WORKING
P A P E R S

THE OTHER FACE OF THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Since September 11, the entire world has been acutely aware of the violent, terrorist face of political Islam. The network of organizations we most frequently think of as al-Qaeda represents a serious threat to the United States, other Western countries, governments of Muslim countries, and ordinary Muslims who abhor violence and would like to pursue their lives in peace. Because of the horrors violent Islamist groups have perpetrated and are unfortunately likely to continue perpetrating, there can be no debate about how the world should deal with them. They need to be tracked down and dismantled and their members brought to justice. To be sure, this will not be easy in practice, but it is clear what the world must strive to do.

It is much less obvious how the international community should deal with the other face of the Islamist movement, the nonviolent face that Mustapha Kamal Al-Sayyid discusses in this working paper. This side is represented by political movements that acknowledge that they are inspired by Islamic principles and yet claim that they want to attain their goals by peaceful means, competing for power democratically with non-Islamist political parties. This side of the Islamist movements is often ignored in current debates, but it is important and becoming ever more so. The electoral victory by the Justice and Development Party in Turkey in November 2002 is one sign of the growing importance of this face of Islamism; so is the open repudiation of violence by one of Egypt's most important and heretofore most radical Islamist movements. The reasons for this repudiation are explained in four recently published and as yet untranslated books that Mustapha Al-Sayyid discusses in this paper.

This more moderate face of the Islamist movements poses a major policy dilemma for the international community. Should the claims of nonviolence by these movements be believed and thus the movements be accepted as legitimate participants in democratic politics? Have such groups really changed their goals, abandoned the idea of building an Islamic state ruled by shari'a, and accepted democracy? Or are they simply seeking to take advantage of the democratic political space that exists in some Muslim countries to win power and then impose a political system that denies democracy and the respect of human rights? In other words, have such movements simply embraced democracy as a tactic for obtaining power, or are they truly willing to accept pluralism and the protection of individual human rights as a permanent feature of the political system?

Like the similar questions that were once asked about Communist parties that appeared to abandon their revolutionary agenda in favor of democratic politics, these are issues that can never be settled once and for all in the abstract but can only be answered as organizations continue to evolve in response to political circumstances. Mustapha Al-Sayyid's paper cannot tell us how far these Islamist groups now embracing nonviolence and democratic politics will go in their transformation. It does tell us, however, about the changes taking place in some Islamist movements and about the growing importance of the other face of Islamism.

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DISCUSSIONS OF POLITICAL ISLAM have been distorted by the tendency of governments in the North as well as in the South to identify political Islam with Osama bin Laden, his associates, and organizations involved in violent actions in places such as Chechnya, Kashmir, Algeria, and Egypt. In reality, such violent, militant groups constitute only a small minority among political Islamists.

All Islamists share the belief that the political systems of Muslim countries should be based on Islamic principles, giving Islam a role in the political process. The majority of Islamists, however, do not engage in acts of armed resistance against their governments but seek instead to bring about political change through nonviolent methods. It is important to recognize this distinction between the minority advocating violence and the majority willing to work politically, because nonmilitant Islamists must be integrated into the political systems of Muslim countries to bring democracy and improved stability to the region and to curb militant Islamists.

Political Islam will continue to be an important political force, despite the unrealistic claims by some analysts that it will soon disappear from the political scene. Several writers, particularly the French authors Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel, have argued that political Islam has failed to develop a platform of workable public policies. None of them has suggested, however, that Islamist movements are no longer important political actors in their own countries.[1] In fact, when Islamist organizations engage in democratic political processes, they do quite well. Islamist parties have had significant electoral successes in Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Yemen. Turkish Islamists finished first among the nation's political parties in the legislative elections of 1995 and won 34 percent of the vote in the most recent legislative election of November 4, 2002. They consequently became the largest party in Turkey's national assembly and were able to form a government composed only of members of their own party. (This in itself is an unusual event because recent Turkish governments have been coalitions.) The Algerian Front of Islamic Salvation (FIS) decisively won local and regional elections of 1990 and the first round of the legislative elections of December 1991 and was poised to win the second round in January 1992 before these elections were canceled to preempt such a victory. Although the FIS is now banned, other Islamist parties usually finish second only to Algeria's ruling party.[2] In Jordan, Islamist groups won thirty-four out of a total of eighty seats in the first competitive elections for the lower house of parliament in 1989; in particular, the Muslim Brothers, the major organization of Jordanian Islamists, won sixteen seats in the elections of 1993 but boycotted the legislative elections of 1997 in protest of electoral law modifications. In Egypt, despite repressive measures taken by the government, Muslim Brothers running as independents

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[1]   Roy (1994); and Kepel (2002).

[2]   Mahfoudh Nahnah, leader of the Islamist Movement of the Society for Peace, finished second to President Zeroual in the presidential election of November 1995, with 25 percent of the vote. In the legislative elections of 1997, his party received 14.8 percent of the popular vote and sixty-nine seats. Al-Nahda, another Islamist party, received 8.7 percent of the popular vote and thirty-five seats. Together these parties formed the second largest parliamentary bloc.

won as many seats as all the other opposition parties combined in the October-November 2000 elections for the People's Assembly. Roy and Kepel may be right to claim that Islamist parties have failed to elaborate an alternative and viable program of economic, social, political, and intellectual development when they have come to power, but Islamists remain serious contenders for government authority in much of the Arab and Muslim worlds.

CHARGES AGAINST POLITICAL ISLAM

If Arab countries are to experience a genuine transition toward political democracy, autonomous Islamist political organizations must be integrated into their systems of government. Arab regimes have long used repressive measures such as disrupting meetings, harassing militants, and even rigging elections to block Islamist activists. If governments pursuing political liberalization continue to refuse the right of the Islamists to have their own legally organized political parties, a large number of citizens will be deprived of their preferred representation. The Islamists' sympathizers will remain suspicious of the democratic character of the political system, fueling the claims of radical minority factions that political liberalization is merely sham democracy and that only armed struggle can bring about political change.

Nevertheless, the participation of Islamist organizations in electoral politics poses many dilemmas. Islamists have used armed action to access political power in the past, targeting not only government officials at all levels, but also ordinary citizens, including Muslims, Christians, and foreigners of various nationalities. This violence has not only threatened lives, but also endangered economic growth by creating a climate of insecurity unfavorable to private and foreign investment.

Doubts still persist about the Islamists' commitment to democratic politics. Some argue that the peaceful actions of Islamist parties are only a cover for the clandestine armed actions of their militant members. Those skeptical of Islamists' democratic credentials believe their participation in the democratic process would lead to the end of the electoral process itself. Islamists, having gained power through elections, would change the democratic constitution to end all opposition to their rule.

Citizens of countries in which Islamist groups operate fear that the participation of such groups in the political process would lead to restrictions on the exercise of civil and political rights regardless of whether the Islamists won or lost the elections. If Islamist organizations gained power, they might repress independent and critical voices in the name of Islam; more insidiously, the incumbent government might be tempted to adopt parts of the Islamists' political program to preempt their victory, with the same effect on civil and political rights.

In addition, government leaders in some countries (Egypt, for example) argue that authorizing an Islamist party would open the way to the formation of other religious parties, such as an Egyptian Christian Coptic Party. Competition among religious parties would inflame communal tensions and increase the risk of a civil war between Muslims and Copts, similar to those that have afflicted Lebanon, most recently between 1975 and 1989. To spare Egypt such strife, the 1977 law on political parties bans the establishment of parties based on religion.[3]

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[3]   See Arab Republic of Egypt Government Press (1991), p. 106.

Finally, many governments, and not only those in the West, view all Islamists to be a threat to regional and international security, making no distinction between Islamists willing to operate by legal means and more radical groups intent on the use of force. These governments are concerned with the role of Islamists in certain regional disputes. Pakistani Islamists do not accept Indian presence in parts of Kashmir. Many governments also fear that Arab Islamists will make it more difficult to reach a settlement of the Arab–Israeli dispute, because they oppose the principles embodied in the agreements signed between Israel and Egypt, Israel and Jordan, and Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, after the events of September 11, 2001, many governments are deeply suspicious of all Islamist movements, and indeed of all Muslims, perceiving them to be terrorists, potential terrorists, or, at least, terrorist sympathizers.

Although the case brought against the more radical Islamist organizations is strong and the fears are justified, the case against the moderate Islamist organizations is much less clear. Such organizations are purportedly committed to following a peaceful, democratic process. The questions that need to be examined are whether such commitment is genuine; whether it is simply a facade to hide that the organizations are still engaging in violent activities; or whether it is simply a tactic to gain power through elections and then to destroy democracy from within the legislature. It is also important to ascertain whether even the moderate political organizations, if they gained strong representation in the parliaments, would seek to enact legislation stripping Arab citizens of civil and political rights in the name of *shari'a* (Islamic law). Another critical question that needs discussing is the possibility that increased involvement of the Islamists in the political process of Arab and Muslim countries would inflame ethnic conflict in these states or increase tensions along the Pakistani–Indian border or between Arab countries and Israel. Finally, U.S. policy makers especially are interested in what the impact of Islamist electoral successes would be on international security.

ISLAMISTS IN EGYPT

To answer some of these questions, this paper will focus on the evolution of the Islamist movement in Egypt. It will examine in particular the evolution of the *Jamiat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen* (Muslim Brotherhood or MB) and the more militant *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Group). The Muslim Brotherhood is the mainstream Islamist organization in Egypt. Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya was, until recently, Egypt's largest militant Islamist group, responsible for most of the political violence that took place in the country from 1992 to 1997. Both of these groups now claim that they are devoted to political, rather than violent, means of promoting Islamist ideals. The Muslim Brothers assert that violence has never been a method accepted by their organization; al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya has preached violence in the past, but it has recently moved boldly to distance itself from that position. This paper will discuss the evolution of these groups and the credibility of their commitment to nonviolence in the context of similar trends among Islamists in other Arab and Middle Eastern countries, particularly Turkey, Jordan, and Algeria.

The Islamist movement in Egypt was chosen for analysis because of the influence all its factions have exerted on Islamists in other Arab and Muslim countries. The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest Islamist organization in the region. Established in Ismailiya in the Suez Canal Zone in Egypt in 1928, it both contributed directly to the creation of affiliate organizations in other Arab countries and served as an inspiration for many Islamist groups. The teachings of MB founder and

first Supreme Guide, Sheikh Hassan Al-Banna, have been disseminated widely among Islamists across the region. Sayyid Qutb, the more radical leader of the MB in the 1960s, denounced all secularist governments as impious and called for Muslim militants to overthrow them to establish a truly Islamist state. Qutb was executed by the Egyptian government in 1966 and thus became the idol of radical factions of the Islamist movement across the Muslim world. More recently, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, leader of Egypt's Jihad Organization, joined Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in forming the Islamist World Front for Fighting Zionists and Crusaders, which has become known in the West, somewhat imprecisely, as al-Qaeda.[4] Mohammed Atta, another Egyptian, is believed by U.S. authorities to have been the leader of the group that hijacked four U.S. airliners and flew them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Given the historical influence of Egyptian Islamist groups, there is no doubt that their continued evolution will reverberate in other countries in the future. Understanding this evolution is particularly important now, when both the Muslim Brothers and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya claim to be emphasizing nonviolence and political modes of organization.

Society of Muslim Brothers: Examining Its History and Relationship to Militant Islam

The Society of Muslim Brothers was founded by Hassan Al-Banna in 1928 in Ismailiya in the Suez Canal Zone, where the major part of the British occupying forces were concentrated. The Brotherhood aimed at establishing an Islamic community governed by shari'a, as interpreted by MB leaders, rather than by the laws of Europe or by the Egyptian civil code of 1949, which borrowed heavily from European codes but left questions of personal status law, such as marriage and divorce, to the shari'a. The MB wanted to reverse this trend, which its leaders described as a process of Westernization, and use shari'a as the exclusive source of legislation. The Brothers pursued this goal peacefully, publishing a newspaper, making speeches, and distributing the writings of their leaders. Within two decades, chapters of the Brotherhood had been established throughout Egypt. The Muslim Brothers also engaged in a variety of social and economic activities for the benefit of poor and lower middle class Egyptians to forward humanitarian goals and to enlist support for the establishment of an Islamic community.

The Muslim Brotherhood did not object to participation in electoral politics and the parliament. During its sixth general conference in 1941, the group decided to contest parliamentary elections, and Al-Banna declared his intention to run for a parliamentary seat in the city of Ismailiya.[5] However, he was dissuaded from proceeding by Mustapha Al-Nahas, leader of Egypt's main nationalist party, the Wafd Party, and prime minister after February 4, 1942. Al-Nahas was concerned that the Royal Palace, with the support of the British colonizers, was trying to use the Brothers to undermine Wafd's claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the Egyptians in negotiations regarding the evacuation of British troops from Egypt. Al-Banna agreed in 1942 not to contest the elections, but in return Al-Nahas committed the government to allow the Brothers free movement, to restrict the sale of alcohol, and to combat prostitution.[6]

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[4]   Al Qa'eda is an Afghan place name; young Muslims initially traveled to Al Qa'eda to fight Soviet military occupation.

[5]   Bayyoumi (1979), pp. 226–7.

[6]   Mitchell and Voll (1993), pp. 26–7.

In 1944, however, the Brothers fielded candidates in the parliamentary election, but these elections were rigged by Palace-supported parties. Both the MB and the Wafd boycotted the elections and thus did not win any legislative seats. During the last parliamentary election before the fall of the monarchy on January 3, 1950, the Brotherhood was outlawed because of its supposed involvement in acts of domestic terrorism.[7] It was authorized to operate again in October 1951 following rapprochment with the king, who wanted to counterbalance the popularity of the Wafd Party, which still controlled the government.[8]

After the revolution of July 23, 1952, the new regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser outlawed all political parties. The MB, which initially had close ties with leaders of the new military regime, was exempted from this ban.[9] But the ties between the Brotherhood and the regime grew strained as the army came to resent sharing power with the Brothers. As a result, the MB was banned in January 1954 after clashes at Cairo University between its student members and members of the Liberation Rally, a new mass organization established by the revolutionary regime. The ban was upheld by the courts, which ruled that the Revolutionary Command Council's decision was "sovereign" and therefore not subject to any adjudication. The MB was outlawed definitively in October 1954 after an attempt on Nasser's life was attributed to a member of the Brotherhood. Thousands of the group's members and sympathizers were imprisoned. A second wave of imprisonment came in the summer of 1965 after another presidential assassination attempt was officially attributed to the group.

Thousands of Muslim Brothers remained in prison until Nasser's death in September 1970. President Anwar Al-Sadat released many members of MB in the hope of using the group to counter the influence of Nasserites and leftists, but he did not lift the ban on the organization. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood resumed its political activities. In 1977, it started publishing a monthly paper, but this was soon banned. Furthermore, leaders of the Brotherhood were among the large number of opposition figures arrested by Sadat shortly before he was assassinated in September 1981 and who were released by the new president, Hosni Mubarak, in 1982. After 1982, the MB began to publish another monthly journal, as well as to participate in the activities of professional associations, student bodies, and university professors' clubs, as it had done in the pre-revolutionary period.

Under Mubarak, the Brothers also demonstrated new electoral skills. Unable to form a legal political party because of the ban on religious parties contained in the 1977 party law, the MB allied itself with other parties, listing its candidates for the People's Assembly, the most powerful house of the Egyptian legislature, on their slates. Despite government harassment, many MB candidates were elected every time the MB decided to participate in the process. In 1984, MB candidates appeared on the slate of the New Wafd Party. In 1987, the Brotherhood joined with the Socialist Labor Party and the Socialist Liberal Party in the "Islamic Alliance," and its candidates appeared on the lists of those parties. In 1990, however, the Brotherhood and most other opposition parties boycotted the elections for the People's Assembly, in protest against the lack of guarantees for fair elections. In 1995, most opposition parties participated in the elections, but the MB and the Socialist Labor Party continued the boycott. In the 2000 legislative election, the MB finally decided to participate

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[7] Mitchell and Voll (1993), pp. 26–7.

[8] Al-Bishri (1972), pp. 368–72.

[9] This exception may have been due to Nasser's wish to avoid a confrontation that combined the Brothers and all other opposition political parties. The Brotherhood was also probably the only civilian political organization that was informed in advance of the date of the military coup; some of the leaders of this revolution were sympathizers or members of the Brotherhood.

again. Since the MB's former partner, the Socialist Labor Party, was banned for its role in inciting student demonstrations at Al-Azhar University in spring 2000, MB candidates ran as independents, identifying themselves to the voters by inscribing the slogan "Islam Is the Solution" on their campaign leaflets.

Throughout this period, the electoral gains of the banned Muslim Brotherhood were notable, increasing from twelve seats (one-third of those gained by the New Wafd Party) in the 1984 People's Assembly to thirty-five in 1987 (the number of Islamist deputies, from the MB and two other parties, equaled that of the New Wafd in the new assembly). In the 2000 elections, the MB won seventeen seats or 4 percent of the total membership, the same number of seats won by all the other opposition parties combined. The success of the Muslim Brothers was even more pronounced in professional associations. The MB came to almost monopolize the leading organs of some of the largest professional associations, both in the technical fields—such as engineering, medicine, pharmacology, and dentistry—and in the professions usually dominated by the liberal intelligentsia—including the law, academia, and journalism.[10]

The Mubarak government attempted to prevent further Islamist electoral success by raising the percentage of members that had to cast a vote in an association's election for the election to be considered valid, by banning alliances among political parties, and by forbidding the use of the names "Islamic Alliance" or "Muslim Brotherhood." The government also resorted to postponing indefinitely professional associations' elections when the MB was expected to win and to systematically harassing MB candidates during national and regional elections.

Government officials and other detractors of the Muslim Brotherhood argue that such actions are justified because the organization's commitment to peaceful activity is not genuine. Rather, they claim, its social, economic, and cultural activities are simply ways to recruit militants, cover up clandestine activities, and build popular support for their eventual seizure of power. This writer finds the evidence against the Muslim Brothers circumstantial at best and unconvincing.

Some of the arguments against the Muslim Brothers point to its early history. Many of their detractors argue that the Brothers did not claim the status of a political party before the revolution of July 23, 1952, although it would have been possible to gain such a status, and that this shows that they were not committed to peaceful political activity. The failure to become a political party, however, is readily explained. The Brothers called their organization the Society of Muslim Brothers and initially rejected the notion of becoming a political party out of the belief that party competition divided the *umma* (the Islamic community) into competing groups. The Brothers also rejected party status because they believed this would imply that the MB was just one of several legitimate parties. They believed that their sacred call for an Islamic society put them above all other parties and that their goal deserved the support of all Muslims. Although the Muslim Brothers still believe in the superiority of their ideology, since the mid-1980s they have sought to gain recognition as a political party like all the others. Younger Muslim Brothers who split from the MB applied formally in the late 1990s to the Committee of Political Parties to register as the Wasat Party (Party of the Center). Their application was rejected on the grounds that the Law of Political Parties in Egypt of 1977 does not allow establishment of parties with a religious character.

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[10]   Abdo (2000); Kepel (2002); and Roy (1994).

A second argument used against the MB is that its members advocated and used violence in several instances. It used such methods to fight attempts by Zionists to establish a state at the expense of the Palestinian people and in the struggle against British occupation in the Suez Canal Zone. Its members were also accused of using violence against their domestic adversaries. For example, they were accused of assasinating several key government officials in 1948 and 1949, including a senior judge and a senior police official, as well as of planting bombs in several movie theaters in Cairo. Such accusations led the government of Prime Minister Mahmoud Fahmi Al-Noqrashi to outlaw the society in 1948, a decision that cost him his life as he was assasinated himself on December 28, 1948.[11] The MB and their apologists do not deny the presence of a clandestine armed organization within the Brotherhood during those years, but they claim that at the time the Supreme Guide did not know about the existence of this violent cell or that the cell acted against his wishes. The Brothers also claim that official Egyptian accounts implicating the group in attempts on the life of President Nasser in 1954 and 1965 are fabrications used to justify repressive measures against Islamists.[12]

According to some detractors, the Muslim Brotherhood continued to use violence even in a more recent period. After the October 6, 1981, assassination of President Anwar Al-Sadat by a member of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, the government accused the MB of maintaining a secret armed organization led by Kamal Al-Sananeery, a prominent young member of the Brotherhood's Shura Council.[13] He died under torture in prison. No evidence was found for the presence of such a secret organization. In fact, under President Mubarak, arrested MB leaders have never been charged with undertaking any armed action against the government or its citizens but rather are imprisoned merely for violating the government ban on the organization.

The claim that the MB continues to participate in violence, or at least to condone it, hinges on the ties that supposedly exist between the Brotherhood and the radical Islamist organizations that formed in the late 1970s, particularly al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and the Jihad Organization.[14] It is known that Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who rose in prominence in the Jihad Organization and became the undisputed leader of the Jihad Group, worked as a physician in a clinic owned by a Muslim Brother in 1980, just before he left the country to go to Afghanistan for the first time.[15] Zawahiri claims that he informed the MB of Jihad's activities through an intermediary and that the leaders of the MB replied that Jihad should carry out armed activities but accept the leadership of the Muslim Brothers. In 1987, leaders of the Brotherhood invited young militants of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya to join the Brotherhood. Some rejected the offer, particularly those who came from Upper Egypt, but

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[11] Al-Bishri (1972), pp. 269–71.

[12] Ramadan (1982).

[13] Allam (1996), pp. 229–41; and Al-Zawahiri (2002), p. 7. Note that *shura* means consultation in Arabic and that Islamists believe *shura* is the Islamic model of democracy.

[14] The Jihad Organization came into being in Egypt in the 1970s led by Abboud Al-Zumur, a former colonel in the armed forces of Egypt, who is still in prison. The Jihad Group was established in Afghanistan in 1987 and was led by Sayyid Imam Abdel-Aziz until 1992 when he was replaced by Al-Zawahiri who was its driving force from the beginning. See Al-Zayyat (2002), pp. 46–7.

[15] Al-Zawahiri's second short visit to Afghanistan in 1981 lasted two months. His extended stay in Afghanistan, which started in 1986, was interrupted by the visit of Borhan El-Din Rabbani in 1992 who did not like the continued presence of the so-called Afghan Arabs. The latter did not want to take sides in the infighting among the different Afghan factions. Al-Zawahiri went to Sudan, Yemen, and Egypt before he returned definitively to Afghanistan in 1996 following the victory of the Taliban. He then worked closely with Osama bin Laden until the two disppeared during the U.S. military campaign against the Taliban regime in 2001. Al-Zawahiri (2002), ch. 2.; and Al-Zayyat (2002), pp. 87–110.

several young militants from the Cairo and Delta governorates accepted it.[16] Other evidence of ties between the Muslim Brotherhood and Jihad is offered by the fact that lawyers who are members of the MB served as attorneys for young militants accused of taking part in armed actions against the government, Copts, or tourists.

On the whole, there are signs of MB sympathy with the militant groups' ideals, as well as indications that the Brotherhood made some attempts to recruit from these groups. But there is scant evidence of strategic or financial cooperation between the Brotherhood and the militant groups. The government's persecution of the Brotherhood is by and large based on specious claims. The Brotherhood has shown a willingness to act as a peaceful political party. In fact, it has been doggedly persistent in doing so in the face of significant government repression. The Brothers' early rejection of party status had clear ideological underpinnings. Their involvement in violence, especially within Egypt, is either long past or unproven and based on questionable government allegations.

History of Egypt's Militant Islamist Groups

At this point, it is important to consider the history of Egypt's avowedly militant Islamist organizations, especially of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. This is the most prominent of the radical organizations and has recently shown intriguing signs of willingness to work within the legal political process.

Two short-lived militant Islamist groups were active in Egypt in the 1970s. One group, which became known as the Technical Military Academy group, was led by Saleh Sariyya and affiliated with the Islamic Liberation Party. In 1975, it planned to initiate a coup d'état by getting weapons from the Technical Military Academy, assassinating the president and other government officials, and occupying the state radio and television building. The first step in this operation failed, and all the members of the group were arrested and convicted. The second group, *Takfir wal-Hijra* (Excommunication and Holy Flight) was led by the agronomist Shukri Mustafa. The group kidnapped and assassinated Sheikh al-Dahabi, former minister of religious properties for Waqf, who had refuted their interpretation of the Koran. The leader of the group was arrested and tried together with many of his followers. Mustafa was executed, and not much of significance has been heard from this group since then.[17]

Much more important are al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and the Jihad Organization. Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya has its origin in the mid-1970s in the activities of Islamist students at universities in Upper Egypt, particularly those of Minya and Assyut. In 1979, these groups coalesced under the leadership of Karam Zohdi. The Jihad Organization has its roots in smaller groups that had operated in Cairo for many years. One of these groups was allegedly formed in the mid-1960s, with Ayman Al-Zawahiri among its members. Other groups came into being in the second half of the 1970s and were known by the name of their founders: the Yahya Hashem group formed in 1975, the Salem Al-Rahhal and Hassan Al-Halawi group in 1977, and the Ibrahim Salamah group in 1979.[18] The latter two groups merged in 1979 under the leadership of Muhammed Abdel-Salam Farag.

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[16]   Those who joined the MB included Isam Al-Erian, Hilmi Al-Jazzar, Abdel-Mon'eim Abou Al-Foutouh from Cairo University and 'Umar Al-Za'farani from Alexandria University. All became prominent in electoral campaigns, in professional associations, and in the People's Assembly. Al-Zawahiri (2002); and Mubarak (1997), p. 316.

[17]   CPSS (1995), pp. 182–3.

[18]   Yahya Hashem was a deputy of the public prosecutor (state attorney) and a member of the first militant cell formed in the mid-1960s. He advocated launching guerrilla warfare against the government from the mountains of Upper Egypt. He lost his life in the early operations of his group in 1975. Al-Zayyat (2002), pp. 43–4.

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and Jihad eventually joined in 1981. This merger was followed by the assassination of President Anwar Al-Sadat on October 6, 1981, and by an armed insurrection in Assyut two days later, which aimed at overthrowing the government, claimed dozens of victims, but eventually failed. Nevertheless, the two organizations continued to pursue a violent strategy. Together, they are responsible for all acts of political violence carried out in Egypt in the name of Islam during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Formally, however, the two organizations split again in 1984 in the wake of a dispute about who should lead the joint organization: Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya rejected the leadership of Abboud Al-Zumur because he was in prison; the Jihad Organization rejected the leadership of Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman because he was blind.[19]

Understanding the Radical Islamists. The original leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and the Jihad Organization were all university graduates, mostly engineers, physicians, scientists, lawyers, and even army officers. They came from middle class families, some even from wealthy, prestigious backgrounds. A study of Islamist prisoners during the 1970s found that these men were high academic achievers and generally came from well-to-do families.[20] However, another study of the Jihad Organization found that the rank and file came from poor districts and the lower middle class.[21]

All militant Islamists were attracted by the goal of establishing an Islamist state ruled according to shari'a. They shared this aim with the Muslim Brothers, but they believed that the Brothers' peaceful efforts had failed. Therefore, armed struggle, which they called *jihad* (holy war), would be necessary for the birth of an Islamist state. Both the MB and the militant Islamists were largely silent on what an Islamic state would actually be like in detail and in practice, instead offering generalities regarding rules of personal behavior and moral obligations for all Muslims. The militants' call for jihad stemmed, perhaps, from the generation gap that separated them from the Muslim Brothers and from the specific intellectual traditions that inspired them. The Muslim Brothers were guided most strongly by the writings of Sheikh Hassan Al-Banna, their first leader and Supreme Guide, whereas the young militants were inspired by Sayyid Qutb, the Pakistani Abou Al-A'la Al-Maudoudi, and Ibn Taymiyya, a thirteenth-century Muslim scholar.[22] Through this literature, militants embraced the idea of *hakimiyya*, which uses God as the legitimation for rule over Muslim society and requires strict application of his shari'a.

For the militant Islamists, jihad against the Egyptian government was a duty for two reasons. First and most important, in 1979 the Egyptian government had made peace with Israel, a Jewish state created on the territory of Palestinian Muslims and including within its borders some of Islam's holy sites. Second, the government had gradually abandoned rule by the shari'a since Mohammed Ali founded the modern state in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. The Napoleonic Civil Code was adopted in the late nineteenth century, and Al-Sanhouri elaborated an Egyptian civil

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[19] Al-Zayyat (2002), p. 185.

[20] Ibrahim (1981).

[21] See Guenena (1986), pp. 66–8.

[22] Sayyid Qutb was a leader of the MB before the 1952 revolution. Although he cooperated with the revolutionary regime in its early years, he was arrested in 1954 and imprisoned until 1964, only to be arrested again in 1965 on the charge of inspiring a conspiracy to assassinate Nasser. He was a prolific writer and his work continues to influence Islamist militants. Abou Al-Maudoudi, who died in 1978, founded the Islamic Society in Pakistan in 1941 and authored several books on Islam and politics. In his later years he was not opposed to a parliamentary system.

code based on European laws in 1949. Militants doubted the efficacy of Sadat's 1980 amendment to the constitution, which provided for shari'a to be the principal source of legislation, observing that alcohol continued to be produced and sold, gambling casinos and nightclubs operated in large cities, and banks were lending money at interest, which is considered usury under shari'a. President Sadat had also obstructed the Islamists' attempts to enforce an Islamic code of dress and behavior.

Waxing and Waning of Political Violence. The assassination of President Sadat was followed by mass arrests of Islamic militants and by the trial of several hundred of them. Although these arrests and trials did nothing to decrease the grievances of the Islamists, the years from 1983 to 1987 were a period of relative calm in Egypt. This was probably due to a tacit understanding that local security forces would tolerate al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya as long as the group limited its activities to preaching in Upper Egypt. It is certain that senior police officers met with some leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya to convince them of the benefits they would get if they ceased armed operations. In return, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya leaders asked for the release of their colleagues in prison and an end to the practice of torture. Tal'at Fu'ad Qasem, leader of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's military wing, explained that this policy of restraint was adopted to deter the government's attacks on the members of the organization.[23]

During this period of quiescence by the militant groups, the Muslim Brothers achieved impressive electoral successes, particularly in 1987, when nearly fifty-eight candidates of the Islamic Alliance, including thirty-five Muslim Brothers, gained legislative seats. The political success of the moderates, however, did not convince the radicals to pursue a peaceful strategy. On the contrary, in 1987 both al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and the Jihad Organization escalated their violent activities.

This resurgence of violence is explained by a change of leadership and tactics on the part of both the Jihad Organization and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. After the two organizations drifted apart over the issue of leadership, each developed new structures and approaches. In 1987, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya set up a military wing and also moved from its strongholds in Minya and Assyut in Upper Egypt to Cairo, where its presence came to be felt particularly in the 'Ain Shams district. This move broke the tacit agreement with the security forces. Clashes started when the security forces tried to dislodge members of the organization from the Adam Mosque in 'Ain Shams, where al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya held its weekly seminar. In the same period, the Jihad Organization also underwent a change of leadership, with Ayman Al-Zawahiri assuming control. Although he had left Egypt for Afghanistan for the third time in 1986, Al-Zawahiri managed to control the organization through some of his loyal followers in Cairo.[24]

Political violence in Egypt reached a climax from 1992 to 1997 and then decreased steeply.[25] During the period of clashes, government forces dislodged militant Islamists from their hiding places or confronted them while they were preaching in mosques. Thousands were arrested, wounded, or

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[23] Mubarak (1997).

[24] After leaving Egypt, Al-Zawahiri became increasingly committed to the international struggle, rather than to change within Egypt, particularly after the government showed success in dismantling the Jihad Organization in Egypt. In 1989, he participated in the founding of al-Qaeda, an alliance of individuals and established groups, dominated by members of the Jihad Organization but bankrolled by Osama bin Laden. In 1998, Zawahiri, bin Laden, and leaders of radical groups from across the Middle East, Balkans, and Central, South, and Southeast Asia formed the international Islamic World Front to fight Zionists and Crusaders. In June 2001, the Jihad Organization finally lost its separate identity, merging with al-Qaeda to form Qaeda al-Jihad, a group that continued to be dominated by Egyptians and funded by bin Laden.

[25] CPSS (1995), pp. 163–209, 291–306.

killed. Political assassinations became common. The government assassination of Ala' Muhiel-Din, spokesman for al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, in 1989 brought militant response in kind. Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya claimed responsibility for a 1989 attempt to assassinate Interior Minister Zaki Badr, the 1990 assassination of Speaker of the People's Assembly Ref'at Al-Mahjoub,[26] the 1992 assassination of the secularist writer Farag Fouda, a 1993 attempt on the life of Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz, a 1995 attempt on the life of President Mubarak, and multiple attacks on Copts and foreign tourists, culminating in a massacre of some sixty tourists at the Hatshepsut Temple in Deir Al-Bahari near Luxor on November 17, 1997. The Jihad Organization was involved in multiple armed attacks, including three failed assassination attempts aimed at Information Minister Safwat Al-Sherif (April 1993), former interior minister Hassan Al-Alfy (August 1993), and former prime minister Atef Sidqi (December 1993). This violence cost the lives of about one thousand people, for the most part Islamists, but also ordinary citizens, both Muslims and Copts, policemen, and foreign tourists.[27]

The futility of this confrontation was not lost on many within the Egyptian general public, among intellectuals, but most importantly within the ranks of the two warring factions, as well as among other concerned Islamists who did not believe that the use of force was the way to build the ideal Islamic society. The general public could not understand how acts of murder could be committed in the name of Islam, which prohibits taking of lives of other Muslims or of people of other religions who are at peace with Muslims. Intellectuals saw some of the most prominent in their ranks become targets of successful and unsuccessful assassination attempts. The government was alarmed by the negative impact of a deteriorating security situation on the country's reputation abroad and on the domestic economy. Concerned Islamist scholars were wary of the increased association in the minds of many people, in Egypt and abroad, between Islamism and violence.

As a result, in 1993 three prominent Islamist scholars tried to mediate between al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and the government. These men were the Sheikh Mewally Al-Sha'rawi, one-time minister of Waqf (religious endowments) and a popular television preacher; Sheikh Mohammed Al-Ghazali, who was close to the Muslim Brothers; and Sheikh Abdel-Mon'eim Al-Nimr, a Muslim scholar close to the government. The attempt foundered when the government refused to release al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya members who had not been charged with involvement in any violent acts or to allow the group the freedom to preach peacefully in return for ceasing their armed activities. Interior Minister Abdel-Halim Moussa was forced to resign because of the failure of these talks, and other members of the government vowed that they would never negotiate with terrorists.[28]

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's Initiative to Cease Violent Operations

Nevertheless, in April 1996, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya declared it would unconditionally cease all armed operations inside Egypt and abroad. The Initiative of Cessation of Violence was first made public during the trial of some of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's members in Aswan. In July 1997, the group

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[26]   Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya intended to assassinate Abdel-Halim Moussa, Minister of the Interior, but the motorcade of the Speaker of the People's Assembly happened to take the same route and was mistaken for that of the minister.

[27]   CPSS (1995), pp. 163–209, 291–306.

[28]   Al-Zayyat (2002), p. 141.

repeated its commitment to nonviolence in the name of the group's imprisoned "historical leaders."[29] This second declaration, like the first, was read during the trial in front of a military tribunal of some al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya members.

The mass killing of the foreign tourists at Luxor only a few months later showed that not all members of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya were ready to accept this call for nonviolence. Still, the call gradually gained the support of most, though by no means all, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's leaders at home and abroad. I will return to this point later.

The clearest sign of the widespread acceptance of the call for nonviolence by the followers of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and the Jihad Group is that no acts of armed resistance to the government by Islamists have taken place in Egypt since the Luxor massacre. What is perhaps even more remarkable is the high profile the initiative has acquired. Makram Mohammed Ahmad, editor-in-chief of the popular weekly *Al-Mussawar* and a close associate of President Mubarak, published interviews with the imprisoned historical leaders.[30] Egyptian authorities allowed the historical leaders to tour Egyptian prisons in the spring and the summer of 2002 so they could explain the initiative to their followers. Finally, in 2002 the historical leaders published four books that use shari'a to refute the legitimacy of armed Islamist struggle and to justify nonviolence. These books have been widely distributed in Egypt. To dispel any doubts about whether the books represent the position of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, each of the four volumes lists the names of those who researched and wrote it, as well as of those who reviewed and approved it. These names include all the historical leaders.

These four works explaining the history and rationale of the initiative have been widely circulated in the Arab world and are likely to wield significant influence there. They have not, however, been translated into English. Because they mark a potentially crucial development in the evolution of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and more generally in the thinking of radical Islamists, I will discuss the arguments presented in these books at some length.

The first book, by Osama Ibrahim Hafez and Assem Abdel-Maged Mohammed, is *Mubadarat waqf al-'onf* (Initiative of Cessation of Violence). The authors argue that the shari'a foundation for the initiative is the principle of interest. The initiative is in the interest of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and of the Muslim *umma*, enabling both to avoid the dangers of *fitna* (sedition). Conversely, the continuation of armed struggle would serve the interests of Islam's enemies, which the authors list as Israel, the United States, and secularistic intellectuals in Muslim countries.

The authors also claim that violence against Muslims and non-Muslims alike is prohibited by Islamic shari'a for multiple reasons, even if undertaken in the name of jihad. First, jihad is prohibited if it is unlikely to attain its goal, or if it becomes an obstacle to the peaceful preaching of Islam. Second, jihad is prohibited if those who are intent on undertaking it are incapable of waging it successfully. Third, it is harmful to the *umma* if there are Muslims among non-Muslims whose lives

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[29]   The term *historical leaders* refers to founders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, who are members of its leading organ, the *Majlis Al-Shura* (Consultative Council). They are Osama Ibrahim Hafez, Assem Abdel-Maged Mohammed, Karam M. Zohdi, Ali M. Al-Sherif, Nageh Abdallah Ibrahim, Mohammed E. Derbala, Fou'ad Al-Dawalibi, and Hamdi Abdel-Azim Abdel-Rahman. According to Makram Mohammed Ahmad, the editor-in-chief of *Al-Mussawar*, Karam Zohdi is the leader of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and Nageh Ibrahim is its theoretician. Zohdi is also connected to Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, spiritual leader of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, by marriage to the sheikh's sister-in-law. Most of the leaders are imprisoned in Egypt. Some have been sentenced to death, but that penalty seems, currently, to be suspended.

[30]   The first interview was published on June 21, 2002. All interviews with comments by Makram Mohammed Ahmad were included in a book that appeared in September 2002.

could be endangered by the fighting. Fourth, Islam prohibits jihad against monotheists, for example, Jews and Christians, who are willing to live peacefully with Muslims; Islam also prohibits fighting against those who have not been exposed to Islam. Finally, jihad is prohibited if the harm it causes is greater than the benefits obtained for the *umma,* or if peace has been established. Throughout their arguments, the authors draw on the Koran, the *sunnah* (the traditions of the Prophet Mohammed), and the writings of Muslim scholars for support.

It is worth noting that the first volume also reveals that there was initial disagreement about the initiative between al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's leaders in Egypt and those abroad. According to the book, the latter opposed the initiative in 1997 and 1998; in 1999 all the leaders finally resolved to endorse nonviolence.

The second book flows directly from the first, listing the errors committed by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in its armed confrontation with the government. *Tasleet al-Ad'wa' 'ala ma Waqa' fi al-Jihad min Akhta'* (Shedding Light on Errors Committed in the Jihad) was written by Hamdi Abdel-Rahman, Nageh Ibrahim, and Ali Al-Sherif and approved by the other historical leaders. The authors of the book declare that the views of Muslim scholars from the past may be adapted to changing conditions and times, implicitly distancing themselves from the views articulated by Muslim scholars in the thirteenth century, such as Ibn Taymiyya. The authors explain that jihad, properly understood, is a means to an end and not an end in itself. Muslims should not undertake jihad in cases where they are likely to fail. Additionally, they declare that shari'a forbids the murder of persons who do not take part in military operations against Islam or do not obstruct the peaceful preaching of Islam. The authors explicitly address the issue of foreign tourists, declaring that Muslims must protect tourists who use legitimate channels and obtain valid visas. In these cases, Muslim governments have made a commitment on behalf of their people to welcome the foreigners as guests and to safeguard their lives and belongings. Finally, the authors argue that the history of conflict among Muslims has weakened the *umma.*

In books three and four, the historical leaders argue against the Islamist practice of excommunication and some other methods used to combat deviation from the teachings of Islam among Muslims. *Hormat al-Gholw fi al-Din wa Takfir al-Muslimin* (The Ban on Narrow Positions on Religion and on the Excommunication of Muslims) was written by Nageh Ibrahim and Ali Al-Sherif. The book takes a stand against *takfir* (the practice of excommunication), which has been used by factions of the Islamist movements against politicians, intellectuals, non-Muslims, and Muslims who do not interpret their religion "correctly" or who cooperate with non-Muslims. The authors argue that *takfir* is based on an excessively strict interpretation of Islamic teaching, stemming from a lack of understanding of the true nature of the religion, obsession with marginal issues, and the influence of teachers who are not competent scholars of Islam. Shari'a, the authors point out, recommends very different actions toward non-Muslims, particularly Christians and Jews, including cooperation in legitimate economic activities, visitation of the sick, expressions of condolence or congratulation on appropriate occasions, support of non-Muslim relatives, and participation in their funerals.

Finally, in *Al-Nos'h wal-Tabyeen fi Tas'heeh Mafahim al-Muhtasebeen* (Advice and Clarification to Rectify Concepts of Those Who Assume Responsibility for Society), Ali Al-Sherif and Osama Ibrahim Hafez recognize the religious duty of Muslims to call for good and to resist wrong, but they argue that an erroneous interpretation of this duty has prevailed among Islamists. Islamists have wrongly called for the annulment of the marriage of several well-known writers and artists, claiming

that they have become impious, and, therefore, that their marriage is invalid because a Muslim woman should not marry a non-Muslim man. Militants have also justified the assassination of senior government officials claiming that these men were no longer Muslims because of their acceptance of secular law. Al-Sherif and Hafez claim that erroneous understandings of religion are common because of self-adulation, leadership cult, suppression of dissenting views, emphasis on retribution, and infighting among Islamists. Those who attend to the *umma* should guard against being driven by ill-feeling, spying on other Muslims, making judgments based on mere suspicion, and violating the privacy of others. Finally, the authors advise their followers not to impose their values on those who do not adhere to their interpretations.

Importantly, the authors point to specific erroneous practices that have turned a majority of Egyptians against al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. These include stopping couples in the streets to verify their identity and membership in the same family; disrupting weddings in which music is being played; forcibly entering private homes suspected of hosting immoral activity; beating drunkards; setting fire to video stores that supposedly sold pornography; quarrelling in mosques with clergymen who differed in their interpretation of religion; destroying television sets on the grounds that they help in the dissemination of decadent materials; and, finally, roaming streets in vigilante groups to monitor public behavior. All these activities have been undertaken by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in the past, particularly in Upper Egypt.

The four texts summarized above constitute a wholesale reversal of the theoretical positions al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya articulated in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This point was reiterated in interviews with the historical leaders that appeared in the Egyptian weekly *Al-Mussawar* and in the leaders' meetings with members of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in several Egyptian prisons.[31] On these occasions, the leaders clarified their position on the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States. Karam Zohdi, the leader of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt, and Nageh Ibrahim, the group's theoretician, concurred in saying that the attack was incompatible with shari'a, which bans killing civilians of any religion.[32] Ibrahim added that the attacks harmed the Islamist cause by spreading a negative image of Islam and leading to the fall of the Islamist regime in Afghanistan. He also characterized Osama bin Laden as an adventurer with the unrealistic ambition to fight simultaneously the Russians in Chechnya, the Indians in Kashmir, and the United States in Saudi Arabia. According to Nageh Ibrahim, bin Laden engages in jihad for its own sake; because his goals could be achieved through peaceful methods, armed action is unjustified.

In interviews, the historical leaders also explained that during two decades of imprisonment, they had had plenty of time to rethink their strategies and examine their compatibility with shari'a principles. They studied the authentic sources of the shari'a, the Koran, and the *sunnah.* They also examined the work of thirteenth-century Muslim scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya in historical context and concluded that his confrontation with the Moguls in the thirteenth century was very different from their own relationship to the Muslim rulers of a Muslim state in the twentieth century. They abandoned, therefore, the strict interpretation of the notion of God's sovereignty, or *hakimiyya*, as it had been elaborated in the work of both Abul Al-Maududi and Sayyid Qutb.[33]

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[31] *Al-Mussawar* (June 21, 2002), pp. 4–22; and *Al-Mussawar* (June 28, 2002), pp. 4–20.

[32] For Zohdi's views, see *Al-Mussawar* (June 21, 2002), p. 19; for Ibrahim's views, see *Al-Mussawar* (June 28, 2002), pp. 15–6.

[33] See *Al-Mussawar* (June 21, 2002), pp. 8, 10.

Several of the leaders, particularly Karam Zohdi and Osama Hafez, suggested that the rethinking had begun as early as 1982. In fact, clashes between al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and security forces, which began in 1988 and escalated between 1992 and 1997, were the result of attacks by government security forces, not of aggression by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. They noted that al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's willingness to put an end to armed action had been stated on many occasions, particularly in 1993 and 1997. However, armed actions by other groups in 1993 sabotaged the reconciliation effort undertaken by Islamist scholars and the Ministry of Interior. The 1997 declaration was undermined by the Luxor massacre, perpetrated by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya members uninformed about the intentions of the leadership. Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya claims that it ceased all military operations in Egypt after this massacre and dissolved its military organization. The few clashes between government security forces and group members since that date, they argue, are due to government harassment of group members.[34]

According to Nageh Ibrahim, all of the leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, in Egypt and abroad, eventually approved the initiative. From prison in the United States, Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman announced in 1997 through his American lawyer that he supported the initiative.[35] Ibrahim claims that Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman's 1997 approval of the initiative was his definitive position, and that the withdrawal of his support announced by his American lawyer in 1999 was not genuine, but the result of a misunderstanding between the lawyer and his client. Abdel-Rahman, according to Ibrahim, is willing to allow the leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya who are based in Egypt to decide what is best for the group.[36]

Some prominent leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya have raised their voices in opposition to the initiative. Among them is Rifa'a Taha Ibrahim, the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya spokesman in Afghanistan under the Taliban and one of the founders of the Islamic World Front to Fight Zionists and Crusaders, known in the West as al-Qaeda. Leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya have now disavowed Rifa'a, claiming he joined the Islamic World Front without consulting al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's Shura Council. The Shura Council itself has rejected any ties with the Islamic World Front, judging that such ties would lead to a risky fight against the United States. Rifa'a has been expelled from the Shura Council of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and has been replaced by Mustapha Hamza, who is currently in Iran and has declared his support of the initiative.

The position of the Jihad Group vis-à-vis the use of violence is much less clear. Armed action by the Jihad Group has grown increasingly rare in Egypt. The Jihad Group was involved in the assassination of Anwar Al-Sadat in 1981 and battled with government security forces in Assyut after that assassination. Since that time, the number of armed actions the Jihad Group has perpetrated in Egypt probably does not exceed three. This confirms the impression given by the Jihad Group's spokesmen and other observers that the Jihad Group has always been a much smaller organization

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[34]   The Egyptian government, for its part, has released thousands of imprisoned members of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. Some of these men had already completed their sentences. Most were being provisionally detained without any trial or specific charges brought against them. The government has also improved conditions for imprisoned militants, allowing them more frequent visits, better food, opportunity to read and meet with fellow prisoners, and facilitating contact between newly released members and leaders in foreign countries. Such contacts are usually undertaken by lawyers of the leaders. One such lawyer active in ensuring these contacts is Muntasir Al-Zayyat, who was himself imprisoned between 1981 and 1984 following the assassination of President Sadat. Since his release from prison, he has defended imprisoned Islamists in court and acted as a spokesman for them.

[35]   Al-Zayyat (2002), pp. 170–1.

[36]   See the clarification of this point by Nageh Ibrahim in *Al-Mussawar* (June 21, 2002), p. 15.

than al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and that it lacked the discipline of its sister organization. Spokesmen for al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya claim that Egyptian leaders of the Jihad Group would like to issue a renunciation of violence, but their lack of unity and discipline and the opposition of their leaders abroad have prevented them from doing so.

The Jihad leaders now based outside Egypt, particularly Ayman Al-Zawahiri who remains leader of the Jihad Group although he does not reside in Egypt, remain adamantly opposed to the initiative. Al-Zawahiri denounced it in his 2002 book *Fursan Tahta Rayat Al-Nabey* (Horsemen under the Banner of the Prophet). He remains committed to a violent fight against the enemies of Islam, including Muslim rulers who fail to apply shari'a, Israel, and the United States. Al-Zawahiri's position is similar to one previously held by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, namely that Muslim rulers who do not apply shari'a are impious and, therefore, represent the "close enemy." Foreign, non-Muslim countries that fight Muslims or support their enemies are the "distant enemy."[37] According to al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya spokesmen, Al-Zawahiri abandoned his original goal of fighting the "close enemy" in order to fight the "distant enemy" when it became difficult for him to remain in Egypt and when the Jihad Group was largely dismantled after Egyptian security forces seized in October 1993 a computer where the names of all members were stored.[38]

Tactical Maneuver or Genuine Change?

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's initiative could have far-reaching implications. The group is highly influential due to the prominent role of the Islamist movement—both its mainstream and militant elements— in Egyptian society. The ideas of the Egyptians Hassan Al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb have also inspired Islamists all over the Arab and Muslim world, and Egyptian Islamists have been prominent in international Islamist movements of all types. Thus, the condemnation of violence by the Muslim Brothers and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (the two largest Islamist organizations in Egypt), the decision by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya to stop all military operations, and the publication of documents arguing that shari'a supports this position will definitely be considered seriously by Islamists all over the world.

Nevertheless, many questions remain unanswered. The first question is the short-term impact of the initiative on the Egyptian political system. So far, the government seems unmoved by the Islamists' move toward nonviolence and continues its hard-line policies, which have long included significant human rights abuse. The government has released many Islamists from prison, but thousands remain jailed. The government continues to harass members of the Muslim Brotherhood and to ban Islamist organizations, whether political parties or other types of associations. Members of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya newly released from jail seem to have accepted this situation for the time being. However, the highly disciplined membership is unlikely to accept indefinitely the lack of a legally recognized organizational framework for their preaching.

The second question is whether the initiative represents a diversionary tactic designed to cloak militant activities or is a sincere shift in strategy. I believe that the initiative represents a real transition from violent to nonviolent strategies. The primary causes of such a transformation are the negative outcome for the group of its armed confrontation with the government, the advancing age and prison experiences of the leaders, the successes of the nonmilitant Muslim Brotherhood in

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[37] Al-Zawahiri (2002).
[38] Al-Zayyat (2002), p. 101.

winning parliamentary seats and penetrating the professional syndicates, and the evolution of the Islamist movement abroad.

The historical leaders launched their initiative because they recognized their own defeat. Islamic militants had succeeded in assassinating President Anwar El-Sadat in 1981. Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya failed to assassinate President Mubarak in 1995. In 1990, their attempts to assassinate two ministers of the interior failed, and the speaker of the People's Assembly, irrelevant to the jihad, was murdered instead. To be sure, some senior security officers were killed, and tourism was disrupted. However, these limited tactical successes had led to a strategic defeat. Many leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya had been killed, were in prison, or had fled abroad, where they had little power to influence events in Egypt. A very large number of the group's members and sympathizers had also been thrown in prison; many had no prospect of obtaining their freedom until they renounced the use of force against the government.

Militancy had also not produced greater public sympathy for the radical cause. A great number of Muslim civilians had been murdered, and so had many Christian Copts and ordinary policemen. Most Egyptians rejected the idea that jihad should be waged against policemen, many of whom are drawn from the rural poor. Nor was there much sympathy for targeting Copts, a practice condemned by a variety of public figures and Muslim scholars. The disruption of tourism earned the group the anger and frustration of the thousands of Egyptians who rely on that industry for livelihood. It is little wonder that the first announcement of the initiative came from the leader of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya military organization in Aswan, one of two cities that suffered the most from the crisis in tourism.[39]

There was also no prospect for a future victory of jihad against the government. Close government surveillance of mosques had made recruitment difficult. The police force, particularly under Minister of Interior Hassan Al-Alfy and his successor Habib Al-Adly, had been very successful in penetrating the group's organization, preempting planned operations, tracing the source of funding, and disrupting lines of communication with these sources. Furthermore, foreign funders put pressure on al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya to target the United States and Israel in their propaganda, leading to harassment of members and leaders of the organization abroad, particularly in Europe.

The historical leaders had also spent close to two decades in prison by the end of 2001. This gave these men ample time to reflect upon their own experiences and the wisdom of launching jihad against a Muslim government and Muslim people. Their advancing age probably contributed to their lack of enthusiasm for armed action and predisposed them to a more moderate approach. The Egyptian government also encouraged the process of rethinking. Well-respected Muslim scholars went to the prisons to engage in debate with Islamist leaders. The government also helped imprisoned Islamists obtain books and allowed interaction among prisoners to debate about Islam. As time passed and the number of armed clashes with the government declined, prison conditions improved and the organization of group seminars on issues confronting Islamists became easier.

The leaders were also influenced by the experiences of the Muslim Brothers. Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya had condemned the Muslim Brothers for abandoning armed opposition to the government in favor of

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[39] The situation in Aswan was dramatic, with hundreds of boats that once cruised the Nile between Luxor and Aswan mooring empty and thousands of Aswanis who worked in hotels, souvenir stores, cafes, and restaurants either out of work or suffering sharp drops in income.

acting more like a political party. Although legally banned, the Brothers' organizing had been officially tolerated. As a result, the MB had gained control of some of the most important and largest professional associations. Members could express their views in the parliament and on the pages of opposition parties' newspapers, and they could take part in joint activities with those parties. More important, the Muslim Brothers seemed to be succeeding in Islamizing the society. Religious practice has been on the rise in Egypt for over two decades. The number of people who go to mosques on Friday for the collective weekly noon prayer, perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, or fast during the month of Ramadan has increased, as has the number of religious books and cassettes for sale.

Finally, the leaders were also aware of the experiences of Islamist groups in other countries. Everywhere, as I will show later, Islamist organizations that chose to participate in electoral politics were much more successful than those that turned to violence.

The initiative of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya is thus the outcome of a choice between armed resistance without prospect for success in the short and medium term and use of a political process that affords a good opportunity of victory in the medium or long term. As rational actors, the leaders had every reason to embrace and to continue to espouse peaceful political activity. Such a course enables them to minimize the loss of members through death, imprisonment, and exile and to maximize their gains, especially because Egyptian society seems increasingly receptive to their beliefs.

ISLAMISTS IN OTHER ARAB AND MUSLIM COUNTRIES

The nonviolence initiative of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya seems to have come about in part on the basis of the experience of Islamists throughout the region. Increasingly, Islamists are finding nonviolent politics to be the best means for advancing their goals. The use of force has been successful so far only in those rare cases in which Islamists confront occupation by a foreign force (for example, the fight of Islamist groups against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan or the fight by Hezbollah against the Israeli occupation force in southern Lebanon). In these situations, Islamists benefit from the sympathy of the majority of the population.

This is not true when the Islamists use militancy against Muslim governments. The majority of the citizenry is repelled by violence and terrorism at home, and Islamists who have chosen such a route have discovered the futility of the struggle. Algeria demonstrated the greater efficacy of politics versus violence for Islamists. In 1992, civil war broke out when the Algerian Army suspended the democratic process to prevent an electoral victory by the Front of Islamic Salvation (FIS). The FIS inflicted many casualties but could not win a military victory. It thus renounced armed struggle in 1997 and instructed the Army of Islamic Salvation, its military organization, to declare a cease-fire. The Army of Islamic Salvation was even ordered to join government forces in harassing the Islamic Armed Group (GIA), which refused to abandon armed struggle.

In 1995, under the restored electoral process, Islamists won popular support, despite a ban of the FIS. Islamist parties finished second only to the parties supportive of the government. Mahfoudh Nahnah, the leader of the Islamist Movement of the Society for Peace, won 25 percent of the popular vote in the presidential election of 1995. His party won 14.8 percent of the vote and sixty-nine seats in the 1997 parliamentary elections, and Al-Nahda (the Islamic Renaissance Movement) won 8.7

percent of the vote and thirty-five seats. Together the two Islamist parties controlled more than one-fourth (27.3 percent) of the seats in the assembly and participated in a coalition government.[40]

The Islamist movement gained success elsewhere without the tremendous toll in lives suffered by Algeria. In Jordan, for example, Islamist candidates won thirty-two seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the first legislative election held after the return to competitive politics in 1989. An Islamist leader was elected speaker of the chamber and six out of twenty-one cabinet ministers were chosen from the Islamist parties. Despite a change of electoral law designed specifically to weaken their presence in the Chamber of Deputies, Islamists remained the largest single party in this chamber of eighty deputies, controlling 20 percent of the seats after the 1997 elections, although some Islamist organizations boycotted the elections in protest against the new law. Islamists remain the most powerful opposition force in the country, largely dominating the country's professional associations.[41]

In Kuwait, Islamists have been present in all of the assemblies elected since the country's liberation from Iraqi occupation in 1991. Islamist groups won eighteen out of fifty seats in the Assembly of the Nation in the most recent election held in 2000. The candidate favored by the Islamists also became speaker. With their control of 36 percent of the Assembly's seats and through alliance with other groups, Islamists can influence the legislative agenda of the Assembly and win passage of some of their controversial laws.[42]

The most impressive electoral successes by Middle Eastern Islamists have taken place in Turkey. Turkish Islamists have emerged, ever more powerful, from every new restriction the government has imposed on their activity. Islamist parties were banned in 1970, 1972, and 1980, and their leaders were not allowed to assume any political position following the military coup of 1980. Despite this repression, Islamists captured local councils in most Turkish cities in 1994, emerged as the largest political party in the Turkish parliament in 1995, and formed the government with the True Path Party (TPP) in 1995, with their leader alternating as premier with Tanzu Ciller of the TPP. The government fell due to military pressure in late 1997. In their most recent incarnation as the Party of Justice and Development, Turkish Islamists won an overwhelming victory in the November 2002, gaining 34 percent of the vote and over two-thirds of the seats. The success of the Turkish Islamists is all the more significant because the Kemalist ideology, which inspired the Turkish Republic following the end of the Caliphate in 1924, is characterized by an extreme form of secularism that does not tolerate religion.[43]

Mainstream Islamist parties are also present in the parliament and/or governments of Lebanon, Yemen, Pakistan (when ruled by civilians), Indonesia, and Malaysia. It is noteworthy that the political systems in many of these nations are not models of democracy. The governments of all Middle East countries have used changes to electoral rules, military pressure, bans on political organization by Islamists, harassment by police forces, and imprisonment to stifle Islamist movements. Despite all these restrictions, Islamists who abide by constitutional and legal rules have become more influential political actors than their militant counterparts.

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[40]   Martinez and Entelis (2000).

[41]   Robinson (1997).

[42]   Yetiv (2002).

[43]   Yavuz (1997).

IMPLICATIONS OF ISLAMIST PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRACY

I have argued that one of the major reasons for the rejection of violence by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya is the evidence that Islamist organizations are more successful when they turn to electoral politics than to violent means. Thus, it can be expected that Egyptian Islamists, like those of other countries, will continue to reject violence and will turn to electoral politics. Whether their new thinking would be credible enough for the Government of Egypt to allow them to participate in politics in the same way as other legally organized groups remains uncertain. It should be noted also that even legal groups complain about the restrictions the government imposes on their activities. Methods of rule familiar under single-party regimes have a long life, even when such a regime has been formally abolished. However, assuming that the Egyptian government will allow the Islamists to integrate into the ranks of the sixteen political parties that exist at present in Egypt or allow them to register a party of their own, what would the consequences be?

First of all, it is important to note that Islamist participation in electoral politics does not mean necessarily that they would win the absolute majority of votes, although they would probably emerge as one of the leading parties, as suggested by recent elections in Turkey, Bahrain, Pakistan, and Morocco. If they did not obtain an absolute majority of votes, Egyptian Islamists would most likely end up as an opposition party. Alternatively, they would join with other parties in forming a coalition government. In a coalition government, they would have to take views of other parties into consideration and would not be able to implement their programs fully.

Nevertheless, as a legally recognized political force, whether in government or in the opposition, Islamists would have a strong influence on public debate. They would certainly stress the importance of legal codes that adhere to their interpretation of shari'a. Again, the experience of other countries gives some indications of what could happen. In Turkey, for example, local councils run by the Islamist Refah Party after 1994 have been more efficient and less corrupt than councils dominated by secularist parties. But Refah leaders at both the local and the national levels have also been very concerned about questions of life style, attempting to ban the production and sale of alcoholic drinks, outlawing prostitution, and promoting the segregation of the sexes in public places. In Algeria, the Islamists who controlled local councils in 1990 and 1991 demonstrated similar concerns. In Kuwait and Jordan, too, Islamist members of parliament advocated segregation of the sexes, and the Kuwaiti Assembly of the Nation actually imposed it in 2000.[44]

Islamists also encourage the establishment of banks that do not pay fixed interest on deposits and instead use profit and loss sharing among both debtors and creditors. The experience with such institutions in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan demonstrates that such a program does not completely disrupt the banking sector or replace commercial banks. Rather, in these countries, Islamist banks only represent a small share of the sector.

Finally, Islamists empowered by democracy would have a role in shaping foreign policy and would likely call for closer ties with other Muslim countries. Necmettin Erbakan, the Refah Prime Minister of Turkey from 1996 to 1997, called for an al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya of Eight Countries to promote economic cooperation among Muslim countries—but the leader of the Justice and Development Party appears more interested in Turkey's prospects to join the European Union.

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[44]   See Robinson (1997); Yavuz (1997); and Yetiv (2002).

Islamist parties would also join in criticizing some U.S. policies, particularly those related to the Arab–Israeli dispute and the continuation of sanctions against the Iraqi people. Many in the West worry that Islamist governments would aggravate the conflict between Israel and the Arab world. However, it is doubtful that Islamists outside the Middle East would do much to translate their solidarity with the Palestinian people into concrete acts. For example, Abbasi Madani, leader of the FIS in Algeria, has said that Algerian Islamists can offer the Palestinians only moral solidarity.

SAFEGUARDING DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

The Islamists' participation in democratic politics undoubtedly presents a serious threat to the maintenance of civil and political rights and democratic procedures in their home countries. Is there a way to safeguard civil and political rights and democracy while integrating Islamists into a legitimate political process in Arab and Muslim countries? There is no simple solution to this dilemma, but there are some ways to reduce the risk.

It is important that the constitutions of Arab and Muslim countries include the full set of civil and political rights formulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, without the limitations Muslim countries typically impose to make such rights compatible with shari'a. More important, the articles of the constitution enshrining these rights should not be subject to easy amendment. Rather, the constitution should state that under no circumstances may these articles be deleted or modified, except to expand civil and political liberties.

To guarantee that such constitutional provisions will not be tampered with, four other conditions must be fulfilled. The first of these is the promotion of the independence of the judiciary, including an appeals process and a supreme constitutional court. The Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court demonstrates how such a court can act, even within Egypt's soft authoritarianism, to halt and reverse the worst legal violations of citizens' liberty. These courts should be empowered both to strike down electoral laws that restrict free and fair elections and to declare the illegality of a party, an association, or an act of the government that violates the citizenry's human rights.

Second, the risk of a dominant party restricting fundamental rights is reduced if the electoral system is one of proportional representation. Majoritarian electoral systems maximize the chances of a single party gaining overwhelming power over both the legislature and the executive. For example, under the British system, it is theoretically possible for a party with only a plurality of votes in most constituencies to gain three-quarters or even four-fifths of the seats in the House of Commons. Proportional representation guards against this dictatorship of the plurality by giving smaller parties a share of the seats roughly equal to their share of the popular vote.

Third, the presence of a bicameral legislature, as seen in the United States, France, Great Britain, India, and many other countries, is another mechanism for guarding against domination by one party. Provided that the rules for election and the terms of office for the members of two chambers are not identical and that a relatively balanced distribution of power prevails between the two of them, the existence of two chambers provides additional checks and balances in the political system.

A final guarantee is the establishment of a supreme constitutional council. The members of this council would be elected as representatives of a full spectrum of political groups and civil society

associations and would serve for life. The council would have the right to order the armed forces to overthrow, if necessary, any government convicted through judicial channels of violating citizens' fundamental civil and political rights. This institution would perform a role similar to that of Turkey's supreme commander of the armed forces, but in a less arbitrary manner.

It would be extremely pretentious to suggest that a formula exists for non-Islamist governments in Muslim countries to reduce the challenge posed by Islamist participation. However, adherence to the rules of a genuinely democratic political process, as well as real concern for the suffering of the majority of citizens in their daily lives, would enable such governments to replenish their stock of legitimacy, now depleted by their authoritarian methods, as well as by their economic policies that openly favor a tiny minority of their population.

Although economic development that caters to the needs of the majority of people will take time to bear fruit, one particularly relevant conclusion from the Egyptian experience is that political liberty in itself will help breed moderation among Islamists, whereas harsh methods will only increase bitterness and acts of revenge. The radical writings of Sayyid Qutb, the intellectual mentor of most militant Islamist groups in Arab and Muslim countries, are the product of harsh years in prison. By contrast, the improved conditions of detention and free debate with enlightened Muslim scholars helped convince the historical leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya to undertake their initiative for nonviolence.

CONCLUSIONS

Islamists cannot be wished away. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the world's major actors are extremely suspicious of all Islamists, but the international enthusiasm shown for democracy promotion should not disappear when Islamists call for such reforms. If Western countries are truly committed to the ideals of democracy they proclaim on all occasions, then they should accept the outcome of a democratic process wherever it takes place, and they should stop putting pressure on the governments of the Muslim countries to bar Islamists from taking part in a peaceful political process.

The distinction between Islamists committed to the cause of a pluralist political process and those intent on the use of violence should be clearly drawn. Labeling all Islamists as terrorists is a losing approach for two simple reasons: first, it is completely unfounded, as this paper has tried to demonstrate; and second, such a wholesale condemnation only increases resentment toward the West in Muslim countries, playing into the hands of the small minority of extremists who fight their own governments and people as well as the West.

Western countries should take more seriously the legitimate concerns of Muslim peoples, particularly Arabs, from among whom those who carried out the attacks of September 11 came. At present, the United States is still preparing to launch a war against Iraq, a war that the vast majority of peoples and governments of the Arab and Muslim worlds oppose. U.S. claims that Iraq constitutes a threat to its national security or violates UN resolutions are not very convincing at a time when the Israeli government daily persists in ignoring all UN resolutions as well as its own commitments under many agreements signed in the presence of U.S. presidents. This highly selective approach to human rights and international legality makes it difficult to continue to develop friendly relations between the West and Muslim countries. And such an approach does not help strengthen moderate Islamists, nor does it further the cause of democracy promotion and the pursuit of the so-called War on Terrorism.

Not every program favored by Islamists is incompatible with Western values; Islamists believe in a free economy, science, and compassion and solidarity among human beings. Accepting their integration in a democratic political process offers better prospects for engaging in a useful dialogue and lifts one major obstacle to democracy promotion in Arab and Muslim countries.

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