



MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Quick Facts

Geographical Areas of Operation: Egypt; Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups operate in Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Numerical Strength: Unknown

Founder: Hassan al-Banna

Religious Identification: Sunni

Source: The Counter Extremism Project, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Founded in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood is one of the oldest, largest, and most influential Islamist organizations in the world. The movement was initially intended to spread Islamic morals and create an Islamic state in Egypt by catering to the country's marginalized communities, but quickly became involved in politics. Since 1954, when the Brotherhood was formally outlawed, until Abdel Fattah el-Sisi assumed the presidency of Egypt in 2014, the movement has been sometimes repressed, otherwise tolerated, at one point in charge, but always illegal. While the movement did not immediately join the 2011 Arab Spring uprising in Egypt, its involvement was ultimately pivotal. Since the election of President Sisi, there has been an ongoing crackdown on the group, bringing it to one of its weakest points in history. Moreover, Sisi has taken this effort abroad in recent years, attempting to convince allied countries to declare the Brotherhood a terrorist organization.

HISTORY & IDEOLOGY

The *Jam'at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* (Society of the Muslim Brothers) was founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, a young primary school teacher from the city of Isma'iliyya in southern Egypt.¹ Originally, the Brotherhood began as a community organization, aimed at providing social services. These included education, health, and professional services designed to assist poor and middle class Egyptians² that the government was unable to deliver.

The Brotherhood advocated moral reform and a revival of Islam in Egypt and the Middle East as a means to combat what al-Banna viewed as Western-inspired secularization.³ Al-Banna felt that the weaknesses of the Muslim world could only be cured by implementing Islam as an “all-embracing concept,” meaning that Islamic principles as defined by the Brotherhood (or those educated according to the Brotherhood's theories) should govern every aspect of life.⁴

Al-Banna introduced a multi-stage process through which the Brotherhood could achieve its political goals: it would recruit individuals (a process that could last up to one year)⁵ and indoctrinate them through

tarbiya (upbringing, education). Recruitment and indoctrination were designed to weed out dissenters and to ensure that all members were committed to the Brotherhood's vision and willing to follow its leaders' orders. The recruitment process was explicitly designed to prevent government security officials from penetrating the group. Those individuals and their families would lead Islamic lifestyles and promote the Brotherhood's vision in society. Once the society broadly embraced the Brotherhood's vision, it would implement it at the state level until Egypt was an Islamic state. Eventually, as the tactics proliferated to other countries, all would unify under the banner of a new *caliphate*.

Al-Banna outlined his vision through a series of epistles, including one titled "On *Jihad*." In this piece, he argued that too many Muslims were passively watching as their values were overcome by the brand of modernity that Westernization brought. He called supporters to invest themselves in pressing back against the tide of Westernization. However, al-Banna believed that *jihad* was not restricted to the struggle against *kuffar* (apostates) but was in fact a more comprehensive awakening of Muslim hearts and minds.

In the 1930s, al-Banna's opposition to British rule and influence found expression as his organization began to recruit followers who saw the appeal of its ideology on issues ranging from poverty and education to nationalism and the nascent Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As the movement grew, it faced domestic repression. During this period, a paramilitary wing called the "Special Apparatus" was created, which sought to protect the organization and, more importantly, send operatives to fight against British rule and engage in a campaign of violent activities. Al-Banna's relationship with this apparatus is disputed, but it was blamed for numerous violent incidents during the 1940s, including the 1948 assassination of the country's prime minister.

By the late 1940s, the group was estimated to have around 500,000 members in Egypt.⁶ After al-Banna's assassination in 1949, the government accelerated its repression of the group. Nearly 4,000 members were arrested, and most were not released from prison for years. Hassan Al Hudaiby, a judge, succeeded al-Banna as leader, but struggled in the role. The Brotherhood supported the military officers who ousted King Farouk during the 1952 Free Officers Revolution, and thus anticipated having influence in the new government. But, after a brief period of cooperation, the Brotherhood (along with all other political parties) was outlawed by the first president of Egypt, Mohamed Naguib. Following a failed assassination attempt in 1954, then-Prime Minister and future President Gamal Abdel Nasser escalated the crackdown on the organization, imprisoning most of its leadership, sending many Brothers into exile, and effectively eliminating its domestic activities.

During this period, the most radical tendencies within the Brotherhood emerged, propelled by its chief ideologue, Sayyid Qutb.⁷ While in prison, Qutb wrote his manifesto, *Milestones*, which has since inspired generations of violent *jihadis*. Published in 1964, *Milestones* argued that the Muslim world had regressed to the pre-Islamic state of ignorance known as *jahiliyya*, and advocated *jihad* as a remedy. Qutb thereby cast contemporary Arab governments, including Egypt's, as non-Islamic, and urged his followers to take up arms against them. The Egyptian government responded by banning *Milestones*, incarcerating Qutb and ultimately executing him in 1966.

In the decades that followed, Qutb and Hudaiby would represent competing trends, both within the organization as well as in the world of Islamism more broadly. "Qutbists" typically favored insularity and ideological purity; more importantly, those Islamists who favored Qutb's call for violent *jihad* gravitated towards it. Meanwhile, those following Hudaiby's teachings favored outreach and working with non-Islamists in pursuit of common short-term objectives.

When Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser as president in 1970, he gradually gave greater freedom to Islamists, viewing them as a useful counterbalance to Nasserists who threatened his authority. This, combined with the upsurge in Islamist activity that followed the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, catalyzed an explosion of Islamist advocacy on university campuses. Prospective Brotherhood members were recruited from this new generation of Islamists; for the most part, those who joined the Brotherhood during this

period rejected violent *jihad* within Egypt.

During President Hosni Mubarak's 30-year reign, which began in 1981, the Brotherhood remained an illegal organization but its members were permitted to participate in parliamentary elections as independents. While the 1984 temporary alliance between the Brotherhood and the liberal *Wafd* party proved effective,⁸ the Brotherhood's success at the polls came at a price, as the Mubarak regime viewed its Islamist ideology and its committed following as a significant threat, and thus repressed the movement.⁹ Ten years later, after the Brotherhood won an impressive 88 of 444 contested seats in parliament, the Mubarak regime yet again targeted the group: two chief financiers, businessman Hassan Malek and deputy supreme guide Khairat al-Shater, were arrested and each given seven-year sentences, while constitutional amendments issued in 2007 were designed to restrict religious parties from future elections.¹⁰

Immediately after Mubarak was ousted from power in Egypt on February 11, 2011 as part of what would become the Arab Spring, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was founded by the Brotherhood's internal *Shura* Council in an effort to capitalize on the resulting political vacuum and promote Islamism.¹¹ By the end of 2011, the FJP, due to its support base, funding network, and estimated 120,000 members,¹² anchored an alliance that won more than 47 percent of the seats. In the FJP-dominated parliament, Brotherhood members held either the chairmanship or deputy chairmanship in 18 of 19 committees. Brotherhood leader Saad al-Katatny was appointed parliamentary speaker.¹³ The key issue before this parliament was the selection of the Constituent Assembly, which was tasked with drafting Egypt's next constitution. The Brotherhood had shifted to proposing a balanced system between the president and parliament; a model that was politically popular at the time. In opposition to the Brotherhood's proposal, the Supreme Court of Armed Forces (SCAF), Egypt's highest military body, proposed a system which would ensure the military maintain significant power over the civilian population, something to which the MB strongly objected.¹⁴ The Brotherhood used its dominance in the parliament to chip away at the SCAF's political legitimacy and escalate what had been a dormant power struggle between the junta and the Islamists.

The 2012 presidential elections further ratcheted up tensions between the Brotherhood and the SCAF. The ascension of Muslim Brotherhood leader Abdel Moneim Abouel Fotouh, a moderate who focused his presidential run on social justice,¹⁵ as a leading candidate caused tension within the Brotherhood, in that he disobeyed an intra-group directive that no member should run for President.¹⁶ To quell rising tensions between the FJP and the SCAF,¹⁷ the Brotherhood banished Fotouh.¹⁸ In late March 2012, the Brotherhood nominated FJP chairman Mohammed Morsi from the final list that featured thirteen candidates, after their first choice candidate, Khairat al-Shater, was disqualified.¹⁹ The elections took place on May 23-24, 2012, with Morsi ultimately securing victory.²⁰

Due to domestic political instability,²¹ when Morsi was sworn in on June 30, 2012, there was no parliament, no new constitution, and his precise powers were undefined. On August 12, Morsi used a major attack in the Sinai the previous week as a pretext for firing leadership in the SCAF, promoting director of military intelligence²² Abdel Fatah al-Sisi to defense minister, and issuing a new constitutional declaration granting himself legislative power until a new parliament was sworn in.²³ This act (technically) made Morsi Egypt's undisputed power holder.

When court rulings threatened a second constitutional assembly, the makeup of which was favorable to Morsi and the FJP, Morsi issued constitutional declaration that protected it, as well as himself, from court rulings.²⁴ When mass protests broke out,²⁵ Morsi used the ensuing political crisis to forcibly ratify a theocratic constitution.²⁶ Violent protests against Morsi erupted with growing regularity, the economy deteriorated, lines for gas extended around city blocks, and power shortages created outages lasting many hours on end.²⁷ On June 30, 2013, only one year after the inauguration of Morsi, millions of Egyptians took to the streets demanding Morsi's resignation. When he refused to compromise, the military ousted Morsi from power on July 3, 2013.

After negotiations between the new government and the Brotherhood (whose members filled city

streets in protest of the coup)²⁸ failed, Egyptian security forces stormed two protest camps and violently cleared the protesters on August 14, 2013, killing at least 800 civilians.²⁹ After the Rabaa massacre, marking the end of the Arab Spring, the government arrested tens of thousands of Brotherhood leaders and supporters and killed at least 1,000.³⁰ Then, following a massive car bomb in al-Mansoura that killed 15 people in December 2013, the Egyptian government labeled the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group.³¹ In August 2014, an Egyptian court ruled that the FJP must be dissolved and ordered the government to seize its assets.³² Following the court ruling, members of the political party were forced underground or exiled to other countries.

GLOBAL REACH

Although suppressed and covert for most of its history, the Muslim Brotherhood has nonetheless expanded its activities throughout the Muslim world, most significantly in Egypt's neighboring countries—Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories—in addition to the Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, and Bahrain. However, offshoots and affiliates have remained largely autonomous from their Egyptian base, and operate independently from one another, making it inaccurate to characterize the Brotherhood as a coherent, homogenous organization.³³

Palestinian Territories

In what is today the Palestinian territories, the movement began in 1935 as primarily a social and religious group – one which included the creation of associations, schools, and the establishment of mosques intended to “bring an Islamic generation up.”³⁴ It was only in 1987, in the context of the first *Intifada* (Palestinian uprising), that the Brotherhood became politicized with the Islamic Resistance Movement, more commonly known as Hamas.³⁵

Since that time, Hamas has evolved into a powerful geopolitical actor. It ranks as one of the world's most significant extremist organizations, with its military faction – the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades – carrying out a multitude of attacks against Israeli civilian targets and population centers over the past three decades.³⁶ In late 2006, the organization unexpectedly dominated legislative elections in the Gaza Strip, and thereafter took control of the territory. Hamas' administration of Gaza has been fraught with controversy, and humanitarian conditions there have markedly worsened in recent years as a result of its misrule.³⁷ Attacks against Israel have also continued, prompting periodic military confrontations and clashes – including 2012's Operation Pillar of Defense and 2014's Operation Protective Edge – designed to erode the movement's military capabilities.

Hamas maintains a contentious relationship with the Palestinian Authority, which governs the Gaza Strip. Repeated attempts for a “unity government” between the two factions (the most recent in September 2020) have so far failed to establish a lasting truce. Notably, Hamas has evolved to function independently from the Brotherhood's original branch in neighboring Egypt, and now maintains a number of positions at odds with those of its Egyptian counterpart – most prominently a significant and ongoing strategic dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Iran, which (despite political differences in recent years) continues to provide the group with funding and materiel.³⁸

Syria

Following the 1963 Ba'athist coup in Syria, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) was outlawed and its leader, Isam al-Attar, was exiled. In 1970, the Brotherhood became the main opposition force challenging the ruling Assad clan. This relationship would change several times between then and now, however, oscillating between open armed struggle, devastating repression,³⁹ and public mutual support. Notably, in

1979, Brotherhood members killed over 80 unarmed Alawi cadets at a military training facility in Aleppo, leading the Assad regime to issue Law Number 49 in 1980. Under Law 49, membership in or association with the SMB became a capital crime.⁴⁰ Part of the Brotherhood's acquiescence to the Assad regime in the late 1990s was a product of the revision of Law Number 49, as well as the promise of freedom or repatriation for imprisoned and foreign-exiled Brotherhood members.

The SMB and its then-newly elected leader, Riad al-Shaqfa, supported the Assad regime until the Syrian uprising began in 2011, when the Brotherhood joined the anti-regime movement after the Assad regime killed thousands of protesters.⁴¹ During the course of the Syrian civil war, SMB members chaired relief committees that distributed aid and money to the rebels.⁴² In the fall of 2014, al-Shaqfeh stepped down and was replaced as SMB head by Mohammad Hikmat Walid.⁴³ Over the course of the war, continuing to today, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's influence has diminished while much of its leadership remains exiled in Istanbul.⁴⁴ However, despite membership in the Brotherhood remaining punishable by death, some members have reportedly begun to return to opposition-held regions of the country in recent years.⁴⁵

Jordan

In Jordan, the Brotherhood was the country's oldest and largest Islamist organization. The group was initially approved by the government as a charity organization affiliated with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Known as the Muslim Brotherhood Group (MBG) since 1953, it was authorized as an Islamic religious organization.⁴⁶

Like the SMB, the MBG positioned itself as a leading player in the 2011 anti-government protests that accompanied the onset of the "Arab Spring" by denouncing public corruption and poverty.⁴⁷ This drew the attention and ire of King Abdullah II, who has spent the last decade restricting the abilities of the MBG to participate in political and social life while demonizing the group in various media outlets.⁴⁸ In July 2020, the Jordanian government formally dissolved the MBG (a decision the group has announced it would appeal).⁴⁹ The Brotherhood's political arm in Jordan, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), as well as offshoots born from interparty divisions (including the National Congress Party and the Muslim Brotherhood Society) have attempted to secularize their messages and curry favor with the Jordanian monarchy, likely so they can remain politically relevant and advance their policy goals.⁵⁰ Notably, despite the ban on the MBG, the IAF remains a legal entity and participated in the country's November 2020 parliamentary elections, although with poor results.⁵¹

Iraq

In Iraq, the Brotherhood-affiliated Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) was established in 1960 and banned almost immediately thereafter by Iraqi nationalists. It remained outlawed under Saddam Hussein's rule (1979-2003), with repressive measures forcing the group underground. The IIP reemerged after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, and has since grown to become the largest Sunni political party in Iraq, displaying an ambiguous posture, and voicing harsh criticism of the U.S. and Iraq's new political elites, all while still participating in the transitional process.⁵² At the outset of the "Arab Spring," the IIP organized demonstrations and strived to gain support for its Islamist messaging among supporters.⁵³ On May 12, 2018, Iraq held its first parliamentary elections since the fall of the Islamic State. IIP candidates won 14 of 329 seats, the party's worst performance since its return in 2003. The party attributed its weak showing to a global trend of disillusion toward organized politics.⁵⁴ There is currently no indicator of how it hopes to regain lost ground in future elections.

Gulf States

While the Brotherhood was being targeted by successive Egyptian regimes,⁵⁵ the organization established branches in several countries in the Gulf. Many exiled Brothers found shelter in Saudi Arabia, but their Islamist doctrine came to be seen as a challenge to the country's official Wahhabi creed. In the mid-2000s, the movement thrived in the Kingdom with support from the Saudi ruling family, who granted asylum to exiled leaders, provided it financial support,⁵⁶ and helped establish Saudi-based Islamic charities. However, with the ouster of Morsi in the wake of the 2013 Egyptian revolution and the rise of Mohammed bin Salman (known colloquially as MbS) within the Saudi royal family, the Saudi government has increasingly clamped down on Brotherhood activity. While relations between the Morsi government and the Saudi crown were not inherently antagonistic, the latter valued stability, and has welcomed the country's post-religious order.⁵⁷ This generated divisions between the Saudi crown and prominent Muslim Brotherhood clerics, some of whom were previously sympathetic to the government. The culmination came in March 2014, when Saudi Arabia designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.⁵⁸ That estrangement has persisted; In November of 2020, the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars issued a statement which designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, and accused it of being a destabilizing factor in the region.⁵⁹

Elsewhere, such as in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, the Brotherhood has relied on a strong intellectual and media presence to influence local populations.⁶⁰ Qatar is the GCC's most prominent funder and defender of the MB, a position which has affected its regional relations.⁶¹ As of spring 2020, Qatar's open door policy toward the Muslim Brotherhood (entailing financial and weapons aid,⁶² political backing, and provision of safe haven)⁶³ remains unaltered.

With the exception of Oman, where the Brotherhood has faced severe crackdowns, the movement also managed to gain seats in parliaments across the region: in Kuwait via the Hadas movement,⁶⁴ and in Yemen through al-Islah ("Congregation for Reform").⁶⁵ Bahrain's Al-Minbar historically had success in the country's 2010 and 2014 Council of Representatives elections, but is now less prominent and only won one seat in the latest election, held in 2018. Al-Menbar, as well as al-Islah, another organization linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, have formally distanced themselves from "any external religious ideology."⁶⁶

Algeria

In Algeria, the Brotherhood emerged in the 1950s as a religious association, members of which joined the uprising against the French during that country's war for independence (1954-1962). Its founders, Abdellatif Soltani and Ahmed Sahnoun, were reportedly inspired by the work of Qutb,⁶⁷ and in 1989 formed a political party, the Movement for an Islamic Society (MSI, also known as Hamas, a nickname still in use today). In 1997, Hamas changed its name to the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) and its slogan from "Islam is the solution" to "Peace is the solution" (amongst other reforms), so that the group could continue operating in the country even as outwardly Islamic parties were banned from politics.⁶⁸ Throughout the Algerian civil war (1991-2002), it chose not to go to war with the government alongside other Islamist organizations, and instead worked with it through formal political mechanisms.⁶⁹

From its founding in the 1990s to 2013, the MSP grew increasingly more relevant to Algerian politics. In 1999, MSP leadership backed the nomination and election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, despite evidence that the election was fraudulent and significant grassroots opposition.⁷⁰ MSP party members would later hold positions of influence in Bouteflika's government.⁷¹

Between May 2013, when the MSP came under new leadership with the rise of Abderrazak Makri, and now, the party has wavered in its support for the central government. It boycotted the 2014 presidential elections, announced a candidate for the same race in 2019, and then later backed out.⁷² In parliamentary elections held the same year, MSP won 33 seats after first moving to oppose the Bouteflika administration in 2017, only to later back it.⁷³

Tunisia

In Tunisia, the Brotherhood's activities are tied to the political party Ennahda (the Renaissance Party), which was founded in 1989.⁷⁴ Formerly outlawed during the Ben Ali regime, Ennahda formally relaunched during the 2011 "Jasmine Revolution"⁷⁵ and became a legal party. However, domestic opposition to Islamism has recently forced *Ennahda* to downplay its Islamism; in 2016, Ennahda leader Rachid Ghannouchi formally distanced the movement from political Islam, signaling that it would instead focus on *dawa* (outreach work). In the most recent 2018 municipal elections, Ennahda was able to claim victory alongside its coalition partner, Nidaa Tounes.⁷⁶ Despite the party's articulated commitment to move away from Islamism, Ennahda continues to support what would be considered traditional Islamist values.⁷⁷

Ennahda, and more specifically Ghannouchi, has maintained a special relationship with Turkey and its president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ennahda has been compared to Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), a party with clear Islamic roots which experts have referred to as "effectively the Turkish arm of the Muslim Brotherhood."⁷⁸ Since the "Arab Spring," Ghannouchi has pushed for Tunisia to establish a closer relationship with Turkey. Despite some critical scrutiny over Ghannouchi's ties to Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Qatar,⁷⁹ Ennahda remains a powerful political force within Tunisian legislative politics.

Morocco

Until 2013, Morocco's ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD),⁸⁰ represented the Moroccan branch of the Brotherhood. This bond, however, was severed after the 2013 military *coup d'état* that removed Morsi from power.⁸¹ Since then, the PJD has repeatedly denied any connection to the Brotherhood.⁸² In the country's most recent 2016 election, the PJD won 125 of the 395 total parliamentary seats.⁸³ The PJD remains influential in Moroccan government, and in 2017 Morocco's monarch, Mohammed VI named former PJD Secretary General Saad Eddine Othmani to the position of Prime Minister.⁸⁴

Libya

The Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood was established in Benghazi in 1949 by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood members who had been exiled, when King Idris I offered them refuge from persecution. However, after seizing power in a coup in 1969, Muammar al-Qadhafi outlawed the movement. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood managed to maintain a vast network of sympathizers in Libya.⁸⁵ The Party of Justice and Construction (JCP), the political arm of the Brotherhood in Libya, formed in 2012, the year after Qadhafi's ouster, and has since gained seats in the country's legislature. It has made clear that it aspires to establish a Libyan *caliphate*.⁸⁶

In the events leading up to the Libyan civil war, the JCP helped form the General National Congress (GNC) and the Government of National Salvation (GNS), both precursors the Libya Dawn Coalition, one of the conflict's major warring factions.⁸⁷ When the Libya Dawn Coalition was dissolved in late 2015 to form the Government of National Accords (GNA), which is now the internationally recognized government of Libya, a number of GNC and GNS leaders joined its rank-and-file and now hold significant influence within it.⁸⁸

Sudan

In Sudan, the Brotherhood branch formed the National Islamic Front (NIF) in 1985, participated in the country's 1986 election and thereafter supported the regime of dictator Omar Hassan al-Bashir.⁸⁹ The National Congress Party (NCP) was formally founded in 1998 and led by President Al Bashir following its split from the NIF. In 1999, after being removed from his position as Secretary-General of the NCP by

Bashir, Hassan al-Tourabi founded the Popular National Congress Party (PNCP), an Islamist movement that the party claims is not affiliated with the MB movement.⁹⁰ Bashir was ousted in a military coup in April 2019.⁹¹

While a permanent government in Khartoum has not yet formed, the Sudanese transitional government has taken several steps to excise the influence of the Brotherhood. Following the coup, the NCP was disbanded, its militia neutralized, and dozens of its former leaders were arrested.⁹² In December 2019, the transitional government announced that it was shuttering the offices of any organization designated as a terrorist group by the U.S. This included Hamas, which had previously used its relationship with al-Bashir to smuggle weapons to the Gaza Strip.⁹³ In May 2020, it was reported that the Sudanese government would quietly return five members of the violent Muslim Brotherhood offshoot Hasm (who were captured *en route* to Turkey) to Egyptian authorities.⁹⁴ However, statements released by Hamas in October 2020 indicate that the group still intends to operate in some underground capacity in Sudan.⁹⁵ As of this writing, it is unclear what effect Sudan's announcement of a normalization of ties with Israel will have on the country's Islamist *milieu*, including Hamas and remnants of the Brotherhood.

Europe

The Brotherhood has gained significant ground in Europe through regional forums like the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe, the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations, and the European Council for Fatwa and Research.⁹⁶ Starting as early as the 1960s, group members and supporters moved to Europe and established a vast and sophisticated network of mosques, Islamic charities, and schools. Among them were those in England (the Muslim Association of Britain), France (the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France), Germany (the Islamische Gemeinschaft Deutschland) and Italy (the Unione delle Comunita' ed Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia).⁹⁷ With considerable foreign funding and the tolerance of European governments eager to engage in a dialogue with Muslim minorities,⁹⁸ Brotherhood-related organizations have gained positions of prominence on the Continent's sociopolitical scene.

In November of 2020, Austrian police raided the homes of dozens of people who were suspected of belonging to and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas as part of a year-long terrorism probe. Prosecutors have charged the Muslim Brotherhood with attempting to set up an Islamic state in the country.⁹⁹

United States

In addition to its presence in Europe, the Brotherhood has also engaged Muslims in the United States, where its members have been located since the 1960s. The movement launched its first long-term strategy in 1975, focusing on proselytizing efforts and the creation of specific structures for youth and newly arrived Muslim immigrants in the U.S. Seeking to exert political influence at the state and federal levels, Muslim Brothers have been represented in multiple religious, civic and communal Muslim organizations in the country, including the Muslim Students' Association (MSA), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), the Muslim American Society (MAS) and various other activist groups.¹⁰⁰

In 2015, U.S. Senator Ted Cruz introduced legislation to designate the Muslim Brotherhood a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and, in 2019, the Trump administration reportedly considered making a similar designation following a visit from Egyptian president Sisi.¹⁰¹ The previous year, in January 2018, the Trump administration designated two Brotherhood appendages, Harakat Sawa'd Misr (Hasm, or the "Arms of Egypt" Movement) and Liwa al-Thawra (Revolution Brigade, or Banner of the Revolution) as global terrorist organizations. It also designated Ismail Haniyeh, the leader of Hamas, as an international terrorist (Hamas has also been designated by the United States as a global terrorist organization.)¹⁰²

However, Senator Cruz's legislation did not pass,¹⁰³ and the Trump administration did not formally make the decision to move ahead with a blanket designation of the Brotherhood during its time in office. The Biden administration, in turn, has given no indication that it plans to do so, or even to reopen the issue.

Turkey

Much of the Muslim Brotherhood's active leadership has relocated to Istanbul, where the organization and its supporters have found safe haven since the 2013 coup that toppled Morsi.¹⁰⁴ Since then, prominent members of Turkey's ruling AKP party - including now-President Tayyip Erdoğan himself - have provided Muslim Brotherhood members with support, including equipment and grants for asylum from Egypt.¹⁰⁵

In 2019, when the Trump administration publicly considered designating the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, a spokesperson for the AKP stated that such a ruling would "damage democracy in the Middle East."¹⁰⁶ Erdoğan has, on several occasions, met with senior Hamas officials. Most recently, the Turkish president held a photo-op with Ismail Haniyeh, the current chief of the terror group, in September 2020.¹⁰⁷

RECENT ACTIVITY

Internal fissures and increasingly harsh pressure from the Sisi government has dramatically weakened the Brotherhood in Egypt since 2014.¹⁰⁸ When the Brotherhood's youth wing won internal elections in 2014, the group's "old guard" rejected the results.¹⁰⁹ The younger, "revolutionary" wing of the Brotherhood endorsed and encouraged the use of violence against Egyptian security forces and state infrastructure, and commissioned a Brotherhood *sharia* body to draft an Islamic legal defense of its violence.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, the older, more cautious wing argued that such violence would legitimize the state's crackdown and accused the young guard of defying the Brotherhood's internal hierarchy.

Within Egypt, some Brotherhood supporters are believed to have joined comparatively low-profile militant groups such as Liwaa al-Thawra, Hasm, and the Popular Resistance Movement that have targeted security forces and state infrastructure.¹¹¹ While each organization has been involved in its own violent *tête-à-tête* with the Egyptian government and military, none have achieved their goal over overturning the Egyptian government, and their capacity to do appears limited.¹¹²

Since President Sisi's re-election victory in March 2018, the Muslim Brotherhood has continued to operate outside the political sphere in Egypt.¹¹³ Sisi's subsequent crackdown has targeted a slew of former senior leadership, who have received harsh legal punishments, ranging from life in prison to the death penalty. The Egyptian government has adopted these draconian rulings based on the plaintiffs' membership in the Muslim Brotherhood or their tangential affiliation with it. The Sisi government's crackdown has drawn criticism from human rights organizations; for instance, Amnesty International referred to the mass death sentence given to 75 Muslim Brotherhood members in September 2018 as a "grotesque parody of justice."¹¹⁴ In 2017, Human Rights Watch released a series of interviews with people detained by the Egyptian interior ministry. According to their accounts, they were tortured by Egyptian authorities while in detention on grounds that some were members of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹¹⁵

In August 2020, Egyptian authorities arrested Mahmoud Ezzat, who had served as the Brotherhood's acting leader since 2013, on terrorism charges. In the wake of the arrest, Ibrahim Mounir, the Muslim Brotherhood's "secretary general," has assumed the position of the organization's acting guide.¹¹⁶ A member of its more pragmatic arm, Mounir has, as of this writing, sought to reconcile with the organization's *shura* council and build consensus among its various factions – albeit with what appears to be only mixed success.¹¹⁷ Ezzat, meanwhile, was convicted in April of 2021 and sentenced him to life in prison.¹¹⁸

ENDNOTES

1. For an overview of the Muslim Brotherhood's core ideology, see Hassan al-Banna's writings and memoirs, particularly the *Letter To A Muslim Student*, which develops the main principles of the movement. For the English translation, see <http://www.jannah.org/articles/letter.html>; see also Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement, 1928- 1942* (New York; Ithaca Press, 1998) and Richard Paul Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).
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