

The Muslim Brotherhood

By Britt Parramore

As we see changes occurring and daily unrest in the Middle East, it is important to understand one of the major players in the social, religious, and political spheres of influence in the region. The Muslim Brotherhood has emerged as a key organization capable of influencing public perception. As they gain support they become more of a threat to Israel and Middle Eastern peace. They are a shadowy organization who operates under a cloak of secrecy; they claim to be peaceful, although their rhetoric and support of terrorist organizations (mainly Hamas) prove that they are anything but. The current situation in Egypt could very well give The Brotherhood what they sincerely desire, control of a major Arab state. If this occurs it will certainly create a long term risk to Israel and threaten any chance of peace being established in the region.

The Brotherhood also known as al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun was founded in Egypt in 1928. They claim that their original intentions were strictly philanthropic and spiritual, with a heavy emphasis on spreading Islam, however, they soon became a reactionary power to combat European style government being imposed in the Middle East.¹ The Brotherhood's stated purpose is "to instill the Qur'an and Sunnah as the sole reference point for ordering the life of the Muslim family, individual, community and state".² They are in fact an international Islamic terrorist organization that has, over the last eight decades given rise to the jihadist terror groups Hamas and al Qaeda. An Egyptian Muslim named Hasan al-Banna founded the group as a response to the establishment of a secular, non-Islamic government in Turkey and the abolition of the Caliphate, the office of the successor of Muhammad that had stood for centuries as the symbol of Islamic unity and political power. With his Brotherhood, al-Banna wanted to bring back the political aspects of Islam that had left as the Ottoman Empire declined and Western colonialism began. He wrote in 1934 that "it is a duty incumbent on every Muslim to struggle towards the aim at making every people Muslim and the whole world Islamic, so that the banner of Islam can flutter over the earth and the call of the Muezzin can resound in all the corners of the world: God is greatest (Allah akbar)!"³

Born in 1906 in the province of Buhrya in Egypt, Hassan Al-Banna was raised in a strict religious setting⁴ His father was an Islamic leader known as an Imam that held to the strict tenets of Islam. Al-Banna however, developed an early interest in Sufism, a mystical practice of the Sunni sect of Islam, and was a member of the Dhikr Circle, a

¹ Pierre Tristam, "What is the Muslim Brotherhood", <http://www.middleeast.about.com>, 02/12/2011

² "Principles of the Muslim Brotherhood", IKHWANWEB The Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Website, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com>, 02/12/2011

³ Robert Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2008) pg. 14

⁴ Asaf Hussain, *Islamic Movement in Egypt, Pakistan, and Iran*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1998), as quoted in Paison pg. 2

group practicing Sufism. In 1923 Al-Banna moved to Cairo⁵ in Egypt which was then and still is today the most populated nation in the Arab world and was the first to experience sustained modernization and westernization. He was profoundly impacted while being trained at the Dar al-Ulum after witnessing what he perceived as “un-Islamic” practices occurring in Cairo.⁶ In response to the westernization, al-Banna aspired to present an alternate pathway to modernization and material expansion. This pathway became known as The Muslim Brotherhood when al-Banna along with six friends took an oath to be “troops for the message of Islam...brothers in the service of Islam; hence we are the Muslim Brothers.”⁷

The Brotherhood grew fast in Egypt from 150 branches in 1936 to 1,500 in 1944 when membership was estimated at between 100,000 and 500,000. Also, they started to spread out all over the Middle East and North Africa by setting up several branches in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Palestine (soon to be Israel), Syria, Lebanon, and Morocco.⁸ While the general perception was that they were still mainly a social philanthropic organization, scholar Martin Kramer suggests they had “a double identity. On one level, they operated openly, as a membership organization of social and political awakening. Al-Banna preached moral revival, and the Muslim Brethren engaged in good works. On another level, however, the Muslim Brotherhood created a secret apparatus that acquired weapons and trained adepts in their use.”⁹ This double identity is still in play today in countries like Egypt.

The Brotherhood promised to provide the Egyptian people with the means needed to stand autonomously, without the pressure of western powers through the use of Islam and the path that Allah provides. Al-Banna criticized not only westernization, but also the third-world’s inability to create its own success.¹⁰ The Brotherhood made it very clear that they wished to relieve the east from this tumultuous relationship through their message: “The disease afflicting these Eastern nations assumes a variety of aspects and has many symptoms. It has done harm to every expression of their lives, for they have been assailed on the political side by imperialist aggression on the part of their enemies, and by factionalism, rivalry, division and disunity on the part of their sons. They have been assailed on the economic side by the propagation of usurious practices throughout

⁵ Michelle Paison, “The History of the Muslim Brotherhood: The Political, Social and Economic Transformation of the Arab Republic of Egypt”, The Institute for Global Leadership, <http://www.tuftsgloballeadership.org>, 02/12/2011

⁶ Paison pg. 3

⁷ Paison pg. 3

⁸ Stealth Jihad pg 15

⁹ Martin Kramer, “Fundamentalist Islam at Large: The drive for power”, Middle East Quarterly, 06/1996, <http://www.meforum.org>, 02/11/2011

¹⁰ Paison pg 4

all their social classes, and the exploitation of their resources and natural treasures by foreign companies...while through imitation of the west, the viper's venom creeps insidiously into their affairs, poisoning their blood and sullyng the purity of their well-being. But God and the believers will not tolerate this."¹¹

Since its genesis the Brotherhood has aspired to reassert Islam through the establishment of Shari'ah law and Sunni Islamic governments throughout the Middle East including Israel. In the Brotherhood's view, this is the natural, correct and primary endeavor of all human civilization, with the ultimate goal being unification under the Caliphate, or universal Islamic state.¹² According to al-Banna "We want the Islamic flag to be hoisted once again on high, fluttering in the wind, in all those lands that have had the good fortune to harbor Islam for a certain period of time and where the muzzein's call sounded in the takbirs and the tahlis. Then fate decreed that the light of Islam be extinguished in these lands that returned to unbelief. Thus Andalusia, Sicily, the Balkins, the Italian coast, as well as the islands of the Mediterranean, are all of them Muslim Mediterranean colonies and they must return into the Islamic fold. The Mediterranean sea and the Red Sea must again become Muslim seas, as they once were."¹³ Once this is established the goal is to spread the rule of the Caliphate to the entire globe "erasing national boundaries under the flag of Islam"¹⁴

Hassan al-Banna was assassinated February 12th,1949 by agents of the Egyptian government. After his death the organization fell under the leadership of Hassan al-Hodybi and then others before Sayyid Qutb took over.¹⁵ While Hassan al-Banna is considered the founder of the Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb is considered the creator of its dogma.¹⁶ Qutb's writings greatly influenced the members of the Brotherhood from the time his work began to be noticed by the Brotherhood in 1952 when he was placed in charge of the Brotherhood's Department of Propagation of the Message and was the editor-and-chief of the official journal of the Brotherhood called Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon.¹⁷

¹¹ Paison pg 5

¹² Steve Emerson, "Report on the Roots of Violent Islamist Extremism and Efforts to Counter It: The Muslim Brotherhood: Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs", <http://www.investigativeproject.org>, Feb. 11 2011

¹³ Hassan al-Banna, quoted in: Caroline Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan (Encounter Books, 2008),pg 19, As quoted by Emerson

¹⁴ Emerson pg.2

¹⁵ Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke. "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood." Foreign Affairs. March/April 2007, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com>, 02/11/2011

¹⁶ Paison pg 5

¹⁷ Paison pg 6

Taking advantage as the editor, Sayyid Qutb came out in public opposition of the pact Egyptian president Abdel Nasser entered into with the British government in July of 1954. The Egyptian government and military reacted to his opposition by banning Ikhwan al-Muslimoon that same year.¹⁸ The conflict that arose from the shut down of the publication scared the Egyptian military because of the Brotherhood's influence on the Egyptian citizens. The next year in 1955 Sayyid Qutb was arrested and sentenced to fifteen years in prison where he was finally hanged in 1966. Shortly before his death his book Ma Alim Fil Tareeq (Milestones) was published. This book is still considered an invitation "calling people to a revolution in the name of Allah against all of those who suppress his will."¹⁹

Sayyid Qutb's writings remain very influential to this day, especially his work dealing with jahil (ignorant) society which he claims is unjust because it's not based on submission to Allah's will alone. In his view these societies stem from man's exploitation of his fellow man and "those living a jahilyyah lifestyle, namely in a state of ignorance, seek power through domination and mistreatment of others. Therefore, as Sayyid Qutb prescribed within his powerful writings and Hassan al-Banna epitomized through example, Islam must fight against this society from two fronts: the individual and the collective."²⁰ The individual is called to purge all evil that comes from mankind with the primary purpose being living the life demanded by the Qur'an. "We must free ourselves from the clutches of Jahili traditions and leadership. Our mission is not to compromise with the practices of Jahili society, nor can we be loyal to it...Our foremost objective is to change the practice of this society."²¹ On the collective level the struggle against evil must go on in the form of Islamic movements like, what we in the west have become all too familiar with, Jihad. Jihad which was promoted by Banna and Qutb and is today promoted still by the Muslim Brotherhood is: "a declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men and as such it recognizes that conflict is essential in human interaction for the Dar al-Islam (House of Islam). This is the place where the Islamic state is established with the implementation of the Shari'ah. The rest of the world is Dar ul-Harb (House of War) with which Muslims can have only two relations: either to have peace with it on the basis of a contractual agreement or be at war with it."²²

Many of the branches of the modern day Muslim Brotherhood have publicly claimed to embrace democracy; however, the philosophies of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb still have a tremendous influence within the organization and their beliefs are still the beliefs of the Brotherhood today. They continue to be driven by these

¹⁸ Paison pg 6

¹⁹ Paison pg 6

²⁰ Paison pg7

²¹ Hussain pg 11

²² Hussain pg 12

philosophies and the belief that Islam is destined to eventually dominate the world. The Brotherhood has made their intentions perfectly clear by statements on their website that claim they seek “the introduction of the Islamic Shari’ah as the basis controlling the affairs of state and society and unification among the Islamic countries and states liberating them from foreign imperialism.”²³ While this stated goal is no doubt intended for the world it is most desired by the Brotherhood first throughout the Middle East.

In 2007, the Brotherhood publicly stated its first official platform in decades. The platform lays out, in plain terms, their agenda in Egypt and the entire Middle East. It calls for “spreading and deepening the true concepts of Islam as a complete methodology that regulates all aspects of life.”²⁴ They also stated “The Islamic methodology aims to reform the state of limited capabilities to make it a strong Islamic state.”²⁵

The Brotherhood is also active in promoting terrorism against all American interest in the Middle East and especially against Israel. The Brotherhood is a current and active supporter of Hamas in Israel and has pledged violence against Israel who they view as occupiers. In a 2007 interview the Muslim Brotherhood’s Supreme Guide Muhammad Mahdi Akef, pledged 10,000 fighters for Palestine. Later in the same interview he denied the existence of al-Qaeda when he said “All these things are American Zionist tricks...there is no such thing as Al-Qaeda. This is an American invention so that they (America and Israel) will have something to fight for.”²⁶ This is just another example of what Robert Spencer termed as “Stealth Jihad.”²⁷ One of the goals of the Brotherhood is to convince the Muslim world that they are simply a charitable organization and the Americans and Israelis are actually the aggressors. This propaganda mission is attempting to re-write history in the eyes of the Islamic world. This “Stealth Jihad”²⁸ has even gone to the extreme of denying the very historical existence of Israel by replacing the true history with their revisionist version.

“Hamas, which includes military and political wings, was formed by the late Sheik Ahmad Yasinat at the onset of the first Palestinian uprising or Intifada in the late 1987, as an outgrowth of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.”²⁹ The armed faction of Hamas called the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades conduct attacks against Israel and her people in the form of suicide bombings and attack on civilian targets.

²³ “The Principles of the Muslin Brotherhood” ikhwanweb.org, The Muslim Brotherhood’s official English Website, <http://www.muslimbrotherhood.com>

²⁴ Emerson pg.9

²⁵ Emerson pg. 9

²⁶ Emerson pg. 9

²⁷ Spencer

²⁸ Spencer

²⁹ “Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement)” GlobalSecurity.org, 06/2010, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hamas/htm>, 02/10/2011

Politically, Hamas' goal is to transform the State of Israel into an Islamic state by any means necessary and to utterly deny the complete existence of Israel which is also the goal of their founding organization the Muslim Brotherhood. This point was made clear in a section of Hamas' 1988 charter ("The Charter of Allah: The Platform of the Islamic Resistance Movement"), which announced the organizations existence: "This is the Charter of the Islamic Resistance (Hamas which will reveal its face, unveil it's identity, state its position, clarify its purpose, discuss its hopes, call for support to it's cause and reinforcement, and for joining its ranks. For our struggle against the Jews is extremely wide-ranging and grave, so much so that it will need all the loyal efforts we can wield, to be followed by further steps and reinforced by successive battalions from the multifarious Arab and Islamic world, until the enemies are defeated and Allah's will prevails. Thus we shall perceive them approaching in the horizon, and this will be known before long."³⁰

As we see unrest in Egypt and the regime being toppled there, it is important to realize what role the Muslim Brotherhood plays, especially with regard to Israel. Gaza, in southern Israel, shares a border with Egypt. The Brotherhood uses this boarder to keep Hamas supplied with weapons to use against Israelis. Many in the west agree that the "Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas are one and the same."³¹ In fact one of the top Muslim Brotherhood clerics has said "kill Jews to the very last one."³² It has become clear that the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas are rooted in the same ideology that was made clear by a Brotherhood leader who told an Arab newspaper that Egyptians should "prepare for war against Israel."³³ Atiyea Jawwabra, a political science professor at Jerusalem's Al Quds University, told the Wall Street Journal's Joshua Mitnick "If the Muslim Brotherhood groups gain a prominent place in the (Egyptian) Government, this would definitely help consolidate Hamas' hold on Gaza."³⁴ The journalist added "Hamas, whose founder was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, has rejected negotiations with Israel and refuses to foreswear military and terrorist attacks."³⁵ Richard Cohen wrote in the Washington Post "Under a different name (Hamas), the Muslim Brotherhood runs the Gaza strip. Hamas states unequivocally that it wants to eradicate Israel."³⁶

Some claim that the Brotherhood has no chance of seizing control in Egypt because they do not have the support needed to be chosen in the next election. History

³⁰ "The Charter of Allah: The Platform of the Islamic Resistance Movement" as quoted by Andrew C. McCarthy, "Hamas is the Muslim Brotherhood", National Review Online, <http://nationalreview.com>, 02/11/2011

³¹ Tzvi Ben Gedalyahu, "Muslim Brotherhood Message Same as Hamas: Kill Jews", Arutz Sheva, 02/2011, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com>, 02/11/2011

³² Gedalyahu pg. 1

³³ Gedalyahu pg. 1

³⁴ Gedalyahu pg. 1

³⁵ Gedalyahu pg. 1

³⁶ Gedalyahu pg. 1

however does not support that claim. “Running as independent candidates to bypass political restrictions, they won 17 seats in the People's Assembly in 2000, and a further 88 in 2005 - 20 per cent of the total seats. At that point long serving President Mubarak started cracking down on them by banning independent candidates from running and changing the constitution to criminalize parties based on religion.”³⁷ Right now it seems as if the Brotherhood may be the only movement with enough organization in the country to gain the majority in the Egyptian government through free elections. This is further precipitated by the fact that many moderate Muslims view the Brotherhood as simply a charitable organization who shares the same religious beliefs they do.

Initiated as a radical Islamic organization whose purpose it was to spread Shari’ah law, the Muslim Brotherhood has evolved into a political force while maintaining the same radical idealistic views its founder Hasan al-Banna intended. More than just a political and religious organization, they have become socially acceptable and even quite popular in the Middle East and especially Egypt. It is this social acceptance that makes the modern Muslim Brotherhood so dangerous, especially considering the move toward democratic free elections in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries. If the Brotherhood is elected in Egypt, Israel will immediately be threatened as never before. The Muslim Brotherhood has become a major source of conflict in the Middle East though its rhetoric and desire to spread Islam. It is important for those in support of Israel to understand the grave threat the Brotherhood poses for the safety and peace of Israel and her people. The outcome of the current unrest in Egypt will no doubt have a major affect on all Middle Eastern countries a subsequently the rest of the world.

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³⁷ Venita Rainey, “Does The West Need To Fear The Muslim Brotherhood?” 02/2011,
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