

# Egypt

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Violent Sunni Islamism has had some of its most powerful manifestations in Egypt, under the heavy influence of Sayyid Qutb's teachings. These have taken the form of a variety of *takfiri-jihadi* organizations, which waged Holy War against other Muslims because they are judged to be impious and thus, in effect, infidels (*takfir*, or declaring a fellow Muslim an apostate). These organizations consider the Mubarak regime illegitimate and thus seek to remove it by force (jihad) and to Islamize society from the top down. Yet the last decade has witnessed Islamism in Egypt moving away from organized, ideological violence and focusing instead on two other strategies: one seeking to Islamize society from the bottom up through missionary and educational work, and the other seeking to achieve power through participation in politics and in the electoral process.

This was the result of major watersheds in the history of the Islamist movement. The devastating social impact of terrorism in Egypt in the 1990s allowed the regime to crush both al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and Jama'at al-Jihad, leading the former to revise its thought and to produce a rich body of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that

systematically refuted the central tenets of al-Qa'ida and its affiliates.

While the events of September 11 created obstacles for Islamist radicals around the globe, the U.S.-led efforts to democratize the Arab states opened up new opportunities for political participation. These democratization efforts allowed the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) to capture an unprecedented 20 percent of the vote in the November–December 2005 parliamentary elections. This has arguably been the most important development in recent years as far as Egypt's Islamist movement is concerned.

## The Muslim Brotherhood

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is well into the third phase of its history. The first phase, from its foundation in 1928 up to the 1952 revolution—under the monarchy and the British presence—saw the formation of the classical MB doctrine and the early days of its ideological adaptation to party politics.

Both the rise of a militant trend in the movement toward the end of this period and rivalry with the new military regime led to the second phase—dissolution of the MB in

1954 and its suppression by Gamal Abdel Nasser, followed by organizational paralysis and the emergence of the *takfiri* trends inspired by Sayyid Qutb.

The third phase is that of the “Second Republic,” under presidents Anwar Sadat and Husni Mubarak. This phase is characterized by the rejection of the isolationist and violent strategies of the takfiris, with the MB instead opting for reform and gradual “bottom-up Islamization” through *da’wa* (the call to Islam) and operations from within the political system. From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, this period first witnessed détente with the regime, which initially encouraged the MB’s reemergence as a counterweight to the left. Later, the regime tolerated the Brotherhood’s activities without formally recognizing its existence. The MB is still officially outlawed. That situation allowed for large-scale expansion and recruitment, penetration of civil society institutions, and political activity, including participation in elections.

Then, from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, the MB’s penetration of civil society and its electoral feats led the regime to change its course. Since the mid-1990s, the MB has engaged in open conflict with the regime, which has in turn aimed to contain it, disrupt its activities, and limit its influence. Still, in the 2005 parliamentary elections, the MB established itself as by far the leading popular nongovernmental political organization in Egypt.

### **Ideology and Strategy**

The opening of the political process in Egypt beginning in the 1970s produced an ideological adjustment to the new democratic game, generally referred to as “new Ikhwanism” (*ikhwan* meaning brotherhood). Like the

old MB, the new Ikhwan strive to create an Islamic state that would apply Shari’a (Islamic jurisprudence). Yet while the classic MB strategy to reach that goal calls for missionary and educational work to spread the call to Islam, the new Ikhwan prefer the tools of democratic politics as a means of attaining power and establishing that state. This change was accompanied by a shift from the classic pan-Islamic orientation of the MB to a focus on the particular territorial state.

The main force for change in the direction of new Ikhwan strategy in the last two decades has been the “second generation” of MB activists, also known as the “middle generation” (*jil al-wasat*). These were former activists of the Islamist student groups in the 1970s who joined the MB, rose through the ranks as trade union leaders, and engineered the movement’s entry into the political arena. (Among them, Abd al-Mun’im Abu al-Futuh and Isam al-Aryan have the highest profile in the media.) Yet much power in the MB still rests with the “old-guard” leaders. Many adherents of the classic MB worldview are veterans of the MB’s “Secret Apparatus” and graduates of Nasser’s jails (such as General Guide Muhammad Mahdi Akif and several members of the MB’s Guidance Bureau). These figures have been more cautious and less open to change in general, and to the increasing politicization of the movement in particular.

Hasan al-Banna, the MB’s founder and dominant ideologue, envisioned the MB as a “comprehensive Islamic body,” spreading the call to Islam and acting as a legal and moral source of authority for Islam as a whole, and therefore above local politics and parties. The MB’s ambitions went far beyond Egypt’s confines, its desire being to spread Islam as a world religion and to

create a pan-Islamic state or a caliphate. The new Ikhwan, on the other hand, argue that the MB should focus on the territorial nation-state, Egypt. They argue also that it should create its political party, and some argue that it should transform itself from a da'wa movement—transcending politics—to a political party, prepared to compete, cooperate, and form alliances with other parties.

In practice, the MB has been deeply involved in politics on all levels—from student associations and trade and professional unions to local government and the nation's Parliament—scoring significant achievements. However, no formal change in its nature has taken place. The official ideological line, as represented by the general guide and his two deputies (Muhammad al-Sayyid Habib and Muhammad Khairat al-Shatir), strictly reflects the classic doctrine concerning the nature of the movement, as set out by Hasan al-Banna. It should be borne in mind that the Egyptian general guide is traditionally also the general guide of the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, he would naturally adhere to the view of the MB as a global movement.

As the MB has no legally recognized status, its room for political maneuver is a function of the government's tolerance at any given moment. Becoming a legal political party would obviously release the MB from this legal limbo. Yet this is exactly why the government continues to deny it a legal status. Attempts by MB members to achieve recognition as a party (the Center Party, see below) have failed. Thus, the MB's occasional references to its intention to declare the formation of its party, al-Amal (Hope), have so far not materialized.

The second-generation spokesmen have maintained that the MB was not aiming

to set up a religious state or a religious government but rather that it sought to establish a civil government and a civil state (*dawla madaniyya*) with an Islamic source of authority (*mar ja'iyya*), where all citizens would be assured equal rights and obligations under the constitution. By "source of authority," its leaders explained, they meant Islam as a civilization and as a social and political system consisting of general principles that govern the functioning of a state with a Muslim majority. After all, as Abu al-Futuh explained in an interview in *al-Araby*, Islam is not only the faith of the majority but also the culture and heritage of all, as Muslims, Christians, and Jews played a part in its creation. This civil state would be based on common citizenship (*muwatana*). However, the second-generation MB has not clearly explained how the state is not a religious one when it is set up in implementation of Divine Will and in order to apply Divine Law.

Furthermore, the MB old-guard leadership continues to uphold the old doctrine as the official line of the movement. In several missives, posted on the MB's Web site ([www.ikhwanonline.com](http://www.ikhwanonline.com)) and intended to eliminate any misconception about where the movement stood, General Guide Akif stated that since its foundation, the MB has had two goals: to liberate the Islamic homeland from any foreign domination, which means ending not only military occupations but also any other form of foreign domination, be it political, intellectual, cultural, or economic; and to set up a free state in this homeland that applies Islam's rules and implements its social order. The MB seeks to achieve these goals everywhere—Islam being the religion of all mankind since it embraces all aspects of life of all people in every age.

Following al-Banna, Akif listed the seven

steps necessary for the MB to attain these goals: reforming the individual; establishing the Muslim home; guiding the society; liberating the homeland; reforming the government; restoring the international entity of the Islamic *umma* (nation); and finally, mastery of the world (*ustadhiyyat al-alam*). The establishment of the Islamic caliphate would require preparatory steps, he wrote, again following al-Banna: cultural, social, and economic cooperation between all the Muslim peoples; forging alliances, treaties, and conferences between the Muslim states; and seeking the formation of the Muslim League of Nations.

In the MB missives, as they appear on the MB Web site, Akif has pointed to the MB's means of achieving those goals: first, da'wa and recruitment of the good elements, who form solid pillars for reform; and second, the constitutional struggle, designed to make the voice of da'wa heard in formal bodies such as parliaments, trade unions, and institutions. Political work is thus seen as intended to reinforce the da'wa, not to supplant it. Elsewhere, in July 2005, Akif wrote that the MB believes that the highest loyalty is to Islam, which does not preclude other, lesser affiliations such as family, tribe, or homeland. He caused an uproar in April 2006 following a press report according to which he expressed his attachment to pan-Islamism and his contempt for Egyptian patriotism.

The political reform narrative adopted by the MB calls for democracy, pluralism, human rights, separation of powers, constraints on the power of the rulers, protection of political freedoms, and independence of the judiciary. Its Reform Initiative of March 3, 2004—launched in response to America's "Greater Middle East Initiative" to democratize the Arab states—indeed supported a republican, parliamentary, constitu-

tional, and democratic political order "in the framework of the principles of Islam." The initiative affirmed that the people were the source of all powers and that no individual, party, community, or society could claim the right to power unless it were derived from free and true popular will. It also stated that the MB was committed to the principle of alternation of power through general, free, and fair elections. Yet the initiative also outlined the Brotherhood's objectives as follows:

Our only hope to achieve progress in all aspects of life is by returning to our religion and implementing our Shari'a. . . . We have a clear mission—to work to implement Allah's Law. This is to be achieved by forming the Muslim individual, the Muslim home, the Muslim government, and the state which will lead the Islamic states, reunite the scattered Muslims, restore their glory, retrieve for them their lost lands and stolen homelands, and carry the banner of the call to Allah in order to make the world happy with Islam's blessing and instructions.

This is the MB's classic mission statement formulated by Hasan al-Banna, as it appears on the MB Web site.

The ambiguity of the Muslim Brotherhood's position regarding the nature of the state it intends to set up is a cause for concern for Egypt's Copts. This was only exacerbated following the MB's electoral achievements in November–December 2005. In an article published after the parliamentary elections on the MB's official *Arabic* language site, entitled "What Will Happen If the MB Reaches Power," First Deputy General Guide Muhammad Habib wrote that the MB viewed the Copts as citizens who enjoy full citizenship rights (*muwatanana*),

and “consequently they have the full right to assume public posts, except for the president of the state.” This exception reflects the Islamic principle that non-Muslims cannot rule Muslims. It should be noted that in the *English* version of Habib’s article, which appeared on the MB’s official English Web site, the Copts were said to have the full right to assume public posts, “including that of the head of state.”

Second-generation leaders have attempted to ease Coptic concerns by offering a more moderate version of the MB’s position on the issue. They have claimed, for example, that the *fatwa* (religious edict) issued in 1996 by then-general guide Mustafa Mashhur that required non-Muslims to pay the poll tax (*jizyah*) should no longer be implemented. This position, however, has not been given an official form, and when asked about the MB’s position regarding the Copts, General Guide Akif replied, in an interview with Faraj Isma’il: “We in the MB apply Allah’s rules in dealing with them.” At an MB event on October 5, 2006, Akif called for the establishment of the Islamic government envisioned by al-Banna. This triggered sharp criticism from the opposition parties.

## Domestic Politics

Two major factors have influenced the MB’s political strategy in recent years: increasing pressure for democratization on the Egyptian regime by the United States and the West; and the nearing end of President Husni Mubarak’s reign and the beginning of a new one, whose nature is unclear but for which the actors in the Egyptian political system are all preparing. Given these factors, the MB has positioned itself as a force for democratic reform, as the political organization enjoying the most popular sup-

port, and as the alternative to the present regime.

The organization’s illegal status has been an obvious constraint. It has exploited the government’s policy of tolerance for its activities as long as it does not cross certain red lines—for example, holding large-scale street demonstrations. In this framework, the MB’s strategy has been to attempt to win every possible election and to oppose the government’s policies on central domestic and foreign policy issues through peaceful means, including street demonstrations and sit-ins. Still, it has calibrated its protest activities so as not to push the regime to suppress it altogether.

At the time of this writing, the struggle for political reform had focused on three central issues: President Mubarak’s reelection for a fifth term in September 2005; the regime’s preparations for transferring the presidency to Mubarak’s son, Gamal; and the extension of the emergency laws (which were imposed after the 1967 war, lifted in 1980, and reimposed in 1981). In late 2004 and early 2005, opposition groups led by a group called Kifaya held public demonstrations against Mubarak on these issues, arousing international interest. The MB leadership joined the trend by holding its own demonstrations in Cairo and in the countryside beginning on March 27, 2005. This was the first time the MB had held public demonstrations on domestic issues since Mubarak took over in 1981. The MB was careful not to cross a red line; it limited the number of demonstrators relative to its potential and alerted the authorities in advance of each demonstration. The government responded by arresting about 1,500 MB members, including senior members. By the summer of 2005, the MB stopped its demonstrations and the government slowly released MB prisoners as part of a deal in



which the MB allegedly agreed not to support opposition candidates to the presidency in the September 2005 elections.

While initially the MB and other opposition groups had made a mutual decision to boycott the presidential elections, the MB suddenly changed its mind on August 21, 2005. The MB then urged its members to participate in the elections by voting for a candidate of their choice, but not to support repression and corruption. This was interpreted as a call not to support Mubarak, but since the rate of participation was more important to the regime than Mubarak's margin of victory, this policy shift ended up working in the regime's favor. Since this outcome gave the elections—and the regime—more legitimacy, there was criticism of the policy in the MB ranks.

Yet this was a small price to pay for the big prize—the November–December 2005 parliamentary elections. By October 2005, following the end of the demonstrations and the cancellation of the boycott, all MB prisoners in Egypt had been released and were able to take part in the election effort. By slating candidates for only 150 of 454 parliamentary seats—namely, fewer than needed to deny the government the two-thirds majority required for changes in the constitution—the MB signaled that it was not seeking confrontation. (It should be noted that since the MB is formally outlawed, its candidates run as independents.) The MB won 88 seats in three rounds of parliamentary elections, compared to 15 in the 2000 elections and to 12 seats won by all the other opposition parties. The MB had taken advantage of the government's low level of intervention in the first two election rounds and managed to win 76 seats in those first two rounds. This spurred the government to take action and to prevent pro-MB voters from reaching the polling

stations for the third round. Hundreds of MB election activists were arrested, leading to violent clashes that left at least 11 people dead. In the third and last round, therefore, the MB only won 12 seats. Its success rate of 59 percent for those seats it contested was nevertheless high. In addition to the foreign pressure on the government, this was the result of the MB's organizational capabilities, the reportedly huge sums of money it had invested, and the decreasing efficacy of the ruling National Democratic Party's electoral machinery. Adding insult to injury, in the Manufiyya Province, the birthplace of presidents Sadat and Mubarak, the MB won 10 seats, while the National Democratic Party won only five.

The MB's electoral achievements seem to have boosted the organization's self-confidence and increased its willingness to confront the regime, both on the rhetorical level and on the street. It took advantage of its strong parliamentary presence to propagate its positions, focusing on attacking government inefficiency and corruption and promoting human rights and reform of the legal system. Over a quarter of the draft laws submitted by MB deputies since the elections have focused on the latter. Its deputies have also served as a channel for contact with representatives of foreign governments, the European Union (EU), and the UN secretary-general. The government reacted by applying pressure on members of the MB parliamentary bloc. According to MB reports on the Brotherhood Web site, the security services have obstructed their social activities, warning local administration officials in the provinces to avoid contact with them and instructing village notables to discourage the people from turning to them to solve their problems.

With its sights set on the next presidential elections (scheduled for 2011), the MB has

been trying to build up public opposition to clause 76 of the constitution. The clause was amended in February 2005, replacing the old system of a single presidential candidate nominated by Parliament and endorsed by a referendum with multiple-candidate elections; yet the conditions it set in effect have prevented the MB from nominating a candidate from within its ranks.

The MB had intended to get the largest possible number of its supporters elected in the April 2006 local council elections, with the goal of reaching the required minimum number of elected public officials for endorsement of a presidential candidate according to the amended version of clause 76. The government blocked that option in February 2006, however, by passing legislation postponing the elections for the local authorities for another two years. While stressing that it had no plans to contest the next presidential elections, in a February 2006 statement to the press, MB spokesmen accused the government of postponing the elections in order to deny the MB the ability to field or support a presidential candidate.

The MB then launched a campaign to protest the extension of the emergency laws. During the 2005 presidential election campaign, President Mubarak announced that these laws would be replaced with new antiterrorism legislation. However, as the expiration of the emergency laws in May 2006 approached, the government argued that completion of the new legislation would require up to two years, and that in order to prevent a legal vacuum, the emergency laws would be extended. The MB protest campaign consisted largely of student demonstrations on university campuses. As reported in February and March 2006 on the MB's English- and Arabic-language Internet sites, in response, the government arrested dozens of activists as well

as several MB businesspeople whose assets were confiscated in what was viewed as an attack on the MB's financial resources. MB members saw these arrests as part of a deal: The detainees would be released if the MB alleviated its opposition to the extension of the emergency laws.

The government accused the MB of training volunteer fighters to be sent to conflict zones, such as Iraq and the Palestinian territories, in order to acquire combat skills. As explained by leading MB spokesman Isam al-Aryan, the MB considered this an excuse for the continued denial of legal status to their organization and for the extension of the emergency laws. In April 2006, the editor-in-chief of the MB's official Arabic Internet site implied that the Easter attacks on Coptic churches in Alexandria and the ensuing violent clashes between Copts and Muslims were actually orchestrated by the government in order to justify the emergency laws. On April 29, 2006, five days after the terrorist attack on Dahab, the emergency laws were extended for an additional two years.

There were reportedly two opposing views within the MB on the issue of Gamal Mubarak succeeding his father as president, as articulated on [almesryoon.com](http://almesryoon.com). The first view, represented by the general guide, held that the movement should strongly oppose Gamal's succession or else lose its credibility. The other view reportedly held that the MB had no interest in opposing Gamal's succession: It should focus instead on more important issues affecting the movement's long-term interests and should concentrate on exploiting the regime's difficulties with the succession in order to advance issues such as ending the state of emergency and changing constitutional clause 76.

There was public speculation that the MB might strike a deal with the govern-

ment, reducing the latter's difficulties in implementing Gamal's succession. There appeared to be internal debate within the MB regarding a possible deal with the government. This was indicated in various entries on the MB main Web site arguing, for example, that deals with the regime had no value because periods of calm in its relations with the MB were usually followed by an escalation in its repressive measures designed to block the movement's political activities. It was argued, moreover, that the MB must oppose Gamal's succession because such a succession would contradict the reform the movement has called for. Additionally, the succession has been rejected by the movement's grassroots, thus to not oppose it would undermine the MB's credibility among the Egyptian masses. Some cautioned that the MB should neither lead a civil disobedience movement against Gamal's succession nor join other opposition groups in street demonstrations on this issue, feeling this would lead to the intensification of the government's campaign against the MB.

By May 2006, the MB's public position on the succession issue shifted from accepting Gamal's presidency, should he be elected in a multcandidate election, to total rejection even under those conditions. Further escalating its tensions with the government, the MB joined the demonstrations held by Kifaya and other opposition groups in April and May 2006 in support of judicial independence, with the MB's Parliament members leading the MB demonstrators. Hundreds of MB members were arrested. In a May 2006 interview in *al-Masri al-Yawm*, Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif implied that his government's intention was to change the constitution in a way that would reduce the number of MPs the MB could get elected. His explanation was that while the

MB did not legally exist, the organization's MPs ran for elections as independents, were elected as such, and once elected, acted openly as an MB parliamentary bloc. Nazif thus confirmed the assessment that the government saw the MB's achievements in the parliamentary elections as crossing the "red lines," and it was determined to prevent such success in future parliamentary elections and to prevent the MB from achieving greater power.

The Second Lebanon War in July–August 2006 provided the MB with an opportunity to gain popularity and the moral high ground by allying itself with the Hizballah-Hamas-Syria-Iran axis and against the Egyptian-Saudi-Jordanian camp. In an August 2006 missive on the Brotherhood Web site, General Guide Akif declared victoriously: "Islam today regains its role in leading the struggle against the Zionist project." The MB enthusiastically supported Hizballah and vehemently criticized those Sunni legal experts and political leaders who argued that as a Shi'a organization and an arm of Iran, Hizballah must not be supported. July 2006 articles on the MB's site supported the view that Hizballah's fighters were Arabs and Muslims waging a war of resistance against an oppression and occupation affecting all Muslims. In August 2006, Akif announced he was ready to send 10,000 MB volunteers to fight alongside Hizballah in Lebanon ([www.ikhwanonline.com](http://www.ikhwanonline.com), August 6, 2006). Moreover, Akif accused the Egyptian regime of siding with Israel in the war against the Islamists. He also sharply attacked Arab leaders for failing to come to the rescue of the Lebanese people, remarking in a missive that had those leaders not been Muslim, "We would have fought against them because they are harder to us than the Zionists and the Americans" ([www.ikhwanonline.com](http://www.ikhwanonline.com), August 3, 2006).



Through its posturing as a champion of the jihad against Israel—in stark contrast to the inactivity of the Arab regimes and their implied collusion with the enemies of Arabs and Islam—the MB thus offered leadership where the state had failed to do so. From substituting for the state in the area of social services, the MB has been moving toward involvement in foreign affairs—hitherto the sacred domain of the state. The offer to send volunteers to fight alongside Hizballah was of particular concern to the regime. Not only did it constitute a public admission that an MB organization exists (in defiance of the law) and that it may have a military arm, but it also indicated that the MB felt that having captured the moral high ground on the issue of standing up to Israel, they should not be constrained in making such public statements. This marked a new level in the rise of MB's self-confidence and sense of empowerment.

MB Parliament members were quick to deny that the MB had a military arm, stating that its members received physical but not military training. Still, the government reacted by arresting senior MB members—among them Secretary-General Mahmud Izzat—on charges of illegal activity, including seeking to create public opinion hostile toward government policies and inciting the public to carry out demonstrations, strikes, and civil disobedience. The MB Parliament members were accused of taking advantage of their parliamentary immunity in their involvement in those activities. It turned out that one of those arrested, Lashin Abu Shanab, an 80-year-old member of the Guidance Bureau, confirmed during his interrogation that an MB organization existed and described in great detail the organizational structure and functioning of the MB. Abu Shanab thus compromised all the MB members as violators of the law.

It has been speculated that the admission that the organization existed was a deliberate move by the MB, designed to force the government to accept its existence once and for all. The MB's open reference to "the MB parliamentary bloc" (including the MB Web site reporting on the bloc's elections for its bureau) seems to be designed to force the government to accept the *fait accompli* of the MB's existence as a political party.

By October 2006, Izzat and other detainees were released, but around 70 MB members were still held, and it appeared that the MB and the government were nearing a decisive point: They could reach a deal, which would grant the MB certain political concessions in exchange for its dropping its opposition to Gamal's succession to the presidency. Conversely, the two could reach a confrontation in which there would be a change in the regime's strategy toward the MB, causing the latter's political activities to be dramatically restricted or even completely prevented.

## **The United States and the West**

The MB's electoral achievements have not moderated its rhetoric regarding the United States. Two approaches stand out: total conflict with the United States, in rejection of any form of dialogue; and a more nuanced approach that ostensibly expresses an interest in a dialogue but packages it with conditions and reservations that make it unlikely.

The first approach, reflecting the traditional MB attitude, sees no room for engagement with the United States because the agendas of the MB and the United States are on a collision course. General Guide Akif, who upholds this line, sees the United States as the embodiment of evil. He argues

that in the new American world order, mankind is divided into classes: first-class humans—Americans and Zionists; second-class humans—Westerners of non-Oriental origins; and finally the tenth-class inhabitants of the Arab, Muslim, and Oriental worlds. In December 2005 on the MB Web site, Akif further claimed that this world order, which has become a global nightmare, was in reality run by the Jews behind the scenes. The MB, Akif said in an April 2006 missive, has been in the vanguard of those who regard the American call for democracy and freedom with suspicion, in view of the dark history of American imperialism, of its continued aid to despotic regimes, of its total alignment with the Zionist project, and of its craving for Arab resources. Akif called for an economic boycott of imperialist states as well as a boycott of their cultural products, which are designed to transform thoughts, morals, and behavioral patterns and to increase susceptibility to imperialism.

Younger spokesmen do express an interest in dialogue with the United States within the context of their revivalist vision of Islam and its gradual and flexible implementation of Shari'a. They welcome an open and public dialogue with all the segments of American society, except the U.S. administration, as having cultural value.

They were suspicious, however, of American intentions: Would the United States support democracy even if it put its political rivals in power? They pointed to the essential contradiction between what they called the growing American project of empire and hegemony on one hand and the steadily progressing MB project to construct an Islamic reformist revival on the other. The Islamic revivalist project, they said, aims at liberating Muslim lands from any foreign hegemony—be it military,

economic, cultural, or spiritual—reforming governance in the Muslim countries, and achieving a real Arab unity and an international Islamic entity (*kiyan dawli islami*). The bottom line, then, is that these are two contradictory projects and there is very little room for dialogue.

## The Palestinians

Part of the conflict with the West, in the MB's view, is the Israeli-Palestinian problem. According to this view, the West planted Israel in the Arab region as a means to control the Arab states and to strike at the Arab and Islamic identity of the region. As articles on the MB's site attest, Israel is seen as a Western state, foreign to the region in its history and culture, and has no right to exist. It should therefore be abolished and its Jewish inhabitants absorbed in the Palestinian-Arab state that would replace it.

The MB celebrated Hamas's 2006 election victory as its own: "The Muslim Brotherhood has reached power in Palestine," declared MB Deputy General Guide Muhammad Habib. In an interview on the Ikhwan's site he stressed that by going down the political road, Hamas did not give up on the resistance or armed struggle. On the same Web site Isam al-Aryan called upon the Palestinians to form a new strategy to materialize their dream of liberating all of the national land. He stressed that it should take the form of the "single democratic state" and could then join a "Greater Syria" (*bilad al-sham al-wasi'a*)—he did not use the historic term *Suriyya al-Kubra*—covering Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.

## Jihad

Akif has repeatedly called upon all Muslims to support the resistance (*muqawama*)

in Iraq, the Palestinian territories, and Afghanistan. Describing jihad and the martyrdom operation (*istishhad*) as “the way to glory and victory,” he stated that Islam regards resistance against occupation as “a jihad for God” (*jihad fi sabil Allah*). This jihad, which means actual fighting (*qital*), is an individual religious duty (*fard ayn*) of the inhabitants of the country under occupation, and it takes precedence over other duties (*fara'id*). For the people of the neighboring countries, participating in this jihad is a collective duty (*fard kifaya*), which becomes an individual duty if the occupied people fail to repel the aggressor. If the occupation persists nevertheless, fighting against it becomes an individual duty for Muslims the world over. In a July 2005 article on the MB Web site outlining the organization’s objectives, Akif stated that for the MB, jihad was the most elevated pillar of Islam after “the two testimonies” (that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger). Akif recapitulated Muhammad’s saying, often quoted by al-Banna: “He who dies and has not fought, and was not resolved to fight, has died a *jahiliyya* death.” (In Islam, *jahiliyya*—literally, ignorance—is the pre-Islamic historical phase of the Arabs.)

The MB’s position on terrorist attacks in Egypt has evolved with time. The movement did not condemn the terrorist attack on Taba of October 2004. Instead, in its communiqué reacting to the attack it commented that, first, the attack was a response to atrocities committed by Israeli forces in Palestine and U.S. forces in Iraq, and second, that one must not accuse any Islamist group since the attack could have been carried out by Israeli or other intelligence services. An expression of understanding for the motivation of the terrorists was still included in Akif’s formal reaction to the July 23, 2005, attacks on Sharm al-

Shaykh when he remarked that the aggression and wars perpetrated by global imperialism against the world’s peoples gave birth to the culture of violence and terrorism. Yet he also condemned the attacks, saying that they contradicted religion and religious law, constituted an aggression against all human values and mores, and played into the hands of the Zionist-American project. This condemnation was repeated verbatim in Akif’s formal response to the April 24, 2006, attacks on Dahab, only this time the “understanding” of the terrorists’ motivation was dropped. This evolution most likely reflects the fact that the Taba attack, the first in the series, was believed to have targeted solely or mainly Israeli tourists, while the other two hit mostly Egyptian and foreign tourists and had a deeper impact on the Egyptian public. As cited on the MB Web site, Akif holds that there is no difference between Israeli soldiers and civilians, because for him “the Zionist People” as a whole is an armed military which occupies Palestine.

### The Shi’a and Iran

Akif has called upon Sunnis and Shi’as in Iraq to stand up against the forces of civil strife (*fitna*). The aggravation of the Sunni-Shi’a conflict led him to issue a missive laying out the legal and practical arguments for the Sunnis to end their conflict with the Shi’a and to form a common front with them against the occupation. He rejected the position that sees the Shi’a as apostates and said that Islam gave non-Muslims the right to freedom of faith and worship, allowing them to live respectfully in Islamic society.

On this basis, he questioned how one could deny that right to those who agree with the Sunnis on the fundamentals of Islam and differ with them only on second-

ary matters. He called for the formation of a body consisting of Sunni and Shi'a *ulama* (religious scholars) whose task would be to spread the culture of Islamic fraternity and make it superior to one's loyalty to one of the legal schools (*al-wala al-madhabhi*). He also called for the revival of the "Committee for Rapprochement Between the Islamic Legal Schools," which was set up in the 1940s with the participation of Hasan al-Banna and *ulama* from al-Azhar and from Iran, and led to the recognition by al-Azhar of Twelver Shi'ism as the fifth school of jurisprudence. Akif urged all of Islam's religious authorities to confront the takfiri philosophy, to spread moderate Islamic thought, and to condemn all criminal attacks on innocent civilians and state institutions, which serve as an excuse for the occupation forces to stay in Iraq.

The Egyptian MB welcomed Iran's nuclear program. Deputy General Guide Muhammad Habib said, as cited in an April 2006 *al-Sharq al-Awsat* article, that he believed that the Iranian nuclear program was for peaceful purposes, but if it were a military program, it would serve to balance the Israeli nuclear arsenal. "It will create a sort of a balance between the two sides, the Arab and Islamic side and the Israeli side." He said that he had no problem with Iran having nuclear weapons and that he believed most Egyptians held the same position.

### **The Center Party (Hizb al-Wasat)**

Egypt's Center Party was founded in 1995 by a group of second-generation MB activists who left the MB. It has failed at three attempts to convince the government that it is not a religious organization and so should not be denied legal status as a politi-

cal party: In 1996 it applied as "The Center Party," in 1998 as "The Egyptian Center Party," and in 2004 as "The New Center." Less a party than an intellectual circle of moderate Islamists, al-Wasat describes itself as the ideological equivalent of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The circumstances of al-Wasat's formation have been a matter of controversy. According to its founders, the party split from the MB when they became fed up with the ideological rigidity and authoritarian leadership style and set up the new body as a moderate alternative to the MB. According to another version, the founders formed the group with the support of at least part of the MB leadership (including General Guide Muhammad Mahdi Akif), which sought thereby to probe whether an MB political party established alongside the MB, and presumably separate from it (like the Jordanian Islamic Action Front, for example), would be permitted by the government. However, eventually a dispute broke out between the leadership and the founders. The founding of the new party was supported by Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and other MB figures abroad, and the government perceived it as an extension of the MB.

At any rate, al-Wasat has positioned itself as an ideological rival of the MB. It points to the existence of two trends in the MB, one of which is reformist and open-minded, and the other—representing the controlling majority—rigid, and argues that the MB's mixing of missionary (*da'wa*) and political activities poses a danger to the nation. Al-Wasat, in contrast, calls for the separation of *da'wa* from politics and was set up as a civil party. Furthermore, according to al-Wasat founding member Abu al-'Ala Madhi (quoted in the Carnegie Endowment *Arab Reform Bulletin* of December 2005), the MB has an ambiguous vision of the Islamic

state and is afraid of democracy, and “even if they call for democracy they do not really believe in it.”

The party defines itself on its Web site, [www.alwasatparty.com](http://www.alwasatparty.com), as “a civil [*madani*] party with an Islamic background [*khalfiyya*], bringing together all Egyptian citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims, as the basis of membership is common citizenship [*muwatana*]: Citizenship is the basis of relations between the Egyptians, and no discrimination among them should be allowed, be it because of religion, sex, color or race.” The “Islamic background” refers to Islam as the religion of the Muslims and the culture (*hadhara*) that has brought together Muslims and non-Muslims.

It should be noted that the party’s Islamic identity is defined in several different versions. While in its mission statement al-Wasat is said to have an Islamic “background,” in another formal document on its site it refers to itself as a civil party with an Islamic “source of authority” (*mar ja’iyya*), and in an English-language interview given to an American institution, the Carnegie Endowment, it describes itself as “a civil party with an Islamic reference point.” Several founding members of the party were Copts, which, al-Wasat argues, proves its commitment to the principle of citizenship (*muwatana*) and that it is not a religious party despite the fact that several founding members were former MB activists.

The party says that it follows the peaceful democratic method and accepts intellectual and political pluralism, participation (*musharaka*), dialogue, and coexistence among all views and ideas. It seeks to create a civil state based on the people’s rule, since the people are the source of all authority. The rulers of that state would be civilians from the general public and not religious scholars or clerics, and they would rule in accor-

dance to civil foundations. Al-Wasat affirms the right to form political parties and civil society institutions, as well as the right of full equality between the sexes: The criteria for eligibility for public positions such as judges or the head of state are competence and capability, not a person’s gender. Al-Wasat declares that its main objective is to bring about, through democratic means, the implementation of the second clause of the Egyptian constitution, which states that Shari’a is the principal source of legislation. The idea is to implement Shari’a through legal interpretations (*ijtihadat*) that will advance society, not paralyze it, and that will ensure Egyptians a better, prosperous, and honorable life.

Ten years after its creation, the party is still engaged in a legal battle over its legitimacy, which actually concerns its identity. The government justifies its repeated refusals to recognize al-Wasat by arguing that it is not distinguishable from existing parties, while the MB argues that the party’s ideology is not different from its own and that it was formed for organizational or personal reasons as opposed to ideological ones. According to al-Wasat’s Web site, the government has fought its legal appeals by, among other means, pressuring Coptic founding members of the party to withdraw, which would substantiate the argument that it is a religious party, forbidden under the constitution.

### **Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad and the Sinai Terror Attacks**

While Egypt’s terror organizations, al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya and Jama’at al-Jihad, have been undergoing a profound ideological revision, steering away from violence (for details see below), the country was rocked by three suicide attacks within a



year and a half, all targeting tourist sites: the October 7, 2004, attacks on Taba and Nuweyba; the July 24, 2005, attack on Sharm al-Shaykh; and the April 24, 2006, attack on Dahab—which together left 250 people dead and 750 wounded. Yet it was soon discovered that the attacks were carried out by members of a small organization of Sinai Bedouins. Some were Palestinian, mainly from al-Arish in northeastern Sinai, which is geographically, demographically, and clearly also ideologically close to the Gaza Strip. They were reportedly influenced and assisted to some degree (with funding and training) by Gaza Palestinians. The organization did not cross over from Sinai to Egypt's heartland.

According to information released by the Egyptian authorities, al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and Holy War) was founded in 2000 by Khalid Musa'id, a dentist of Bedouin origin from al-Arish and a member of the Muslim Youth (al-Shubban al-Muslimun) Islamic organization. He recruited for the organization by selecting young individuals who attended his religious classes on faith and jihad, delivered in al-Arish's mosques. He used the September 11, 2001, events and Israel's military incursion to Jenin in 2002 to press upon the group's members the need to carry out jihad against the United States and in the West Bank and Gaza. Following the American invasion of Iraq, Musa'id began to drive home the need to carry out suicide attacks against foreign tourists whose states partook in that invasion. He declared the Egyptian state and its institutions apostate because they collaborated with the so-called enemies of Islam.

The group's name and its objectives clearly indicate the influence of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's model, though no direct connections with him have been reported. A video recording by one of the three Sharm

al-Shaykh suicide bombers reflected the inspiration of Osama bin Laden.

Musa'id established contacts with Islamist activists in Gaza (whose organizational affiliation was not specified by the Egyptian authorities) who helped his organization with funds and training. Occasional robberies by group members served as another source of funds. In preparation for the terror operations, the organization's membership of about 100 was divided into half a dozen strictly compartmentalized cells, each based in a different part of Sinai and each unaware of the others. Taba and Nuweyba, attacked on the anniversary of the start of the 1973 war, were selected for attack due to the high proportion of Israeli tourists present, and indeed two members of the Nakhel cell, which executed the attack, were of Palestinian origin. Sharm al-Shaykh was attacked on the anniversary of the 1952 revolution, and Dahab on the anniversary of the Israeli evacuation of Sinai in 1982.

Initially, the Egyptian security authorities assumed the Taba-Nuweyba attack was isolated and that its perpetrators were not part of a larger organization. However, following the Sharm al-Shaykh attack, as well as a failed attack on a Sinai Multinational Forces bus near al-Arish in August 2005, they picked up the trail of the organization and launched a hot pursuit of its members all over Sinai, killing Khalid Musa'id and capturing several others. Yet the compartmentalization allowed the new leader, Nasr Khamis al-Malahi, Musa'id's former right hand, to prepare and carry out the Dahab attack. However, Malahi died in another failed suicide attack on the Sinai Multinational Forces near al-Arish on April 27, 2006, right after the Dahab attack. Several members were still on the run.

Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad differs fundamentally from al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and Jama'at

al-Jihad. First, as explained in an *al-Ahram* article, it did not develop an intellectual or doctrinal framework explaining its goals, nor did it create a structured organizational hierarchy. Second, for al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, jihad was not seen as the means to reach power and set up an Islamic state. Rather, conducting jihad against the infidels and apostates was the goal of the organization. In this sense, it resembled the attack by a lone assailant on foreign tourists near al-Azhar in Cairo in April 2005. It was later discovered that the attacker was not connected to any terrorist group; he had simply felt compelled to act by Islamist literature he found on Internet. Both Jama'at al-Jihad and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya denounced the Dahab attack, the former calling it un-Islamic and lacking any Shari'a basis, and the latter focusing on the inadmissibility of attacking tourists who, according to Islamic law, are immune and must be protected.

It has been argued that the organization's antistate activities were a reaction to the heavy-handedness of the Egyptian security forces toward Sinai's Bedouins, an impoverished and neglected sector of Egypt's population. It appears that large-scale and perhaps brutal arrests and investigations of Sinai Bedouins after the Taba-Nuweyba attack, in search of the perpetrators, did antagonize that population, but al-Tawhid wal-Jihad had been founded, and its objectives decided, well before that attack took place, as reported by *al-Hayat*.

In April 2006, the Egyptian authorities announced that they uncovered a new takfiri group, al-Ta'ifa al-Mansura. The group was allegedly planning to carry out terrorist attacks against tourist targets, to blow up a major gas pipeline in Cairo, and to assassinate Muslim and Christian religious leaders; 22 members were in fact arrested. Critics of the government, including Isam

al-Aryan, a leading spokesman of the MB, implied that the story was fabricated in order to justify the extension of the emergency laws, which were then being debated in Parliament, by pointing to alleged terrorist threats in Egypt. No trial was ever held, and by September 13, 2006, all of the suspects, including the alleged leader of the group, were released.

### **Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and Jama'at al-Jihad**

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya today is a da'wa group that emphasizes the fight against the takfiri ideologies through Shari'a and ideological tools. On its Web site, [www.egyptianislamicgroup.com](http://www.egyptianislamicgroup.com), inaugurated in June 2006, it describes itself as a group of Muslims whose task is not to push people away from Islam by accusing them of apostasy but rather to bring people into Islam and guide them to Allah's way. "We are people of da'wa, not judges [*du'at, la qudhat*]," it says—in reference to the well-known book by that title written by Hasan al-Hudaibi (the second general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, 1951–1973), which argues against the takfiri doctrine of Sayyid Qutb. "Our task is to guide people to serve God, not to rule or judge them," says the group's mission statement.

The metamorphosis of the Jama'a, which in the 1980s and 1990s was the largest and most lethal terrorist organization in Egypt, may have begun in the mid-1990s but it became known in 1997, when the organization launched its "Initiative of Cessation of Violence" and its continuing process of ideological revision, which amounted to the construction of a systematic and detailed legal case against the doctrines of takfir and violent jihadism.

The Initiative of Cessation of Violence was

launched on July 5, 1997, when an imprisoned member of the leadership of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya read a statement while in court on behalf of the organization, calling for the cessation of all violent acts in Egypt and abroad and for all incitement to violence to come to an end. After overcoming internal difficulties, by March 1999 the decision to approve the initiative was signed by all the members of the Jama'a's Consultative Council (*majlis al-shura*). The organization's spiritual leader, Shaykh Umar Abd al-Rahman, who is formally still its leader, supported the initiative from his jail cell in the United States and may have even been its initiator. The Jama'a's de facto leader, Karam Zuhdi, is the head of its Consultative Council and also Abd al-Rahman's son-in-law.

The November 1997 terror attack in Luxor, which killed 58 tourists and for which Rifa'i Taha, head of al-Jama'a's military wing, claimed responsibility, fueled doubts about the sincerity of the initiative. Evidence found by the authorities on the scene, however, indicated that the perpetrators had been cut off from the leadership in prison and were thus unaware of its decision to stop all violence. The initiative's credibility was also saved to some extent by the Jama'a leadership's opposition to the founding statement of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders (set up by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri in March 1998). In addition, its insistence that Rifa'i Taha, who initially joined the Front, should leave it—which he did—also helped the Jama'a's image. The regime's continued legal and security measures against Jama'a members, such as the execution of members condemned to death and the killing of others in police raids, did not weaken the Jama'a leadership's resolve to maintain the initiative nor its ability to market it to its membership.

For about four years, the initiative was given little attention, and the Egyptian government did not adopt an official position on it. This began to change after September 11, when in October 2001, the government allowed al-Jama'a's imprisoned leaders to begin lecturing in various prisons in order to promote their initiative. In June 2002, the government launched an intensive media campaign allowing the Jama'a leaders to explain their views, as well as expressing its own endorsement of the initiative as a sincere and serious one. In September and October 2003, about 900 Jama'a members, including leading members, were released from prison. Following the release of 900 additional members during April 2006, about 2,000 remained in prison.

The government's decision to publicly and dramatically embrace the initiative five years after it had been launched triggered several theories. One of them connected the timing of the move with the pressure campaign the government was conducting at the time against the Muslim Brotherhood, suggesting that the regime was seeking to make the Jama'a compete with the MB and thus weaken the latter's predominance. The most likely explanation, however, seems to be that at that time, the U.S. administration had adopted a new concept, according to which al-Jama'a was part of al-Qa'ida's network. That could again put Egypt on the spot as a focus of terror. Giving Jama'a leaders the opportunity to demonstrate publicly the depth of their ideological transformation was the best way to refute that view.

It was also in 2002 that the organization was permitted to publish the first four in its series of revisionist books, entitled *The Correction of Conceptions (Tashih al-Mafahim)*; two others came out in 2003 and 2004. The first four books were: *The Initiative of Cessation of Violence: A Realistic Vision*

and a Shar'i View (*Mubadarat Waqf al-Unf: Ru'iyah Waqi'iyya wa-Nazra Shar'iyah*), *The Prohibition of Excessiveness in Religion and of the Attribution of Apostasy to Muslims* (*Hurmat al-Ghulu fi al-Din wa-Takfir al-Muslimin*), *Illuminating the Mistakes Occurring in the Jihad* (*Taslit al-Adwaa ala ma Waqa'a fi al-Jihad min Akhtaa*), and *Advice and Clarification to Correct the Concepts of Those who Take Responsibility for Society* (*al-Nush wal-Tabyin fi Tashih Mafahim al-Muhtasibin*). The fifth book, *The Strategy of al-Qa'ida—Mistakes and Dangers* (*Istratijiyyat al-Qa'ida—Akhtaa wa-Akhtar*), was published in August 2003, to be followed in June 2004 by *Islam and the Challenges of the 21st Century* (*al-Islam wa-Tahaddiyat al-Qarn al-Wahid wal-Ishrin*). Each book was written by one or several members of the leadership group and approved by the others. The group includes Karam Zuhdi, Najih Ibrahim, Usama Hafiz, Ali al-Sharif, Hamdi Abd al-Rahman, Asim Abd al-Majid, Isam al-Din Dirbala, and Fuad al-Dawalibi.

The last book, *Islam and the Refinement of Wars* (*al-Islam wa-Tahdhib al-Hurub*), came out in August 2006. It refutes, among other things, al-Qa'ida's central argument that Saudi Arabia contravened Islamic law when it relied on military help from non-Muslims (the United States and other non-Muslim members of its coalition) against Saddam Hussein's forces after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and allowed the presence of those non-Muslim forces on the soil of the Arabian Peninsula in order to defend against Iraqi attack on Saudi Arabia itself. The book maintains that al-Qa'ida's strategy has contributed to the unification of the entire world against what is perceived as the "Islamic danger" and has led to the destruction of Afghanistan. It further argues that Islam today is in a situation that requires a

"defensive jihad" (*jihad al-daf*)—in defense against invasions by foreign forces—and not "offensive jihad" (*jihad al-talab*), seeking to expand the lands of Islam, which unifies its enemies against it. It refutes the legal foundations of the February 1998 fatwa issued by the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders, which authorized the killing of every American, including civilians, anytime and anywhere.

The book also rejects the takfiri position that Muslim society at large is in a state of apostasy because it fails to observe the Shari'a, arguing that many or most Muslims do observe the Shar'ia's instructions. The book also criticizes the bombings and suicide attacks that were carried out in Muslim countries, refuting the jihadists' argument that the Shari'a allows the killing of Muslims if they stand in the way or are used by the infidels as protective shields (*tatarrus*). It further states that hijacking an aircraft and holding its passengers hostage is a violation of the Shari'a because it amounts to punishing the innocent, and that destruction of infrastructure and government facilities by Islamist groups leads to public resentment and animosity toward Islam. According to Islam's laws of war, the book argues, wars should not be fought for revenge and should not seek to annihilate the enemy; the killing of noncombatant civilians is also forbidden. Each position and judgment is backed by ample evidence from the Koran and the *hadith* (the words and deeds of Muhammad), reflecting deep knowledge of *fiqh* in the four legal schools (*madhahib*).

Yet what is the actual significance of al-Jama'a and its revisionist project? To what extent does it influence the attitudes of young Islamists, attracted by the appeal of the takfiris and Salafist-jihadists? Al-Jama'a's detractors argue that it is a

spent force with no influence whatsoever because it has associated itself so tightly with the state security apparatuses that it appears actually to be handled by them. Yet the taped message of al-Qa'ida's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri (shown by al-Jazeera on August 12, 2006), in which he announced that "a great faction of the leaders of Egypt's al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya," including Umar Abd al-Rahman and Rifa'i Taha, had joined al-Qa'ida, demonstrates that al-Jama'a's positions still count.

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and Jama'at al-Jihad were formed in the 1970s, mainly by university students who viewed President Anwar Sadat's policies as amounting to apostasy. Influenced by Sayyid Qutb's doctrine, they held that Sadat's regime had to be removed by force, and they condemned the Muslim Brotherhood for its strategy of coexistence with what they considered to be an apostate government. The two organizations were united between 1980 and 1983, perhaps the most important years in their history. Al-Zawahiri, the former leader in al-Jihad's organization, later sought to have al-Jama'a join the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders when it was formed, but al-Jama'a declined.

Najih Ibrahim, one of its leaders, firmly denied al-Zawahiri's August 12, 2006, statement and managed to prove that the personalities mentioned above, as well as others, had not joined al-Qa'ida. According to him, al-Zawahiri made that statement for two reasons: first, because he seeks to have followers in Egypt, which he does not, and Egyptians might be tempted to join him if they believed that al-Jama'a leaders have; and second, because al-Jama'a's anti-violence initiative led many mujahidin to recant, and al-Zawahiri seeks to undermine that initiative.

Still another explanation provided for al-Zawahiri's move was that negotiations, which had been under way for some time, between the authorities and imprisoned al-Jihad leaders over a new cessation of violence initiative to be announced by al-Jihad, were nearing a critical stage, and al-Zawahiri had attempted to subvert them and block that initiative. It was reported that during the negotiations between the state and al-Jihad—conducted on behalf of the latter by Muhammad al-Zawahiri (Ayman's younger brother) and Mustafa Hamza (responsible for the June 1995 attempted assassination of President Mubarak) among others—the point had indeed been reached where all the incarcerated members of the organization accepted the principle of cessation of violence as it was formulated by al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya.

A final agreement was delayed, however. This was because al-Jihad's leader, Abud al-Zumur, had demanded that as part of the agreement, once out of prison, the group's members would be free to enter political life and form political parties, yet the government rejected this request. Al-Zumur's insistence on that demand has reportedly prevented the completion of the negotiations and the launching of al-Jihad's own antiviolence initiative. Whatever the final terms of that agreement, by late 2006 Jam'at al-Jihad had for all practical purposes been transformed, as was the case with al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah.

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