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cc:



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**EGYPT: THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD – TERRORISTS?**

*Summary*

1. Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood a religio-political movement. Historic links to terrorism – assassinations in 1940/50s and ideologue Sayyid Qutb modernised the concept of  *Jihad* . Since then, Islamic terrorist groups in Egypt have had only circumstantial links to the Brotherhood (e.g. attracting disaffected members). But Brotherhood is a political threat to the regime – it is the largest and most effective opposition grouping – and thus demonised as 'terrorist'.
2. There is no formal Muslim Brotherhood international organisation. But there is debate and collaboration between national branches. Some are licensed political parties (e.g. Jordan). Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood in all but name.

*Detail*

3. You asked me about the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's involvement in terrorism. President Mubarak told Solana in a conversation about the London bombings that one had to be careful with the Muslim Brotherhood (egram 8679/05). In May, President Bush told visiting Egyptian PM Nazif that the US considered the Muslim Brotherhood a 'terrorist organisation' (egram 5323/05).
4. I am grateful to BE Cairo, BCG Jerusalem, JTAC and Head/RA Terrorism Team for their comments on an earlier draft.

*The History of the Muslim Brotherhood*

5. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB; Arabic:  *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* ) is the largest Islamist movement in Egypt. In short, it is a political movement which sees Islam as the model for social and political organisation, with  *Shari'a*  (Islamic law) being the basis for legislation. The MB was founded in 1928 by an Egyptian, Hassan al-Banna. He saw Islam as having answers not only to religious questions and social behaviour, but also providing a critique of domestic politics and colonialism (after 1922 Egypt was no longer formally a British protectorate, but the military occupation lasted until June 1956).
6. In tandem with its political and religious activity, the MB for a long time had a militant arm. Some of its members fought in the 1948 Palestine war. Both the monarchy and the post-1952 revolutionary government cracked down on MB supporters, and there were tit-for-tat political killings. In 1949, al-Banna himself was assassinated. Although the MB supported the 1952 coup leaders, relations soon soured and Nasser saw them as a threat to his authority. An attempt on his life gave him the opportunity to crack down hard on the organisation.

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7. One of the MB leaders imprisoned during the Nasserist crackdowns was the ideologue Sayyid al-Qutb. Although he was executed in 1966, his published writings have subsequently inspired Islamists in Egypt and elsewhere, including many in al-Qa'ida. *Jihad* was to be waged on *jihali* society (that is, society ignorant of Islam).
8. During the 1970s, President Sadat part-liberalised the domestic political scene, and the MB were one of the beneficiaries. Other Islamic groups also flourished on the university campuses and elsewhere, including radical extremists who used terrorist tactics against the regime. In 1981, Sadat was assassinated by one of these latter groups and Mubarak became president.

*The Muslim Brotherhood under Mubarak*

9. Mubarak's rule (1981-present) has seen two extremist uprisings: the first was at the time of Sadat's killing, the second was during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when westerners – particularly tourists, were amongst those targeted. In both cases, the regime used repressive tactics to put down the violence. Although the historic terrorist groups of this period (*al-Jihad*, *al-Gamaa al-Islamiya*) are now severely weakened, we are beginning to see the emergence of a new phenomenon – small groups inspired by regional events to use violence against western targets. All these groups are distinct from the MB.
10. During Mubarak's rule, the MB has remained outlawed, but has abstained from violence and repeatedly tried to make gains through the parliamentary process. It has fielded candidates in parliamentary elections, standing as independents, sometimes in alliance with other political parties. In the 2000 elections (which were neither free nor fair), the MB won 17 seats in the People's Assembly. They performed better than any of the licensed opposition parties.
11. The MB continues to believe that implementing *Sharia* at national level will address Egypt's social and political problems. However, in the absence of 'full' *Shari'a* much can be achieved through grassroots activism and preaching. Over the last few decades MB strategy has seen reduced emphasis on a quick route to majority rule and more on 'change from below': achieving social change in the absence of political power, proving its competency in the leadership of syndicates and trade unions, and contributing to the 'Islamic revival'. It does this in the People's Assembly, the syndicates, Islamic NGOs and residential districts, and on university campuses. It also preaches patience to its followers, genuinely believing that advancing its agenda by stealth will make it among the primary beneficiaries of meaningful political liberalisation in the future.
12. The MB enforces strict discipline on its members, but critics see this leaving the group inflexible. Some members would rather take a more pragmatic line, working with non-Islamists and even the regime to increase its stake in local and national decision-making processes. In the mid-1990s, some left in an attempt to form their own, more pragmatic party; both the regime and the MB leadership turned against them. Others criticise the leadership's cautious approach, particularly its failure to challenge the regime's foreign policy line. Yet the ageing leadership is unmoved. The political pragmatists must either bide their time or leave for the no-mans-land that is Egyptian opposition politics; the hotbloods must either bide their time or seek more assertive organisations.

*The Muslim Brotherhood international*

13. During the mid-twentieth century, Al-Banna's ideology quickly won over adherents, with branches of the Muslim Brotherhood being set up in many other Arab countries. Where political activity was allowed, they participated in elections. But any democratic openings (e.g. Syria in the 1950s) were soon eclipsed by authoritarianism and MB branches were perceived as a threat to those in power. The confrontation between the Baathist regime in Syria and the Syrian MB was particularly fierce, and when radicals turned to terrorist tactics, the regime launched a wholesale offensive against all elements of the Syrian MB, violent and non-violent.
14. MB branches have adapted to local needs and now pursue national agendas over pan-Islamic ideals. The MB in Jordan has created a political party, the Islamic Action Front, which participates in elections; Jordanian brothers have long been viewed with suspicion because of their accommodation with the

