

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

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**Allah is our objective.
The Prophet is our leader.
Quran is our law.
Jihad is our way.
Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.**

Slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood Society, or *Jama'iyah Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun* (also referred to simply as *Ikhwan*), was formed in Ismailiya, Egypt, in 1928 by Hassan Al-Banna, a charismatic schoolteacher and Islamist preacher. Al-Banna formulated a politicized, extremist form of Islam as a means of confronting Western moral and cultural influence among Egyptians. The Brotherhood's goal is to eliminate all Western influence and create an Islamist state in Egypt and, ultimately, the world.

Al-Banna sought to explain the malaise of Egyptian society in his time as being due to what he portrayed as the corrosive influence of Western culture. He accused government officials and other prominent members of Egyptian society of abandoning Islamic principles and behaving in an immoral fashion due to Western influence. The remedy, he insisted, was a revival and reestablishment of an Islamic state that would return Muslims to the pinnacle of their military, historical, and cultural glory. He pointed to the Caliphate, the historic Islamic empire and the most celebrated period of Islamic history, as the template for his vision of an Islamic state. In a 1947 letter to Egypt's King Farouk titled "Towards the Light," Al-Banna asserted that the only way to return to those days of glory was to reestablish shari'a, Islamic law, as the source for governance as well as for societal and personal behaviors.¹

In his teachings, Al-Banna preached a return to the Prophet Muhammad's strategies during the early days of Islam in the seventh century, strongly emphasizing each Muslim's personal obligation to carry out jihad, which he defined as physical warfare.

In a tract from the 1930s titled "Jihad," Al-Banna writes:

Jihad is an obligation from Allah on every Muslim and cannot be ignored nor evaded. Allah has ascribed great importance to jihad and has made the reward of the martyrs and the fighters in His way a splendid one. Only those who have acted

¹ Hassan Al-Banna, "Towards the Light," May 1947/Rajab 1366, IkhwanWeb, official English language website of the Muslim Brotherhood,; <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=802>

similarly and who have modeled themselves upon the martyrs in their performance of jihad can join them in this reward. Furthermore, Allah has specifically honored the Mujahideen [those who fight jihad] with certain exceptional qualities, both spiritual and practical, to benefit them in this world and the next. Their pure blood is a symbol of victory in this world and the mark of success and felicity in the world to come.²

Drawing a parallel between the times of the prophet Muhammad and the present, Al-Banna portrayed non-Muslims as idol worshipers and placed a central focus on spreading Islam and fighting what he termed the “enemies of Islam.” The purpose of jihad, he asserted, was not for the personal glory or gain of Muslims: “Rather, jihad is used to safeguard the mission of spreading Islam. This would guarantee peace and the means of implementing the Supreme Message. This is a responsibility which the Muslims bear, this Message guiding mankind to truth and justice.”³



Symbol of the Muslim Brotherhood

Jihad plays a central role in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is also reflected in the symbol of the movement. It consists of a circular green background signifying Islam. Superimposed over it are the Quran, representing the centrality of its teachings for the movement, and two crossed swords below it, denoting jihad. Below the swords is the Arabic word “wa’aduwa,” meaning “make ready” or “prepare yourselves.” It refers to this verse in the Qur’an which is interpreted by the Brotherhood as an exhortation to engage in jihad against the enemies of Muslims today:

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly.⁴

² Hassan Al-Banna, "Jihad," Young Muslims of Canada website, youth division of Islamic Circle of North America; http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/jihad

³ Hassan Al-Banna, "Jihad," Young Muslims of Canada website; http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/jihad

⁴ Qur’an, Surat Al-Anfal, 8:60, Yusuf Ali translation, SearchTruth.com, http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter_display.php?chapter=8&translator=2#60

Impact Today

Al-Banna's writings, the core ideological texts of the Muslim Brotherhood, remain the basis for the ideology of the movement and the curriculum for the indoctrination of its initiates today. In the early years of the movement, his writings were distributed as pamphlets in mosques, Brotherhood-affiliated charitable institutions, and coffeehouses. The movement established its own mosques, schools, and sports clubs in order to spread its ideology, and by the time of Al-Banna's death in 1948, the Brotherhood is believed to have garnered some 2 million followers in Egypt.⁵ Today Al-Banna's writings are promoted and distributed by the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated organizations via the Internet.

Al-Banna's strategy and tactics for establishing an Islamist state have become a template for the Brotherhood's activities throughout its history. As a means of achieving a critical mass of supporters, Al-Banna prescribed a long-term course of indoctrinating the Muslim masses in the ideology of his movement, which would ultimately bring the establishment of an Islamist state, and it became a template for the Brotherhood's activities throughout its history. This strategy of Islamization is referred to as *da'awa*, meaning "invitation" or "outreach," and is still in use today.

Terror Activities

In parallel to these activities, Al-Banna created an underground paramilitary wing called the "Special Apparatus," which carried out attacks against the British as well as a campaign of bombings and assassinations that also targeted Egyptian Jews.⁶ The Brotherhood leadership regularly engaged in violent anti-Semitic rhetoric against Egyptian Jews which incited attacks against the community, including the torching of the Alexandria synagogue.⁷ On the international level, Al-Banna supported Haj Amin Al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem who worked for the Nazis to recruit international Arab support for Germany. The Nazis provided subsidies to the Brotherhood, which were coordinated by Al-Husseini, and part of the funds were used to purchase arms.⁸ Members of the Brotherhood were also later recruited to take part in the 1948 war against Israel, which they considered to be part of their obligation to engage in jihad.

The Brotherhood was declared illegal in 1948 after it was accused of assassinating Egyptian Prime Minister Muhammad Al-Nuqrashi. Later that year Al-Banna was assassinated, reportedly by a member of the Egyptian security forces.

⁵ "Profile: Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," BBC News, January 28, 2011; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12313405>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Richard S. Levy, ed., *Anti-Semitism: A historical encyclopedia of prejudice and persecution*, (Santa Barbara, California: ABC CLIO, 2005) 478-479.

⁸ Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers: The rise of an Islamic mass movement, 1928-1942*, Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1998) 178-179.

The movement subsequently supported the 1952 Free Officers military coup, and was then briefly permitted to operate more freely. But in 1954, when the Brotherhood was considered responsible for an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Egyptian president Gamal Abd Al-Nasser, it was again declared illegal. Thousands of its members were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured, and the movement was forced to shift its operations underground. Its most prominent ideologue of that period, Sayyid Qutb, was executed in 1966. Others left for Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries.

In 1971, President Anwar Al-Sadat, Abd Al-Nasser's successor, seeking to counter the political influence of Communists and Nasserists who were trying to oust him, looked to the Brotherhood as a countervailing force that could assist him in maintaining power. He declared a general amnesty for the imprisoned members of the Brotherhood. But this period of cooperation was short-lived. The Brotherhood turned against Al-Sadat for rejecting the implementation of shari'a and the establishment of an Islamic state, and for signing a peace treaty with Israel. The Egyptian Islamic Jihad, an offshoot of the Brotherhood, assassinated Al-Sadat in 1981. After Husni Mubarak succeeded Al-Sadat as president, Egypt's 1958 Emergency Law was reenacted, giving the government power to arrest individuals without charging them with a crime and to detain prisoners indefinitely, limiting freedom of expression and assembly, and establishing a special security court. The emergency laws have been in effect ever since and were extended for two more years in 2010.⁹

The Brotherhood's Global Reach

Although the Muslim Brotherhood was originally established in Egypt, its activists and ideology have spread throughout the Muslim world as well as within Muslim communities in the West, including Europe and the U.S. Its activists have also spawned terrorist organizations, most prominently Al-Qaida, whose second-in-command, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, started out as a Brotherhood activist and then created the terrorist organization Egyptian Islamic Jihad. He became an official founding member of Al-Qaida in 1998.

Today the Brotherhood claims branches in over 80 countries.¹⁰ Each branch maintains ideological affiliation to the movement even though in many cases local branches of the movement will establish themselves as separate entities with different names. Hamas, for example, is the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Tunisia's Al-Nahda Movement, led by Rashid Al-Ghanushi, is the Muslim Brotherhood branch in that country. Turkey's AKP originated in the Muslim Brotherhood and, similarly, the Islamic Action Front in Jordan and the Iraqi Islamic Party are branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in their respective countries.

⁹ "Egyptian Emergency Law Is Extended for 2 Years," New York Times, May 11, 2010; <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/12/world/middleeast/12egypt.html>

¹⁰ "Glimpse Into the History of [the] Muslim Brotherhood," IkhwaanWeb, June 10, 2007; <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=794>

Political Support within Egypt

Due to the numerous crackdowns by the government against the movement, the Brotherhood has focused on Islamization through social welfare projects, establishing its own infrastructure of social services among the poor and disenfranchised members of Egyptian society that are not served by the government. These services have generated sympathy and support for the movement among Egyptians.

The Brotherhood has also focused its efforts on garnering power through involvement in private organizations. Via the democratic process, it now controls professional and student associations that are considered to be the most prominent nongovernmental organizations in the country.¹¹

Since 1984, the Brotherhood has engaged in open political activity, running independent candidates in Egyptian parliamentary elections. In 2005 it won 20 percent of the vote, resulting in 88 seats.¹² It is estimated that the Brotherhood could win up to 30 percent of the vote in new elections.¹³ Although there has not been a poll directly examining Egyptians' sympathies for the Brotherhood, the views of Egyptians were similarly reflected in a recent Pew study. It indicated that 31 percent of Egyptians see a struggle between modernizers and Islamic fundamentalists in their country, and 59 percent of that number identify with Islamic fundamentalists.¹⁴

Future Prospects

Islam is the solution.

Slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood

The current General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Badi, has demonstrated adherence to Hassan Al-Banna's ideology by reiterating its principles in a series of recent sermons. In a September 2010 sermon he reasserted that the Qur'an should be the constitution of the state, and declared it the duty of Muslims to enact Islamic law.¹⁵

Badi also promotes jihad as a central means of returning Islam to its former glory. In April 2010 he declared, "Muslim leaders, Islam, to which you belong, advocates jihad as the only means for setting the Ummah's [nation's] situation aright." He continued, "Our

¹¹ John Walsh, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," Harvard International Review, March 6, 2006;

<http://hir.harvard.edu/perspectives-on-the-united-states/egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood>

¹² "Mohammad Badi: A Voice in the Government," Newsweek, November 29, 2010;

<http://www.newsweek.com/2010/11/29/mohammad-badie-on-egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood.html>

¹³ "'We Are On Every Street': What the Future May Hold for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," Spiegel Online, February 1, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,742940,00.html>

¹⁴ "Egypt, Democracy and Islam," Pew Global Attitudes Project, January 31, 2011;

<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1874/egypt-protests-democracy-islam-influence-politics-islamic-extremism>

¹⁵ "An Overview of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Stance on U.S. and Jihad," MEMRI, Special Dispatch 3558, February 3, 2011; <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4970.htm>

revival, majesty, and glory depend on the return to righteousness, which will only be achieved through resistance and the support of [resistance] in every way – with money, arms, information, and self [sacrifice]." Badi further proclaimed that it is the "obligation" of Muslims to stop all negotiations with Israel and to "support all forms of resistance for the sake of liberating every occupied piece of land in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and all [other] parts of our Muslim world."¹⁶

In a September 2010 sermon, Badi asserted that the U.S. "is now experiencing the beginning of its end, and is heading towards its demise...." He further declared that the victory of Muslims against their enemies was preordained and called upon Muslims to rise against Israel and the U.S.: "Resistance is the only solution against the Zio-American [sic] arrogance and tyranny, and all we need is for the Arab and Muslim peoples to stand behind it and support it."¹⁷

Prior to Egypt's first round of parliamentary elections in November 2010, Badi denounced the Mubarak regime and called for its removal "by peaceful means outlined in the constitution and the law."¹⁸ During the recent demonstrations, Badi has called upon Egyptians to continue the "blessed uprising" until the Mubarak regime steps down, and has insisted that "the Egyptian people, from all groups, refuse to negotiate with the ruling regime."¹⁹

The Brotherhood initially played a low-key role in the current mass anti-government demonstrations that have swept Egypt, but its leadership in recent days has begun to amplify its demands, focusing on the removal of the Mubarak government. While the Brotherhood was not involved in the early days of the demonstrations, its activists have joined the secular organizers of what they are calling an anti-Mubarak revolution. At this point, they are not calling attention to their Islamist agenda and have not displayed Muslim Brotherhood banners or shouted the traditional chants of the movement.

On the ground in Tahrir Square, however, they have played a leading role. The presence of the Brotherhood volunteers is ubiquitous: they man checkpoints, provide hot tea to the protestors, and participate in the demonstrations by chanting, "Welcome to Free Egypt!"²⁰ Rashad Bayoumi, the deputy leader of the Brotherhood, asserted that his members are involved in the demonstrations, but they are emphasizing that it is a revolution against the regime, not an Islamist revolution: "We are taking part. Thousands

¹⁶ "An Overview of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Stance on U.S. and Jihad," MEMRI, Special Dispatch 3558, February 3, 2011; <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4970.htm>

¹⁷ "Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide: 'The U.S. Is Now Experiencing the Beginning of Its End,'" IkhwanOnline.com, September 30, 2010; translated by MEMRI, Special Dispatch 3274, October 6, 2010; <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/193/4650.htm>

¹⁸ "General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood Muhammad Badi", in Pre-Election Interview, Calls to Remove the NDP from Power," Al-Jazeera, November 24, 2010; translated by MEMRI, Special Dispatch No.3476, December 28, 2010; <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4877.htm>

¹⁹ "Egypt: Jamaa Islamiya ideologue blasts Muslim Brotherhood," Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (Saudi Arabia), February 3, 2011; <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=1&id=24018>

²⁰ "Egypt: Muslim Brotherhood influence felt at Tahrir Square," GlobalPost.com, February 7, 2010; <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/egypt/110207/egypt-muslim-brotherhood-tahrir-square>

of our members are on the streets. But we are saying that this isn't a Muslim revolution. This is a revolution against Mubarak!"²¹

Representatives of the movement living abroad have called for an end to the regime in a more direct manner. Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, the Muslim Brotherhood's spiritual leader and most prominent ideologue, is the author of fatwas legitimizing suicide bombings against Israeli civilians and U.S. military personnel, and expresses vehemently anti-Semitic views. His comments have been regularly broadcast in Tahrir Square at the epicenter of the demonstrations. In a January 29 interview on Al-Jazeera that was broadcast from his home in Qatar to the demonstrators he declared, "Go away, Mubarak, leave this people alone! Enough, you've ruled for 30 years already! Dozens have been killed in one day. You cannot stay, Mubarak!" He continued, "On behalf of hundreds of thousands of religious clerics in Egypt and in the Muslim world I'm calling on you to leave your country."²² More recently he has declared that participating in the demonstrations is an Islamic obligation and that staying home is forbidden.²³

At his most recent Friday sermon, Al-Qaradawi went even further, calling on the Egyptian army to depose Mubarak immediately and appoint the head of the country's constitutional court as president. At the same time, he played down the involvement of the Brotherhood in the demonstrations, insisting that no more than 10 percent of the demonstrators were from the movement.²⁴

On February 4, Rashad Bayoumi, the deputy Brotherhood leader, sounded one of the movement's core political agenda items, declaring, "After President Mubarak steps down and a provisional government is formed, there is a need to dissolve the peace treaty with Israel."²⁵ Muhammad Ghanem, a Brotherhood spokesman in London, went even further, calling for war with Israel and stopping the passage of ships through the Suez Canal: "I am absolutely certain that this revolution will not die, and that the next step must be one of civil disobedience. This civil disobedience will generate strife among the Egyptians. This disobedience must include halting passage through the Suez Canal, stopping the supply of petroleum and natural gas to Israel, and preparing for war with Israel."²⁶

²¹ "'We Are On Every Street': What the Future May Hold for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," Spiegel Online (Germany), February 1, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,742940,00.html>

²² "Top cleric: Mubarak, go away!" Ynet.com (Israel), January 29, 2011; <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4020733,00.html>

²³ "Top Sunni Cleric: Participating in demonstration is an Islamic obligation," Ahlul Bayt News Agency (Iran), February 5, 2011; <http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&id=224430>

²⁴ "Qaradawi calls on Mubarak to step down, Gulf Times (Qatar), February 5, 2011; http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=414096&version=1&template_id=36&parent_id=16

²⁵ "Muslim Brotherhood seeks end to Israel treaty," Washington Times, February 3, 2011, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/feb/3/muslim-brotherhood-seeks-end-to-israel-treaty/?page=1>

²⁶ "The Middle East Crisis XVI: Muhammad Ghanem, Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Representative in London, Calls for Civil Disobedience, Including 'Halting Passage through the Suez Canal ... and Preparing for War with Israel,'" Special Dispatch 3558, Al-Alam TV (Iran), January 30, 2011, translation by Middle East Media Research Institute, February 3, 2011; <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4972.htm>

Conclusion

As events unfold in Egypt, the Brotherhood has openly stated that it wants to play a role in negotiations leading to a new government. Muhammad ElBaradei, the most prominent leader of the secular opposition, has recognized its influence and has welcomed its participation in the transition process. And, in a striking move, Omar Suleiman, Egypt's new vice president, met with the Brotherhood and other opposition parties for the first time on February 6th. For its part, the Brotherhood's leadership has been especially careful to emphasize that it wants the departure of the Mubarak regime without overtly promoting its Islamist agenda, which at this time makes it possible for it to work with the secular leadership of the demonstrations.

Based on its prior history and recent statements by its General Guide, the Brotherhood will likely bide its time until the formation of a new Egyptian government before testing the new regime by again raising its Islamist agenda. Over the years, the movement has had the benefit of observing the strategy of a number of Islamist movements in other countries to gain power, particularly that of Hamas, its Palestinian branch. In many ways the Brotherhood's current situation is similar to that of Hamas, which built its support on an agenda of reform and providing social welfare services. The Brotherhood may similarly focus its efforts on the democratic process of transforming the support it has garnered for its social welfare projects into political power at the polls. Employing the model of Hamas, it may use the new political playing field as a means of Islamization to transform Egypt into an Islamist state, gradually increasing its political power until it can take control through the democratic process, carrying out a coup d'état, or both.

Clearly, the current political climate in Egypt has given the Brotherhood a new lease on political life. Its recent statements nevertheless indicate that it has not changed its extremist political agenda, which remains a cause for deep concern among Egyptians and observers of the situation throughout the world.

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