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## **EGYPT AND NORTH AFRICA: POLITICAL ISLAM AND REGIONAL INSTABILITY**

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## Acronyms

AIS	Armeé Islamique du Salut – Islamic Salvation Army (al-Jaish al-Islamiyya li-l-Inqadh)
AQI	Al-Qa‘ida in Iraq (Tanzim Qa‘ida al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn)
AQIM	Al-Qa‘ida in the Islamic Maghreb (Tanzim al-Qa‘ida bi Bilad al-Maghrib al-Islami)
FIS	Front Islamique du Salut – Islamic Salvation Front (al-Jabha al-Islamiyya li-l-Inqadh)
GIA	Groupe Islamique Armé – Armed Islamic Group (al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya al-Musallaha)
GSPC	Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat – Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (al-Jama‘a al-Salafiyya li-l-Da‘wa wa-l-Qital)
IAF	Islamic Action Front (al-Jabha al-‘Amal al-Islami)
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya al-Muqatila bi-Libya)
LP	Liberal Party (Hizb al-Ahrar)
MB	Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSP	Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix – Movement of Society for Peace (Harakat Mujtama‘a al-Silm)
NDP	National Democratic Party (Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati)
PA	People’s Assembly (Maglis al-Sha‘b)
PJD	Parti de la Justice et du Développement – Party of Justice and Development
SLP	Socialist Labour Party (Hizb al-‘Amal al-Ishtiraki)

## **Executive Summary**

Egypt is one of the most important countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and political instability there would likely affect the region as a whole. Experience with Islamist insurgencies in Egypt and Algeria during the 1990s suggests that a radicalization of the Islamist movement in Egypt could pose a massive threat to political stability, especially in the context of attempts by al-Qa'ida and its regional proxies to launch a new, cross-regional terrorist network.

The Egyptian Islamist landscape is dominated by the moderate Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which remains committed to a strategy of formal political participation, rather than violence. Despite the fact that the MB has been subjected to increased repression since early 2006, as yet there are no signs that the organization is revising its accommodationist approach. The radical fringes of the Egyptian Islamist movement, moreover, have largely demobilized and to some extent deradicalized since the late 1990s, though a small portion has joined Osama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida. Nevertheless, there currently is no organizational infrastructure of radical Islamist networks comparable to that of the 1990s, and the terrorist attacks that have occurred in Egypt since 2004 do not signify a reactivation of the old radical groups.

Attempts by al-Qa'ida to spread to Egypt in the form of the newly launched Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have so far been unsuccessful. AQIM emerged from the radical Algerian Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) and remains largely confined to Algeria and neighbouring countries. Moreover, Egypt currently lacks the infrastructure of established radical groups that would allow al-Qa'ida's strategy of "franchising" to succeed there, and attempts by al-Qa'ida to lure former Egyptian radical groups into cooperation have been rebuffed. A potential source of instability, however, is the involvement of Egyptian nationals in the jihadi insurgency in Iraq. Although the extent of this involvement is not clear, should there be a wave of Egyptian jihadists returning from Iraq this could increase the danger of radicalization.

Overall, the immediate risk of destabilization posed by a radicalization of the Islamist movement in Egypt is small. Radicalization in the medium or long term, moreover, is more likely to emerge as a result of continued violent repression of the moderate Islamist movement, rather than external involvement.

## 1 Introduction: Political Islam

Political Islam is without any doubt the aspect of Middle Eastern politics that draws most international attention. Despite this fact, important conceptual questions pertaining to the study of political Islam are still highly contested. One of the most intriguing problems is that of defining what we mean by such expressions as political Islam, Islamism, Islamic fundamentalism, integrism, *Kharijism*, Islamic extremism, etc. to cite just a few of the labels currently in use to denote essentially the same social and political phenomenon. As is immediately apparent from a brief glance at the range of Islamist actors, it is extremely difficult – if not outright impossible – to cite ideological convictions that all Islamist groups have in common beyond a somewhat vague commitment to strengthen the role of Islamic law (*shari‘a*) in public life (and even this is mainly a preoccupation of Sunni Islamists). Not only are there sectarian divisions between Shiite and Sunni actors, but there are also huge ideological differences within each of these camps.<sup>1</sup> More recent studies of Islamism have therefore tended to define their subject matter in non-ideological terms and to instead refer to such broad concepts as the “mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes”.<sup>2</sup> Such definitions quite deliberately do not link the definition of Islamism to a single scholarly conception of what is and is not Islamic, but rather try to accommodate

the variety of contention that frequently emerges under the banner of ‘Islam,’ including propagation movements, terrorist groups, collective action rooted in Islamic symbols and identities, explicitly political movements that seek to establish an Islamic state, and inward-looking groups that promote Islamic spirituality through collective efforts.<sup>3</sup>

If we take such a definition of Islamism as a point of departure, it is necessary to further distinguish between several currents within the broader Islamist movement. According to a typology advanced by the International Crisis Group, the spectrum of Islamic activism can usefully be further divided into political, missionary, and jihadi currents.<sup>4</sup> The first of these types, political Islam, comprises Islamist political parties such as the Jordanian Islamist Action Front (IAF), the Moroccan Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD – Party of Justice and Development), but also formally illegal groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Syria. These groups pursue rather limited political goals and generally refrain from violence. The second current, that of missionary Islamism, by contrast, is characterized by retreat from political activity in the narrow sense, and concentration on proselytizing and preaching activities, or Islamic *da‘wa* (“calling to Islam”). This group is epitomized by the so called “scientific” Salafiyya (*salafiyya ‘ilmiyya*), active in many countries of the MENA region. The third current of jihadi groups is the category of actors that has been at the centre of international attention at least since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. It

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of these problems, see Albrecht, H. and K. Köhler, Dimensionen des politischen Islam im Vorderen Orient: Eine Einführung, in H. Albrecht and K. Köhler (eds), *Politischer Islam im Vorderen Orient: Zwischen Sozialbewegung, Opposition und Widerstand*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008, pp. 11-30; International Crisis Group, *Understanding Islamism*, Brussels, 2005; Schwedler, J., *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.8

<sup>2</sup> Wiktorowicz, Q., Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory, in Q. Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 3

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group, *Understanding Islamism*, p. 1; see also Albrecht and Köhler, p. 13; Schwedler, p. 10

comprises terrorist groups that wage jihad against their national regimes, such as the Egyptian radical groups of the 1990s, militant resistance groups such as the Palestinian Hamas that primarily fight against foreign occupation, and finally transnational networks of international terrorism associated with Osama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida (the Base), that have been attacking the "far enemy", primarily the United States, since the late 1990s.<sup>5</sup>

Matters become more complex still, if we try to make sense of these different orientations by using the common distinction between radical and moderate actors. If we understand the moderate-radical dimension in terms of ideological positions, we will find that there are moderates and radicals in all of the three currents outlined above. Ideology alone, to put it differently, does not seem to predict a group's strategic behaviour. Rather, ideologically radical actors might engage in violent jihad against their respective states, as was the case in Algeria and Egypt in the 1990s, but they might also be allied with their rulers, as the Wahhabiya in Saudi Arabia still is today. Ideologically moderate groups might pursue non-violent, accommodationist strategies as the Moroccan PJD does, but they may equally as well employ militant tactics as exemplified by the Palestinian Hamas. What is more, since Islamists – just as any political actor – interact with their environments on a number of different levels, they dispose of a range of ideological orientations toward different issues that might not be easily denoted as radical or moderate as a whole. Rather, as Jillian Schwedler notes, "the terms *moderate* and *radical* might be applied to *some* positions on a particular issue, but hold little analytic value as wholesale categories".<sup>6</sup>

For the purpose of this report we have chosen to differentiate between moderates and radicals on the basis of the strategies employed by each group. Thus, whereas moderate actors shun the use of violence in the pursuit of their aims, radical groups usually not only condone violent struggle, but often employ it as their main strategy.<sup>7</sup> Ideological systems are used to justify these strategic choices, but do not determine them. We thus think of Islamist movements as collective actors that mobilize for causes they themselves see as Islamic. They do so by employing a whole variety of different strategies, ranging from formal political participation in electoral politics, to preaching and ideological persuasion, to violent struggle and terrorist activities. Which strategy a specific actor chooses depends to a large extent on the political context. Islamists, that is to say, are not actors *sui generis*, but rationally react to the incentives and disincentives for collective action that they face in their specific political environment.<sup>8</sup>

The last few decades have shown that Islamist actors certainly can behave in ways that threaten their countries' political stability. The Islamist insurgency in Egypt from 1992 to 1997 is just one example of this; others include the equally prominent case of the Algerian civil war after 1992, but also lesser known cases such as that of Tajikistan during the same period. On the other hand, the presence of a strong national Islamist movement does by no means necessarily result in rebellion and political instability. Rather, as an analysis of several cases of Islamist insurgencies suggests, Islamist movements radicalize and engage in

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<sup>5</sup> See Albrecht, H., Politischer Islam und autoritäre Herrschaft im Vorderen Orient, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 3, 2006, pp. 11-31; as well as Albrecht and Köhler, pp. 14-25

<sup>6</sup> Schwedler, p. 10

<sup>7</sup> Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003, p. 5

<sup>8</sup> Wiktorowicz, p. 4

insurgencies as a result of specific repressive conditions.<sup>9</sup> Muslims, to put it in the words of Fred Halliday, seem to rebel for “the same reasons as everyone else”.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 The Spectrum of Political Islam in Egypt

In Egypt, there are two main currents of political Islam. The first and by far the strongest current is primarily represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, a moderate organization that combines characteristics of a political party with preaching activities and the provision of social welfare services. On the other hand, there are militant jihadi groups on the fringes of the Islamist movement that challenged the Egyptian state in a prolonged insurgency from 1992 to 1997 and rejected the accommodationist strategy pursued by the Islamist mainstream. Since the end of the insurgency, large parts of the radical groups have deradicalized, but some now form part of the international terrorist network of al-Qa’ida and have thus shifted their focus away from Egypt.

### 2.1 A Background of Political Exclusion

The political environment with which the Islamist movement in Egypt is faced is characterized by entrenched authoritarian mechanisms of rule. The country underwent some significant changes in terms of political development with the introduction of a formal multiparty system in the second half of the 1970s, with altogether seven parliamentary elections under this new system, and with the first multi-candidate presidential elections in 2005, to name just the more prominent developments. Nevertheless these changes did not amount to fundamentally altering the nature of the political process.<sup>11</sup> Formal institutions in Egypt are not invested with real competences; political power rather flows through informal, personalist channels and ultimately remains centralized in the person of the president. The field of political participation in electoral processes is contained by restrictive legislation and informally biased in favour of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP – Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati).<sup>12</sup> The state moreover strives to maintain strict control over societal actors via corporatist arrangements, restrictive legislation and repression, so as to prevent the autonomous organization of political or civil society interests.<sup>13</sup> This political context, of course, has important consequences for any collective actor trying to mobilize support.

Most importantly, the Egyptian state has always denied Islamist actors access to the formal political system. Until recently, the Law on Political Parties (Law 40/1977) prohibited the formation of political parties on the basis of religion and thus constituted a legal hurdle that was used to prevent Islamist participation.<sup>14</sup> These regulations have been elevated to the rank

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<sup>9</sup> See Hafez, M.M., *Why Muslims Rebel*

<sup>10</sup> Halliday, F., Foreword: Rebellion in the Islamic World, in M.M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, p. xi

<sup>11</sup> For details on authoritarianism in Egypt, see Kassem, M., *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004; Kienle, E., *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2001

<sup>12</sup> See Koehler, K., Authoritarian Elections in Egypt: Formal Institutions and Informal Mechanisms of Rule, *Democratization*, Vol. 15, No. 5, 2008, pp. 974-90

<sup>13</sup> On the politics of controlling civil society in Egypt, see Abdelrahman, M.M., *Civil Society Exposed: The Politics of NGOs in Egypt*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2005; on opposition more generally, see Albrecht, H., How Can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt, *Democratization*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2005, pp. 378-97

<sup>14</sup> See Kienle, *A Grand Delusion*, pp. 28-31; Stacher, J., Parties Over: The Demise of Egypt’s Opposition Parties, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2004, pp. 215-33

of constitutional provisions in the constitutional amendments of 2007. The amended Article 5 of the constitution now explicitly outlaws political parties with a religious “frame of reference” (*marga‘iyya*), a revision that specifically targets the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Islamist actors are time and again subject to security clampdowns and face trials before special State Security Courts for membership in an illegal organization and similar charges. Taken together, the Islamist movement in Egypt operates within narrow margins and is to some extent dependent on the regime’s tolerance.

Despite the fact that the Islamist movement is denied formal status, it arguably remains the strongest oppositional force in Egypt. This can be explained by two factors. First of all, the Islamist movement in Egypt possesses considerable mobilization potential and ideological outreach. This is to a large extent due to the establishment in the 1970s and 1980s of a parallel Islamic societal sector, consisting of private (*ahli*) mosques, attached to which were networks of Islamic nongovernmental organizations that provided basic social services such as health care, poverty relief, etc. but also operated kindergartens, cultural centres, and educational institutions.<sup>16</sup> Through these extensive networks, Islamist activists were able to establish links to the population and significantly enhance their ideological outreach. The state reacted to these developments by trying to bring independent mosques under the control of the ministry of Awqaf (religious endowments) since the 1980s, but financial constraints as well as the sheer number of private mosques limited the effectiveness of these measures.<sup>17</sup>

The second reason for the Islamist movement’s prominence is the weakness of secular opposition groups and parties. While these actors are subject to some of the very same restrictions on formal political participation as their Islamist counterparts, they generally lack access to networks of mobilization and outreach comparable to those of the Islamist movement.<sup>18</sup> Thus, especially since the Muslim Brotherhood’s success in the most recent parliamentary elections of 2005, political dynamics in Egypt narrowed down to a bipolar confrontation between the Muslim Brotherhood and the ruling NDP.

## **2.2 Moderate Islamist Actors in Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood (MB)**

The spectrum of Islamist groups in Egypt has always been clearly dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB – al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) as the strongest and most important organization.<sup>19</sup> Founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, the relation between the Brothers and the Egyptian regime historically oscillated between accommodation and repression. Although the MB had initially embraced the 1952 coup d’état that overthrew the monarchy and brought to power a group of military officers led by Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser, the regime started to turn against the Muslim Brotherhood soon thereafter. In the wake of an attempt to assassinate Nasser that was blamed on the MB, the organization was banned in 1954 and those of its members who were not imprisoned were forced underground.

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<sup>15</sup> See Brown, N.J., M. Dunne and A. Hamzawy, *Egypt’s Controversial Constitutional Amendments: A Textual Commentary*, 23 March 2007, Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/egypt\\_constitution\\_webcommentary01.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/egypt_constitution_webcommentary01.pdf) [accessed January 2009]

<sup>16</sup> Rosefsky Wickham, C., *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pp. 93-118

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, pp. 106-8

<sup>18</sup> See Kassem, M., *In the Guise of Democracy: Governance in Contemporary Egypt*, Reading: Ithaca, 1999, pp. 75-125

<sup>19</sup> The classic work on the history of the Muslim Brotherhood is Mitchell, R.P., *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969



As a result, the MB began to develop a more radical ideological outlook under the influence of Sayyid Qutb, who emerged as a major spiritual leader of the organization in the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> In his thinking, Qutb developed the doctrine of *jahiliyya* (pagan ignorance), that continues to influence Islamist groups around the Muslim world to this day. According to Qutb, the Nasserist regime and, by implication, any regime that failed to apply the *shari'a*, must be considered a society of *jahiliyya*. Therefore, he argued, it was a religious duty for every Muslim to work for the overthrow of this regime so as to establish an Islamic state. As an ideological innovation, this doctrine was used as a justification by the radical groups challenging the Egyptian state in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1970s, Nasser's successor Anwar al-Sadat partially reversed the relation between the state and the Brotherhood. Hoping to win the Brothers' support in his struggle against leftist opponents, Sadat allowed the organization to re-emerge. He released the group's supreme guide, Omar al-Tilmassani, from prison and oversaw the reconfiguration of the Brotherhood's activities, as well as the spread of Islamic groups (*gama'at al-islamiyya*) at the country's universities. These developments would lay the foundation for the revival of the Egyptian Islamist movement and contributed to the socialization of a new generation of Islamist activists.<sup>22</sup> They are largely responsible for the Brotherhood's turn toward a more pronouncedly political strategy since the early 1980s.

### **2.2.1 The Politicization of the Muslim Brotherhood**

The 1980s and 1990s saw the Muslim Brotherhood return to political prominence. Since the group was not permitted to field its own candidates, the MB participated, in 1984 and 1987, in electoral alliances with the Wafd Party or with the Socialist Labour Party (Hizb al-'Amal al-Ishtiraki – SLP) and the Liberal Party (Hizb al-Ahrar – LP). In 1984, this resulted in eight members of the Brotherhood winning seats in the People's Assembly (Maglis al-Sha'b – PA), a number that was significantly raised in 1987, to 38.<sup>23</sup> Starting with the 1990 elections, the MB ran its candidates as independents due to a change in electoral laws. The MB's electoral performance since the 1990s has varied pronouncedly. Thus, although the group boycotted the 1990 elections along with most other opposition forces, it nevertheless won five seats in parliament. In the 1995 elections, by contrast, the Brotherhood fielded 150 candidates of whom only a single one won a seat due to massive repression.<sup>24</sup> Despite these negative experiences, the Brotherhood upheld its commitment to formal participation and won 17 seats in 2000 and an unprecedented 88 seats in the most recent parliamentary election of 2005.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Esposito, J., *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 128

<sup>21</sup> Nedoroscik, J.A., *Extremist Groups in Egypt, Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2002, pp. 47-76

<sup>22</sup> It is important to note the plural here. *Al-gama'at al-islamiyya* (Islamic groups) are not to be confused with al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group), the terrorist group that evolved later. On the *gama'at al-islamiyya*, see Beattie, K.J., *Egypt During the Sadat Years*, Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2000; Kepel, G., *Der Prophet und der Pharaon*, Munich: Piper, 1995, pp. 139-87 [original title: *Le prophète et pharaon*, Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1993]

<sup>23</sup> See Hendriks, B., *Egypt's Elections, Mubarak's Bind*, *MERIP Reports*, No. 129, 1985, pp. 11-18; and Post, E., *Egypt's Elections, Middle East Report*, No. 147, 1987, pp. 17-22

<sup>24</sup> See Campagna, J., *From Accommodation to Confrontation: The Muslim Brotherhood in the Mubarak Years*, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 1996, pp. 278-304; for the 1990 and 1995 elections, see also Kienle, *A Grand Delusion*, pp. 52-64

<sup>25</sup> Howeid, A., *Watch This Space*, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23-29 November 2000, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2000/509/eg3.htm> [accessed January 2009]; McDonough, C., *Egypt's Muslim*

The Brotherhood's electoral success in the 2005 elections heavily influenced the regime's attitude toward the group. At the same time, it exemplified several internal developments within the organization that are worth pointing out. To begin with, the 2005 electoral success and the MB's reaction to it again showed that the organization is not easily classified. Rather, the Brotherhood continues to combine aspects of a religious organization primarily concerned with spreading the Islamic call (*da'wa*), with a network of social welfare organizations, and a proto political party.<sup>26</sup> The 2005 electoral success gave new impetus to the process of working toward an organizational separation of the MB's political component from the branches of the organization concerned with *da'wa* and welfare activities. This development is most visible in the discussions surrounding a draft party programme that was launched by the Brothers in 2007. Beyond the ideological aspects, the draft party programme signifies the Brotherhood's continuing commitment to formal participation. Despite the fact that it is highly improbable that the regime will indeed grant the organization legal status, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood seems to regard the formation of a political party as the logical conclusion of its increasing involvement in electoral politics since the 1980s.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the electoral success and the subsequent discussions about the party programme highlighted internal cleavages within the organization. On the one hand, there is an older generation of veterans from the pre-revolutionary Brotherhood. Members of this group, more often than not, served long prison sentences under Nasser and were released by Sadat in the 1970s. The organization's Supreme Guide (*murshid al-'amm*) so far has always hailed from this generation, including the current *murshid*, Mahdi 'Akif. On the other hand, there is a younger generation of activists, the so called middle generation. Socialized primarily in the student movement of the 1970s, they tend to be more politicized in terms of strategies and reformist in ideological outlook. The middle generation is strongly represented in the Brotherhood's political wing, particularly among parliamentary deputies and those active in professional organizations or syndicates.<sup>28</sup> They were a driving force behind the MB's adoption of a more openly political strategy and represent the organization's reformist current. Within the Brotherhood's leadership body, the Guidance Bureau (*maktab al-irshad*), the middle generation is mainly represented by Essam al-Erian, head of the political department, 'Abd al-Mon'im Abul Futuh, and Deputy Supreme Guide Muhammad Habib.

In terms of ideological development, the propagation by the Muslim Brotherhood of an official party programme represents a significant step, comparable to the rejection by the organization of Qutbism in the 1970s. Even before Nasser's death in 1970 and the subsequent rapprochement with the regime of Anwar al-Sadat, then MB Supreme Guide Hassan al-Hodeibi published a rejection of Qutb's ideas on *takfir*, the act of declaring others to be infidels (*kufar*) as a precondition for waging jihad against them. This ideological revision constituted an important point of conflict between the moderate Islamist movement and the

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Brotherhood Enjoys Unprecedented Election Success, *Voice of America*, Cairo, 8 December 2005, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/egypt/egypt-051208-voa01.htm> [accessed January 2009]

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt's Opportunity*, Brussels, April 2004, p. 9

<sup>27</sup> See Lübben, I., Die ägyptischen Muslimbrüder: Auf dem Weg zur politischen Partei?, in H. Albrecht and K. Köhler, (eds), *Politischer Islam im Vorderen Orient: Zwischen Sozialbewegung, Opposition, und Widerstand*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008, pp. 75-97

<sup>28</sup> On the middle generation, see El-Ghobashy, M., The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2005, pp. 373-95; Lübben, pp. 85-7; Rosefsky Wickham, pp. 115-18

radical groups during the 1980s and 1990s. Today, MB leaders acknowledge that Qutb was an influential Islamic thinker, but deny being influenced by his thought.<sup>29</sup> In declaring its intention to form a political party, the Brotherhood began to officially distance itself from some of the views held by its founder, Hassan al-Banna, who had rejected political parties (*hizbiyya*) as detrimental to the welfare of the *umma* (community of believers). Already in 1994, the MB had come out in favour of popular sovereignty and multipartyism, signalling important ideological revisions.<sup>30</sup> This process was carried a step further by the Brotherhood's decision to formally announce its intention to form a political party.

If the fact that there was an MB party programme in the first place signalled ideological development, the various versions of the document itself showed marked conservative influences. Initially, the programme had been crafted by a commission in the *maktab al-irshad* led by Essam al-Erian, a reformist member of the middle generation. When al-Erian was arrested and imprisoned in August 2007, a second commission revised the draft and added more conservative elements to the initial version.<sup>31</sup> The most controversial points included the question of whether the presidency should be open to women and non-Muslims (for which read Copts), and the envisioned council of '*ulama*' (Islamic religious scholars) that, according to the programme, would oversee the compatibility of legal regulations with *shari'a* law.

### **2.2.2 The Backlash Against the Muslim Brotherhood**

If the MB's primary lesson from the 2005 electoral experience so far seems to have been to further consolidate its strategy of formal political participation, regardless of the significant costs associated with it, the regime has drawn altogether different conclusions. Beginning in 2006, the Muslim Brotherhood was targeted by two rounds of repression, one involving the arrest of numerous leaders and activists as well as other forms of security intervention, the other further deliberalizing the legal framework.<sup>32</sup> Since early 2006, at least 2,000 Brotherhood members have been arrested, among them Deputy Supreme Guide Khairat al-Shater. Islamist students were prevented from running in student union elections in October 2006 and similar interventions marred the labour union elections in November 2006 and the Shura Council elections of June 2007. When the repressive campaign continued in the run-up to the 2008 municipal elections and only about 500 of the more than 5,000 MB candidates managed to register, the Brotherhood decided to boycott the contest. On the legal front, the constitutional changes introduced in 2007 specifically targeted the Muslim Brotherhood. The revised Article 5 of the constitution now stipulates that political parties might not be formed on the basis of a religious "frame of reference" (*marga'iyya*), using exactly the term which is often employed by moderate Islamist actors when describing their relation to religion.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the fact that future elections according to revised Article 88 will be supervised by an "independent" electoral commission, rather than by the judiciary, will most probably open the way for electoral manipulation directed against all opposition actors, including the Muslim Brotherhood.

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<sup>29</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism in North Africa II*, p. 10

<sup>30</sup> Lübben, p. 83

<sup>31</sup> *Idem*, pp. 84-90

<sup>32</sup> The following description of the security backlash follows the account in International Crisis Group, *Egypt's Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?*, Brussels, June 2008

<sup>33</sup> Brown, Dunne, Hamzawy, p. 3; in Egypt, the term is used by the unlicensed Wasat party that is led by former MB members, see Utvik, B.O., Hizb al-Wasat and the Potential for Change in Egyptian Islamism, *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2005, pp. 293-306

The question then arises of what effects this level of repression will have on the organization in the medium and long term. So far, the MB and its members have taken security interventions with remarkable stoicism. Over the longer term, however, high levels of repression are almost certain to weaken those reformist forces within the wider Islamist movement that advocate an accommodationist strategy. Since high levels of repression significantly raise the costs of formal participation, it can not be ruled out that forces will emerge within the Islamist movement in Egypt that call for a revision of this strategy. Although this is not necessarily bound to lead to a radicalization of the Muslim Brotherhood itself, it might well contribute to the spread of radical ideas among its followers and to a possible revitalization of the Islamist movement's radical fringes. So far however, radical Islamist groups in Egypt do not show signs of renewed activism.

## **2.3 Radical Islamist Actors in Egypt**

Among the radical Islamist groups in Egypt, two – al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and Gama'a al-Jihad (or al-Jihad, as it is most commonly called) – have gained particular notoriety and were among the most active groups. In the following section we will briefly look at the emergence of both movements in the 1970s, their most active phase of terror in the 1990s, as well as their subsequent development from the end of the violent insurgency in the late 1990s up until today. In the concluding part, we will examine the series of terror attacks that have shaken Egypt since 2004 in order to determine if there is a new cycle of violent jihad with potential international connections.

### **2.3.1 Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad**

The history of both al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad is linked with the Egyptian Islamist student movement emerging in the 1970s. When Anwar al-Sadat succeeded to the presidency after the death of President Gamal Abd al-Nasser in 1970, he sought to counter leftist opposition against his policies by promoting more conservative currents in all sectors of society.<sup>34</sup> Part of this strategy was to encourage the proliferation of so called *gama'at al-islamiyya* (Islamic groups) at the country's universities.<sup>35</sup>

Structurally supported by the regime, the *gama'at al-islamiyya* of the 1970s sought greater Islamization of everyday life, starting from the university campuses, but soon also extending into broader society. Their missionary approach included the provision of voluntary transport alternatives exclusively for female students, the segregation of the sexes in lecture halls, the sale of low-priced Islamic dress, etc. Countering the formerly dominant leftist currents, by 1976 the *gama'at al-islamiyya* held the position of the single most powerful student group at most university campuses.<sup>36</sup>

Soon however, the relationship between the Islamist student activists and the regime began to sour. In order to avoid predictable Islamist opposition to his rapprochement with Israel, Sadat started to turn against the *gama'at al-islamiyya* in the late 1970s. Partly in response to the regime's changing policies from 1977 onwards, a process of radicalization of the student movement set in. Starting with growing militancy in the Islamization of campus life, including the use of violence to prevent "un-Islamic" cultural events on campus, and frequent

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<sup>34</sup> On the significant changes in policy during that time, see Cooper, M.N., *The Transformation of Egypt*, London: Crook Helm, 1982

<sup>35</sup> Kepel, pp. 139-87

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

clashes with leftist students, in the end, several different tendencies within the *gama'at al-islamiyya* emerged as a result of the radicalization process.<sup>37</sup> The more moderate factions turned towards the Muslim Brotherhood, while the more radical factions, predominantly localized in Egypt's poorer south, rallied around Abdel Salam Farag to form al-Jihad in 1980.<sup>38</sup>

While this alliance between activists of the *gama'at* and al-Jihad was relatively short-lived, it did succeed in its most famous coup – the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat by the young lieutenant and member of al-Jihad, Khalid al-Islambouli. Soon after the attack, in 1984, a split occurred within the group due to controversies over strategies, objectives and leadership. While one faction aimed at building up a strong mass movement by focusing on *amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding good and forbidding evil), thus planning to encourage a popular Islamic revolution in Egypt, the other faction preferred a clandestine organization exclusively focused on ridding Egypt of its infidel rulers through means of a coup. The first faction ultimately split to form the Gama'a al-Islamiyya under the spiritual guidance of Omar Abdel Rahman, while the second retained the name of al-Jihad under the leadership of Abdou Zumur. From there on, the two groups would follow diverging trajectories.<sup>39</sup>

When the assassination of President Sadat did not usher in the hoped-for Islamic revolution, and his successor Husni Mubarak launched a massive repressive campaign, many activists of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad either were imprisoned, or else sought refuge in Afghanistan, where they fought against the Soviet occupation.<sup>40</sup> Despite the repressive environment, however, the Gama'a al-Islamiyya managed to resurrect their organization in the 1980s, with strongholds in Upper Egypt, particularly in the governorates of Assiut and Minya, as well as in some of Cairo's shantytowns, particularly Imbaba. In these regions, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya established so called "liberated zones" under their control, in which they enforced their notion of Islamic society, targeting those that did not conform to their standards of acceptable behaviour, including Christian Copts. While the regime initially tolerated these activities since they also included the provision of social services to poor areas neglected by the state, by the end of the 1980s the number of clashes between Islamists and the security forces had increased and the conflict finally culminated in the "liberation of Imbaba" by some 16,000 security forces in 1992.<sup>41</sup> The clashes led to an escalation of tension between the Gama'a al-Islamiyya and the state, and ultimately to the violent insurgency of 1992-1997. Targeting among others liberal intellectuals, Coptic Christians, government officials, and tourists, the wave of terrorist activities finally left 1,442 people dead.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast to the Gama'a al-Islamiyya, al-Jihad never recovered from the organizational break-up and essentially splintered into smaller groups that still shared the same name, as

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<sup>37</sup> See Lübben, I. and Fawzi, I., Ein neuer islamischer Parteienpluralismus in Ägypten? Hizb al-Wasat, Hizb al-Shari'a und Hizb al-Islah als Fallbeispiele, *Orient*, Vol 41, No. 2, 2000, p. 236

<sup>38</sup> Hafez, p. 130

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Lübben and Fawzi, p. 236

<sup>41</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism in North Africa II*, p. 7

<sup>42</sup> Hafez, M. M. and Q. Wiktorowicz, Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement, in Q. Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 71

well as some history.<sup>43</sup> What holds true for its organizational structure also applies to its subsequent campaigns, which included several unsuccessful attempts to assassinate high ranking government officials, such as then Information Minister Safwat al-Sharif, Interior Minister Hassan Alfi, and former Prime Minister Atif Sidqi, all in 1993, as well as President Husni Mubarak himself in 1995.<sup>44</sup>

While the radical groups thus certainly succeeded in spreading fear in Egypt during the first half of the 1990s and badly damaged the country's tourism industry, it increasingly became clear that the insurgency would not lead to the overthrow of the Egyptian regime. On the contrary, the state continued its crackdown on al-Jihad and the Gama'a al-Islamiyya, as well as the wider Islamist movement, dismantling much of the radical groups' organizational structure and jailing about 47,000 suspects, many of whom had not actually been involved in the insurgency, but rather had the misfortune to be related to someone who had.<sup>45</sup> While this did not prevent one of the bloodiest attacks by the Gama'a al-Islamiyya on tourists in Luxor in 1997, in which 58 people were killed, the repressive campaign as well as the violent strategy's apparent futility eventually led the Gama'a's leaders to announce a unilateral ceasefire.<sup>46</sup> At first regarded with suspicion by the regime, the ceasefire ultimately held and the massacre of Luxor was the last act of terror committed by the Gama'a al-Islamiyya. The organization of these attacks has been attributed to some of its external leadership located in Afghanistan and Pakistan, who were not willing to comply with the ceasefire. In 1998 the group's Consultative Council (*maglis al-shura*) formally reaffirmed the call to end all violence, and the initiative was widely supported among members of the Gama'a al-Islamiyya inside of Egypt, many of whom were serving prison terms at that time.<sup>47</sup>

While the Gama'a al-Islamiyya thus demobilized and declared a ceasefire in 1998, the same is not true for parts of al-Jihad. Although the latter group does not possess significant organizational structures in Egypt, some of its members and leaders, who had fled the country during the 1980s and 1990s for countries such as Afghanistan or Pakistan and later on also Chechnya and Bosnia, remained committed to violent jihad as a means toward their aims. Under the leadership of its most prominent member, Ayman al-Zawahiri, these remnants of the Egyptian Jihad increasingly turned towards the international arena, exemplified by the formal merger with al-Qa'ida in 1998.<sup>48</sup>

The Gama'a al-Islamiyya, however, so far has remained true to its rejection of violence, despite attempts by al-Qa'ida to lure the organization into reviving jihad. Moreover, the group significantly revised its ideological position, culminating in the publication of several books, the so called Revised Concepts, in which imprisoned leaders renounced the use of violence, their earlier practice of *takfir* (declaring someone infidel), and several other key ideological concepts.<sup>49</sup> Although questions remain as to the sincerity of these modifications,

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<sup>43</sup> Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, *The Spectrum of Islamist Movements*, Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2007, p. 64

<sup>44</sup> Botha, A., *Politics and Terrorism: An Assessment of the Origin and Threat of Terrorism in Egypt*, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, December 2006, p. 5

<sup>45</sup> Idem, p. 78

<sup>46</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism in North Africa II*, p. 8

<sup>47</sup> Rashwan, D., Struggle within the Ranks, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 5-11 November 1998

<sup>48</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism in North Africa II*, p. 8

<sup>49</sup> Rashwan, D., Two Targets, One Enemy, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 9-15 June 2005

their scope in the end amounts to a complete reversal of al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya’s erstwhile positions.

In addition, the group’s strategies to some extent seem to reflect the ideological revisions. In 1999, members of the Gama‘a al-Islamiyya, together with followers of al-Jihad who had been released from prison, took steps toward the creation of political parties – Hizb al-Shari‘a (Shari‘a Party) and Hizb al-Islah (Reform Party).<sup>50</sup> While both initiatives failed due to the regime’s quite predictable refusal to grant licenses, they do however represent an attempt to play by the rules of formal political participation. Moreover, the Gama‘a al-Islamiyya has consistently rejected any association with international jihadism and al-Qa‘ida. When in 1998, Rifai Ahmed Taha, one of the group’s leading figures outside Egypt, signed al-Qa‘ida’s founding document, he was forced to revoke any affiliation with the Gama‘a al-Islamiyya by its leadership in Egypt. The Egyptian state in turn rewarded the Gama‘a al-Islamiyya for its moderation by releasing most of its imprisoned leaders, as well as nearly 1,000 lower ranking members in 2003.<sup>51</sup>

### **2.3.2 A New Cycle of Violence?**

Despite the demobilization of the radical groups that had been active in the 1990s, since 2004 several terrorist attacks have been carried out in Egypt. The first and most publicized group of attacks took place in southern Sinai over a period of two years, focusing on international tourism and generating large numbers of victims. In October 2004 a single attack killed 34 people in Taba; in July 2005, three parallel explosions in the tourist resort of Sharm al-Sheikh claimed 88 lives, and finally in April of 2006 an attack in Dahab, a popular diving resort on the coast of the Red Sea, killed 23 people.<sup>52</sup>

The second series of attacks took place in the capital, Cairo. The incidents were generally of a much smaller scale than the ones in the Sinai. On 7 April 2005 a bomb killed three tourists as well as the perpetrator himself in the al-Azhar district of Cairo, near the Khan al-Khalili bazaar, which is popular with tourists. Two more incidents took place in April 2005, with a bomb exploding near the Egyptian Museum, and two women opening fire on a tourist bus in the district of Islamic Cairo the same day. In each of the latter incidents, the only lives lost were those of the attackers, who were apparently relatives of the assailant killed in the first incident.<sup>53</sup>

It is doubtful whether these two series of incidents should be seen as initiating a new cycle of violence, not least because of the great difference between the attacks in terms of the degree of professionalism of planning and execution. In the Cairo attacks there was a noticeable lack of sophistication – in the first incident the bomb consisted of a bag full of nails together with explosives, the manual of which was later shown to have been downloaded from the Internet; in the others the weapons were two rusty, old machine guns.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, while several groups claimed responsibility for the Cairo attacks, they seem to have been carried out by an

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<sup>50</sup> See Lübben and Fawzi, pp 240-60

<sup>51</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism in North Africa II*, p. 8

<sup>52</sup> Botha, p. 11

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Sid-Ahmed, M., Terrorism and the Computer, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 21-27 April 2005

isolated small circle of activists, whose connection with international terror groups such as al-Qa'ida is an abstract ideological one at best.<sup>55</sup>

The Sinai tourists resort attacks displayed much greater sophistication, but the background of the attacks is even more obscure. Immediately after the attacks the security forces assigned blame exclusively to local Bedouins. In the aftermath of the first attacks in Taba the security forces thus arrested about 3,000 Bedouins, among them women, children, and elderly people, in what can only be described as an arbitrary manner.<sup>56</sup> While once again several groups claimed responsibility for the acts, the police initially blamed a local group known as al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad (Oneness [of God] and Holy War). Other theories have linked the attacks to the Palestine issue, with Taba being a resort used by Israeli tourists and a Palestinian radical supposed to have been involved.<sup>57</sup> The following attacks, according to this interpretation, were undertaken in revenge for the extremely heavy-handed approach, allegedly including torture, by the security forces against local Bedouins. Later, the security apparatus also suggested a connection to al-Qa'ida, whose involvement they previously were eager to deny.<sup>58</sup>

Irrespective of who in the end is to blame for the attacks on the Sinai, some conclusions can be drawn. Whereas in the previous period of terrorist violence of 1992-1997, the radical groups involved displayed a hierarchical organizational structure, were guided by a clear ideology and long-term objectives, and consisted of thousands of militant members, this is not the case with the group or groups involved in the Sinai attacks. Rather, al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad seems to have been a group limited to about 40 followers concentrated in the northern parts of Sinai.<sup>59</sup> As in the case of the Cairo attacks, their links with al-Qa'ida seem to consist mainly in their adoption of the broader ideological framework of global jihad, but probably not in a clear organizational involvement of the latter. Thus, as an Egyptian expert on Islamism concludes, the attacks must also be seen as “a result of frustrations with the domestic social environment, of social and cultural marginalization, and also of the widespread abuse to which Sinai inhabitants have been subject since the Taba attack in 2004”.<sup>60</sup>

## 2.4 Transnational Linkages

Both the Muslim Brotherhood and the various radical groups have strong transnational linkages, albeit of a decidedly different character. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt could be described as the mother organization of a whole range of national branches of Brotherhood organizations or Brotherhood affiliated political parties all over the Middle East. Members of the radical groups in Egypt, on the other hand, developed transnational ties primarily because they had to leave the country at one point or another, and established contacts and networks in other parts of the world, primarily in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where they found refuge during the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, the Brotherhood, as well as its affiliates in other countries, remains largely oriented toward domestic political issues, while those radicals that

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<sup>55</sup> Abdel-Latif, O., Back Against the Wall?, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 5-11 May 2005

<sup>56</sup> Botha, p. 14

<sup>57</sup> El-Sayed, M., Harsh Aftermath, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23-29 August 2007

<sup>58</sup> Halawi, J. Shadowy Pursuits, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 7-13 September 2006

<sup>59</sup> International Crisis Group, *Egypt's Sinai Question*, Brussels: January 2007, pp. 4-5

<sup>60</sup> El-Shoubaki, A., The New Face of Terror, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 11-17 May 2006



remained active after the end of the insurgency shifted their focus from domestic Egyptian politics to international terrorism. Thus, the radical groups came to rely on their transnational links to a much greater extent than the moderate Muslim Brotherhood.

#### **2.4.1 *The International Muslim Brotherhood***

Founded in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood soon spread to other countries of the Arab World, with national Muslim Brotherhood organizations being established from Morocco to the Gulf, often with Egyptian organizational support. Today, there are firmly established branches of the original Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood all over the Middle East.<sup>61</sup> Some of the groups emerging from the Brotherhood movement, such as the Palestinian Hamas (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya – Islamic Resistance Movement), the Jordanian Islamic Action Front (al-Jabha al-‘Amal al-Islami – IAF), or the Yemeni Islah party (al-Tajammu‘ al-Yamani li-l-Islah) for example, have since become important national political players in their own right. Taken together, all Brotherhood affiliated organizations share a common commitment to strategies of participation in the political systems of their respective countries, rather than relying on violent means to achieve their respective aims. Only the Palestinian Hamas is in some sense an exception to this rule, a fact that is largely due to the exceptional circumstances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Today, the linkage between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its various regional derivatives is largely one of shared ideological foundations and intellectual orientations, a common sense of “Muslim Brotherhoodness”, to put it in the words of Peter Mandaville.<sup>62</sup> Although there is a formal coordinating body, the International Organization (*tanzim al-‘alami*), which tends to be dominated by Egyptians, the national organizations determine their strategies independently and in relation to their respective national political context.<sup>63</sup> The International Organization is thus not a centralized decision making body within a coherent transnational movement, but rather “a loose and feeble coalition scarcely able to convene its own members”.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the Egyptian mother organization and its Supreme Guide (*murshid al-‘amm*) do command special respect in all branch organizations, although in the end, national political considerations generally trump allegiance to the transnational Brotherhood network.

#### **2.4.2 *Transnational Radicals: al-Jihad and al-Qa‘ida***

While most members of al-Jihad, particularly those within Egypt, joined the initiative by al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya’s leaders to end violence in 1998, a faction of al-Jihad under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri rejected the initiative. This faction almost exclusively consisted of so called Arab-Afghans, Egyptians who had fled their country in the 1980s and joined the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.<sup>65</sup> Already from the end of the 1980s, Ayman al-Zawahiri had been a close associate of Osama bin Laden, and many fellow Egyptians populated the leadership ranks of his network. However, at this time, al-Zawahiri was still committed to fight the “near enemy” – the Egyptian regime – rather than the enemy afar, an idea to which Osama bin Laden adhered. In 1998 after al-Zawahiri’s rejection of al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya’s ceasefire initiative, he formally joined bin Laden in establishing the

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<sup>61</sup> Mandaville, P., *Global Political Islam*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 283

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, also see Leiken, R.S. and S. Brooke, The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 2, 2007, pp. 107-21

<sup>64</sup> Leiken and Brooke, p. 115

<sup>65</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism in North Africa II*, p. 5

Global Islamic Front for Fighting Jews and Crusaders, which would come to be known under the name of al-Qa'ida.<sup>66</sup>

While al-Zawahiri brought those factions of al-Jihad located abroad into his alliance with bin Laden, this move was almost unanimously rejected by al-Jihad's leaders in Egypt, whether they were behind bars or not. Al-Zawahiri subsequently resigned from the general leadership of al-Jihad in 1999 and was left with only the small al-Jihad faction he had led into al-Qa'ida. The heterogeneous character of the group had been further accentuated by the heavy security clampdown on the organization during the 1990s, which deprived al-Jihad of a coherent leadership structure comparable to that of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya.<sup>67</sup> Thus, while al-Zawahiri joined al-Qa'ida to eventually become its second most important leadership figure after Osama bin Laden, al-Jihad in Egypt proved unable to settle on a new leadership, and many of its members associated themselves with the peace initiative of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Therefore, al-Zawahiri's association with Osama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida mainly concerns that small part of al-Jihad that operates outside of Egypt, and has done so for the last decades. Within Egypt, by contrast, al-Jihad does not currently have any significant organizational networks.

### **3 Islamism and Political Stability in Egypt and North Africa**

As we have seen Egypt is home to a strong Islamist movement with a dominant moderate organization and some minor radical groups that largely demobilized after the end of the 1992-1997 insurgency. Recently, however, some observers have expressed concern that renewed efforts by al-Qa'ida to launch a cross-regional radical Islamist movement in North Africa could potentially spill over to Egypt and lead to a revitalization of the country's largely dormant radical Islamist scene.

#### **3.1 Radical Islamism in North Africa**

In September 2006 in a videotaped message marking the fifth anniversary of the 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, Ayman al-Zawahiri, second-in-command of the al-Qa'ida network, announced that an Algerian jihadi group known as the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC – Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), had joined Osama bin Laden's global terrorist network. The group affirmed this merger when in February 2007 it took on the name of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), simultaneously demonstrating its ambition to launch a new cross-regional movement of radical Islamist groups.<sup>68</sup>

The history of the GSPC can not be separated from the broader history of Algeria, notably from the history of the Algerian civil war that shook the country from 1992 for more than a decade.<sup>69</sup> The civil war had been triggered by the Algerian military's intervention in electoral politics during the 1991-1992 parliamentary elections. In the first round of these elections in December 1991, the Islamist Front Islamique du Salut (FIS – Islamic Salvation Front) had

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<sup>66</sup> Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, p. 69

<sup>67</sup> Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, p. 70

<sup>68</sup> Steinberg, G. and I. Werenfels, Al-Qaida im Maghreb: Trittbrettfahrer oder neue Bedrohung?, *SWP-Aktuell*, No. 11, February 2007, p. 1

<sup>69</sup> On the historical context, see e.g. Hugh, R., *The Battlefield: Algeria, 1988-2002: Studies in a Broken Polity*, London: Verso, 2003; Stone, M., *The Agony of Algeria*, London: Hurst, 1997

won about 47 per cent of the vote, prompting the military to intervene so as to stop the Islamist party from winning the elections. On the pretext of preventing the emergence of an Islamic dictatorship, the military cancelled the second round of the elections scheduled for January 1992 and forced President Chadli Bendjedid to resign.

The cancellation of the electoral process, the subsequent banning of the FIS, and the indiscriminate repression of the broader Islamist movement, forced Islamist leaders underground or abroad and led to the emergence of a number of radical armed groups.<sup>70</sup> The group that gained most notoriety due to its large-scale attacks and indiscriminate targeting of civilians was the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA – Armed Islamic Group). Founded in 1992, mergers with a number of smaller armed organizations from all over the country in 1993 and 1994 soon made the GIA the most important guerrilla group.

When the attacks by the GIA became increasingly cruel after 1996, including numerous massacres of civilians, this renewed radicalization precipitated the decision by more moderate groups to declare a unilateral ceasefire in September 1997.<sup>71</sup> In the wake of this decision, the GIA largely fell apart with some of its constituent groups joining those calling for a ceasefire and others, disagreeing with the GIA's massive use of violence against civilians, deciding to continue to fight independently. One of the latter groups became known as the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC – Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat).<sup>72</sup>

Because of their intent to keep fighting, the GSPC, along with other groups that had rejected the 1997 ceasefire, was excluded from both the 1999 Law on Civil Concord and the 2000 amnesty offered by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The group continued to fight the Algerian state, employing mainly guerrilla tactics against military targets. Already before the attacks of 11 September 2001, however, accusations were raised against the GSPC concerning alleged links to al-Qa'ida. Though these allegations were raised more forcefully after 9/11, initially the GSPC's strategy of exclusively attacking Algerian targets seemed to suggest that the group remained committed to its primarily national agenda.<sup>73</sup> Since approximately 2005, however, the GSPC has become strongly involved in attacks outside of Algeria.<sup>74</sup> As we have seen the move toward global jihadist strategies was finally formalized in 2007 when the group took the name of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The alliance with al-Qa'ida and the associated change in strategy, however, is far from undisputed within the former GSPC itself. Originally the GSPC had broken away from the GIA because GSPC leaders were appalled by GIA's indiscriminate use of violence against civilians. In the first years of its existence, the GSPC therefore limited itself to attacks on security forces. When the GSPC allied itself with al-Qa'ida, however, the group's strategy

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<sup>70</sup> On the process of radicalization as a reaction to repression in Algeria, see Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, pp. 71-82

<sup>71</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page*, Brussels, July 2004, p. 14

<sup>72</sup> For the GSPC's renunciation of indiscriminate violence, see International Crisis Group, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria*, p. 16, fn. 121

<sup>73</sup> *Idem*, p. 16

<sup>74</sup> Black, A., *Recasting Jihad in the Maghreb*, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 5, No. 20, October 2007, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=4498&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=182&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4498&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=182&no_cache=1) [accessed January 2009]

changed noticeably. In contrast to the GSPC, the AQIM now uses suicide attacks against civilian and foreign targets as one of their main tactics. This led to controversies within the group, pitting its founder and former commander, Hassan Hattab, against its current commander, Abu Mus‘ab Abd al-Wadoud (also known as Abdelmalek Droukkel).<sup>75</sup>

Overall, the GSPC’s merger with al-Qa‘ida does suggest a change in the group’s strategies, from an agenda focused on national Algerian politics to one strongly influenced by the global reach of Osama bin Laden’s network. Organizationally it is unlikely that the merger significantly broadened the group’s reach. Although AQIM was involved in attacks in the countries bordering Algeria, a truly cross-regional movement with unified structures of strategic planning and hierarchical organizational features is unlikely to emerge from the group. Rather, it will probably remain a network dominated by its Algerian background, although it may attempt to reach out to broader North African, especially Mauritanian, Moroccan, Libyan, and Tunisian constituencies.

### 3.2 Islamist Groups in Egypt and Transnational Activism

The question now is whether there is a potential for Islamist groups in Egypt to spread out to the region or to ultimately ally itself with those claiming to represent a cross-regional radical movement. However, it must be remembered that the moderate Islamist movement in Egypt has been ideologically opposed to the version of jihadi Islamism advocated by al-Qa‘ida right from the latter’s inception. With the rejection of Qutbism and its conceptions of *jahiliyya* and *takfir* in the 1970s, the MB renounced the ideological foundations for jihadi activism. Since then, the Brotherhood in Egypt has been vocal in criticizing al-Qa‘ida on ideological grounds; moreover, the group’s peaceful political activities since the early 1980s confirm the Brotherhoods orientation toward accommodationist strategies. In the Algerian context, moreover, from which the GSPC originally comes, the Islamist groups that hail from a Brotherhood background are the three legal Islamist parties, one of which, the Movement of Society for Peace (Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix, MSP), has participated in every government since 1994.<sup>76</sup> The Brotherhood is thus ideologically linked to Algerian forces participating in government, rather than to the radical jihadi opposition in that country.

Moreover, Egypt has not had a sizeable infrastructure of jihadi groups within the country since the end of the violent Islamist insurgency in 1997. Therefore, al-Qa‘ida’s tried and tested strategy of “franchising” did not succeed in Egypt. The radical Egyptian groups of the 1990s either renounced violence, or – in the case of Jihad – are already part of bin Laden’s network, although they do not have a significant presence in Egypt. Thus, whereas AQIM announced its merger with Libya’s Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), as well as the Moroccan and Tunisian Islamic Combatant Groups in November 2006,<sup>77</sup> this strategy of absorbing existing groups was not an option in Egypt. Rather, when al-Qa‘ida’s second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, announced that al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya had joined forces with al-Qa‘ida in September 2006, this was strongly denied by leading members of the group, who once again took the opportunity to confirm their rejection of violence and their doctrinal

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<sup>75</sup> See McGregor, A., Leadership Disputes Plague Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 4, No. 30, September 2007, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=4433&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=240&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4433&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=240&no_cache=1) [accessed January 2009]; see also Steinberg and Werenfels, p. 3

<sup>76</sup> International Crisis Group, *Islamism, Violence, and Reform in Algeria*, pp. 18-19

<sup>77</sup> Kirschke, J., AQIM, the North African Franchise, *World Politics Review*, October 2008, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=2819> [accessed January 2009]

differences with al-Qa'ida.<sup>78</sup> Thus, despite some efforts by al-Qa'ida to establish links with former radical groups in Egypt, the latter's renunciation of violence seems to be sincere. There are two possible explanations for this. Either the ideological revisions that especially al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya has undergone since 1997 have truly changed their religious convictions, or the leaders of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya have learned the lesson that violent jihad was indeed an inefficient means to attain their particular goals during the 1992-1997 insurgency and in the end served them badly.<sup>79</sup> Whatever the truth of this matter, it is clear that AQIM does not have a significant presence in Egypt.

Egyptian Islamists, however, have played a part in the insurgency in Iraq. Figures on Egyptian involvement vary considerably. Some sources, based on the nationality of fighters captured in Iraq, estimate Egyptians to be the single largest group of foreign insurgents, while other samples yield contingents of Egyptians ranging from about 18 per cent of foreign fighters to considerably lower ratios.<sup>80</sup> In fact, some analysts even remark on the conspicuously low numbers of Egyptian activists involved in the Iraqi jihad, especially when compared to those in Afghanistan and Bosnia.<sup>81</sup> Whatever the real numbers, there is no doubt that there are some Egyptian jihadists in Iraq. Since the death of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the late leader of al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), in 2006, the group is actually led by Abu Hamza al-Mujahir, also known as Abu Ayyub al-Masri, an Egyptian national and close associate of Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>82</sup> Apart from this leading figure, however, Egyptian activists do not seem to figure particularly prominently among AQI's activists.

What is more important in the current context, however, is the fact that Islamist radicals fighting in Iraq are exposed to battleground experience and acquire considerable military skills in addition to being subject to the indoctrinating effects of the jihadist environment in Iraq. It can not be ruled out that in the long run, this new generation of Egyptian jihadists will produce effects similar to the returnees from the Afghan jihad in the late 1980s and early 1990s that swelled the ranks of the radical groups during the 1992-1997 insurgency. So far, however, there is no evidence to suggest that returnees from the Iraqi jihad have engaged in terrorist activities in Egypt. Overall, it is hard to clearly assess the danger posed by such a scenario, particularly since we lack reliable figures on the extent of the phenomenon and as it is not unlikely that jihadists leaving Iraq will move on to other arenas of their global war and to ally themselves with radical groups active in other parts of the region, instead of returning

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<sup>78</sup> See Zambelis, C., Egyptian Gama'a al-Islamiyya's Public Relations Campaign, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3, No. 35, September 2006, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=900&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=239&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=900&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=239&no_cache=1) [accessed January 2009]

<sup>79</sup> On the so called "Revised Concepts Series" containing the most important texts documenting the ideological debate within al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, see Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, pp. 313-70

<sup>80</sup> Krueger, A.B., The National Origin of Foreign Fighters in Iraq, unpublished manuscript, Princeton University; Felter, J. and B. Fishman, Becoming a Foreign Fighter: A Second Look at the Sinjar Records, in Fishman, B. (ed.), *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2008, pp. 32-65

<sup>81</sup> Al-Shishani, M., The Salafi-Jihadist Movement in Iraq: Recruitment Methods and Arab Volunteers, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 3, No. 23, 2005, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=621&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=180&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=621&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=180&no_cache=1) [accessed January 2009]

<sup>82</sup> See Bakier, A.H., A Profile of al-Qaeda's New Leader in Iraq: Abu Ayyub al-Masri, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3, No. 24, 2006, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=812&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=239&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=812&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=239&no_cache=1) [accessed January 2009]

to Egypt, where they face prosecution and repression. These caveats notwithstanding, the ongoing insurgency in Iraq has arguably increased the danger of Islamist radicalization all across the Arab world.

#### **4 Conclusion: Assessing the Risk of Political Instability**

Overall, the immediate risk of political instability caused by a (re)radicalization of the domestic Islamist movement in Egypt seems rather small. This is mainly due to two factors. First of all, the moderate Muslim Brotherhood continues to dominate the national Islamist spectrum in Egypt and remains committed to a gradualist and accommodationist approach. Thus, the MB is able to absorb individuals into its ranks who might otherwise be drawn to more radical types of activism and so channels their energies into formal political participation, instead of anti-systemic or violent activities. As long as the Brotherhood is able to exert this absorptive function, the risk of radical groups emerging in Egypt alongside the moderate mainstream is greatly reduced. Secondly, the infrastructure of radical Islamist networks that had been built up during the 1970s and 1980s has been largely dismantled by the repressive state campaigns of the 1990s and has not been reconfigured to this day. What is more, the ideological appeal of radical Islamism seems to have suffered from the 1992-1997 insurgency, as even former activists (notably those of the Gama'a al-Islamiyya) began to revise their ideological conceptions. Both factors inhibit, or at least severely hamper, attempts by external Islamist actors, including those Egyptians who joined the global jihadi movement, to gain ground in Egypt.

The Egyptian configuration has thus proven rather stable in the face of attempts by al-Qa'ida and its regional proxies to induce former Egyptian radicals into cooperation with international jihadi terrorist networks. These attempts have been futile so far and are unlikely to succeed in the near future, in the absence of an infrastructure of militant jihadi activists. For AQIM to really develop into a cross-regional radical Islamist movement as its somewhat pretentious name suggests, the group would need to be able to reach out to functioning structures of mobilization. Thus, al-Qa'ida, as one recent study contends, is more "ideology, mythology, and technology" rather than an organization in the traditional sense.<sup>83</sup> Although al-Qa'ida thus understood might have been involved in the attacks on the Sinai and in Cairo, this involvement is unlikely to have transcended the purely inspirational and ideological level. Organizationally, the attacks on the Sinai have probably more to do with networks of Sinai's Bedouin tribes and their grievances in terms of local underdevelopment; the way in which the Cairo attacks have been executed, moreover, suggests that the perpetrators had little in the way of logistical or practical support by actors experienced in this kind of activity. Most significantly, however, none of the recent attacks in Egypt suggests that any of the radical networks active during the 1980s and 1990s have been revived. Thus, there is no immediate danger of a renewed armed confrontation between Islamist militants and the state in Egypt, or of Egyptian radical Islamists joining AQIM or any comparable network in significant numbers.

This optimistic account, however, needs to be qualified especially with a view to the current state of the relationship between the Islamist mainstream and the Egyptian regime, but also in terms of possible regional developments. As maintained above, the absorptive capacity of the moderate Islamist movement in Egypt may be regarded as a crucial factor in reducing the danger of Islamist radicalization on the fringes. In order for the Muslim Brotherhood to retain

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<sup>83</sup> Mandaville, p. 273

this absorptive capacity, however, joining the group must be an attractive option for individuals ideologically drawn to Islamism. The current wave of repression against the MB might, if it were to continue over a longer period, threaten this attractiveness in several ways. First of all, if the Brotherhood were to be excluded from even what limited access to the formal political system it currently enjoys, as some of the recent developments – most notably the constitutional amendments of 2007 – seem to suggest, this would most likely increase the danger of radicalization. There is a strong connection between political exclusion and radicalization; what is more, if the MB were to lose the ability to act as an important domestic political player in Egypt, the incentives to join the Brotherhood and to commit oneself to its gradualist agenda would certainly be reduced. Thus, the current wave of legal and security repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt – far from serving to contain the challenge of radical Islamism – is likely to increase the danger of radicalization and therefore of political instability over the long run.

A last caveat to the above optimistic picture concerns the possible fallout of the jihadi insurgency in Iraq. Since the available figures on the extent of involvement by Egyptians in the jihad in Iraq are anything but reliable and estimates of numbers range widely, the actual scope of the phenomenon is difficult to determine. Whatever the numbers, however, it is almost certain that it can only impact negatively on Egyptian political stability if a substantial number of highly ideological and experienced radical Islamist fighters were to return from Iraq. In combination with the aforementioned dangers posed by continued repression of the moderate Islamic movement, this could lead to a potentially explosive situation.

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