Al Ikhwan Al Muslimin (Society of Muslim Brotherhood) Aims and Ideology, Role and Impact

Noman Sattar

Introduction

Al Ikhwan al Muslimin or the Society of Muslim Brotherhood has been a religious political force in Egyptian politics since the 30s. Its conservative religious orientation, underlying political role, and impact in other Islamic countries make it an interesting subject of study.

The paper purports to make a study of the Muslim Brotherhood in terms of its aims and ideology, as well as role and impact. The paper starts with a brief account of its emergence alongwith the description of factors contributing to its emergence. The next section takes a look at its structure and organization, highlighting the main institutions and their role.

A discussion of its ideology starts with turning to the ideas of its prominent leaders and ideologues, Hasan al Banna, Sayed Qutub, and Hasan al Hudaybi, who have had a great influence on the Society's orientation and activities. While it is not meant to trace its evolution chronologically, its political role is meant to give an idea of the dominant trends and how these have been perceived. The section ends with a brief discussion of the current situation.

In the next section, there is a short account of its impact, focusing on the Brotherhood in other Islamic countries. In this context, Sudan has been chosen as a model exemplifying in detail its impact. It is meant to compare and contrast the role of the movement with its Egyptian counterpart. Concluding discussion follows an evaluation in sociological terms.

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A few clarifications need to be made about terminology used. Different authors have used different terms for the organization, The Society of Muslim Brothers, Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Brethren. An effort has been made to use a single term. In the same context, terms Society, organization and movement have been used interchangably. As the Society remains dissolved and banned, most of the discussion is presented in the past tense.

Background and emergence

Reform movements have been a part of the Islamic tradition, and have been active throughout Islamic history. Though these have risen in response to different kinds of challenges and circumstances in different parts of the Islamic world, they have had some what common elements. While some have been conservative, others have been moderate, while still others militant-nationalist.

The *Wahabi* movement of the 18th century was one such movement. The puritan movement was started by Abd al Wahab in Arabia, who rejected Westernization and gave a call to return to pure and traditional Islam. It became a movement against unIslamic practices adopted by the Muslims and attracted following in different parts of the Muslim world.

The Pan-Islamism of Jamal ad-din al-Afghani was both a religious and a political movement, influencing religious thought in the 19th century. Afghani believed in the glory and unity of Islam, and travelled far and wide with his gospel, attracting adherents. The impact of Afghani and such other movements has been summed up by Nikkie Keddie: "The ambiguity of his words thus left a peculiar legacy, in which Jamal al-din Afghani is claimed as a precursor by the widest variety of persons-all the way from leftists who cite with favour his anti-imperialism and his reputed vague words about Muslim socialism, to groups like the Muslim Brethren who want primarily to preserve Muslim traditions from western encroachments".[1]

The rise of *Ikhwan al Muslimin,* the Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt of the 20s, can be explained both in terms of the nationalist fervour of the interwar period and the *Wahabi* and Pan-Islamic movements. Intellectually, they drew from Wahab and Afghani, and

1. Nikkie R Keddie, *Sayyied Jamal al-din "al-Afghani"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p.422.

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Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. Abduh was a disciple of Afghani; he accepted modern science and advocated new methods of education. Rida was a follower of Abduh.

While the Arab world had been divided among the European powers after the breakup of the Ottoman empire, the colonial occupation of Egypt was greatly resented by the Muslims, who saw it as a form of domination by the Christians. These sentiments were translated into strong religious nationalism and fueled the 1919 anti-British uprising.

British colonial rule had led to Westernization and secularization of the educated middle class. Secular trends were also visible in the ideas and approach of Egyptian scholars. This was seen as symptomatic of weakening of Islamic laws and institutions on the one hand, and traditions and values on the other. For instance, the Constitution of 1932 was viewed as being Western "modeled".

Events in Turkey were also disturbing. The abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal was seen as a de-Islamization of a Muslim country that for centuries had been the focus of religious allegiance of the Muslims.

The movement can also be viewed as a reaction to the corrupt Egyptian monarchy. King Fuad, along with the British, was intent on keeping nationalist and religious fervour in check. The failure of democracy in the late 20s and early 30s facilitated the rise of a mass-based popular movement, both to check and replace the authoritarian regime.

Hasan al-Banna, a young school teacher, capitalized on this opportunity, and the Society of Muslim Brothers came into being in 1928. In the early years, keen for political recognition, it kept a religious and reformist orientation. In the late 30s, they decided to get active in politics. A new political weekly *Al Nadhir* ("The Warner") was issued, which pointed to their role in "political action," and their participation in "political struggle" at home and abroad.

It was after the Second World War that the Brotherhood became more active in politics. Their membership reached about half a million, with about 2000 branches, a network of socio-religious activities all over Egypt, and following in other Arab countries. This was ac-

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complished by a combination of organizational skill and charismatic leadership.

The Brotherhood played an active role in the nationalist struggle in Palestine. They raised funds, purchased weapons and sent volunteers to fight in Palestine. The Brotherhood used the organization for anti-British and anti-Jewish activity. Consequently, it was suppressed by the British. The organization viewed the failure of the Muslim forces in Palestine as the failure of the Islamic governments, giving a call for the establishment of genuine Islamic rule.

To counter the rising tide of nationalism and violence, the movement was dissolved in 1948, under Emergency Regulations. The Brothers responded by assassinating Prime Minister Muhammad Fahim Nuqrashi. The regime retaliated by masterminding the killing of Hasan al Banna. This was followed by another spree of violence between the government and the Brothers. But King Farouk tried to keep the conflict in check and released many of the imprisoned leaders. This was to become a pattern that would be followed in the years to come by different Egyptian regimes: confrontation-suppression-accommodation.

Structure and organization

Before going further, it is worthwhile to take a look at how the Society was organized,[2] which would also shed light on its role and activities. The Society was built as a tight hierarchy, a totalitarian organization. The regulations governing the Society were based on "The Fundamental Law of the Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood" adopted in 1945. It was amended by Banna subsequently, "in the light of the experience of the recent years".

The top position was that of the General Guide, who was head of the Society and Chairman of two of its major governing bodies, the General Guidance Council and the Consultative Assembly. The position of the General Guide was one of leadership and responsibility, who was to pursue the Society's interests "according to the Book and the Sunnah".

2. From Richard Mitchell, who gives an elaborate treatment to the structure and organization of the Society. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*(London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

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General Guidance Council was the "highest administrative unit", comprising 12 members (the number varied). Members of the Council held office for two years, but were eligible for reelection. A majority decision was binding on the members. The Council presided over the operations of the Society, supervised its administration, shaped and executed its policy. The Secretary General, elected by the Consultative Assembly, was the chief representative of the Council.

Consultative Assembly had a membership varying between 100 and 150. Duties of the Assembly included the "general supervision" of the progress of the Society, election of the Guidance Council, and auditing. A Committee, with legal training, was to "supervise members' 'behaviour' and mete out appropriate penalties".

The Guidance Council, Consultative Assembly, and the General Guide formed the nucleus, the General Headquarters of the Society in Cairo. Other activities and functions can be briefly summed up as under:

Technical operations

Technical operations related to administrative machinery were handled by six committees – finance, policy, legal, statistics services, legal opinion – directly responsible to the Guidance Council. These had two aspects; related to the administrative machinery were six committees directly responsible to the Guidance Council: finance, policy, legal, statistics, services, legal opinion.

Ten sections were concerned with ideology and indoctrination, propagation of message, labour, peasants, family, students, liaison with Islamic world, bodily training, professions, press and translations, and Muslim Sisters.

Muslim Sisterhood was an auxiliary group of the Society, aimed specifically at reform of the society in the context of the family. Zainab al Ghazali was an active member, who worked closely with Banna and was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Qutub conspiracy case.

Field units: These were administrative channels through which directives of the high command were passed on to operational membership groups.

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Finance: Revenues of the Society were derived from membership fees, contributions, legacies, and profits from its economic enterprises, publications, and sales of emblems and the like.

Membership: In the beginning, Banna defined three categories of membership, Assistants (*musaid),* Related *(muntasib*), and Active (*Amil),* (with a movement to the higher category). A fourth degree was that of Strugglers (*mujahid),* which was the last stage open to few. After "contracting" to live by the laws of the Society, a member made oath of allegiance (*bayt).*

Communication and Indoctrination: This was an important aspect of the Society's programmes and was carried out through a number of regular publications, like *Majallat al Ikhwan al Muslimin* (a weekly paper), *al Nadhir* (a weekly magazine), besides others. Propagation was also carried out by a series of lectures, often in the form of mass meetings.

Ideology and ideologues

One way to look at the Brotherhood's ideology is to look at its leaders and at how they viewed Islam and defined the goals and objectives of the Society.

Hasan al Banna

He was the founder and charismatic leader of the *Ikhwan* for the first two decades. His ideas were put forward in a gradualist approach over a twenty-year period. He viewed the growth and expansion of the movement in two stages. The first stage was peaceful propagation, aimed at gaining support of the masses. The second stage related to mobilization of select units, which would represent the para-military group. The third phase was militant, characterized by "unrelentless struggle amounting to a holy war (*jihad*), and persistent efforts to achieve the goal, notwithstanding all hardship and suffering".[3] The

3. Al Banna, *Majmuat,* quoted by Ahmad M Gomaa, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Egypt During the 1930s and 1970s: Comparative Notes," in Gabriel R Warburg, Uri M Kupferschmidt, (eds.) *Islam, Nationalism, and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*(New York: Praeger, 1983), p.152.

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aim was to establish a state in which Islam becomes both a belief *(aquida)*, and worship *(ibada)*, a homeland (*watan)*, and a nation (*jinsiyya*), a religion (*din*), and a state *(dawla)*, a holy book *(mushaf)*, and a sword.[4] On the use of violence Banna added that "such a defiance (of authority) is not proper yet in terms of timing. One must choose the appropriate conditions or calculate fully before resorting to it".[5] Despite a clear programme of action, there is a note of restraint here. It is interesting to see how these ideas were elaborated and interpreted.

Sayed Qutub

Sayed Qutub was the leading ideologue of the Brothers, whose views and writings have left a deep imprint on the Society. He worked for the Ministry of Instruction, was both a teacher and a man of letters and was a member of the *Wafd* party in the beginning. He also spent sometime in the US in the late 40s, but returned disgusted and got involved with the Brothers after resigning from his job. Between 1951 and 1966, he produced eight works, five of them in prison. He also wrote a voluminous commentary on the Quran.

Qutub's ideas and militant approach are clearly reflected in his book, *Ma alim fil Tariq*("Signposts"). He wrote the book while in prison; it is more of a political than a religious study. There are references to the Quran and *hadith*, but none to the Muslim Brothers, or Banna, which could be said to reflect his disillusionment with the leadership of the Society. He refers to Maulana Maudoodi[6] who inspired many of Egypt's religious leaders and movements.

Qutub developed two main themes. First was a world view not different from Banna and Rida, that Western civilization was on the brink of failure in spite of its material wealth and achievements. This was due to a lack of system of values and spiritual orientation. And Islam was a way out with its God prescribed moral codes. He also developed the concept of *jahiliya*, the state of affairs in pre-Islamic Arabia. In his view the whole world lived under a new *jahiliya*, which

4. *Ibid.*, pp.152-53.
5. *Ibid.*, p.153.
6. Founder of Jamat-e-Islami in India, and its leader in Pakistan. A contemporary of Banna, Maudoodi advocated revolt against oppressive and unIslamic regimes.

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included the "so called" Muslim countries. A true Islamic society was that which applied Islam as belief (*aquida*), worship (*ibada*), law (*sharia*), system (*nizam*), moral code (*khuluq*), and behaviour (*suluk*).[7] Here he drew from Banna and elaborated his view. The Muslims were not really Muslims if they lived in a state of *jahiliya*. He also developed the concept of *hakamiyat Allah*, or "Government of God", which he borrowed from Maudoodi. The concept of *hakamiyat Allah* can be traced to the *Kharjites*, the splinter group of "seceders," in the time of Caliph Ali.

In the second theme, he prescribed a plan of action. Islam was not to be taken only as theory, but both a belief, *(aquida) and* a plan of action *(minhaj)*. Beliefs must be translated to full adherence. A nucleus group *jamaa* must be formed of even a few, which could be developed into "an organic activist association". The aim is to put an end to *jahiliya*, with all its laws, rules, traditions and values. The group had a difficult task for they were fighting not for political or economic gain, but for their faith. They should not compromise between faith and disbelief and between *jahiliya* and Islam. They should try to win people to their cause through persuasion. The next stage would be to wage an all-out struggle to destroy the bases of *jahiliya* society, and prepare for "resurrection of Islam" to enable it to assume world leadership. He warned that this would imply great hardships, suffering and persecution.

One finds many strains and influences in the thoughts of Qutub. The idea of political legitimacy can be traced to 14th century theologian Taqi ud din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya, who gave a call for *jihad* against a ruler who did not follow *sharia*.

Hasan al Hudaybi

Hudaybi became the General Guide after Banna. He was a judge by training. His views find expression in his book *Duat la Qudat* ("Preachers not Judges"), which is a more sober and moderate version of Qutub's books, as well as his ideas. His book in a way refutes Qutub's arguments and was written while he was in prison in the 60s. He draws from the Quran and *Sunnah* and the ideological framework developed by Banna.

7. *Op.cit.*, Ahmed M Gomaa, p.149.

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Hudaybi stresses that the Islamic government stipulated in the Quran and *sunnah* is one that rules according to Islamic principles, *regardless* of who is the head. It has a right to legislate for pblic good. It cannot prohibit what is specifically ordained, or allow what is prohibited. Establishment of an Islamic government is a collective duty of society. If such a government does not exist, the Muslims are responsible individually for their adherence to Islamic rules. They do not cease to be Muslims because of circumstances beyond their control. He also dismissed the concept of "God's government", as it was not stipulated in the Quran and *Sunnah.*

As for the prerequisites for the Muslims, he stressed that only *shahada and iman* are important, and it is up to each individual to practice his religion as required by Islam. On the means of establishing an Islamic government, he was not so clear. He points to the establishment of an Islamic group, whose purpose would be to guide others, and cooperate for the well-being of the community. The concept of *jahiliya*, to Hudaybi, denotes a situation of "non-observance" and "non-conformity," *not* amounting to renunciation of Islam. The ideas of Hudaybi not only point to an ideological schism within the Society, but offer a moderate and alternate route to achieve its goals.

Umar al Talmasani, who took over the leadership from Hudaybi in 1973, considered Hudaybi's ideas as more representative of the thinking of the Society than those of Qutub. He stressed that the Brotherhood did not favour a revolutionary change though conditions were there for this, unless the government applies Islamic principles before it was too late. The Brotherhood would resort to force to achieve their objectives only if all other means fail, and after proper warning, which points to a little change in thinking.

The fundamental goal of the Brothers was to establish a *nizam al Islami* which means an "Islamic order". To some "Order" meant an Islamic state, and this remains open to interpretation and controversy. But it was *how this* was to be achieved that posed problems. If the writings of its ideologues are a guide, this was to be achieved by overthrowing the existing order in the name of a theocracy. To them, an Islamic state was to be bound by three principles:

1. Quran is the fundamental constitution.

2. Government operates according to the concept of consultation (*shura).*

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3. The executive ruler is bound by the teachings of Islam and the will people.

An Islamic state or order would mean a return to the pure origins....

fundamentals – of Islam, *al salah al salih*. Explaining the Brotherhood symbol of a pistol alongside the Quran, General Guide Abu al Nasr explained, "The presence of the Quran alongside the pistol did not signify murder and assassination. Rather, it was a reference to protection of the truth by force".[8]

It would be worthwhile to take a look at how the government viewed the ideology and activities of the Brotherhood. In 1965, the Legislative Committee of the National Assembly issued a report on the activities of the Brotherhood (recommending passage of a bill giving the President powers to enforce special penalties against its members). The report noted that "The Principles of the Brotherhood stem from a series of epistles and books which they have adopted as their ideology and as their manual of conspiratorial action. Their hatred of society and their call to sever all contacts with it, their desire to throw society back into a state of regression, poverty and underdevelopment, their plots against the state – this has been the inspiration for their actions. In these epistles and books they strive to interpret religion and the Holy Quran in a contradictory and deceptive manner, and try to misrepresent the true call of Islam and its genuinely progressive nature by inventing anti-religious interpretations".[9] The Report noted the following points in the teachings of the Brotherhood:[10]

1. Denial of Arab nationalism.

2. Their defense of class divisions and exploitation.

3. Rejection of patriotism, the family and relatives.

4. The destruction of society.

8. Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p.36.
9. The Report, quoted by Donald Eugene Smith, (ed.) *Religion, Politics, and Social Change in the Third World* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), p.137.
10. *Ibid.*, pp.137-38.

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The Report observed that the Brotherhood strived to gain power by "bloodshed, destruction and ruin".

Political role and activism

Sometime after its inception, the Brotherhood became active in politics. In the early 50s, seeking to earn political recognition, they took part in the campaign against the British. It was at this time that they were able to establish contacts with the army, especially with the Free Officers Group. They supported the revolution carried by the Free Officers in 1952. In 1953, when other political parties were dissolved by decree, the Brotherhood was exempted as an "association", the new regime not risking confrontation. The new leader Gamal Abdel Nasser wanted to use the Society to counter the Marxist left. But the Brotherhood was to discover that Nasser's philosophy of socialism was not close to their Islamic creed. While Hudaybi called upon Nasser to move the country toward Islam, Qutub called for a tougher approach, advocating a seizure of power.

Under Hudaybi, the Brotherhood did not want to merge with the Revolution, or for that matter with any political party. Hudaybi did not accept the three posts offered to them in the Cabinet; he wanted to be "left free," to support the government, and to criticize it. They pressed the government for an Islamic order (calling for an end to gambling and liquor). The government accepted a few of the minor demands. Relations between the two deteriorated as the Brotherhood denounced the agreement with the British on Suez.

The simmering confrontation reached a climax with an attack on Nasser's life by a member of the Brotherhood in Alexandria. Nasser took the opportunity to consolidate his position by outlawing the Brotherhood, putting hundreds in prison. At the same time he tried to establish his Islamist credentials and put these to test by making up with the Brotherhood. In a general amnesty, Brotherhood members were freed, and returned to their posts. But Qutub openly challenged Nasser's leadership, going on to say that it was not an Islamic society or country, but a state of *jahiliya*. In 1965, Nasser announced a Brotherhood plot to kill him and to overthrow the government. Again, hundreds of activists were arrested, including Qutub, who, along with

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two others, was executed a year later. According to Muslim Sister Zainab Ghazali, "If you want to know why Sayed Qutub was sentenced to death, read *Signposts*".[11] It was stated that the trial revealed Brotherhood cells in the army and police; also that the movement was aided by Saudi Arabia. The Brotherhood's activities remained curtailed till Nasser's death.

After the failure of Nasser's brand of socialism and the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, there was a new wave of Islamic revivalism. The new president Anwar Sadat took note of this. He had pre-revolutionary ties with the Brotherhood and needed their support against Nasserite leftists and radicals. He freed the Brotherhood leaders, including General Guide Hudaybi and Sister Zainab Ghazali, allowing them to engage in political activities, getting a pledge from them to keep these limited-both keen to make a new beginning.

In order to placate the Brotherhood, Sadat involved the Brotherhood in drafting sections of the new Constitution, which was amended, making Islam the state religion, and *sharia* "the main source of legislation" But this was not followed by transforming the legal system, which the Brotherhood found lacking. The "Islamic provisions" of the Constitution, or the lack thereof, remained an issue, and figured prominently in religious debate.

The Brotherhood supported Sadat in the 1970 elections, in an effort to check the left at the same time. Support for Sadat was not just electoral; Sister Zainab, along with two prominent members of the Society, publicly supported Sadat, as a true Muslim, who had put a stop to oppression, and as a man "whose piety and strong faith I know well".[12] Sadat allowed the Brotherhood to publish their journal *al Dawah* (The Call), which refrained from calling for revolution, or attacking Sadat. The Brotherhood, while still illegal, continued to participate in electoral activities. Meanwhile, other militant groups adopted Qutub's ideology and tactics, adding to the government's troubles.

Even after Sadat's trip to Jerusalem and the peace treaty with Israel, the Brotherhood did not abandon the conciliatory posture. Under General Guide Talmasani, the Brotherhood did not rise against

11. Quoted from her biography *Ayam min Hayati*. Gilles Keppel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt. The Prophet and Pharaoh*. Originally published in French as *Le Prophete et Pharaon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.42.
12. *Op.cit.*, Ahmad M Gomaa, p.155.

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Sadat, though he said he opposed the treaty from a religious viewpoint. But many did not view it that way, causing a cleavage. To the Islamists and many among the Brotherhood this was a betrayal, and they condemned the treaty and the opening to Israel. They allied with the opposition parties, including those on the left.

Sadat responded by suspending publication of *al Dawah*, banning political activity in the universities and accused Talmasani of trying to overthrow his regime. Hundreds of Islamist activists were arrested, including Talmasani. In the crackdown, a number of Brotherhood publications were banned and ten Islamic societies were dissolved. Sadat also took some religious "steps" to placate the Islamists. It can be said that as the Brotherhood felt confident and strong, Sadat decided to pull the reins, before the situation got out of hand. The crackdown was not against the Brotherhood alone, but against the rising tide of fundamentalism and "rejectionism". The confrontation with the Islamists reached a bloody climax at the anniversary celebrations of the 1973 war in 1981, when Sadat was gunned down by members of the militant *al Jihad group*. This was another turning point for the Islamists and the Brotherhood.

President Hosni Mubarak was also faced with Islamic revivalism, coinciding with developments in other parts of the Islamic world. He also started with a policy of reconciliation with the Brotherhood and, in an implicit understanding, allowed them to function with restraint. While he also consulted them on religion, in his meetings with opposition parties, he stressed their common interest in limiting Islamic extremism. The Brotherhood continued with their electoral and other activities, but neither their organization was legalized nor were they able to get their demand for *Sharia* enacted into law. Mubarak's government, like earlier governments before him, want the Brotherhood to be dependent on his goodwill. One of the Brotherhood leaders has argued: "We are forbidden to argue about the Brotherhood's ideology. Otherwise we would be accused of reviving a disbanded group, and the penalty for this charge is three years in prison ... If we had a party the Brotherhood's "quality" would restrain the (radical) groups' quantity".[13]

While the question of implementation of *sharia* remains a crucial issue and a test for both the government and the opposition, in 1985, Parliament defeated an effort to make *sharia* the law of the land.

13. *Op.cit.*, Barry Rubin, p.36.

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While the government made an effort to tolerate the Brotherhood and moderate Islamists, it followed a tough policy against radicals engaged in violence.

Even though the Brotherhood did not function as a political party, they were free to make political alliances and take part in electoral politics. In the 1984 elections, they provided the *Wafd Party* with the Islamic vote, enabling it to win 58 seats and 15 per cent of the vote. The Brotherhood's share was 8 seats. In 1986, Brotherhood broke off with the *Wafd* and joined the small Liberal Party. With its bigger size, Brotherhood dominated the Party, giving the Brotherhood influence over the Party proper. In the 1987 elections, the Brotherhood led an Islamic Alliance, which included the Liberal, Socialist and Labour Party. The Alliance contested the elections on a platform of economic reform and more democracy and implementation of *sharia*. The Alliance won 60 seats, with the Brotherhood getting 36. Its support for the government was reflected in supporting the ruling National Democratic Party in voting for Mubarak's nomination for a second six-year term.

The Brotherhood in the 70s and 80s was viewed differently, as more rightist and enjoying Saudi patronage. When Sadat allowed them to engage in political activities in the mid-70s, General Guide Talmasani said that he would follow the path of the leaders Hudaybi, the builder of the movement "who defied the forces of corruption in his age", and Banna, the "standard bearer", who "laid the basis for real understanding of true Islam in words and deeds".[14] This signified a move away from Qutub's militant posture. The Brotherhood also resorted to a policy of political manipulation for tolerance and concessions on the part of the government. But this policy did not always work. This led to alienation of groups advocating a more militant approach as advocated by Qutub. This split had been there since Nasser's time, an extremist militant trend led by Qutub and a reformist-pacifist trend led by Hudaybi. The movement also tried to cultivate a new image, in which they denounced revolutionary fervour and dismissed past acts of violence as fabricated.

Under its new image, the Brotherhood has accepted political pluralism and parliamentary democracy and tried to establish credentials as a non-violent opposition movement – yet unable to win legal status as a political party. It continues to demand implementation of

14. *Op.cit.*, Ahmad M Gomaa, p.155.

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sharia and transformation of Egypt into an Islamic society. They continue to demand more political rights, reinforce their institutional base and to win support, among the army, intellectuals, and professionals. Islamic banks and financial institutions, with the Brotherhood's support, offer interest-free financial services. A network of medical, charitable and social welfare organizations is spread throughout the country. It gives the impression of being committed to a peaceful and legal struggle to achieve its goals. Former Guide Talmasani defined the role of the movement as "watchman" and "Guardian" to ensure that the government does not stray from the laws of Islam, forming a form of Islamic pressure group. The new General Guide Muhammad Abu al Nasr sounds a conciliatory tone, saying that "As Muslims, the (government) officials are not really against the implementation of Islamic *sharia*; it is just that there are pressures here and there to delay its implementation. In the end, however, only what is right prevails, everything else disappears".[15] There are hints of compromise, which could be reflecting the changing mood and approach of the movement; "All we ask is that the authorities declare that they agree to implement the Islamic *sharia*. The actual implementation could then begin gradually and quietly until full implementation...",[16] Abu Nasr observed.

The present state of "Islamic insurgency" in Egypt has been linked, in part, to the "divide and rule tactics" of President Sadat.[17] This view does not give the whole picture of either the problem, or the factors surrounding it. But the Muslim Brothers are very much part of the picture, and figure prominently in the "problem," and arguably, the solution. They have been in the vanguard of the Islamic movement for more than six decades. The present government, like the earlier ones, sees them as a threat to its stability.

In a recent crackdown, four Brotherhood leaders were arrested and the government report pointed to their involvement in "terrorist practices", and preparation for "organizational operations" from outside Egypt. The intelligence report identified the "extent and objectives of these activities" as follows:[18]

Exploiting the Humanitarian Relief Committee of to arrange the travel of MB youth abroad under the cover of working on relief

15. *Op.cit.*, Barry Rubin, p.34.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Paul Witter, "Tackling Egypt's Islamic Insurgents," *Middle East International* (4 November 1994), p.19.
18. "Four Muslim Brotherhood Leaders Arrested," Cairo. MENA. 30 March 1995. *FBIS Daily Report-NES*,31 March 1995.

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projects or on commercial projects in Somalia, Yemen, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Brundi;

Exploiting the military conflicts in some of the above countries and areas to get military training on the use of weapons and explosives and prepare the MB...;

Joining extremist religious organizations, especially the terrorist Islamic Group and sending some elements to receive the same military training programmes given to the MB elements in the above areas;

Implementing a plan to use extremist terrorist organizations as the military wing of the dissolved MB and to train military cadres from both sides..

The charge sheet explains why the government views the Brotherhood as a threat. Last year President Mubarak accused the Brotherhood of being behind fundamentalists' violence in Egypt, which has claimed about 700 lives since 1992. The government accused 28 prominent Brotherhood leaders of supporting terrorism and forming a secret organization to oust the government.

In a recent statement in the form of an article titled "Freedom, Elections, and Enemies,"[19] deputy General Guide Mustafa Mashhur urged confrontation with the "enemy" and touched upon a number of themes of concern to the Muslims, ranging from events in Algeria, to the Oslo accord, to electoral alliance in Egypt.

Impact and following

Since its inception in the 20s, the Brotherhood has continued to attract adherents in different parts of the Arab world and Africa. While it is not possible or meant to discuss the local societies in detail, a brief look would give an idea of their role.

A fringe group of the Brotherhood in Egypt, *al jihad* counters the moderate and reformist tendencies of the society. One of its leaders

19. "Brotherhood's Mashhur Urges Confrontation With Enemy", Cairo. *Al-Shab*. 28 February 1995. *FBIS Daily Report-NES*, 16 March 1995.

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Abu al Faraj argued for waging a war against the political enemies of Islam.[20] His views find expression in *Farida al Ghaibah* ("The Neglected Duty"). Faraj contended that the Quran and Hadith are fundamental about warfare and the concept of *jihad* has to be taken literally. For him, the "duty" that has been "neglected" has been *jihad*, and it calls for fighting. Anyone who deviates from the moral and social requirements of the Islamic law is a fit target for *jihad*. *Al jihad* offers a radical and militant version of the Brotherhood. In Egypt, Faraj's views have been applied to both politics and religion, finding practical expression in the assassination of President Sadat.

While the Brotherhood has a similar agenda and goals, it plays a different role in different countries, depending on the local conditions. For example, in Syria, its role is not the same as in Egypt. Since its inception in the 30s, in an anti-imperialist fervour, the Brotherhood in Syria has remained an opposition party. Its early goals were to spread Islamic education and values. After independence, it put forth a programme of Islamic socialism. Unlike in Egypt, it did not have a specific programme of action. It was opposed to the Baathists, Nasserites and the communists. Its main constituency was among the urban small traders and artisans. After Hafez al Assad's rise to power, a schism developed between the northern militant wing and the Damascus-based urban wing, as the interests of the latter's urban constituency found Assad's economic policies favourable. But as the northern militants gained strength, they started struggle against the government. The Brotherhood forms *sunni* opposition to the dominance of a regime identified with the *Alawi* sect. Their tactics included attacks on *Alawi* officials and government institutions. In the 80s, they even tried to overthrow the government. After the government crackdown, the Brotherhood regrouped as Syrian Islamic Front, a broad-based front of Islamic groups, and continued confrontation with the government.

Muslim Brotherhood of Palestine and Jordan were meant by Banna for additional support. Interestingly, its leader in Jordan sought the blessings of King Abdullah for their activities, who allowed them to perform religious functions, but not to interfere in politics. Thus their activities included propagation of Islam and charitable activities. After the 1948 Palestine war and annexation of the West Bank, the Brotherhood became more political. In the 50s, the new

20. Johannes J G Jansen, *The Neglected Duty. The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

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leadership approached and received "licence" from the Prime Minister for an expansion of its mandate and activities. A noteworthy aspect was its close relations with the regime, in contrast with the situation in Egypt. For the government, the Brotherhood was a useful ally against the left. In 1957, when King Hussain banned all political parties, the Brotherhood was exempted, as it has officially been registered as a charity. In practice, it functioned as a political party and took part in elections.

Relationship with the government became strong and mutually dependent. In 1970, when Hussain fought the Palestinians, he was able to rely on the Brotherhood. And in the 70s, in a dispute with Syria, the Brotherhood was allowed at establish paramilitary bases in the north to train Syrian Brotherhood to campaign against Assad. But as they gained political influence, they started criticizing the government, which was not liked by the government. As relations improved with Syria, Hussain blamed the Brotherhood for the strained relations between Syria and Jordan. The first party-based elections in 1991 allowed the Brotherhood to show its political strength. It was not surprising that, with 34 seats, they became the largest parliamentary bloc. In the Parliament, their focus is more on social and religious issues than on economy and defense.

In Palestine, *Hamas* is viewed as an offshoot of the Brotherhood, whence it derives inspiration as well as its agenda for an Islamic order. In a communique, the movement was described as "the powerful arm of the Association of Muslim Brothers". It takes a position on the basis of Islamic beliefs and traditions, and criticizes the Arab states on compromises with the US and Israel. It is opposed to the peace process with Israel and shows its opposition to the peace accords in the form of terrorist attacks against Israel. With strong support in the occupied territories, it offers formidable opposition both to the PLO and the peace process.

Sudan

Sudan offers a variant of the Muslim Brotherhood and an interesting study of its evolution in a different geopolitical setting. There also, the movement rose in the early 20th century, in the post-Mahdist period. Following World War II, rise of the Brotherhood was a reaction to the communist activity, coinciding with the rising tide of nationalism. It is believed that some members of the Brotherhood from Egypt visited Sudan and established its branches there. The

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movement attracted students in particular and led to the formation of Islamic Movement for Liberation (IML), which identified itself with the Brotherhood. In the early 50s, Sudanese students studying in Egypt also joined the Brotherhood there. The two organizations kept close contacts and, in 1954, the Muslim Brotherhood was established in Sudan, under Rashid al Tahir and Hasan al Turabi.

In contrast to Egypt, the Brotherhood did not become a mass organization in Sudan, having mostly students and educated elite as members. They also did not play an active role in politics and formed a political alliance with the Mahadists. It was after Sudan's independence in 1956 that fundamentalism gained in strength along with nationalism. Evolution of the Brotherhood, compared to Egypt, was more gradual and less violent.

The Brotherhood in Sudan did not form a major political party but remained a political force. They advanced a programme of strict adherence to Islam and *sharia*. But, unlike Egypt, they focused on converting the individual than demanding that the government *enforce* Islam. They opposed anything deemed unIslamic, also those groups that advocated elimination of sectarian politics.

The Brotherhood gained from President Jafar Numeri's programme of Islamization and their influence spread beyond the students and young professionals, paving the way for an enhanced political role. While in 1960, parties supported by the Brotherhood got 5 per cent of the vote in the north, in 1986, the National Islamic Front, supported by them, secured 20 per cent vote. The financial power of commercial class gave the Brotherhood leverage in maintaining a sizable urban middle class constituency and establishing links with the army.

President Numeri cultivated the Brotherhood by introducing Islamic banking and similar policies and he used their support to assume dictatorial powers. While he appeased them by introducing *sharia*, this also made religion a divisive issue in Sudanese politics, leading to civil strife. When the Brotherhood felt that its agenda was threatened, it used its political clout and links with the army to seize power. Turabi remains the leader of the Islamic regime that took power in the military coup in 1989, though he denies any formal title or post.

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A western-educated lawyer, Turabi feels that Islam can fill the vacuum left by Western imperialism, Arab nationalism and other ideologies. He is opposed to Saudi Arabia as well as the US, but does not "want to be enemies with the American people".[21] He would like to keep the confrontation limited and condemns the bombing of the World Trade Center by extremist Muslims. Turabi believes that Islamic regimes must come to power by democratic means than through revolution, differing with the Egyptian Brotherhood. On democracy, Turabi believes that the Western concept of democracy is alien to Islam and democracy does not require multiple parties. Rule is a prerogative of God, not people, echoing Qutub's idea of *hakamiyat Allah*. He also feels that there is nothing inherently wrong in peace between the Jews and the Muslims. Undeniably, there are mixed signals in Turabi's philosophy of religion and politics. There is a conscious effort to revise and reform the original Brotherhood ideology, in light of political realities. One tends to agree with the view that in the Sudanese context, "fundamentalism is not inevitably violent, oppositional, or anti-modern".[22]

Interpretation of perspectives

In recent years, "fundamentalism" has been a term both popular and notorious in political discourse, especially in the Islamic context. The triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran not only brought a fundamentalist government to power but also institutionalized "Islamic fundamentalism". This was accompanied by events and developments in other parts of the Islamic world, signifying Islamic revival. Resurgence of Islam and fundamentalism has since been a dominant theme and concern.

While the term fundamentalism is being used rather commonly and loosely, it is worthwhile to take a close look at it. One finds two views on fundamentalism. According to one interpretation, in Islamic history "it is possible to discern a fundamentalist style of Islamic experience that has certain common and continuing features," and there is a "dimension of Islamic experience that includes a vigorous spirit of sociomoral reconstruction and a demand for strict

21. Interview with Judith Miller, "Faces of Fundamentalism," *Foreign Affairs, (New York)* Vol.73, No.6 (November-December 1994).
22. John O Voll, "The Evolution of Islamic Fundamentalism in Twentieth-Century Sudan," in Gabriel Warburg-Uri Kupferschmidt, pp.114-15.

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adherence, without compromise, to a literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet".[23] In a moderate strain, fundamentalism can be viewed as a "series of creative dynamics of Islamic expression". These point to a series of alternate end points of basic Islamic style or tradition: immanence-transcendence, diversity-unity, openness-authenticity.[24]

To Bernard Lewis, use of the term for Islamist movements even in the Muslim countries is "ill-chosen". He explains his objection in terms of the analogy with American Protestantism, as the doctrine and the purposes of the movements and the issues on which they differ with mainstream Islam are very different from those that divide American Christianity from the mainstream churches.[25] To Lewis, the protest of the "so-called Islamic fundamentalism" is not against liberal thought or scriptural criticism, but more *fundamental*, "directed against the whole process of change that has transformed a large part of the Muslim world in the last century or more, creating new structures, and proclaiming new values".[26]

In a recent study on Islamic movements in North Africa, Francois Burgat refers to the "plethora of indiscriminate and misleading labels," *integrisme*, fundamentalism, traditionalism, extremism, militancy, Khomeinism, fanaticism, political Islam,[27] all of which lead to confusion. Burgat prefers to use the neutral term "Islamism".

Despite this tendency to be neutral and objective, one cannot deny the radical and extremist nature of some movements, which calls for an appropriate label. Thus, if a fundamentalist is one "who rejects latitudarian compromise with local custom as polytheism and insists upon a literal application of the Quran and *sunnah* to all local conditions, regardless of how differing they may be...",[28] one could apply the term to the Muslim Brotherhood. There may be some variations and qualifications. Most of the studies refer to them as fundamentalist, implying a movement to return to the fundamentals of

23. *Ibid.*, p.115.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Bernard Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.118.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Francois Burgat, *L'Islamisme au Maghreb (The Islamic Movement in North Africa)*, (Austin: University of Texas, 1993).
28. *Op.cit.*, John O Voll, pp.115-116.

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Islam. One could add that it is fundamentalist in ideology and extremist in orientation.

One way of looking at the Brotherhood is in a sociological perspective. In recent years there have been many interpretations on the social and globalizing role of religion. One of these focuses on the public and private role of religion.[29] Peter Beyer defines public influence as when one or more religions can become the source of collective obligations, such that deviation from specific religious norms will bring in its wake negative consequences for adherents and non-adherents alike. This depends on what *route* religion takes, or is made to take. The Brotherhood focuses on the society as a whole, looking at it as a religious entity. For them there is no division between public and private religion, rather the two overlap. The *public* role of religion is all-pervasive.

Another interpretation that offers insights is by Mark Juergensmeyer who views religious nationalism as one way of reconciling two "heretofore unreconcilable elements–traditional religion and modern politics".[30] This has been a challenge both for these movements and for the states where they operate. Both take different routes, based for one on expediency and for the other on what *it* considers true interpretation of religion.

Juergensmeyer's idea of religious nationalism comes close to explaining the Brotherhood ideology. Since its inception, the Brotherhood could be seen as trying to reconcile the two, traditional religion and modern politics. While they have tried to adapt *religion* to politics (and not the other way round), they have not been successful.

Conclusions and evaluation

Peter Beyer observes that "what conservative religious movements sometimes succeed in doing is making religious or cultural themes the stuff of politics and law".[31] This makes it easier both to study and understand the Brotherhood. They have been able to do just that in Egyptian politics and wherever they are active. But despite their long and hard struggle, they have not been able to ac-

29. Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1994).
30. Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War. Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.191.
31. *Op.cit.*, Peter Beyer, p.94.

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complish their goal or objective. The reasons for this have more to do with their strategy than ideology. Ironically, the slogan *al Islam howa al hul* (Islam is the solution) has not been able to bring them success.

The attitude of the Brotherhood has been compromising and confrontational at the same time. In a setting and system as obtaining in Egypt, it is important what kind of relationship they maintain with the government. And one can discern a uniform pattern; they have started with supporting all governments, from Nasser to Mubarak, and then parted ways. They have done this, sometimes, at the cost of compromising their ideology, sometimes allying with the left. This inconsistency in approach has not served them well. It has been pointed out that the vagueness of their vision and programme is intentional; it "allows the movement's leaders great flexibility in political alliance-making with groups ranging from the right to the left.[32]

On the other hand, almost all governments have used them for their own ends and tried to coopt them against other political and religious groups. This policy is also aimed at not risking confrontation with them. This has been a characteristic pattern, which has served only the short-terms interests of both, but which been counter-productive. It is interesting that it has sometimes allied with the parties on the left to pressure the government, and when it has supported the government, it has been *against* the leftist parties and tendencies. On the other hand, governments, both in Egypt and Jordan, have used them in order to fend leftist tendencies.

Another interesting aspect is that while the Society was dissolved in 1948 and outlawed in 1954 , it continued to function normally at different levels. And though not a political party, its members take part in parliamentary elections in alliance with other parties. This incongruity of policy on the part of successive Egyptian governments has enhanced the political role of the Brotherhood.

While the Brotherhood has a reformist trend from the beginning, and it has moderated its position for sometime, its approach generally has remained confrontational and uncompromising. It has neither been able to be won over (as in Jordan), nor has it been able to overthrow the government, as Qutub would want it (as in Sudan), or show its popularity at the ballot. Thus its role has been more con-

32. Nadia Ramsis Farah, *Religious Strife in Egypt. Crisis and Ideological Conflict in the Seventies* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1986), p.43.

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troversial than constructive or positive. Even a change of tactics and approach over time has not helped it.

The Brotherhood remains a multidimensional and multinational movement. It has inspired religious groups like *al-jihad* in Egypt, and Hamas in Palestine, with Brotherhood chapters in most Arab countries. It has some influence in the religious and political circles in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Despite its chequered and vicissitudinous existence, the Brotherhood enjoys mass support – and promises to remain a strong religious force. Its strength lies in strong ideological commitment, organizational skill, and mass support the reason successive Egyptian governments have been unable to neutralize it or put the ban into effect. In a way, it has institutionalized extremism in politics, inspiring and providing support to extremist groups. While active in social and welfare programmes as well, it has made religion a divisive issue in Egyptian politics. A brief sketch of the Brotherhood elsewhere shows that its evolution and functional patterns outside Egypt are different. Its role in Jordan and Sudan, in particular, is instructive and offers two alternative routes of achieving its goals.

Despite the wave of Islamic revivalism, chances of the Brotherhood being accepted as a mainstream political party are slim. No Egyptian government would be willing to take that risk. At a critical time like the present, the leadership needs to overcome a dilemma and decide whether the Brotherhood wants to be a religious movement or a political party, and revise its orientation accordingly. Trying to be both has not helped being either. This decision may ease the strains and pitfalls of a dubious existence and lead towards a more coherent programme and a more productive role.

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