

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

The plot to install a Syrian ayatollah

A faction fight in Syria's Muslim Brotherhood—and now a murder—are ominous for the region's stability.

The murder on March 17 of Mrs. Benan al-Attar, wife of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leader Issam al-Attar, is likely to spark a new round of factional warfare in Syria and destabilize the Middle East. Up until recently Issam al-Attar had worked out of the West German town of Aachen, where he directed an institute called the Islamic Center. Earlier this month al-Attar went into hiding for fear of an assassination.

Al-Attar told the London-based Syrian journalist Tammin al-Barazi that his wife had been killed by "Syrian agents" and in the same interview made the curious revelation that its aim was to "upset the delicate truce between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Syrian government." The truce was organized at the instigation of Saudi Arabia to cool down growing rivalry between Jordan and Syria. Damascus has blamed Jordan for instigating the Muslim Brotherhood against the government of Hafez Assad. This tension nearly exploded into a border war earlier this year.

A former member of the Syrian People's Party founded by the Saudi Ma'arouf Dawalibi, the current head of the Saudi-based World Muslim Congress, Issam al-Attar became a member of the Syrian parliament in the early sixties and then the head of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. He was expelled from Syria in 1964 and, after a short exile in Beirut, established his institute in

Aachen where he pursued his opposition to the Damascus government. Al-attar was known to have supported the Muslim Brotherhood takeover of Iran, but in a later interview with this magazine tempered his ardent support for the ayatollah's regime by stating that the dying Shah should not be extradited to Iran as Khomeini was demanding.

Al-Attar is known to have grown more reluctant to maintain his Iranian connection as the genocidal character of the Iranian regime became clear. In fact al-Attar has been challenged by a "Young Turk" faction inside the Brotherhood which espouses the same brand of bloody extremism as in Khomeini's Iran.

In January 1981 al-Attar lost control over the Syrian Brotherhood to a "Gang of Three" headed by Adnan Sa'ad Uddin. This new grouping has received extensive publicity in the West German and British media, culminating two weeks ago with a lengthy interview on German television with Sa'ad Uddin in which he called for violent confrontation with the Assad government. He praised the massacre of several Syrian cadets in June 1979, as exemplary of such confrontation which his "Jihad [holy war] movement" supports.

In another interview with the British-based weekly *Impact*, the proterrorist Sa'ad Uddin declared that his aim is to "establish the rule

of Allah and seek his pleasure," just as Khomeini did in Iran.

Sa'ad Uddin has received powerful support from certain interests in Saudi Arabia and Cairo, the headquarters of his operation. Al-Attar himself has strong ties with the old-guard Saudi religious establishment. His daughter is married to a prominent Islamic judge in Saudi Arabia, Ali al-tantawi.

But this old guard in the Saudi religious community traditionally maintains ties to the ruling family, which has no interest in seeing Syria ripped apart in internecine warfare aimed at installing a Syrian version of Khomeini.

Like the young Muslim insurgents who seized the Mosque in Saudi Arabia in 1979, the new breed of Muslim militant like Sa'ad Uddin aims at destroying the Arab nation-states in the name of Islam.

The Bonn correspondent of the London *Times* reported the day of the murder that a new influx of Syrian refugees reached Germany recently as a result of the violence between Muslim guerrillas and Syrian government forces. Though the *Times* is retailing old news, the publicity which the new Syrian Brotherhood has received, and its threat of renewed violence makes clear that London-based controllers of Islamic terrorism are setting Syria up for a new round.

Other scenarios include a Syrian war against Jordan, coupled with an upsurge of Palestinian extremism which anglophile scenarists see as the preconditions for toppling Jordan's King Hussein. From their standpoint, such a bloodbath is necessary in order to continue the Camp David "peace process" in the Middle East, which Hussein has opposed.