

Hassan al banna and the muslim brotherhood



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For almost eight decades, the Society of Muslim Brothers, or Muslim Brotherhood, has been an integral part of the Egyptian political body. It was established in 1928, by Hassan al-Banna in the northeastern Egyptian city of Ismailia with the goal of restoring the Caliphate and implementing Sharia law. It quickly spread in Egypt and throughout the Islamic world at large. During this period, the Muslim Brothers acted as a political movement challenging the modern Egyptian state.

Hassan al-Banna was born October 14, 1906 in Al Mahmoudeya, Al - Behaira, Egypt to a traditional lower middle-class family. His father, Shaykh Ahmad al-Banna, a local imam and instructor of the Hanbali rite, was educated at Al-Azhar University. He wrote books on Muslim traditions and was a teacher at the local madrasah dÄ« niyyah where al-Banna received his first lessons in Islam. Shaykh Ahmad al-Banna also had a shop where he repaired watches and sold phonographs. Though Shaykh Ahmad al Banna and his wife owned some property, they were not wealthy and struggled to make ends meet, particularly after they moved to Cairo in 1924. Like many others, they found that Islamic learning and piety were no longer as highly valued in the capitol, and local craftsmanship could not compete with large-scale industry.

Hassan al-Banna's religious proclivity, activism, charismatic appeal, and leadership potential were evident from an early age. When Hassan al-Banna was twelve years old, he became involved in a Sufi order. At thirteen he participated in demonstrations during the revolution of 1919, against British rule, and by the age of fourteen he memorized the Koran.

From an early age Hassan al-Banna was attracted to the extremist and xenophobic aspects of Islam which were hostile to western secularism and its system of rights; particularly women's rights. While still in secondary school, he began to organize committees and societies stressing Islamic principles and morals. While still in his teens, al-Banna and his friends, or "brethren," met frequently to discuss the situation throughout the Middle East. They argued about the problems of Arab society and expressed their grief at the decline of Islam. Their anguish was in large part a reaction to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire[1], the end of the Muslim Caliphate[2], the British occupation of Egypt[3], and the resulting exposure of Arab society to western values.

It was in Cairo during his years at Dar al-' Ulum University that al-Banna joined religious societies involved in traditional Islamic education. He soon realized that this type of religious activity alone was insufficient to bring the Islamic faith back to its status in the public life of Egyptian people. He felt that more activism was needed, so he organized students from al-Azhar University and Dar al-Ulum University. He and his group started to preach in mosques and popular meeting places. During this period, al-Banna came to be influenced by the writings of Muhammad Abduh[4]and Rashid Rida[5].

When he graduated in 1927, he was appointed as a teacher of Arabic grammar in a primary school in Ismailia, a new small town in Egypt with a semi-European quality. It hosted the headquarters of the Suez Canal Company and a sizable foreign community. In Ismailia al-Banna started to preach his ideas to poor Muslim workers, local merchants, and civil servants, warning his listeners against the liberal way of life of the Europeans in town

and the dangers of emulating it. It was here he won his first followers, who encouraged him to form the Society of the Muslim Brethren in 1928.

For Hassan al-Banna, as for many other Muslims worldwide, the end of the Caliphate, although brought about by secular Muslim Turks, was a sacrilege against Islam for which they blamed the non-Muslim West. It was to strike back against these evils that in March 1928 along with a group of his “Brothers,” Hassan al-Banna created the Muslim Brotherhood. Similar to the groups that Al-Banna joined since he was twelve; the Brotherhood at first was only one of the numerous small Islamic associations that existed at the time where the members preached to anyone who would listen about the need for moral reform in the Arab world. These associations aimed to promote personal piety and engage in charitable activities. The Brotherhood’s ideals were based on the notion that Islam was a comprehensive way of life, not simply a religious observance. In its infancy the Brotherhood was a religious, political, and social movement with the basic beliefs that, “Allah is our objective; the Quran is our constitution, the Prophet is our leader; Jihad is our way; and death for the sake of Allah is the highest of our aspirations.” (Ikhwanweb) Al-Banna called for the return to fundamental Islam because according to him, contemporary Islam had lost its social dominance, because most Muslims had been corrupted by Western influences.

The Brotherhood saw itself both as a political and a social movement. The group’s activities focused on the secular regimes in the Arab world, starting with its own local, Egyptian government. The Muslim Brotherhood also worked to protect workers against the oppression of foreign companies and

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monopolies. They established social institutions such as hospitals, pharmacies, and schools.

Al-Banna's hatred towards Western modernity soon moved him to shape the Brotherhood into an organization seeking to check the secularist tendencies in Muslim society by asserting a return to ancient and traditional Islamic values. Al-Banna recruited followers from a vast cross-section of Egyptian society by addressing issues such as colonialism, public health, educational policy, natural resources management, social inequalities, Arab nationalism, the weakness of the Islamic world, and the growing conflict in Palestine. Among the perspectives he drew on to address these issues were the anti-capitalist doctrines of European Marxism and fascism.

In 1936 the Brotherhood had about 800 members, but by 1938, just two years into the Arab revolt in Palestine, its membership had grown to almost 200, 000, with fifty branches in Egypt. The organization established mosques, schools, sport clubs, factories and a welfare service network. By the end of the 1930s there were more than a half million active members registered, in more than two thousand branches across the Arab world. (Meir-Levi) Robin Hallett reports: " By the late 1940's the Brotherhood was reckoned to have as many as (2) million members, while its strong Pan-Islamic[6]ideas had gained supporters in other Arab lands." (Hallett) Its headquarters in Cairo became a center and meeting place for representatives from the whole Muslim world, also recruiting among the foreign students. The Muslim Brotherhood spread internationally founding groups in Lebanon (1936), Syria (1937), and Transjordan (1946).

As the Brotherhood grew through the 1930's and extended its activities beyond its original religious and social revivalism, al-Banna became more obsessed with the idea of the restoration of the Caliphate. He believed this could only become a reality through Jihad[7]. This idea helped grow a multitude of followers. Al-Banna described in inciting speeches the horrors of hell expected for heretics, and consequently, the need for Muslims to return to their purest religious roots, re-establish the Caliphate, and resume Jihad against the Kafir[8], or non-Muslim world. Al-Banna spelled out his ideas in a dissertation entitled "The Way of Jihad."

Hassan al-Banna saw Jihad as a defensive strategy against the west, stating that Islamic scholars: "Agree unanimously that Jihad is a communal defensive obligation imposed upon the Islamic ummah (Muslim community) in order to embrace Islam, and that it is an individual obligation to repulse the attack of unbelievers upon it." As a result of unbelievers ruling Muslim lands and degrading Muslim honor: "It has become an individual obligation, which there is no evading, on every Muslim to prepare his equipment, to make up his mind to engage in Jihad, and to get ready for it until the opportunity is ripe and God decrees a matter which is sure to be accomplished." (al-Banna)

Al-Banna's ideas on the rule of Jihad for the ummah in a citation of the Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna in which he goes back to the Hanafi-rules: "Jihad in its literal significance means to put forth one's maximal effort in word and deed; in the Sacred Law it is the slaying of the unbelievers, and related connotations such as beating them, plundering their wealth, destroying their shrines, and smashing their idols." "It is obligatory on us to begin fighting <https://assignbuster.com/hassan-al-banna-and-the-muslim-brotherhood/>

with them after transmitting the invitation [to embrace Islam], even if they do not fight against us.” (al-Banna)

The first steps that al-Banna took towards the Jihad that he envisioned came in the form of terrorism during the Arab revolt in Palestine from 1936-1939. One of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders, Hajj Amin al-Husseini[9], Grand Mufti (Supreme Muslim religious leader) of Jerusalem, incited his followers to a three-year war against the Jews in Palestine and against the British Mandate for Palestine.[10] Under al-Banna’s stewardship, the Brotherhood developed a network of underground cells, stole weapons, trained fighters, formed secret assassination squads, and created sleeper cells of subversive supporters in the ranks of the army and police who waited for the order to go public with terrorism and assassinations.

Underground links between the Nazis and the Brotherhood began during the 1930s and were close during the Second World War. Documents from the British, American, and Nazi German governmental archives, as well as, from personal accounts and memoirs of that period, confirm that in return for the Nazi aid the Brotherhood was involved in the agitation against the British, espionage and sabotage, as well as other terrorist activities.

The common link between them was their hatred of the Jews and the common goal of the destruction of the Jews. Both were explicitly anti-nationalist in the sense that they believed in the insolvency of the nation-state in favor of a non-national unifying community. For al-Banna and the Brotherhood this was the ummah; and for the Nazis it was dominance of the master race. The Nazis also offered great power connections to the Brotherhood. As the

Brotherhood's political and military alliance with the Nazis developed, these parallels facilitated practical connections that created a formal alliance. Al-Banna's followers easily introduced into the Arab world a new Nazi form of Jewish hatred. This was accomplished with Arab translations of Hitler's autobiography and political ideology, *Mein Kampf*, (translated into Arabic as "My Jihad") and other Nazi anti-Semitic works, including *Der Sturmer*, [11]and racist cartoons, modified to portray Jews as the demonic enemy of Allah.

When the question of Palestine came before the United Nations[12], al-Banna and Amin al-Husseini jointly urged the Arab world to unite in opposition to the creation of Israel. The two men saw in the UN resolution for the partition of Palestine, an example of the "Jewish world conspiracy," even though the plan provided for an Arab state in Palestine alongside the Jewish one. But in al-Banna's estimation, the creation of a state for the Arabs of Palestine was less vital than the eradication of Zionism and the annihilation of the region's Jews.

In November 1948, police seized an automobile containing documents and plans thought to belong to the Brotherhood's "secret apparatus" or military wing with the identity of its members. This find was succeeded by a series of bombings and attempted assassinations. Consequently thirty-two of the brotherhoods leaders were arrested and its offices raided.

Growing concern over the Brotherhood's rising influence and popularity, as well as rumors that the organization was plotting a coup against the Egyptian government, Prime Minister Mahmoud an-Nukrashi Pasha outlawed

the group in December 1948. The government seized the Brotherhood's assets and incarcerated many of its members. Less than three weeks later in what is thought to be retaliation for these acts, a member of the Brotherhood, veterinary student Abdel Meguid Ahmed Hassan, assassinated the Prime Minister Mahmoud an-Nukrashi Pasha on December 28, 1948. Following the assassination, al-Banna released a statement condemning the assassination, stating that terror is not an acceptable way in Islam.

The Egyptian government was not convinced of al-Banna's and the Brotherhood's non involvement. On February 12, 1949, al-Banna was at the Brotherhood headquarters in Cairo with his brother-in-law to negotiate with a representative from the government, Minister Zaki Ali Basha. The Minister never arrived and by 5 o'clock in the evening al-Banna decided to leave. As al-Banna and his brother-in-law stood waiting for the taxi, they were assassinated by two men. Al-Banna was shot seven times and was taken to a hospital where he died shortly thereafter.

After Egypt imprisoned and executed many Muslim Brothers through the 1950s, many of its' members fled the country and spread the brotherhood's attitudes and viewpoints throughout the Arab world. The group's main ideological voice became Sayyid Qutb, who detested Western values and believed that the Koran justified violence to overthrow any non-Islamic governments wherever Muslims lived. Qutb is credited for the ideology that has sparked many violent Islamic fundamental groups in existence today such as al Qaeda. He spent time in the United States in 1949 studying education and became a very vocal spokesperson about the evils within American Culture. On his return to Egypt Qutb became a leader of the

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Muslim Brotherhood and urged Muslims to take up arms against non Islamic governments. In 1964, Egyptian President Gamal Nasser granted amnesty to imprisoned Brothers which he was rewarded by the Brotherhood with three assassination attempts on his life. In 1966 the top leaders of the Brotherhood in Egypt were executed to include Sayyid Qutb who was accused of plotting against the government. Many others that failed to escape the country were imprisoned.

Nasser's successor, Anwar-as-Sadat, promised the Brotherhood that shari'a law would be implemented as Egyptian law. Like Nasser, Sadat released the members of the Brotherhood held in Egyptian prisons. The temporary peace between the Brotherhood and the Egyptian government lasted until Sadat signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1979. This enraged the Muslim Brotherhood who had deeply supported the Palestinians in their quest to take their homeland back since the 1922 British Mandate. On 06 October 1981 the Muslim Brotherhood assassinated Anwar Sadat during the annual victory parade held in Cairo to celebrate Egypt's crossing of the Suez Canal.

Al-Banna, as a first option did not propose violence as a means of creating an Islamic State but as the Muslim Brotherhood grew to an enormous size encompassing a large population with diverse and varying viewpoints many of its supporters in the did.

Brothers, who broke away from al-Banna's Brotherhood usually connected to or formed Islamic extremist organizations characterized by the same ultimate goal through different methods. These societies openly recognize and practice their will to use violence against " infidels" in order to promote

their brand of Islam. Although the Muslim Brotherhood denies involvement with off shoot organizations labeled as terrorist, many people in today's global security industry do consider the Brotherhood an underground terrorist group or at the very least a supporter of those organizations. However, the United States does not include the Muslim Brotherhood on their list of terrorist organizations. The United States does, however, regard many of the known off shoot groups such as the Islamic Jihad Group (IJG) and HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement) as terrorist organizations. (U. S. Department of State)

Islamic Jihad and Hamas are only two of the groups whose founders and leaders broke away from the Muslim Brotherhood because they believed in committing immediate and extreme acts to foster an Islamic State. The events surrounding the 1976 Egyptian Parliamentary elections lead to the creation of Muslim Brotherhood splinter groups. Because Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat did not recognize the Brotherhood as a political party the members of the Brotherhood running for seats in the Parliament were forced to either run as independents or as members of the ruling Arab Socialist Union. The Brotherhood won 15 seats on parliament; six had won on the ruling party's ticket and nine won independently. Sadat's success in co-opting several of the Brotherhood leaders into the political system angered many militant Brothers. The militant Brothers then disbanded from the Brotherhood in order to establish underground radical groups. These groups include Mukfirtiya (denouncers of the Infidel), Jund Allah (Soldiers of God), Munnazamat al Jihad (The Jihad Organization) and Al Takfir wa al Hijra (The Denunciation of Infidels and the Migration).

The Islamic Jihad Group developed out of the Muslim Brotherhood whose members viewed the Egyptian Brotherhood leaders' responses toward the occupation of Israeli as too moderate. (Moneeb) The Brotherhood favored the gradual development of a dominant Islamic State instead of seeking an immediate response through violence. This decision did not satisfy some of the members of the Brotherhood who were motivated to breakaway. These members, having been exposed to militant Islamic groups, such as the Jihad Group looked to satisfy their opinions in the formation of a new organization they titled the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

Hamas as well grew out of the Muslim Brotherhood in December 1987. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a Brotherhood spiritual leader, founded Hamas to be the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm in Palestine. Then in 1988 Hamas broke away from the Brotherhood when it published its official charter. Hamas's winning of the January 2006 Palestinian Authority's general legislative elections indicate Hamas is now the largest Palestinian militant movement. Hamas is well known for suicide bombings and other violent attacks with the goal to end Israel and to implement an Islamic state in its place.

Throughout the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, members have been rounded up and arrested for their anti-government stances in Egypt. Members have fled to Europe, Africa, throughout the Middle East and to the United States. They have set up charities to assist the Palestinians and to convert non-Muslims and to aid the poor. The Brotherhood has began taking a more moderate stance in their approach to the governments of the world in an attempt to gain further acceptance and to distance itself from its

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violent past. The main problem within the Brotherhood is the clandestine cells and financial networks that act on behalf of the Brotherhood in arming and organizing militant fundamental Islamic groups to further the goal of a worldwide Islamic Caliphate. It is the secrecy and behind the scenes objectives that will forever link the group to the majority of Sunni Islamic terrorist organizations around the globe.