

Frequently Asked Questions on the Muslim Brotherhood

What is the Muslim Brotherhood?

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is the world's oldest, largest and best-organized Islamist movement. Founded in Egypt in 1928 by Islamic scholar Hassan al-Banna, the Brotherhood remains dedicated to its original jihadist slogan: "Allah is our objective, the Koran is our constitution, the Prophet is our leader, struggle is our way and death for the sake of Allah is the highest of our aspirations."

As a transnational movement with branches in most Arab countries (including Hamas in Gaza), the Brotherhood strives to return all of the Islamic world to a Caliphate (Islamic empire) ruled by one individual governing by Islamic law. According to the Brotherhood's worldview, the existence of a sovereign non-Muslim entity within what it defines as the realm of Islam is unacceptable. The Brotherhood, therefore, has as a matter of religious faith opposed recognizing Israel as a sovereign Jewish state. Brotherhood spokesmen have promised to revoke the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The Brotherhood's restrictive stance toward women, religious minorities and societal freedoms are all based on its fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and varies greatly from established Western standards.

Has Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood moderated its positions and should it be considered a conventional political party whose involvement in the political process need not raise any special concerns?

Unlikely. Other Islamist groups have also modulated their pronouncements in an effort to seek popular support and gain power, only then to revert to repressive Islamist rule once in power. The most recent example of this is Hamas, which itself is an offshoot of the Brotherhood. Running on a "clean government" platform in the 2005 Palestinian elections, Hamas has since instituted a repressive Islamic dictatorship in Gaza.

The Brotherhood has long combined tactical flexibility with strategic rigidity. It has made numerous compromises to survive the Egyptian regime's suppression and to appeal to a broad constituency but has never abandoned its strategic goal of reestablishing the Caliphate over Egypt and beyond. As noted above, despite its "adoption" of democracy, the Brotherhood still declares that "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Koran is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."

While Egyptians will decide who may run in any future election, electoral success by the Brotherhood could jeopardize U.S. and Israeli security interests as well as the safety and well-being of religious minorities in Egypt. As the Brotherhood's newly elected leader Muhammad Badi stated last April, "We will continue to raise the banner of Jihad and the Koran in our confrontation with the enemy of Islam."

What is the Muslim Brotherhood's stance toward the United States?

Hostile. The Brotherhood has made numerous anti-U.S. statements. Muhammad Badi, the group's leader, recently said: "[T]he factors that will lead to the collapse of the U.S. are much more powerful than those that led to the collapse of the Soviet empire—for a nation that does not champion moral and human values cannot lead humanity, and its wealth will not avail it once Allah has had His say, as happened with [powerful] nations in the past. The U.S. is now experiencing the beginning of its end, and is heading towards its demise..."

Badi depicts the United States and Israel as Islam's main enemies. He said as recently as last September, "It is your obligation to... support all forms of resistance for the sake of liberating every occupied piece of land in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and all [other] parts of our Muslim world. The sources of your authority, as all religious scholars have agreed, are the Koran and the Sunnah, and not U.N. resolutions or the dictates of the

Zionists or Americans. This can be achieved if you declare the Palestine cause and the causes of the [other] occupied Islamic nations your primary concern. You must stand behind your free peoples and their various institutions in their repeated calls for boycotts, an end to normalization, and support for the resistance and its representatives...”

What is the Muslim Brotherhood's position on Israel and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty?

“Israel is an illegitimate occupier of Muslim land, and the peace treaty must be abrogated,” Brotherhood leader Badi said last September in a Friday prayer sermon. “It is your obligation to stop the absurd negotiations...and to support all forms of resistance for the sake of liberating every occupied piece of land in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and all [other] parts of our Muslim world.” In April 2010, he said, “The Muslim Brotherhood still considers the Zionists to be its main and only enemy. The Jews who occupy Palestine have their eyes set on Egypt.”

Top Brotherhood officials have repeatedly said they would abrogate the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Deputy Brotherhood leader Rashad al-Bayoumi was recently quoted by the Russian news agency RiaNovosti as saying, “After President Mubarak steps down and a provisional government is formed, there is a need to dissolve the peace treaty with Israel.” Meanwhile, Badi, the group’s top leader, said: “You must revoke all the agreements of capitulation... especially the Camp David Accords... which go against the Egyptian constitution and U.N. resolutions, and do not therefore obligate Egyptian senior officials.”

What is the Muslim Brotherhood's position on violence?

It supports “resistance.” In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Brotherhood engaged in violence against the Egyptian regime. Following a failed assassination attempt by the group against then-Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Brotherhood was ruthlessly repressed. It was only at this point that the group renounced the use of violence inside Egypt. It has, however, advocated violence against the United States and Israel as indicated in Badi’s statement above. Moreover, the Brotherhood’s Palestinian branch is the terrorist organization Hamas, whose “resistance” against Israel the Brotherhood has strongly supported. Thus, Badi stated on the Brotherhood’s website on Sept. 30, 2010, “I say to our brothers the *mujahideen* in Gaza [i.e., Hamas]: be patient, persist in [your jihad], and know that Allah is with you...”

What are the Muslim Brotherhood's core beliefs?

It believes Islam, through the Koran and Sunnah, constitutes a perfect way of life, and the organizing principle for social, legal and political organization. With branches in many Muslim countries, the Brotherhood believes that Islamic governments must be based on this system and eventually unified in a restored Caliphate. The Muslim Brotherhood’s goal, as stated by founder Hassan al-Banna is to establish an Islamic empire (“Caliphate”) over the entire area stretching from Spain to Indonesia.