

ISLAMISM IN POLITICS: Integration and Persecution in Egypt

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Abstract

This paper tries to portray the why in which Islamism reacted to political constellation in the Egyptian context from the time of Anwar Sadat to of Hosni Mubarak. It shows that the Egyptian government from time to time often adopts a harsh policy toward any forms of extremism in the name of Islam. However, persecution led to nothing but the increase of radical Islamism. This occurred because the Islamist movement failed to integrate their ideas in the real political domain. Failure in integration to both political and social life fueled further exclusivism.

Keywords: Islamism, Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood, Modern Arab World

A. Introduction

Moderate Islamists have attempted to integrate themselves into the political systems of the Middle East, but have continually been met with repression and persecution by incumbent regimes. Due to their increasing popularity in the Arab world, state governments have marginalized Islamists in politics by various means. These restrictions include instituting constitutional reforms that limit their ability to participate, bolstering support for smaller secular opposition groups who are seen as less of a threat, delegitimizing the results of elections where Islamists gain a majority of the popular vote, and imprisonment. This marginalization of their political status throughout history, and in

many cases their persecution, stimulates sentiments amongst Islamists that participation is a lost cause to achieve their political goals. From this repression, a divergence in political strategies emerged amidst Islamists in the Middle East. Continued exclusion of moderate Islamists from the political process paves the way for radical extremist groups to splinter off and pursue more violent forms of political expression. In an effort to understand some of the root causes for the existence of radical extremism in the Arab world, it is critical to understand the long history of repression and persecution suffered by a group that tried to integrate: the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Islam as a political ideology refers to “the beliefs and practices of those Muslims who seek to establish an Islamic state in order to enforce obedience to the Islamic law or *sharī‘a* derived from the Koran and the life and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed.”¹ As such, Muslims who follow this ideology seek to replace existing Western influenced political structures with those viewed as more in line with core religious values. The manner in which Muslims choose to establish an Islamic state varies considerably throughout the Middle East. For Muslims in places like Algeria and Sudan, violence and conflict are used as a means to attain this goal.² Conversely, there exist moderate Islamists in other regions who seek to work within existing pluralistic political frameworks to rise to power, where they then can maintain their commitments to implement *sharī‘a* law.³ Cases of the more moderate vein of Islamism exist with groups like the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Regardless of what means is used to employ political Islam, both camps within religious political activism seek to provide solutions to existing socio-economic, political and cultural challenges that affect Muslim society.

Moderate Islamists choose to participate in the political process of their respective countries for several reasons. Their decision to participate

¹ Caroline Cox and John Marks, *The West, Islam and Islamism: Is Ideological Islam Compatible with Liberal Democracy?* 2nd ed. (London: Civitas, Institute for the Study of Civil Society, 2006), p. 6.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

in the legal political process stems primarily from the beliefs of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.⁴ First, one of the key ideas promoted by the Brotherhood is the notion of *shūra*, or consultation.⁵ This idea of *shūra* suggests that a ruler attains power only through the collective will of the people to grant him this power, trusting that he will obey the law.⁶ This idea in Islamic law provides the reasoning for moderate Islamists in the Arab world to participate in the political process. Second, moderate Islamists accept that they have to operate within a framework in which other political parties exist, and that these other parties have different ideologies and goals.⁷ Third, they accept the sovereignty of Arab state boundaries and their autonomy, thereby abrogating their ideals of establishing one Islamic state.⁸ Finally, moderate Islamists understand that operating within the existing political framework is necessary to have a voice and achieve their objectives.⁹ Even though moderate Islamists recognize the legitimacy of pluralistic politics and agree to operate within these frameworks, their desire to integrate is consistently met with opposition.

Despite their wishes to participate in the political process, moderate Islamists face continued challenges in the Arab world that stem from fear of their popularity in the Middle East, and from questions regarding their true commitment to democracy. As a result, moderate Islamists are marginalized in politics by incumbent regimes that fear the ramifications of Islamist participation. First and foremost, opposition groups – to include small secular parties and Islamists -- have a difficult time wading through the political process given the power, money and influence of

⁴ Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, *Getting to Pluralism: Political Actors in the Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), p. 70.

⁵ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 243.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation: The Challenge for Euro-Mediterranean Relations* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2009), p. 109.

⁸ Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, *Getting to Pluralism*, p. 70.

⁹ *Ibid.*

incumbent regimes.¹⁰ Regimes use their power to place boundaries on the extent of Islamist participation in politics in particular.¹¹ Second, opposition groups face repression by the incumbent regime. There is a great imbalance of power between incumbent regimes and oppressed opposition groups.¹² This imbalance prevents the opposition from “developing into sophisticated organizations capable of exerting real pressure on the governments.”¹³ It is for these reasons that political reform is inert in the Middle East. Political stagnation thus occurs as a result of inequitable power distributions between incumbent regimes and opposition parties.¹⁴

As a direct result of the many political challenges that moderate Islamists face in the Middle East, there is a realization that their participation efforts are futile.¹⁵ Therefore, radical groups form and seek alternative measures to address their socio-economic and political woes. The regimes they rebel against offer no “hope for a better life... they offer little but oppression and despair.”¹⁶ These radical forms of political expression are thus “reactionary” in nature.¹⁷ According to Esposito, radical extremists develop their strategies in reaction to repressive government policies.¹⁸ What is interesting however is that though radical groups respond through violent means against the repressive incumbent regimes, moderate Islamists remain committed to non-violence as a strategy.¹⁹ Radical extremists seek to overthrow the existing regimes while moderates choose to continue operating within

¹⁰ Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, *Getting to Pluralism*, p. 5.

¹¹ Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation*, p. 115.

¹² Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, *Getting to Pluralism*, p. 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation*, p. 108.

¹⁶ Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism: Causes, Diversity, & Challenges* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2008), p. 22.

¹⁷ John Esposito, *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), p. 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation*, p. 108.

institutional frameworks.²⁰ This dichotomy between radical and moderate religious activism in Islamism will be explored further through the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

B. The Muslim Brotherhood: Integration and Persecution

Egyptian regimes over the past sixty years have fluctuated between integration and persecution of Islamists in politics. There has been a consistent history of punishment and exclusion of Islamist groups who attempt to assimilate into the political process. This trend of exclusion and persecution is particularly evident throughout the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, and is highlighted here because many other moderate and radical activists have their beliefs founded in those of the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite their unrelenting oppression, the Muslim Brotherhood continues to pursue non-violent means to achieve their political goals in Egypt. Conversely, there has been a pattern of radical extremist groups fragmenting from the Muslim Brotherhood who seek violent means to attain their goals. It is this continued pattern of repression and persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt that provides insight into the roots of radical extremism.

The Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic activist group, was founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928.²¹ While studying in Cairo, al-Banna became disenchanted by the corruption of educated youth who strayed from the “Islamic way of life” in Egypt.²² After his studies, Hasan became a teacher in the Islamic faith and moved to a town called Isma’iliyya, a small town situated along the Suez Canal in Egypt. He taught the “message of Islam” at the local mosques to students during the day and parents at night.²³ While in Isma’iliyya, al-Banna was disturbed by the social influences that westernization had on Muslim peoples in the region, and in particular the western occupation of the Suez Canal.²⁴ He also observed great disparities in economic wealth between the British

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim*, p. 8.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

foreign occupiers and their impoverished workers.²⁵ One day in 1928, several poor workers from the Suez Canal project approached al-Banna to show their admiration for his teachings, and to express their wishes to be led by him.²⁶ It was on this day in 1928, that he officially formed the Society of the Muslim Brothers.²⁷

The message of Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood focuses on a return to Islam as a solution to many of the problems that Muslim society faces. Al-Banna was concerned with Muslim disunity arising from rival factions in Islam, western economic imperialism in Egypt, the moral degradation of Muslim life through western social influences, and the impact that western secular ideologies had on Egyptian politics.²⁸ As a solution, the Brotherhood believed that the socio-economic and political restoration of Egyptian rule should be guided under the principles of Islam and restored to an Islamic order under *shari'ah* law.²⁹ According to al-Banna, Islam did not refer solely to religion, but rather encompassed religion, culture, politics and economics.³⁰ In Islam, he believed there was no separation between *dīn* and *dawla*, religion and state.³¹ According to al-Banna, this resurgence of Islam in politics would follow the notion of *shūrah* and be fully adaptable to the needs of a modern Muslim society.³² Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as a moderate Islamist group at the onset that would agree to work within the framework of modern societies, and not aim to proselytize opposition groups. Al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood gained popularity in Egypt because the group promoted progressive reforms on issues in government, economics, education, social welfare, public health, women's rights and morality.³³

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 216-23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 235-6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 258-94.

In the twenty year period following Egypt's declaration of independence from Great Britain in 1922, it was ruled under a "corrupt and inefficient" monarchy that relied heavily on British support.³⁴ The Muslim Brotherhood was a major opposition group to Egyptian rule during this period, and several strands of the movement responded with acts of violence toward the regime despite the non-violent teachings of al-Banna. The Egyptian monarchy ultimately held Hasan al-Banna accountable for the violent acts of his Society, and thus assassinated him in 1949.³⁵

1. Early Signs of Persecution under Nasser

After al-Banna was assassinated in 1949, the Muslim Brotherhood joined forces behind the Egyptian revolution of 1952, led by the left-leaning Free Officers' regime and headed by General Gamal Abdul Nasser.³⁶ After some disputes over leadership in the year following the revolution, Nasser ultimately became president of Egypt in 1954. During this period, tensions and conflict arose between the Muslim Brotherhood, headed by Hudaybi (al-Banna's successor), and Nasser. At the heart of these tensions was the concern that Nasser intended to promote secular Arab nationalism instead of promoting an Islamic state.³⁷ Social, political and religious freedoms were sacrificed in Egypt for Nasser's desire to unite all Arab nations under his rule.³⁸ In 1954, there was an attempt to assassinate Nasser, and as a result he blamed the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁹ Between 1952 and 1960, several Brothers were condemned to death, while many more were imprisoned indefinitely -- including Hudaybi, the Brotherhood's leader.⁴⁰ Though the assassination attempt seemed to justify their persecution outwardly, Nasser used this opportunity to

³⁴ Peter R. Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism: The Dilemma of the Muslim World* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006), p. 97.

³⁵ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim*, p. 68-71.

³⁶ Peter R. Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism*, p. 97.

³⁷ John Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 174.

³⁸ Peter R. Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism*, p. 98.

³⁹ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim*, p. 157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 161-2.

squash his regime's greatest political threat: the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴¹

Nasser's repressiveness toward the Muslim Brotherhood caused a divergence within Islamist thinking. Among those imprisoned was an influential ideologue, Sayyid Qutb.⁴² As a result of the massive political repression of the Muslim Brotherhood at this time, Qutb viewed the Nasser regime as the *jāhiliyya*, or impious society that needed to be destroyed.⁴³ According to Qutb, sovereignty belongs only to God in Islam and not man.⁴⁴ Qutb believed that it was the duty of Muslims to overthrow the *jāhiliyya* just as the Prophet Muhammad did in the city of Mecca during the *jihād*, or the struggle.⁴⁵ Qutb translated this into the use of violence as the means to do so, and thus a radical base developed within Islamist thinking.⁴⁶ In 1962, Qutb put his ideas into a book that became known as *Signposts*.⁴⁷ Nasser read and banned all copies that had been produced and announced in 1965 that the Muslim Brotherhood was conspiring against the regime, with Qutb as its leader.⁴⁸ Qutb was subsequently arrested and sentenced to death in 1966.⁴⁹

The continued imprisonment and execution of Islamists in Egypt under Nasser urged small armed wings to split from the Muslim Brotherhood, because they saw that there was no hope for Islamists in politics.⁵⁰ These radical extremists were followers of Qutb's teachings, considered Qutb to be a martyr, and thus rallied behind his execution.⁵¹ These extremists also thought that the moderates of the Muslim Brotherhood possessed "cowardly" and "accommodationist" traits.⁵² It is

⁴¹ Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵¹ Peter R. Demant. *Islam vs. Islamism*, p. 103.

⁵² *Ibid.*

here where the divide within the Muslim Brotherhood becomes apparent. Conversely, the moderates within the Muslim Brotherhood continued to follow in the ideals of its founder, al-Banna, who denounced the use of violence as “anti-Islamic.”⁵³ Also, Hudaybi believed that people of the Islamic faith could only be judged by God, and were not relegated to the judgment of man.⁵⁴ Therefore, most of the Muslim Brothers renounced violence despite repression suffered by the Nasser regime.⁵⁵ Since the 1960s, this group has tried to separate itself from the teachings of Sayyid Qutb.⁵⁶ Instead, the majority of the Brotherhood has “committed to moderate educational and political activity, hoping to turn society around in the long run.”⁵⁷

2. *Failed Attempt to Integrate Islam in Politics under Sadat*

When Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser as president in 1971, there was a revitalization of the Islamic movement in Egypt. Egypt’s major defeat by Israel in the 1967 “June War” signaled the end of Nasser’s popularity and the emergence of Islamism as an alternative.⁵⁸ In an effort to counter the strength of the Nasserites in the region, Sadat committed to a resurgence of Islam in Egyptian politics. Sadat “employed Islamic symbols and rhetoric” throughout his presidency.⁵⁹ Sadat made a commitment to integrate Islam in his political affairs: he increased the number of mosques, “legitimized the 1973 Egyptian-Israeli war as *jihād*,” and freed the Muslim Brotherhood leaders from imprisonment.⁶⁰ The main reason he freed and strengthened the once weakened Muslim Brotherhood was to bolster his own legitimacy and garner public support.⁶¹

⁵³ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim*, p. 69.

⁵⁴ Peter R. Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism*, p. 102.

⁵⁵ Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, “Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt’s Opportunity”, *ICG Middle East and North Africa Briefing* (Cairo and Brussels, 20 April 2004), p. 10.

⁵⁷ Peter R. Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism*, p. 102.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵⁹ John Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, p. 174.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Though the Muslim Brotherhood was weakened after imprisonment, they took a strong stance against violence and vowed to work for change within the political framework.⁶² It should be noted that after their release, they were still not recognized by Sadat's government as a legal party.⁶³

Conversely, radical extremists splintered off once the Muslim Brotherhood was freed from repression. Their fervor streamed from their experiences of imprisonment and persecution by the government, and believed the government to be anti-Islamic.⁶⁴ These radical groups saw peaceful participation was not an option for Muslims in the political process, and thus sought to use violent means to overthrow the government.⁶⁵ When Sadat freed the Muslim Brotherhood from imprisonment, he also empowered radicals from this group who countered Sadat's leftist opposition. The jihadists wanted Sadat to form an Islamic state, but he rejected their wishes. These groups ultimately gained popularity and strength due to a lack of public support for Sadat's regime.⁶⁶

After reviving the Islamic movement, Sadat came to fear the popular support that the Muslim Brotherhood had gained in Egypt. He began to view this group as a political threat to his regime, just as Nasser felt a decade before. There were several occurrences in Egypt that augmented these fears. First, Islamic student associations throughout Egypt were gaining widespread support within their universities and posed a formidable threat by their numbers.⁶⁷ Second, the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (a radical splinter of the Brotherhood) criticized Sadat for the concessions he made in the peace treaty with Israel in 1979, his support for the Shah of Iran, and his liberalized economic policies that were seen as too "western."⁶⁸ Finally, both moderate and radical

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet: The Rise and Fall of Radical Political Islam* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p. 61.

⁶⁷ Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam in Egypt and Jordan* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), p. 38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

branches of the Brotherhood felt that Sadat's policies would reopen the door to increased Western economic and social influences in the region, and thus compromise Islamic mores.⁶⁹

As a result, Sadat reversed his support for the Islamist movement and reverted to repressive measures against the Muslim Brotherhood. He came to be known as "the Pharaoh" by radical groups. He instead promoted a separation of religion and state, reversed his position on the privatization of mosques, prohibited Islamic student unions from forming, and marginalized the political status of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷⁰ In addition, he modified electoral laws in 1976 which made it difficult for groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to form legal political parties.⁷¹ This suppression ultimately resulted in the imprisonment of many Islamic thinkers from the public strata, and sadly in the assassination of Sadat in 1981 by members from the radical group, al-Jihad al-Islamiyya.⁷²

3. Integration and Persecution under Mubarak

When President Mohammad Hosni Mubarak assumed leadership of the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Egypt in 1982, he was more receptive to the moderate Muslim Brotherhood than his predecessor had been in the recent years. He allowed this group to openly operate out of their headquarters in downtown Cairo, and even gave the group rights to contest parliamentary elections in 1984 and 1987.⁷³ This tolerance was due in large part for several reasons. First, President Mubarak did not have any political leanings prior to his election as Vice-President under Anwar Sadat in 1975.⁷⁴ Second, he was not part of the generation that followed Nasser, and thus did not harbor any of the same tensions that had existed previously with the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷⁵ Third, given the public distaste for the government and the rise in radical extremism

⁶⁹ John Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, p. 175.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁷¹ Hesham Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy: The Muslim Brothers and Mubarak, 1982-2000* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2004), p. 79.

⁷² Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism*, p. 121.

⁷³ Hesham Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy*, p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

following the Sadat era, President Mubarak acted prudently against any forms of public oppression of the group.⁷⁶ Therefore, Mubarak needed to regain public support for the government and needed the reinforcements of the majority opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷⁷

In the early 1990s, the Mubarak regime continued to extend an olive branch to the Muslim Brotherhood in an effort to overpower radical Islamists in the region. He did this by distinguishing between two groups of Islamists in Egypt: those which use peaceful means to operate within the current political system, and those who use violent tactics to overthrow the government.⁷⁸ As such, the regime opened up a “dialogue” with the Muslim Brotherhood to counter the violent threat together.⁷⁹ With their greater acceptance, their desire increased for political participation. In 1994, the Muslim Brotherhood conducted internal party elections in 1994 in an effort to work within the political system, yet faced backlash by the regime who viewed these efforts as a threat to the existing government.⁸⁰ This backlash resulted in a dismemberment of the Muslim Brotherhood political faction, and a slide back into exclusion from political assimilation.⁸¹ Once again, this repression fueled subsequent radical sentiments by violent strands of Islamist activists. Before President Mubarak’s inevitable reelection for a third time in 1995, a radical extremist made an attempt on his life during his trip to Ethiopia.⁸² The regime reacted by instituting harsh security measures in response to the extremist threat. The regime’s repressive measures were taken against all Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Mubarak’s regime thus arrested and imprisoned key figureheads in this organization as a result.⁸³

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁸ Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation*, p. 42.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Hesham Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy*, p. 189.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

C. Radical Extremism: a Response

Radical extremists are motivated by some of the same goals as moderate Islamists: by politics, social and economic inequalities, military intervention of Western states, and the Arab world's loss in the 1967 war with Israel.⁸⁴ The difference between these two groups lies in their beliefs on governance and in the means by which they seek change. First, moderate Islamists believe in *shūra* or consultation, while radical extremists believe in *ḥākimiyya*, or governance by God alone. Second, unlike the moderate Islamists who follow the moderate teachings of Hasan al-Banna, radical splinters from this group follow Sayyid Qutb's teachings and seek revolution and violence as a means to achieve their political goals.⁸⁵ Unlike their moderate counterparts who are willing to work within pluralistic political frameworks, radical extremists seek to "destabilize the state through sporadic acts of violence."⁸⁶ Radical Islam "has proven seductive to those on the margins of society, excluded from wealth and power, and the inequities in many Muslim societies have provided fertile fodder for Islamist agitation."⁸⁷ Thus, the marginalization and persecution of Islamists in the political strata by presiding regimes, has played a significant role in the ascendance of radical extremist groups.

1. Origins of Jihadists in Egypt

As detailed throughout the history of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the ideologies of radical extremist groups that splintered were based in the teachings of Sayyid Qutb. As mentioned before, Qutb believed that Nasser's government at the time represented the *jābiliyya*, or an impious society.⁸⁸ According to Qutb, the *jābiliyya* must be destroyed as the Prophet Muhammad destroyed the impious city of Mecca through *jihād*.⁸⁹ He also felt that political reform was a waste of time because it "only served to corrupt Muslims and strengthen the enemies of

⁸⁴ Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam*, p. 4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, *The Receding Shadow*, p. 61.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁸ Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Islam.”⁹⁰ Radical extremists that follow Sayyid Qutb, put his teachings to practice.⁹¹ Thus, radical extremists feel that *jihād*, or the struggle, is necessary to achieve their socio-economic and political goals as did Qutb.⁹² In the 1970s and 1980s, Qutb’s teachings were popular amongst university students in Egypt, who joined these radical extremist groups.⁹³ University students turned to radical extremism due to their repression and imprisonment suffered under the Sadat regime, and because of their rejection of his liberal socio-economic policies in Egypt.⁹⁴

Beginning under Sadat’s regime, two main radical extremist groups splintered from the Muslim Brotherhood: al-Jihad al-Islamiyya (EIJ) and al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya. Both groups sought to overthrow state government and were the leaders in conducting acts of violence in Egypt through to the late 1990s.⁹⁵ The main difference between the two existed with regards to their “social and geographical environment.”⁹⁶ Both groups were believed to have collaborated in Sadat’s assassination in 1981, resulting in the arrest of their leaders and their subsequent execution.⁹⁷

The EIJ formed in Cairo and Giza in 1979 under the leadership of Mohammad Abdel Salam Farag, who adopted Qutb’s ideologies.⁹⁸ In his work entitled *The Neglected Duty*, Farag draws on the ideas of Qutb and another ideologue, Ibn Taymiyya, proposing that *jihād* is the sixth pillar of Islam.⁹⁹ In particular, Farag believed that “the decline of Muslim societies was made possible by those who had lulled the community into believing that *jihād* was non-violent...the restoration of the Muslim world to the straight path of Islam hinged on reclaiming the true meaning of

⁹⁰ Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism*, p. 86.

⁹¹ Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam*, p. 25.

⁹² Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism*, p. 86-7.

⁹³ Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 155.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129-38.

⁹⁵ Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam*, p. 25.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹⁷ Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation*, p. 35; Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam*, p. 27.

⁹⁸ Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam*, p. 27.

⁹⁹ John Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror In The Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 62.

jihād...the neglected requirement of Islam.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Farag and his followers in the EIJ believed that the violent overthrow of the state and its rulers was necessary, and it was the “obligation for all true believers.”¹⁰¹ Thus, the EIJ rejected the thought of working within the framework of the current political system and sought instead to “destabilize the state through sporadic acts of violence.”¹⁰² They targeted killings of key state officials, and sought the establishment of an Islamic state led by a caliph.¹⁰³ It was believed that this goal could only be achieved through *jihād*. In 1998, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of the EIJ, became affiliated with Osama bin Laden’s al-Qai’da network. In 2001, the EIJ officially became a part of al-Qai’da.¹⁰⁴

Al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya was founded in 1973 in the poorer regions of Upper Egypt, Minya and Assiut.¹⁰⁵ Al-Jama’a’s rebellion against the state stemmed from its poor economic conditions in Upper Egypt, the high unemployment rate amongst youth, and a strong hatred for Sadat’s regime.¹⁰⁶ Unlike the EIJ, al-Jama’a targeted killings on Egyptian society in addition to state officials in Egypt.¹⁰⁷ The goals of this organization were to eradicate the regime and restore an Islamic state led by *shari’a* law, and to commence a *jihād* against the “enemies of Allah” which included the state and its supporters.¹⁰⁸ Thus, violence was used to attain their goals.

The constant pattern of political repression and persecution faced by moderate Islamist parties from the Nasser regime through to the current Mubarak regime, has been met with a pattern of revolt and violence. While the long history of the Muslim Brotherhood has shown that this moderate Islamist group continues its struggle for political participation amidst resistance from the state, its persecution over the

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁰² Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, *The Receding Shadow*, p. 61.

¹⁰³ Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism*, p. 123; Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism*, p. 122.

¹⁰⁵ Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁷ Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁸ Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam*, p. 28.

past sixty years has fueled radical sentiments and the formation of violent extremist groups like the EIJ and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya.

In recent years, the Muslim Brotherhood has continued to be suppressed from the political strata by the Mubarak regime. In 2005, though still not recognized as a political party, the Muslim Brotherhood won a majority 20% of seats in the parliamentary elections.¹⁰⁹ The Muslim Brotherhood emerged as the largest opposition group to the regime seeking political reform, and thus faced subsequent repression by the NDP. Mubarak's regime responded by instituting several legal and security measures that limited Muslim Brotherhood participation in politics further. The regime restricted their ability to run in future elections, to serve in parliament, and imprisoned many of their supporters and key leaders.¹¹⁰ In an effort to moderate their position further, the Muslim Brotherhood separated their political stance from their religious beliefs in 2007 by expressing their desire to run as an independent political party, at the risk of alienating themselves from the entire Society.¹¹¹ As a result, President Mubarak solidified his stance against the Muslim Brotherhood by amending Article 5 of the Constitution in 2007, to continue the ban on "the formation of a political party by the Muslim Brotherhood."¹¹² These amendments went a step further and forbid "any political activity within any religious frame of reference."¹¹³ This stipulation further restricts the Muslim Brotherhood who has attempted to separate its political platform from its religious beliefs in the hopes of participation.¹¹⁴ These additional measures to crackdown on a moderate, non-violent Islamist group that seeks participation in the political process continue to fuel radical sentiments.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, "Egypt's Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?" *ICG Middle East/North Africa Report*, 18 June 2008, p. i.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹² Nathan Brown and Michele Dunne, "Egypt's Controversial Constitutional Amendments," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 23 March 2007, p. 3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation*, p. 28.

2. *Is Islamist Integration Possible under the NDP?*

The short answer is no. President Mubarak's son, Gamal is likely to be his predecessor in the next 2011 presidential election and will likely continue the ruling line of the National Democratic Party.¹¹⁶ Opposition parties to the NDP believe there will only be hope for free and fair democratic elections in Egypt if someone from the outside wins over the incumbent regime in the next presidential election.¹¹⁷ In early December 2009, former head of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, announced his interest in running in the next election only if it is free and "transparent."¹¹⁸ He also claimed that he wants the elections opened up to all political parties, which would include the Muslim Brotherhood.¹¹⁹ The liberalization of the political system in Egypt in the next presidential election could pave the way for a new direction in leadership, one that is more representative of the people.

Radical extremists may resort to violence again if the NDP remains in power and remains immobile on liberalizing the political process.¹²⁰ While President Mubarak's amendments to the Constitution in 2007 further excluded the Muslim Brotherhood from the political process, they also fueled radical extremist sentiments.¹²¹ Ayman al-Zawahiri, lieutenant to Osama bin Laden, stated that the amendments to the Egyptian Constitution in 2007 "are a blow to everyone who took the path of elections to enact change in Egypt."¹²² In addition, in response to the increased security measures taken by the Mubarak regime, there are concerns that younger members of the Muslim Brotherhood, namely

¹¹⁶ Sheera Frenkel, "Mohamed ElBaradei Considers Running in Egypt Presidential Elections", *Times Online*, 05 December 2009, Cairo, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6945326.ece, accessed on 08 December 2009.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ BBC News, "EX-IAEA head ElBaradei Mulls Egypt Presidential Bid", *BBC*, 04 December 2009; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8395752.stm, accessed on 08 December 2009.

¹¹⁹ Sheera Frenkel, "Mohamed ElBaradei".

¹²⁰ International Crisis Group, "Islamism in North Africa I", p. 1.

¹²¹ Nathan Brown and Michele Dunne, "Egypt's Controversial Constitutional", p. 1.

¹²² Michael Emerson *et al*, *Islamist Radicalisation*, p. 28.

university students, may resort to violence.¹²³ In January of 2008, The International Crisis Group conducted an interview with Khalil Al-Anani, an expert on Islamist groups in the region, who suggested that continued repression by the Mubarak regime toward the Muslim Brotherhood will move younger members of this organization to violence as an alternative.¹²⁴ He also claimed that these young members feel that they will not achieve any of their goals by engaging in the political process, judging by the failures of the Muslim Brotherhood to integrate.¹²⁵ These divergent thoughts are not all that new to splintered factions of the Muslim Brotherhood, but rather another instance of history repeating itself.

D. Conclusion

As this research has shown, there has been a cyclical history in Egypt in terms of Islamist attempts at integration in politics, their subsequent repression by the government, followed by the splintering of radical extremist groups. This dichotomy between Islamist integration and persecution from politics in Egypt reverberates from the time of the Nasser regime through to the current Mubarak regime. Al-Awadi reiterates this point in 2004 when he says, “from the founding of the movement in 1927, the relationship between the Muslim Brothers and the Egyptian regimes followed a sort of cyclical pattern that usually began with an accommodation or an alliance, and ended with confrontation.”¹²⁶ The consistent denial of integration of the Muslim Brotherhood and their long history of persecution, have repeatedly fueled radical extremist behavior over the last sixty years. In order to stem the tide of radical extremist behavior in the future, Egypt needs to liberalize its political system and open it up to all political parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Great power politics have influenced the decisions to repress this group over time, since they pose and have posed the largest opposition threat to the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak regimes in Egypt. These regimes have all sought to squash their largest political rival in an

¹²³ International Crisis Group, “Egypt’s Muslim Brothers”, p. 10.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Hesham Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy*, p. 30.

effort to preserve their strongholds in Egypt. If this pattern continues, and Islamists and other opposition groups feel that political participation is a waste of time just as Qutb did before, more radical extremist groups will splinter from the main movement. Therefore, only the integration of Islamists in the political process in Egypt will dispel radical extremist beliefs that a peaceful movement for reform is impossible. The realization that political goals may be achieved through peaceful means may help to resolve one of the root causes of radical extremism in modern day society.

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