission Report, at 51 (noting that Osama bin Laden “relies heavily” on Sayyid Qutb, al Banna’s ideological MB successor).

¹⁰ Testimony of Richard Clarke before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, (Oct. 22, 2003).

¹¹ Resume of Maher Hathout, available at <http://www.islamonline.net/livedialogue/english/Guestcv.asp?hGuestID=1CITGp> (last accessed Nov. 2, 2009); Mathis Chazanov, “Call of Mecca: A Rising Response,” *Los Angeles Times* (July 3, 1988).

¹² Laurie Goldstein, “Influential American Muslims Temper Their Tone,” *The New York Times*, (Oct. 19, 2001).

donation...to the families of imprisoned Muslims...In one of these mock trials my brother [Maher] and three of his fellows were at court interrogated...”¹³

Maher himself later admitted to participating in anti-British resistance activities during an interview, on MPAC’s Muslim Wavelength Radio in September 2000.¹⁴

Following Maher’s release from prison in 1968, he moved from Egypt to Kuwait, and in 1971 immigrated to the United States to Buffalo, NY.¹⁵ In 1978, Maher moved to California and helped found the ICSC.¹⁶ When MPAC was established as an offshoot of the ICSC, Hathout took a position as senior advisor.¹⁷

The influence Hathout’s brother Hassan played in Maher’s life is relevant in assessing the ideology driving the ICSC, which Hassan co-founded, and MPAC. Hassan Hathout died in April 2009. Until then, the Hathout brothers were inseparable, making their way to California from Egypt and working together on the closely intertwined activities of the ICSC and its publication, *The Minaret*.

Hassan Hathout had close and well-documented ties to the MB. As he recounted in his memoirs, his connections to the MB began at an early age. Discussing his relationship with al Banna, Hathout stated:

“My teacher was a student at the time. His name was Hassan al Banna...I believe he is a unique type of person. Centuries might roll over before a similar personality is produced. I think that the person who most influenced my life was that teacher.”¹⁸

Discussing the effect that these teachings had on him and his youthful work with the MB, Hathout explained:

¹³ Dr. Hassan Hathout, “Living Memories: My Mother,” *The Minaret*, Vol. 14, No. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1992) at 47.

¹⁴ Dr. Maher Hathout, “Hillary Clinton; Mujahedine-e Khalq; Media Bias in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict; Hate Crimes,” Muslim Wave Length Radio and Islamicity (Sept. 31, 2000) (“I participated in, while I was very young, in the rallies and the struggles against British occupation”).

¹⁵ Pat and Samir Twair, “Southern California Chronicle: Muslim Achievement Awards go to Hathout Brothers,” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (Jan/Feb. 2000) at 47-50.; available at http://www.wrmea.com/archives/Jan_Feb_2000/0002047.html

¹⁶ Laurie Goldstein, “Influential American Muslims Temper Their Tone,” *The New York Times* (Oct. 19, 2001).

¹⁷ Dr. Maher M. Hathout, Muslim Wavelength; available at <http://web.archive.org/web/19981212015744/http://mpac.org>

¹⁸ Dr. Hassan Hathout, “The Man Who Influenced My Life,” *Voice of Islam* (Dec. 25, 1997), available at <http://www.islamicity.com/voi/transcripts/HassanAB.htm>. In recounting the story of the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood and al Banna’s teachings, Hathout quoted one of the Koranic verses that al Banna used to preach to his followers: “those who disobey and fight God and his Apostle, and spread mischief in the land should have their punishment in the form of being killed, crucified, mutilated, or exiled.” *Id.* Since then, Hathout explained that al Banna “is among the few who have influenced my life, and he certainly shaped my Islamic personality.” Dr. Hassan Hathout, “Tales of the Blessed,” Dr. Hassan Hathout, *Personal Memoirs*, Los Angeles: Multimedia Vera International (2002) at 51-53.

“Parents are usually concerned when their children get too involved in Islamic and/or Patriotic activities that compete with scholastic work and indeed expose them to actual peril. Not in my case, for in my home God and country were primary concerns.”¹⁹

Having worked alongside the MB in Palestine,²⁰ when Hassan Hathout returned to Egypt he was arrested along with his brother Maher for “Muslim Activism.”²¹ Hathout later commented on these arrests, his subsequent exile, and arrival in the United States.²² In particular, he said that he found the U.S. to be fertile ground to restart the Islamic Movement and grow from there:

“Long after Hassan al Banna, when Egypt had been through the Revolution and the new Regime, but Islam was always considered an enemy. We were persecuted, we were in jail, including my brother and myself. We had to flee home, at last coming to the United States of America. *Who knows, maybe the infertile soil that would not accept the seed of Islam in the East, might be replaced by a more fertile soil that would accept Islam in the West... This is the beginning of the Islamic Movement in the United States and in the West, and you are a part of this.*”²³ [Emphasis added]

2. Dr. Mohamed Fathi Osman

Also demonstrative of the shared Islamist ideology of the founding members of MPAC is the story of Mohamed Fathi Osman.²⁴ Over the course of his career and time with MPAC, Osman repeatedly has made statements either justifying terrorism or attempting to downplay such acts.

¹⁹ Dr. Hassan Hathout, “Living Memories: My Mother,” *The Minaret*, Vol. 14, No. 5 (September/October 1992) at 47.

²⁰ Dr. Hassan Hathout, “The Man Who Influenced My Life”, *Voice of Islam* (Dec. 25, 1997), available at <http://www.islamicity.com/voi/transcripts/HassanAB.htm> (“many volunteers, including myself, volunteered in Palestine in 1948. Not hateful at all, but to serve the cause of Justice, for wherever Justice is compromised, Muslims should be concerned, whether in Palestine, Kashmir, Eastern Europe, or South Africa. Wherever there is the question of just and unjust, Muslims should have a stand. Because the mission of Islam is a global, universal mission”).

²¹ Dr. Hassan Hathout, “My Mother,” *The Minaret* vol. 14, Issue 5 (Sept/Oct. 1992) at 47.

²² Dr. Hassan Hathout, “The Man Who Influenced My Life,” *Voice of Islam* (Dec. 25, 1997), available at <http://www.islamicity.com/voi/transcripts/HassanAB.htm>.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Dr. Fathi was born in Cairo in 1928, studied history at the University of Cairo, and eventually received a Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1976. He is an Islamic author and scholar who has written numerous books and articles and served as Editor in Chief for the *London Magazine* in Saudi Arabia, *The Islamic World Review*. Since that time, he has held numerous academic positions at different universities, including when he was a Visiting Professor for the Spring, 1995 at the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. See Conference Speakers, Prof. Mohamed Fathi Osman, University of Southern California institute for Advanced Catholic Studies (May 5-7, 2003), available at <http://www.usc.edu/programs/iacs/programs/conferences/bv/speakers/osman>

In his book *Sharia in Contemporary Society*, Osman minimized issues with Islamist movements, saying that Western and Muslim reservations towards such groups were the result of Western media attacks on Islam:

“Why do we find many Muslims and non-Muslims along with Westerners worried about any movement or state which may commit itself to Islam and Islamic law? Whenever any individual or group from an Arab or Muslim country is accused of an act of violence, especially if the group’s name contains *jihad*, Western media automatically accuses and attacks Islam.”²⁵

More than simply defending Islamist movements, Osman has explicitly condoned jihad. In a 1987 article entitled “The Anatomy of Terrorism,” Osman argued that the concept of jihad is justified in Islam if undertaken in response to oppression:

“Jihad is allowed in Islam against those who attack the faithful...the jihad of Islam is no more nor less than any legitimate struggle for justice, which many contemporary political powers and intellectuals insist on ignoring whenever they discuss terrorism and Islam.”²⁶

Although the humble beginnings of these three individuals can be clearly traced back to the MB, MPAC continues to rely on the same Islamist ideologies enshrined in its leaders decades ago by the Brotherhood. Demonstrative of this influence is the continuing anti-Zionism,²⁷ apoloia for acts of terror,²⁸ and subversive political tactics.²⁹

C. The Muslim Public Affairs Council Today

MPAC began as a small, single-issue organization, with many of their earliest activities dedicated to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In particular, MPAC actively supported the Palestinians during the first *Intifada* in 1987-88.³⁰ Then known as the Muslim Political Action Committee, MPAC held a New Year’s protest for Palestinian human rights in front of Los Angeles City Hall³¹ and held another anti-Israeli rally on January 22, 1988.³² An advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* in March 1988 by MPAC compared Israel to the Nazis, intent on slaughtering the Palestinians:

²⁵ Fathi Osman, *Sharia in Contemporary Society: The Dynamics of Change in the Islamic Law*, Los Angeles: Multimedia Vera International 1994 at 109.

²⁶ Fathi Osman, “The Anatomy of Terrorism,” *The Minaret* Vol. 8, Issue 2 (Spring 1987) at 24-27.

²⁷ See e.g., Part III, B.

²⁸ See e.g., Part III, C.

²⁹ See e.g., Part IV, B.

³⁰ Press Release, “American Muslims Enter the Democratic Party Process,” Muslim Political Action Committee, July 20, 1988.

³¹ Salam al Marayati, “Political Profile: MPAC,” *The Minaret*, Vol. 9, Issue 3 (Summer 1988) at 11.

³² “Jerusalem is Bleeding!,” Muslim Political Action Committee Advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 22, 1988).

“A new chapter of violence and terrorism is opening...In the 1930’s acquiescence led to the Holocaust. Our acquiescence now towards such atrocities [Israeli occupation] will prepare the stage for a new one.”³³

MPAC’s first paper, published in February 1989 was entitled *Israel, the United States and the Palestinians: A Relationship Re-examined*, and discussed Israeli human rights violations with recommendations for courses of action.³⁴

MPAC offers a young, dynamic leadership, from executive director Salam al Marayati (who will be referenced throughout this report) and spokeswoman Edina Lekovic. As a UCLA student during the late 1990s, Lekovic served as an editor for *Al-Talib*, a Muslim student magazine.³⁵

Its July 1999 issue featured Ayatollah Khomeini and Osama bin Laden on its cover, with a headline “The Spirit of Jihad.” Inside, bin Laden was identified as a “freedom fighter and philanthropist.”³⁶

In an editorial about Muslim pride and maintaining a Muslim identity in the West, the *Al-Talib* staff urged readers “that we act not according to the watered-down, twentieth-century version of Islam in the West, but to the Islam that was revealed by Allah and taught by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) – the Islam people took pride in, and didn’t sacrifice any part of.”³⁷

By July 1999, Al Qaida had issued a declaration of war against the United States and issued a fatwa saying it was “an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to... kill Americans and their allies.”³⁸ Among its attacks were the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.³⁹ Yet, the *Al-Talib* editorial cast bin Laden as a heroic figure:

³³ Advertisement, “Never Before...Never Again,” Muslim Political Action Committee, *Los Angeles Times* (March 30, 1988).

³⁴ Book Review: “Israel and the United States: A Relationship Reexamined,” *The Minaret*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Summer 1989) at 54-55.

³⁵ Lekovic is listed as managing editor in the November 1998, January, May and July 1999 issues. In at least five issues from November 1999 through May 2002, she was listed as a copy editor and writer. In addition, Lekovic’s service as an *Al-Talib* managing editor was included in her biography at the December 2001 MPAC convention. The listing can be seen at http://www.investigativeproject.org/redirect/MPAC-2001_Bio_with_Al-Talib.pdf#page=6

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ Editorial, “Jihad in America, maintaining an Islamic identity in an un-Islamic environment,” *Al-Talib*, Volume 9, issue 6, July 1999.

³⁸ “Text of Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans,” first published in *Al Quds al-Arabi*, London, February 28, 1998.

³⁹ *US v. bin Laden, et al.*, Indictment, (98cr1023 SDNY), November 4, 1998.

“When we hear someone refer to the great *Mujahid* (someone who struggles in Allah’s cause) Osama bin Laden as a ‘terrorist,’ we should defend our brother and refer to him as a freedom fighter; someone who has forsaken wealth and power to fight in Allah’s cause and speak out against oppressors. We take these stances only to please Allah.”⁴⁰

Over the years, MPAC has evolved to a non-profit social welfare organization, describing its objectives as a “public service agency working for the civil rights of American Muslims, for the integration of Islam into American pluralism, and for a positive, constructive relationship between American Muslims and their representatives.”⁴¹ Run by Executive Director Salam al Marayati (“al Marayati”),⁴² MPAC now has as many as 21 branches throughout the United States with its headquartered in Los Angeles.⁴³ The organization has become so influential

⁴⁰ Editorial, “Jihad in America, maintaining an Islamic identity in an un-Islamic environment,” *Al-Talib*, Volume 9, issue 6, July 1999.

⁴¹ Muslim Public Affairs Council, “About MPAC,” available at http://www.mpac.org/about/about_menu.shtml (last accessed Nov. 2, 2009).

⁴² Muslim Public Affairs Council, “About: Staff,” available at <http://www.mpac.org/about/staff-board> (last accessed Nov. 2, 2009). Al Marayati is married to Dr. Laila el Farra, the daughter of the ICSC’s el Farra. See Pat McDonnell Twair, “In Memoriam: Dr. Sabri el Farra (1934-2000),” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (June 2002) at 59, 86, available at http://www.wrmea.com/archives/June_2000/0006059.html.

⁴³ The branches include San Francisco, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *Muslim Public Affairs Council-Local Chapters*, available at <http://web.archive.org/web/1996111123227/www.mpac.org/local.htm> (last updated Sept. 26, 1996) (founded in 1993); Chicago, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *Muslim Public Affairs Council-Local Chapters*, available at <http://web.archive.org/web/1996111123227/www.mpac.org/local.htm> (last updated Sept. 26, 1996) (founded in 1994); New York, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *Muslim Public Affairs Council-Local Chapters*, available at <http://web.archive.org/web/1996111123227/www.mpac.org/local.htm> (last updated Sept. 26, 1996) (last updated Sept. 26, 1996); Washington, D.C., MPAC News, *Ted Koppel Speaks at MPAC Forum in DC*, available at <http://web.archive.org/web/1997122122115712/http://mpac.org>; Iowa, Joe Rodriguez, *Losing Sight of Islam*, *Wichita Eagle* (Sept. 10, 2006), available at <http://www.kansas.com/mld/eagle/living/religion/15474263.htm>; Arcadia, *Great Work From Our Chapters*, MPAC Report, Second Quarter, 202, at 8; North Orange County, *Great Work From Our Chapters*, MPAC Report, Second Quarter, 202, at 8; South Orange County, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *MPAC National Chapters*, available at http://web.archive.org/web/20030602203022/www.mpac.org/home_chapters.aspx; Law Vegas, *MPAC’s Houston and Las Vegas Chapters Participate in Raising Funds for Gujarat Victims*, Second Quarter, 2002, at 2; Houston, *MPAC’s Houston and Las Vegas Chapters Participate in Raising Funds for Gujarat Victims*, Second Quarter, 2002, at 2.; Glendale-Pasadena, *MPAC Chapters’ Work Expanding*, MPAC Report, First Quarter 2002, at 7; Inland Valley, *MPAC Chapters’ Work Expanding*, MPAC Report, First Quarter 2002, at 7; Fresno, *MPAC Chapters’ Work Expanding*, MPAC Report, First Quarter 2002, at 7; Bakersfield, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *MPAC National Chapters*, available at http://web.archive.org/web/20030602203022/www.mpac.org/home_chapters.aspx; South Bay-Santa Monica, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *MPAC National Chapters*, available at http://web.archive.org/web/20030602203022/www.mpac.org/home_chapters.aspx; Dayton, Ohio, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *MPAC National Chapters*, available at http://web.archive.org/web/20030602203022/www.mpac.org/home_chapters.aspx; Phoenix, AZ, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *MPAC National Chapters*, available at http://web.archive.org/web/20030602203022/www.mpac.org/home_chapters.aspx; and Boston, Muslim Public Affairs Council, *MPAC National Chapters*, available at http://web.archive.org/web/20030602203022/www.mpac.org/home_chapters.aspx.

within government and public policy spheres that the U.S. State Department recently sent al Marayati to Europe to discuss religious freedom and free speech.⁴⁴

As a result of its growth and development, MPAC has referred to itself as the “guiding light for American Muslim institutions on contributions to both the formulation of counterterrorism policy and its enforcement at the Mosque level.”⁴⁵ While these objectives reflect magnanimous and genuine intentions, since its inception, an analysis of the organization’s ties and membership - as well as its statements and publications - reveals an organization that has routinely defended designated terrorist organizations;⁴⁶ as well as individuals and charities that are supporters of terrorism;⁴⁷ opposes U.S. counterterrorism measures as part of a consistent knee jerk reaction claiming bias and discrimination behind law enforcement efforts;⁴⁸ and reflects a blatant conspiratorial anti-Semitism.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Muslim Public Affairs Council, “Al Marayati Explores Religious Freedom and Free Speech in Paris & Geneva,” *MPAC News* (Jan. 28, 2010), available at <http://www.mpac.org/article.php?id=102#9x220eD4e9a20>

⁴⁵ *The Islamic Society of Boston, et al., v. The Investigative Project on Terrorism, et al.*, Brief of Amicus Curiae Muslim Public Affairs Council, at 3, Doc. 2006-P-1358 (Mass. App.) (Feb. 26, 2007).

⁴⁶ See, *infra* Part III, B.

⁴⁷ See, *infra* Part V.

⁴⁸ See, *infra* Part IV.

⁴⁹ See, *infra* Part III, A.