

Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen: The Muslim Brotherhood

WITHOUT CLOSELY examining *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen* (the Muslim Brotherhood) founded in Egypt in 1928, it is impossible to try to understand modern Islamic radicalism. Al-Ikhwan was the first of its kind to politicize Islam within the context of the colonial age and the first to put into practice the theories of Salafist thinkers such as Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. These two Muslim revivalists, who wrote and preached during the beginning of the 20th-century, espoused that Islam and modernity are compatible and that Muslims lack control over their destinies because they have fallen into fatalism, abandoning the quest for understanding. According to Al-Afghani and Abduh, falling away from their true faith has made Muslim lands vulnerable to Western colonialism.

From the Muslim Brotherhood ranks came Sayed Qutb, who wrote the jihadist pamphlet *Ma'alim* (Guideposts), and many members of the more militant Gammaa al-Islamiya (The Islamic Group) and Al-Jihad as well as Al-Takfir wal-Hijra (Excommunication and Migration). Most leaders of these militant organizations and their members were once members of the Brotherhood. The history of the Brotherhood is intertwined with the events surrounding Egypt's 1952 founding as a Republic.

Al-Ikhwan members once included the late Mohammed Atef, Osama bin-Laden's military

commander, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's political ideologue. The question for those studying Islamic terrorism is, "To what extent did the Muslim Brotherhood influence the suicide bomber Muhammad Atta and the blind cleric Shiekh Omar Abd-al-Rahman?"

Understanding Hasasan-Al-Banna's Egypt

Hassan-Al-Banna, born in 1906 in the delta town of Mahmudiya, saw an Egypt completely dominated by England. By 1919 he was participating in nationalist protests. He and his family witnessed nationalist leader Saad Zaghloul calling for the withdrawal of the British and the granting of independence to Egypt. British high commissioners in Cairo, including the distinguished commissioner Lord

Horatio Kitchener, had governed the country since 1882. Despite being granted independence in 1922, Egypt retained a de facto British high commissioner, who continued to dictate policy to King Fouad and his son King Farouk. England continued to treat Egyptians with contempt, using such racial epithets as "gyppos" and "camel jockey," words that originated with British and Australian troops serving tours of duty in Egypt. Egyptians have typically been weaned on stories of English domination, some real, others exaggerated. One such story is about an English hunter shooting pigeons on an Egyptian

farmer's property. The farmer, seeing the birds he raised for food being killed, tried to persuade the hunter to stop. The hunter refused to acknowledge the farmer, so the farmer struck the Englishman, killing him. In retaliation, British troops razed the village, causing many deaths and casualties. Today, this town is called Damanhour (Flowing Blood) in commemoration.

Al-Banna's childhood education consisted of an Islamic elementary education and learning watch repair, his father's craft. His father, a graduate of Al-Azhar University, was the village's Islamic leader. At the age of 12, Al-Banna was enrolled in primary school and began his association with Islamic groups. He also became a member of the Society for Islamic Morality, whose members were to adhere to a strict code of Muslim behavior, with fines imposed on those who cursed, drank, or smoked. This evangelism expanded to include a membership in the Society for Preventing the Forbidden. At 16, Al-Banna attended Dar-al-Ulum, an Islamic teacher's training college in Cairo where he focused his studies on Tawheed (theology), Fiqh (jurisprudence), Arabic literature, and Kalam (modern Islamic ideology or theosophy). The Hasafiya Order of Sufism also attracted Al-Banna because of its strict observance of scripture, rituals, and ceremonies. He found a sense of cause and importance in joining the order, and he became its secretary, handling charitable social needs. However, his activities were limited to upholding Islamic standards and imposing them on others.

During his 5 years in Cairo, Al-Banna saw Egypt's secular culture as immoral, decadent, and atheistic. He was alarmed also by the reforms of Kemal Attaturk, who abolished the Caliphate. Al-Banna worried that the 1925 establishment of secular Egyptian universities was the first step toward a Turkish-style abandonment of Islam.¹



Al-Banna, finding like-minded men at his school and other universities, came under the influence of Sheikh Al-Dwijiri, who argued that Al-Azhar clerics were not capable of stemming the tide of Western influence. This idea was not new; it reflected the writings of Muhammad Abduh, saying that the Al-Azhar clergy were corrupt agents of the government and that any cleric who helped maintain colonial rule was to be considered illegitimate. The most influential person in Al-Banna's life, however, was Sheikh Muhibb al-Din Khatib, a Syrian reformer who ran the Salafiya Library and helped found the Young Muslim Men's Association. From Khatib, Al-Banna learned elements of organizing the masses and mobilizing disaffected youth.² Al-Banna graduated from Dar-al-Ulum in 1927 and proceeded to teach at a post in the port city of Ismailiah.

Al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood

In Ismailiah, a town on the Suez Canal, Al-Banna's influences caught up with him as he witnessed the exploitation of Egyptian workers by foreigners who ran the Suez Canal Company. In response, Al-Banna and

his colleagues founded Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen. He declared that Egyptian poverty, powerlessness, and lack of dignity resulted from failing to adhere to Islam and adopting Western values and culture. "Islam hooah al-hal" (Islam is the solution to all Egyptian and mankind's ills), a buzzword still uttered today, represents a frustration with socialism, capitalism, and a democracy manipulated to favor the ruling party.

The first 10 years of Al-Ikhwan activities focused on recruiting and establishing branches throughout Egypt. Al-Banna called for a constitution derived from the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, as well as the precedents set forth by the first four rightly-guided Caliphs. He wanted the abrogation of secular law and

the introduction of Islamic law as the law of Egypt. Another aspect of Al-Banna's message was the prohibition of vices such as gambling, prostitution, usury, monopolies, books, and songs, as well as ideas not conforming to Islamic law. Although Al-Banna preached pan-Islamism, he was not opposed to pan-Arabism and Egyptian nationalism. In his pamphlet *Diary of Dawa and Dai'iah*, Al-Banna clearly outlines the early years of the organization saying, "I prefer to gather men than gather information from books."³ He emphasized building the Ikhwanic organization and established internal rules to keep it going beyond his lifetime.⁴

Al-Ikhwan under Kings Fouad and Farouk

In 1936, Al-Banna sent a letter to King Farouk and Prime Minister Nahas Pasha encouraging them to promote an Islamic order. That same year Egypt signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, giving more control and autonomy to local governments. By 1938 Al-Banna called on King Farouk to dissolve Egypt's political parties because of their corruption and the division they caused within the country.⁵ The Brotherhood's tactics began to change from working within the system to advocating an armed revolutionary struggle to facilitate change.⁶ Today, the debate on whether Islamists should work within the system or propagate violence continues within Ikhwan ranks, a debate that has led to the creation of such splinter groups as Gamaa al-Islamiya and Tanzeem al-Jihad.

As early as 1940, guerrilla training camps were established in the Mukatam Hills that overlook Cairo as well as in areas in southern Egypt, with members of the Egyptian officer corps (some affiliated with Nasser's Free Officers' Movement) providing training. So organized was the Brotherhood's militant wing that during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War there was an increase in the types of weapons in its arsenal. That same year several thousand Ikhwan members fought in the Arab-Israeli conflict, increasing the organization's stature and recruiting ability and further cementing its relation-



Hassan-Al-Banna

ship with the Egyptian Army.

When the Brotherhood began, it included political, educational, and social arms. The organization added a militant arm during World War II and established an Ikhwan quasi-judiciary that issued fatwas against those who were judged to have betrayed faith and country. Once the judiciary arm condemned a person, the Brotherhood's militant arm carried out the sentence. Brotherhood activities also included the 1948 bombing of the Circurrel Shopping Complex and the assassinations of internal security officials, Judge Ahmed Al-Khizindaar, and Prime Minister Noqrashi Pasha. In retaliation, King Farouk's internal security apparatus assassinated Al-Banna in 1949, but the Brotherhood endured and has since become intertwined in Egyptian domestic politics.

Ikhwan under Nasser

Anwar Sadat played a pivotal role in bringing together the Brotherhood and members of the Free Officers' Association. As early as 1946, he saw that the two groups had common

aims (the overthrow of the monarchy blamed for the military failure in Palestine) and that the recruitment of officers and infiltration of troops was redundant and often divisive.

When Nasser finally met Al-Banna in 1948, Nasser convinced Al-Banna that gaining a wide base of support among the military through his Free Officers and uniting secular and Muslim officers under the banner of Egyptian self-rule would be more constructive and lead to a quicker revolution than a purely Islamist one. Once liberated, Egypt could determine the best way to govern the country.⁷

Nasser succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy in July 1952 and, with the help of the Muslim Brotherhood, hoped to steer a course toward an Islamic government. But the Brotherhood was rebuffed when Nasser offered it only a ministerial post in the Awqaf (religious endowments) and an appointment to the post of Mufti of Egypt. A deterioration of the relationship between Nasser and the Ikhwan ensued. Nasser's decision to set aside the Brotherhood had much to do with the Coptic Christian and Mus-

lim secular members of his Free Officers' Association who did not espouse Al-Banna's vision of an Islamic Egypt.⁸ Perhaps surprisingly, the Ikhwan talked directly with the British Embassy in an effort to find common ground in destabilizing Nasser's regime, which both France and England saw as being hostile toward them.

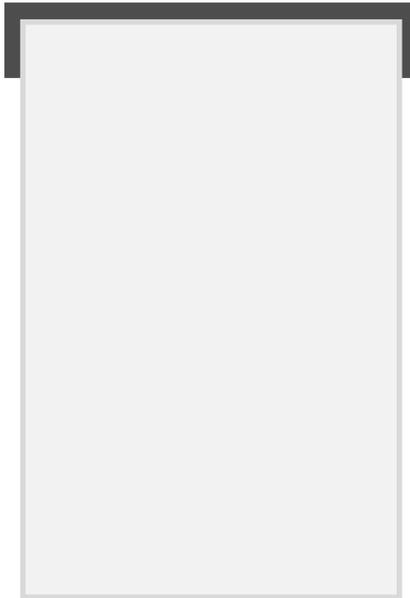
During Nasser's regime, many Brotherhood members were driven underground, and thousands were jailed. Ikhwan writings show that the level of its persecution under Nasser was greater than what they endured during the monarchy. Qutb, influ-

enced by Al-Banna, wrote *Guideposts* during Nasser's reign and formulated his ideas for militant Islam in the jail cells of Nasser's Egypt. Another side-effect of Nasser's crack-down of the Ikhwan involved the dispersal of members to neighboring Arab countries like Saudi Arabia. It was during this time that the strict Wahabi strain of Islam was infused into Ikhwan ideology.

Sayed Qutb's *Guideposts* argues that leaders should be accepted not merely because they are Muslim. They must be selected by the Ummah, and the selected leader must be just, void of corruption, and not an oppressor. Qutb saw Nasser's experimentation with socialism as leading the nation toward heresy. Qutb was executed on the gallows of Tura Prison in 1966.⁹

Like Al-Banna, Qutb's message left an important legacy for militant groups. Muhammad Faraj, another member who split off to become a founding ideologue of Gamaa al-Islamiyah, was, like Qutb, influenced by repression and corruption. In 1982 Faraj published *Al-Farida al-Ghaiba* (The Missing Obligation), referring to Jihad. Faraj writes that abandoning the holy war led Muslims to their plight. He characterized Hosni Mubarak's government as a neo-colonialist regime that had rejected as futile Ikhwan's efforts to work with the regime.

Relations between the Ikhwan and Egypt's regimes have been rocky, ranging from Nasser's suppression to Sadat's liberalism before Camp David but suppression after and finally, to complete suppression under Mubarak. The Ikhwan have also been influenced by Arab Afghans and have been a militant political voice of Islam in Egypt. Gamaa al-Islamiyah (The Islamic Group), established in 1979, and Al-Jihad loosely pursued the organization's militant agenda. To say the three are firmly connected



would be an overstatement; they operate individually and collaborate occasionally when the political opportunity warrants.

Ikhwan Ideologies

The Ikhwan, which has successfully infiltrated elements of the Egyptian Army and police, has also been successful in controlling lawyers', pharmacists', engineers', and doctors' unions in Egypt. The organization also recruits technical university specialists, which has been made easier by Mubarak's complete suppression of any political expression in the universities. In the 1950s and 1960s there

were a variety of student unions that have disappeared under Mubarak's regime. Students are turning to the Brotherhood to express their discontent with government policies and the economy.¹⁰ In *The Messages of Imam-ul-Shaheed Hassan Al-Banna*, Al-Banna characterizes the Ikhwan by highlighting the following principles that unite organizations modeled on the original Egyptian version:¹¹

- Following the Salaf, a complete rejection of any action or principle that contradicts the Sunnah and Quran.

- Striving to implement the Sunnah in every aspect of public life. The Egyptian court system has been used successfully to bring suit against intellectuals and writers deemed heretics. The most famous case was that of Abu Ziad, an Islamic scholar, who was declared an apostate by the Court of Cassations. He was forced to divorce his wife and after repeated threats, he fled to the Netherlands. A climate created by the Ikhwan may have stimulated another tragedy, the 1994 stabbing death of Egyptian Noble Laureate Naguib Mahfouz.

- Increasing Iman (religiosity) by focusing on the purity of hearts.

- Working toward Islamizing the government and assisting in this goal outside the borders of Egypt within the Islamic world.

- Forming sports clubs and committing members to a life of physical fitness.

- Enhancing the knowledge of Islam and the Shariah among Egyptians and others.

- Establishing a sound economic infrastructure through contributions of its members to sponsor Islamic schools, healthcare, and other projects.

- Fostering links with other Ikhwan within the Islamic world and beyond.¹²

These principles have found their way into the dialogues of modern leaders like Omar al-Telmesany, who ran the organization during Sadat's reign as well as into their newspaper *Al-Dawa* (The Call).

Objectives

Introduction to the Dawa of the Ikhwan al-Muslimoon outlines the organization's main objectives. It begins with the self and ends with a united Islamist world in their image by advocating —

- Building the Muslim individual. Building an organized person, strong in body and mind, able to earn a living, correct in worship, and possessing a self-struggling character.

- Building the Muslim family. Choosing a proper spouse, educating children Islamically, and building a community network of family support groups.

- Building a Muslim society. Creating a society starting with individuals and families and addressing the problems of society honestly, realistically, and through open debate.

- Building a Muslim State. The Ikhwan publicly espouses that preparing a society for an Islamic government should be the first step toward Islamization. This means spreading Islamic culture, ideals, and policy through media, the mosque, and charitable works as well as through soliciting membership from public organizations like unions, syndicates, and student unions. This dogma is found in Ahmed Ar-Rasheed's, *The Path*.¹³

- Building the Caliphate. This means building a united Islamic world.

- Mastering the world of Islam. Muslims should control their own destiny within Dar-ul-Islam (The Abode of Islam).

Methods of Education (Tarbiah)

Once a person becomes an Ikhwan member he participates in weekly study units known as Halaqas. There are also monthly Katibah in which several



Gamal Abdel-Nasser (center) at his graduation from Egypt's military academy, 1938.

Halaqas from various enclaves and villages meet to discuss political and religious affairs. There are also trips, camps, courses of study, Islamic workshops, and conferences that Ikhwan sponsors throughout Egypt and the Islamic world. Each member is given a schedule with established goals to complete that require the endorsement of key leaders. This description can be found in Ali Abd-Haleem's, *Means of Education of the Ikhwan al-Muslimoon*.¹⁴

As careful study shows, the Ikhwan have articulated goals, which resonate among Egyptian lower and middle-class societies. In addition, the education system is organized with the dual purpose of mass mobilization and control, much like a military unit.

In the realm of counterterrorism, there is much to be gained by careful analysis of the Ikhwan. For example, looking at the 10 principles of Al-Banna, number three states, "Assume first that you are wrong, not your Muslim Brother, and see how you find the truth impartially."¹⁵ The 10th principle states, "Have sympathy for those who do not see the light; rather than being angry or expose their shortcomings, I never attacked my accusers or detractors personally, but rather sought God's help in making His message clearer to those listening."¹⁶ Such phrases contradict Al-Banna's actions during the violent phase initiated in the 1940s. Armed with this information one can begin to isolate and delegitimize groups willing to work within Al-Banna's peaceful call and those wanting to resort to violence.

Sadly, the organization's current theme has been radicalized by Egyptian Ikhwan contact with Saudi radicals and is expressed in the last two of the five key phrases of the organization's pledge:

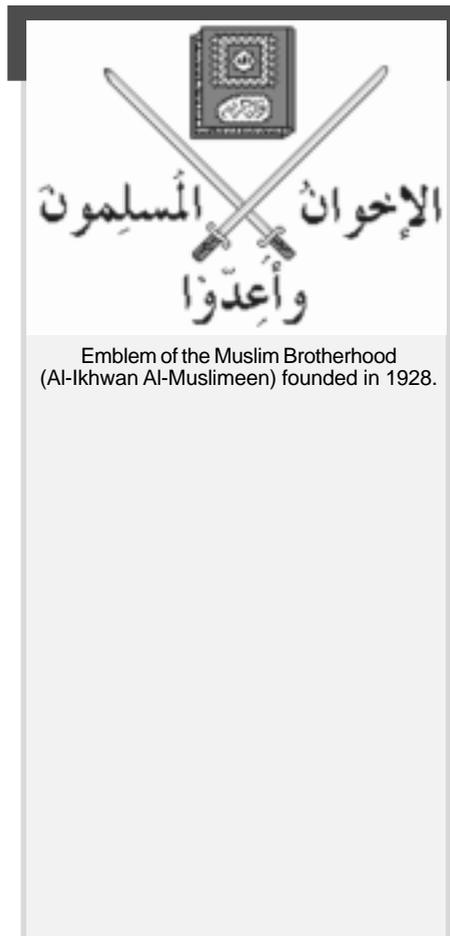
- Allah is our objective.
- The messenger is our leader.

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

- *Quran* is our law.
- Dying in the way of God is our highest hope.
- Jihad is our way.¹⁷

This was never part of Al-Banna's message. The counterterrorism challenge will be to foster the original message of working toward peaceful change as well as encouraging and acknowledging the social service provided to poor Egyptians. Integrating the elements that work with the government and its political system should be part of an aggressive counterterrorism strategy. There is blanket persecution of all Islamists by the Egyptian authorities, without truly delineating between violent militants and fundamentalists. Exploiting the ideological differences between those who want to express themselves politically through violence and others through peaceful means can be used to undermine those really dangerous militants.

Egyptian democracy is eroding. Even as Mubarak tries to stem the challenge of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Ikhwan continues to dominate the lawyers', doctors', pharmacists', engineers', and journalists' unions known as niqabat. The government has stepped in to change the rules, which allowed Islamists to be legally elected into positions of authority. Law 93 of 1995, which would have allowed Egyptian authorities the right to arrest anyone publishing false news, was issued and then



Emblem of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen) founded in 1928.

withdrawn. The journalist syndicate threatened a shut down and Mubarak bowed to public pressure. In 1995, the Mubarak regime manipulated the general elections for assembly seats by changing the wording of the election laws that resulted in mass arrests on the eve of the election. This undermined Muslim fundamentalists wanting to work within the system and empowered jihadists calling for a violent overthrow.¹⁸

The Muslim Brotherhood, inadvertently through dissent within its own ranks, spawned several militant groups. Group splits occurred as early as 1939 with the creation of the "Youth of Our Lord Muhammad Group," which denounced Al-Banna for his compromises with the Egyptian monarchy. In 1973, students aligned with the Brotherhood created Gamaa al-Islamiyah, which gained popularity on college campuses, but was suppressed

by the government of Anwar Sadat.¹⁹ Today, this group's militant and social affairs function is to bring an Islamic government to Egypt. By providing technical guidance through its philosophies and techniques, the Brotherhood has been a source of inspiration to other Islamic militants in the Arab and Muslim world, which makes it an organization worth tracking. Its history is one of sedition and violence. **MR**

NOTES

1. Arabic material cited in this essay represents LCDR Aboul-Enein's translations and understanding of the material; David Commins, "Hassan Al-Banna (1906-1949)," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnama (London: Zed Books, 1994), 131-33.
2. Ibid.
3. Muslim Brotherhood Movement homepage, on-line at <www.ummah.org.uk/ikhwan>, accessed 14 April 2001.
4. The Muslim Brotherhood Movement Homepage seems to have been created in the United Kingdom, and the disclaimer illustrates that the maintainer of the page is not a member of the Ikhwan and does not approve or agree with everything it espouses. The page was created for educational purposes and has no connection to any organization. Nonetheless it is an excellent summary of Brotherhood objectives, themes, and history. No date or author appears on the website.
5. Commins, 131-33.
6. Mir Zohair Husain, *Global Islamic Politics* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 53-54.
7. Abdullah Imam, *Abd-al-Nasser wa Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen: Al-Unf al-Deene fee Misr* (Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood: Islamic Violence in Egypt)(Cairo: Dar-

- al-Khiyal Printers, 1997), 83-90.
8. Ibid., 102-108.
9. Ibid., 92-97.
10. Saad Alfati, "Search into Education and Knowledge: The Ease of Influencing Young Minds," *Rose-El-Yossef*, 4 April 2002, 27.
11. Muslim Brotherhood Movement homepage.
12. Ibid.
13. Ahmed Ar-Rasheed, the *Path*, Muslim Brotherhood pamphlet, undated.
14. Ali Abd-al-Haleem, *Means of Education of the Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*, Muslim Brotherhood pamphlet, undated.
15. Hassan Al-Banna, "The Messages of Iman-ul-Shaheed Hassan Al-Banna," Muslim Brotherhood homepage, accessed 14 April 2001.
16. Ibid.
17. Muslim Brotherhood Movement homepage.
18. Denis J. Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society vs. the State* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 132-34.
19. Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 263-68.

Lieutenant Commander Youssef H. Aboul-Enein, U.S. Navy, is a Middle East Foreign Area Officer currently serving in the Pentagon. For the past several years, he has been working with Military Review to bring Arabic topics of military interest to the pages of the journal. Aboul-Enein wishes to thank Midshipman 2d Class Samuel Boyd, a student of government at the U.S. Naval Academy for editing and providing technical help with this article.