

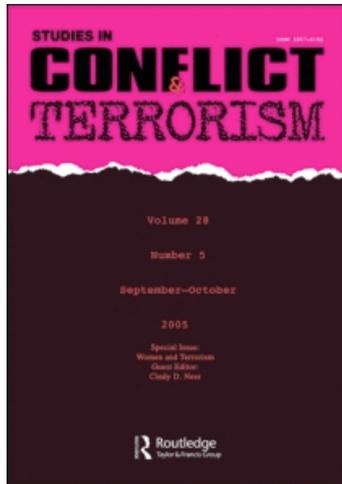
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Islam Divided Between *Salafi-jihad* and the *Ikhwan*

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The Muslim Brotherhood poses a unique challenge to efforts to combat Al Qaeda and like-minded groups. It is one of the key sources of Islamist thought and political activism, and plays a significant role in shaping the political and cultural environment in an Islamist direction. At the same time, it opposes Al Qaeda for ideological, organizational, and political reasons and represents one of the major challenges to the salafi-jihadist movement globally. This dual nature of the Muslim Brotherhood has long posed a difficult challenge to efforts to combat violent extremism. Does its non-violent Islamism represent a solution, by capturing Islamists within a relatively moderate organization and stopping their further radicalization (a “firewall”), or is it part of the problem, a “conveyor belt” towards extremism? This article surveys the differences between the two approaches, including their views of an Islamic state, democracy, violence, and takfir, and the significant escalation of those tensions in recent years. It concludes that the MB should be allowed to wage its battles against extremist challengers, but should not be misunderstood as a liberal organization or supported in a short-term convergence of interests.

The Muslim Brotherhood (hereafter MB), the largest and most influential mass-based Islamist movement in the Arab world, poses a unique challenge to efforts to combat Al Qaeda and like-minded groups. It is one of the key sources of Islamist thought and political activism, with affiliated organizations in almost every country in the world and a sophisticated political and social infrastructure.¹ It plays a crucial role in promoting Islamic consciousness and organizing political activism in a wide range of countries, particularly in the Arabic-speaking world. It strongly supports violent resistance against Israel, but at the same time has consistently denounced Al Qaeda’s ideology and terrorist activities in Muslim countries and in the West. It offers a significantly different vision of an Islamic state from that favored by *Salafi-jihadist* groups. As an Islamist movement with global reach and a message that resonates widely with Arab publics, the MB represents the strongest challenger to Al Qaeda and like-minded groups within Islamist politics—far stronger than the more liberal and Westernized “secular Muslims” or pro-American activists with which the United States generally prefers to work. Its leaders speak the language of democracy, reject extremism and *takfir*, and advocate peaceful political participation; yet, the MB

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remains deeply committed to spreading a conservative vision of Islamic society and its cadres are deeply hostile to Israel and to U.S. foreign policy.

How should the MB therefore be understood in the context of efforts to combat Al Qaeda and like-minded groups? Does its organizational and ideological rivalry with *Salafi-jihadist* groups outweigh its contributions to spreading Islamic identity and public culture? Why has the MB emerged in the last several years as a primary hostile fixation among *Salafi-jihadist* leaders and commentators? Should counterterrorism efforts identify the MB as a key part of the problem—facilitating the recruitment into more radical movements and ideologies even if eschewing violence itself—or as part of the solution? And how should policymakers weigh the short-term benefits of harnessing the MB's opposition to Al Qaeda against the long-term risks of facilitating the Islamization of Arab politics and society?

This is not simply a theoretical issue. The long-latent conflict between the MB and Al Qaeda has emerged over the last few years as a central cleavage in Islamist politics, driven by intense disagreements over Iraq, Palestine, the Shi'a question, and the legitimacy of participation in democratic elections.² Al Qaeda leaders from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir have sharpened their long-standing animus against the MB into a more global critique. In a series of tapes and writings, al-Zawahiri savaged Hamas and the Egyptian MB for their participation in elections and public life. Baghdadi and Muhajir identified the MB as the driving force behind the setbacks of the *jihad* in Iraq.

Like Al Qaeda, the MB is a global organization with a genuinely transnational scope and a universalizing mission.³ It competes with Al Qaeda at the global level in a way that few other Islamist movements can, commanding Arab media attention and a political presence which more than rivals its violent competitor. In general, Al Qaeda has found itself on the wrong side of virtually all of these arguments with respect to mainstream Arab public opinion, while the MB has taken broadly popular positions on each. At the same time, however, the "Global Muslim Brotherhood" exists only notionally. The MB is a loosely connected set of national organizations that vary widely in their local strength and relationship to competing power centers, and with very limited operational control from the main offices based in Cairo. Different national MB organizations feature widely varying configurations of organizational structures, ideological peculiarities, and relations with the state and other local Islamist movements.⁴ Understanding the extent of its challenge to Al Qaeda requires carefully analyzing national variations in addition to the macro-level debates.⁵

The debate about the counterterrorism implications of the MB revolves around two influential arguments: the "firewall" argument—that the MB "captures" Islamists within a relatively moderate and peaceful movement and prevents their evolution into more radical, violent actors—and the "conveyor belt" alternative, in which the MB's "nonviolent extremism" is only a stage in the process toward radicalization.⁶ The policy implications are enormous. States that repress the MB—often to preserve their own political power rather than to combat extremism—may not only be weakening the foundations of democracy and public freedoms, but also opening up the space in which Al Qaeda and other extremist groups can organize, recruit, and act. Ultimately, this article argues the MB should be allowed to wage its battle against its extremist challengers, but not supported as a privileged interlocutor. In addition, engagement with the Brotherhood should not promote illusions that it is a *liberal* actor, or likely to support broader American foreign policy objectives in the region. At one level, the discussion involves weighing the short-term potential for harming Al Qaeda against the long-term effects on the wider political culture.

The Intertwined Islamist Movements

We—the MB—reject completely the methods and actions by al-Qa’ida network. —MB Deputy Supreme Guide Mohammed Habib⁷

I don’t know where to start with the conspiracies, treasons, hateful alliances [of the MB] . . . they believe in parliaments and elections instead of declaring *takfir* on the tyrants . . . the Brothers of apostasy, living under the thumb of the tyrants and rejectionists (i.e. Shi’a) . . . —Al-Ekhlaas forum contributor “Shamal al-Baghdadi”⁸

The MB was formed in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna and quickly became a major political force inside of the country, then rapidly establishing branches throughout the Arab world.⁹ Only a few years after the 1952 Free Officers Revolution, which the MB supported, President Gamal Abd al-Nasser’s repression drove the MB underground and abroad into exile. Egyptian repression fueled Sayid Qutb’s formulation of his much more radical conception of contemporary society as *jahiliyya*—a term referring to the pre-Islamic age of “ignorance.” It also dispersed MB cadres throughout the world, particularly to Saudi Arabia, who carried with them these new Qutbist ideas even as the MB itself reasserted a more moderate orthodoxy under the guidance of its then-leader Hassan Hudaybi.¹⁰ When viewing the MB globally, it is important to recognize that the much-studied Egyptian MB evolved in a more moderate, *wasatiya* (centrist) direction than did some of the branches more influenced by the Qutbist-inspired exiles.

Sayid Qutb is both the key link and point of divergence between the mainstream MB and its more radical cousins. During the period of Nasserist repression, Qutb’s more extreme vision of Egyptian society as existing in a state of *jahiliyya* took root within a demoralized, angry, and fiercely repressed Brotherhood. Many of the MB members who fled to Saudi Arabia in the 1950s and 1960s to take up positions in the Saudi state apparatus were from the Qutbist wing—and fled in part because of their uncompromising vision and more radical political views. Their ideas politicized Wahhabist doctrines and helped build a new orientation towards what today we call *Salafi-jihadism*.

The mainstream MB rejected the core of Qutbist ideology with the publication of *Preachers Not Judges* in 1969 (even if Qutb’s books remained widely read and popular among MB rank and file). In the 1970s, the Brotherhood took full advantage of Anwar Sadat’s invitation to enter politics as a counterweight to the Nasserists and Communists.¹¹ It evolved in Egypt into a mainstream organization participating in public works and elections across all levels of civil society and government. The official MB website prominently features founder Hassan al-Banna, not Qutb, as its guiding spirit. Nonetheless, Qutb remains popular with the MB’s membership. Discussions of his ideas can be found throughout MB-affiliated Internet forums and publications, and from all accounts Qutb continues to be read in the MB curriculum. Qutb’s writings, for example, are widely available in MB-affiliated bookstores across the Middle East.

In contrast to this Egyptian evolution, MB members who took refuge in Saudi Arabia during the years of Nasserist repression in the 1950s and 1960s and MB theoreticians such as the Palestinian-Jordanian Abdullah Azzam were extremely influential in the formation of Al Qaeda. This cooperative relationship grew even stronger in the cauldron of Afghanistan, where the MB’s organizational networks worked hand in hand with the Saudi project of supporting the *mujahideen*. The Muslim Brotherhood itself is internally diverse, and more

radical thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb remain influential within its membership despite the official rejection of his key doctrines. Ayman al-Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad Organization grew out of a Qutbist splinter of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

The tensions between these trends could be seen on the ground in key conflict zones. Even in Afghanistan, competition between the "Wahhabi" and the "Ikhwani" factions was often stiff and grew even sharper in the 1990s as violent insurgencies broke out in key Arab countries. The Afghan returnees who made up an important part of violent insurgencies in places such as Egypt and Algeria had little use for local Islamist organizations of any kind, particularly the MB which they saw as overly accommodating of local political structures. In Algeria in the 1990s, the *Salafi-jihadist* Group Islamique Armée [Armed Islamic Group] (GIA) fought viciously with the MB-infected remnants of the Islamic Salvation Front which had been on the brink of winning national elections before the military coup.¹² The MB often found itself caught up in the undifferentiated regime crackdowns that followed, forcing it to go to great lengths to demonstrate its differences from its more radical and violent competitors.

For their part, *Salafi-jihadists* no longer recognize the MB as the inheritor of its own ideas. Al-Zawahiri's influential denunciation of the MB, *Bitter Harvest*, traces a catalog of catastrophe from that doctrinal divide.¹³ *Bitter Harvest* offers the template for a standard *Salafi-jihadist* bill of complaints about the MB over the last two decades in which the MB time and again sided against the doctrine of *jihad* and with the convenient compromise.¹⁴ As Shaykh Nasir al-Din al-Albani argued (before his death in 1999), the MB supports the *Salafi* doctrine in principle but abandons it in practice.¹⁵ In another example, in August 2007, Abd al-Majid Abd al-Karim Hazeen wrote that "no doubt there are many sincere Muslims in the MB and Hassan al-Banna was a good man." But in the modern day, he continued, it was impossible to overlook the MB's alliances with "Crusaders, Communists, Jews, Masons" or a whole panoply of ideological deviations.¹⁶ Similarly, another prolific forum commentator wrote that "Hassan al-Banna created a fine organization but then circumstances changed . . . a new phenomenon emerged under the same name."¹⁷

The challenge posed to Al Qaeda by the MB is rooted in the groups' core similarity: both are Islamist movements with a global reach. Both want to Islamicize the public domain and create Islamic states ruled by *Sharia*. Both are *Salafi* in their approach to jurisprudence, both consider *jihad* central to Islam (although they interpret *jihad* differently), and both are deeply suspicious of Westernization and U.S. foreign policy. At certain points in their history, there have been important crossovers (such as the role played by Palestinian MB figure Abdullah Azzam in the organization of the Afghan *jihad*).¹⁸ These similarities have led many observers to see them as kindred organizations, whether or not there are demonstrable organizational ties.¹⁹ Such views are reinforced by concerted propaganda efforts on the part of some Arab regimes challenged by mass-based Islamist moderates to tie the MB to Al Qaeda in order to delegitimize it in the eyes of the West and their own publics.

While Al Qaeda clearly resented the MB's condemnations of the 11 September 2001 attack, the conflict remained relatively muted through 2005. As late as spring 2005, *Salafi-jihadist* figures like Louis Attiyatollah wrote about the MB not as a potent adversary, but as a spent force—one that had lost credibility and influence and was desperately seeking a new role.²⁰ Tensions began escalating in 2005, however. In late September 2005, Yusuf al-Qaradawi infuriated the *jihadist* forums by calling Abu Musab al-Zarqawi a "criminal."²¹ *Salafi-jihadists* also complained as the MB condemned virtually every attack carried out by Al Qaeda-affiliated organizations in Muslim countries. The MB participated in elections in Egypt, and Hamas in Palestine—scoring great successes each time—leading MB Political Office member Essam el-Erian to explain that the Islamic world is split between two Islamist

programs, one of which has demonstrated over decades that it works (strengthening Islam from within) and one which has not (coups and violent change). This provoked one *Salafi-jihadist* who identified himself as Fatah al-Rahman to write a widely disseminated, over 90-page-long rebuttal to the MB on behalf of the *Sharia Committee of the Jihad* rehearsing the MB's alleged history of doctrinal and practical failure.²²

In January 2006, al-Zawahiri released an audiotape focused on the MB's participation in the Egyptian elections and on developments in Iraq, which was seen at the time by many analysts as a departure in the style and focus of Al Qaeda discourse—an attack on competing Islamist groups rather than seeking the high ground of Islamist consensus.²³ This decision likely reflected Al Qaeda's unease over the growing popularity and profile of its Islamist competitors at a time when it was riding relatively high due to the course of events in Iraq (see later). Over the course of 2007, the influential Jordanian *Salafi-jihadist* writer Akram Hijazi announced that developments in Iraq were hastening “the decisive showdown between Salafi-jihadism and MB.”²⁴ Hijazi argued that *Ikhwan* rhetoric against *jihadism* “mirrors the propaganda campaign of the Zionist-Crusaders.” The conflict went well beyond Iraq: “What remains of *hakimiya* (God's sovereignty) or jihad when the Islamic Party participates in occupation of Muslim lands . . . [when other MB branches] participate in governments not based on sharia . . . deny that jihad is an individual obligation . . . attack the jihad and the jihadist program . . . deny the doctrine of takfir”?

Leaders of Al Qaeda, not only influential commentators, pushed this conceptual confrontation with the MB. In March 2007, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader Abu Hamza al-Muhajir voiced his anger at the MB's Iraq branch, fuming that “the treason [of the Iraqi Islamic Party] is not the product of the moment.” In September 2007, Islamic State of Iraq leader Abu Omar al-Baghdadi singled out the MB for its role in the campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq—an argument he expanded on in his 22 February 2008 audiotape. In that tape, he criticized Hamas for “a chain of treacheries” and other MB branches for “entering into peculiar alliances with the apostate regimes” in Egypt, Syria, and Iran while displaying “rampant hostility towards the Salafi Jihadists.” According to Baghdadi, they “have truly betrayed our religion and the Islamic nation, and they have abandoned the blood of the martyrs.”

In his April 2008 answer to questions posed on the Internet, al-Zawahiri focused heavily on the MB.²⁵ His single longest answer to any question was a detailed critique of the MB's draft party platform circulated in the fall of 2007. Al-Zawahiri argued that the platform is not truly based on *Sharia* and is fundamentally inconsistent with the principle of *hakimiya* (God's law on earth) because of its efforts to work within the Egyptian constitution. He worked through the party platform point by point to demonstrate that the MB's “reform” program subordinates the *Sharia* to the constitution, proving the movement's abandonment of true Islam. In the eyes of many in Al Qaeda circles, by the fall of 2007 the “MB globally helped surrender Iraq to the crusader occupation.”²⁶ Nor was this the exception: “this happens again and again . . . [they are] not an isolated incident.”²⁷

From the available evidence, Al Qaeda's conflicts with the MB and with other Islamist groups (including Hamas, Hezbollah, and the nationalist insurgency groups in Iraq) have had the effect of isolating Al Qaeda rather than greatly harming the MB. Public opinion polling showed broad support for the Brotherhood's general orientations and very little for Al Qaeda's. For instance, an opinion survey from spring 2009 found that 83 percent of Egyptians approved of attacks on American troops in Iraq (as did the MB), but only 8 percent approved of attacks on American civilians in the United States (as did Al Qaeda).²⁸ Another recent public opinion survey found that 64 percent of Egyptians had a positive view of the MB and only 16 percent negative views, 69 percent think that it is genuinely

committed to democracy, and almost 75 percent agree with its idea of a body of religious scholars with a veto over legislation.²⁹

Ideology

They call for *wasatiya* [centrism] but what is half-way between truth and falsehood? —Abu Hadhifa al-Libi³⁰

There is little disagreement that the MB and Al Qaeda disagree over tactics. The MB's leadership has consistently denounced Al Qaeda's violence, from 9/11 (which Supreme Guide Mohammed Mehdi Akef calls "a criminal act which could only have been carried out by criminals"³¹) to the attacks carried out in Muslim countries. The intense public argument between al-Zawahiri and the Egyptian MB over the question of reform demonstrates this gap clearly, with al-Zawahiri denouncing protests and elections as useless and Brotherhood leaders countering that Al Qaeda had "nothing to offer than their futile ideology of violence and destruction."³² The more serious argument revolves around their strategic objectives, with many critics of the MB arguing that it shares Al Qaeda's ultimate goals.

But a closer look at the ideology of the MB as it has evolved in recent decades demonstrates serious problems with the common argument that the MB and Al Qaeda share similar goals even if their tactics differ. They do share the general goals of spreading Islamic identity and ultimately establishing an Islamic state governed by *Sharia*. Yet, there are extremely significant differences in their conception of *Sharia*, state, and society.³³ A MB-inspired Islamic state would look very different from a *Salafi-jihadist* Islamic state—a vital point obscured by their lazy conflation as undifferentiated Islamists. Both versions are superficially "Islamic states" but the differences between them are far more pronounced than usually recognized.

Al Qaeda's conception of the Islamic state envisions absolute *hakimiya*; an extremely strict reading of Islamic behavior and practice; the rigorous enforcement of Islamic morality; no place for civil law independent of *Sharia*; no tolerance of diversity or interpretation; and no place whatsoever for the institution of the nation state. Both in ideology and practice, the MB has demonstrated that it can tolerate a wide range of practical variation in forms of governance, diversity of interpretation, civil law drafted by elected parliaments and enforced by an independent judiciary, and the legitimacy of state borders. The MB's recoiling from the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan and from the excesses of the Islamic State of Iraq are typical of a general opposition to both the methods and the goals of the *Salafi-jihadist* trend.

The MB sees itself as part of society, changing it from within through open political and social action, while Al Qaeda conceives of itself as outside of a corrupt *jahiliya* (pre-Islamic society), changing it from the outside. The MB rejects the use of violence outside of carefully defined domains as a matter of principle, not just tactics—although, problematically for the United States, its definition of legitimate violence against foreign occupation includes both Palestinian resistance to Israel and the Iraqi insurgency against the U.S. presence. The MB accepts nation-states as zones of action, and is itself organized around a framework of largely independent branches within sovereign states, while Al Qaeda rejects the very principle of states and sees itself as a de-territorialized "band of knights."

The MB's political pragmatism, working within existing institutions, clashes sharply with Al Qaeda's principled rejection of existing institutions as *jahili* and its sharp definition of possible alliances through the doctrine of *al wala wa al bara* (embracing all that is Islam

and disavowing all that is not). The MB has renounced the doctrine of *takfir* since the publication of *Preachers Not Judges* under the name of then-Guide Hassan al-Houdaybi in the late 1960s, while Al Qaeda has embraced the *takfirist* method in full fervor. In contrast to the role of the MB in facilitating the flow of Arab volunteers to Afghanistan in the 1980s, there has been virtually no evidence of any MB “foreign fighters” in Iraq. Indeed, in October 2007, a *jihadist* commentator writing under the name of Abdullah Mansour complained: “Why has the Ikhwan not issued one official statement calling its followers to jihad in Iraq?”³⁴

The depiction of the MB as “moderate” rests only in part on its juxtaposition to the *Salafi-jihadists*. Core aspects of the vision of economic and political reform expressed in a variety of MB electoral platforms are quite compatible with the ideas presented by secular trends.³⁵ The influential cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi explicitly locates the Brotherhood’s form of Islamism as “centrism [*wasatiya*]” in opposition to “extremism.”³⁶ The politically minded “middle generation” of the MB prides itself on pragmatism, and has demonstrated real commitments to the political process and to a generic vision of economic and political reform.³⁷ Their condemnations of violence (outside of domains defined as legitimate resistance to occupation) go well beyond tactics, judging by their documents, speeches and interviews over the last decade in both Arabic and English.³⁸

Still, there are limits to the Brotherhood’s “moderation.” The group’s program for the complete transformation of society from the bottom up, spreading faith “one soul at a time” (in the phrase commonly associated with founder Hassan al-Banna) through proselytization from below and legislation from above, is actually far more radical than the more prosaic goals of other movements that simply want to seize power. While the MB consistently avows “no compulsion in religion,” its methods do not necessarily live up to this lofty ideal, and many non-Islamists in these countries find a great deal of compulsion within their project. While it may not initiate *hisba* cases [lawsuits declaring a Muslim to be an apostate] itself, for instance, it has rarely taken a strong stand against them. It is a conservative voice in local culture wars, and is generally feared and even despised by secular liberals in these societies.

As much as the MB doctrine of *wasatiya* [centrism] falls short of the hopes of many Western liberals, it also poses a rich target for the ideological purists of *Salafi-jihadism*.³⁹ In general, the modern MB is stronger on organization and politics than on doctrine—which arguably has served it very well in terms of institutional survival, but has put it at a disadvantage when embroiled in doctrinal disputes. The London-based Egyptian *Salafi-jihadist* Hani Siba’i argues that if judged by closeness to *Sharia*—a standard important to doctrinal purists but not to MB pragmatists—then the MB experience has been failure.⁴⁰ When the MB fails to deliver results—such as in unsuccessful electoral campaigns or an inability to influence legislation—it will be on the defensive against ideologically purer and tactically more aggressive rivals.

The MB–Al Qaeda cleavage rose to the forefront of Islamist politics around a number of major issues: 9/11 and *jihad*, *takfir*, Palestine, democracy, Hezbollah and the Shi’a question, and Iraq. While the Shi’a question and Hamas were exactly important triggers of the broader conflict between MB and Al Qaeda, I focus here on ideological questions of *jihad* and *takfir*, democracy, and Iraq.

Jihad

Views of the application of the doctrine of *jihad* are a key marker separating the two competing doctrines. The MB has long embraced the centrality of *jihad* in Muslim life, but has never accepted Abdullah Azzam’s influential elevation of the duty of *jihad* to a

central pillar of Islam which informed *Salafi-jihadism*. The MB (and many of its affiliated public figures) immediately condemned the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers, terrorism and bin Laden's strategy. They have consistently condemned virtually every Al Qaeda attack in the Muslim world, from Morocco and Algeria⁴¹ to Indonesia and India⁴² and—with the important exception of Hamas attacks against Israel—are invisible in the roster of suicide terror attacks of the last decade.⁴³ They openly criticized Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's attacks on civilians and on the Shi'a. In the summer of 2009, Yusuf al-Qaradawi released a major book, *Fiqh al-Jihad [The Jurisprudence of Jihad]*, which defended *jihad* as an obligation under specific conditions but that denounced Al Qaeda's "mad declaration of war on the whole world."⁴⁴ Remarks such as those by MB Supreme Guide Mohammed Mahdi Akef against bin Laden's view of *jihad* infuriated *Salafi-jihadist* purists: "the blood of the martyr Sayid Qutb has not dried yet . . . did he not show the jihad to be one of the obligations of Islam?"⁴⁵

At the same time, the MB supported the insurgency in Iraq as a legitimate resistance to foreign occupation (even as their Iraqi branch participated in the political system under occupation) and praised Hamas violence against Israel. The MB's stance rested heavily on a distinction familiar to Arab public discourse between illegitimate terrorism and legitimate resistance: "The (Muslim) Brotherhood calls for the ending of the occupation with the Mujahidin, whatever the place, time or nationality. . . . For the MB is with Al-Qa'ida in its jihad against occupation in any place where an occupation is present. The MB is with Al-Qa'ida with everything in this only."⁴⁶

It bears repeating that the MB position sits firmly within the Arab mainstream on the question of the use of violence against Israel or against the United States in Iraq. As demonstrated in the survey research discussed earlier, its positions on these issues broadly reflect wide trends in regional discourse and attitudes rather than uniquely Islamist views. The same is true of the MB's condemnation of acts viewed as terrorism outside of those zones of "resistance," whether in the United States, Europe, or Muslim-majority countries. This is cold comfort to Americans in Iraq or to Israelis facing Hamas attacks, but does attest to the essentially mainstream aspirations and orientations of the MB.

Takfir

The use of *takfir*—the process of declaring a Muslim to be an apostate—is a key ideological line of division in contemporary Islamism. The use of *takfir* by *Salafi-jihadists* is based on a stark, restrictive definition of Islam in which only the doctrinally pure merit the name Muslim. This doctrine authorizes the most extreme brutality, from Algeria to Iraq, and is one of the most potent weapons in the arsenal of Islamism. The MB struggled with the *takfir* question for decades before officially repudiating it with the publication of *Preachers Not Judges* under the name of then Supreme Guide Hassan Hidaybi. Its position on this question continues to arouse doubts in Egypt and beyond, since it refuses to either endorse or to take a strong public stance against the *hisba* cases (court cases declaring public figures to be infidels, as in the case against Nasir Hamed Abu Zayd) brought against public figures in Egypt by radical lawyers such as Yusuf al-Badri. But this nevertheless remains a stark line of doctrinal distinction between the two trends.

Democracy

The question of participation in formal political life, like *jihad*, cuts to the core of the differences between the MB and Al Qaeda. For Al Qaeda, as for Sayid Qutb, contemporary Arab states that do not rest on *Sharia* should be considered a form of *jahiliya*, the

pre-Islamic age of ignorance. Participation in elections or in such parliaments, which elevates the rule of man over that of God, represents a form of polytheism and a rejection of the doctrine of *hakimiya* (rule of God on earth). Coexistence with non-Islamist groups, to say nothing of actual alliances, violates the principle of *al wala wa al-bara*, which *jihadi-salafis* believe forbids cooperation or interaction with non-Muslims. This stance puts Al Qaeda far on the margins of contemporary Arab discourse, where majorities of 90 percent typically express support for democracy as a form of government in public opinion surveys.⁴⁷ Indeed the MB's position is attacked in the Arab world mainly by those who doubt the sincerity of its avowed commitments, not because of its democratic discourse.⁴⁸

Since the 1970s, the MB's pragmatic approach has focused upon participating in elections wherever permitted, working within the political system to advance the cause of Islamic life and law. MB-affiliated thinkers have developed an elaborate theoretical defense of democracy, rooted in the principles of *shura* (consultation) and *ijtihad* (personal interpretation).⁴⁹ MB leaders sometimes describe participation in elections as a form of *da'wa* (outreach), a way of getting their message out to the people and thus important independent of electoral outcomes.⁵⁰ In that regard, Yusuf al-Qaradawi's 1993 *fatwas* in support of pluralism and democracy established the broad guidelines for the movement that remain in place to the present day.⁵¹ The MB has participated in elections at every level possible, from student unions to professional associations to Parliaments, in virtually every country and in every possible occasion when their participation was permitted by the authorities (with the major exception being polls so blatantly rigged that participation would be pointless). Brotherhood members of Parliament have worked pragmatically and effectively where possible, focusing on issues of corruption and governance as well as cultural and Islamic issues.⁵² While MB members argue furiously about the appropriate balance between politics and *da'wa*, in general the MB considers itself fundamentally a part of society and not as a righteous movement outside of a hopelessly corrupt, fundamentally non-Islamic society.

The long-festering democracy question dividing the MB and Al Qaeda came to the fore with the fierce attack by al-Zawahiri on the decisions by Hamas (2006) and the Egyptian MB (2005) to participate in parliamentary elections. In line with *Salafi-jihadist* orthodoxy, al-Zawahiri argued that democracy is opposed to the *Sharia* because it puts the will of a human majority over the will of God. He also challenged the MB's participation on pragmatic grounds, asking how the movement's participation in elections had improved the conditions of Islam under Mubarak. Al-Zawahiri also skillfully exploited the international community's boycott of the Hamas-led elected Palestinian government to highlight Western hypocrisy toward democracy and Islamists.

Such pragmatic arguments gained far more traction than did the ideological critique. Whereas the argument against democracy in principle had limited resonance, the argument against participating in a democratic process openly manipulated by authoritarian governments had more appeal. That is probably why in his later tapes, rather than rehearse the doctrinal issues, al-Zawahiri instead details the Egyptian government's repression of the MB and crude intervention in the municipal elections, the struggles of Gaza under Hamas, and the mistreatment of Islamist parties in Morocco and Jordan in parliamentary elections. Whatever one thinks of democracy in principle, he suggests, the practice in today's Arab world does tend to make a mockery of those advocating participation.

Iraq

Iraq emerged in 2006–07 as one of the most intense arenas of conflict between Al Qaeda and the MB, as the insurgency divided and broad swathes of the Sunni community turned

against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). While the reasons for this turn are beyond the scope of this article, an important factor was the declaration of the Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006, and the attempt by Al Qaeda to impose its hegemony over the disparate and fragmented Iraqi insurgency. Ironically, given the intensity that this conflict generated, this was in a way a conflict with the *Ikhwan* in name only, since many of the targeted groups were not part of the global MB at all (only the Iraqi Islamic Party [IIP] and a handful of insurgency factions were officially affiliated with the MB, while major groups such as the Association of Muslim Scholars of Iraq were not). As late as November 2006 Ali al-Na'imi, spokesman of the Islamic Army of Iraq (the largest and most important of the so-called nationalist *jihadi* factions), called the MB's Islamic Party "nothing but supporters of the enemies of the *ahl al-sunna*, the crusaders and *ruwafidh*" and called on all "honest Muslims" to leave the IIP. Six months later, the Islamic Army was routinely denounced as MB—which evolved into a catch-all term for Islamist groups that were willing to work within existing political institutions, prioritized the national rather than the universal *jihadi*, and put pragmatism ahead of principle.

The MB, for its part, faced its own dilemmas in Iraq. While its global constituency and leadership opposed the U.S. invasion and supported resistance factions, the MB in Iraq joined the political process.⁵³ As noted later, there was no global MB to discipline the Iraqi MB—and the Iraqi MB's decision to participate in existing political institutions when given the opportunity was, in fact, entirely consistent with MB practice and doctrine. Iraq had not previously had a serious MB presence because of Saddam's refusal to tolerate competing movements or power centers, and much of the Iraqi MB sided with the opposition in exile against Saddam because of Saddam's treatment of the movement over the years.⁵⁴

Al Qaeda came to blame the global MB and its Iraqi affiliates as the key enemy in Iraq, lurking behind the scenes of a variety of irritants—the tribes, the *sahwat* (Awakening movement), Al-Jazeera, and the Islamic Party. The net of the alleged MB conspiracy was cast wide. For instance, one prolific forum commentator wrote in late April 2007 that the IIP and Association of Muslim Scholars of Iraq (for years the leading *salafi* reference for the Iraqi insurgency) are two sides of the same coin, the MB.⁵⁵ In one of his audiotapes, Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) Emir Baghdadi discussed the conspiracy against the *jihadi* as "not a monopoly of the *ikhwan* but also include[ing] some claiming the name of *salafiya* and who have rapprochement with *ikhwan*."⁵⁶ Al-Jazeera, which in the first years of the Iraqi insurgency was seen by the United States and the insurgency alike as helping the "resistance" (i.e., the battle of Fallujah in 2004), was now cited in the forums as the media arm of the conspiracy. These complaints grew even more intense after Al-Jazeera appeared to misrepresent the contents of an audiotape focused on Iraq by Osama bin Laden. *Salafi-jihadists* saw this as part of a wider MB attempt to find a rapprochement with the United States and its "moderate" Arab allies.

The Al Qaeda–MB rift in Iraq was muted during the early years, 2003–2004, when the insurgency was relatively unified across ideological lines. Al-Jazeera's Ahmed Mansour, generally considered to be sympathetic to the MB, had no problem reporting sympathetically from Fallujah during the April 2004 battle. The conflict emerged in fits and starts over the course of 2005–06, linked to U.S. engagement (direct and indirect) with insurgency representatives, the turn towards attacks on Shi'a civilians by al-Zarqawi's movement, and the broader Sunni turn against Al Qaeda in Iraq. Al-Zarqawi engaged in a highly public polemic with Yusuf al-Qaradawi over the latter's criticism of beheading videos and attacks on Shi'a civilians.

The brewing struggle exploded with a 4 April 2007 statement by the Islamic Army of Iraq denouncing the ISI (described on numerous forums as "the most dangerous document").

The document put forward a bill of complaints, including the *Salafi-jihadist* imposition of strict *Sharia* and the attempt to impose political hegemony. This set in motion open ideological warfare. On 6 April, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir attacked the Iraqi Islamic Party (Hashemi) as a proxy for the intra-insurgency rivals. The *jihadist* forums followed suit, quickly coming to define nearly all of their Islamic rivals as “*Ikhwani*” no matter how tenuous their actual connection to the MB. Grumbled the *Salafi-jihadist* theorist Akram Hijazi, “the Islamic world is most confused and upset by the MB . . . if the tribes are just in it for the money, what explains them?”⁵⁷ As Al Qaeda searched for reasons for its setbacks on the ground in Iraq, then, many of its theorists settled on the Muslim Brotherhood as its most important enemy and the one most in need of exposure before its own people.

Organization

The MB poses two rather different challenges to Al Qaeda: a global ideological challenge and a local, context-specific, organizational challenge. MB organizations share a general doctrine and a pyramidal cell-structure organization emphasizing close face to face interaction locally and hierarchy nationally. They tend to participate in political life wherever given the opportunity, maintain large-scale social service sectors, and engage in *da'wa* (outreach) through a wide set of avenues. At the same time, there is enormous variety in their relative organizational strength, the distribution of radical and moderate voices within the organization, their major competitors (Islamist and otherwise), their relationship to the ruling regimes, and more. The “global” organization is more a theoretical construct than reality, with Cairo exercising little operational control over its like-minded member organizations. There has never been an effective global MB organization, only local organizations who are themselves divided over many key issues united by a shared ideology and overlapping personal networks.⁵⁸ This means that the MB’s operational challenge to Al Qaeda will vary significantly based on local conditions.

A great deal of analysis of the MB draws on the relatively unique Egyptian case, but expanding the comparative universe of cases of MB organizations offers a much more diverse picture of the relative strengths and weaknesses. This section briefly reviews a number of Arab cases beyond Egypt to show the significance of local conditions and variations.

In Egypt, the MB is exceptionally public (despite still being outlawed), well-entrenched, and a forceful presence in both mass and elite society. It is widely considered to be the largest mass-based political organization in the country, with perhaps 100,000 members and deep financial resources. While some observers argue that it is losing its grip on the poorer sectors and evolving into a middle-class organization, it retains a formidable organization.⁵⁹ As noted earlier, the moderate trend in the MB was consolidated by Anwar Sadat’s encouragement of the MB as a political alternative to Nasserism. Throughout the 1980s, the MB participated in electoral politics at all levels and built up a strong public presence. More radical members of the MB split off from the organization, forming a number of smaller, violent trends. When Egypt descended into insurgency and counterinsurgency in the 1990s, however, the Mubarak regime stopped differentiating between moderate and radical Islamists and cracked down indiscriminately on both radical Islamists as well as the MB. With the MB leadership paralyzed, liberal reformists split off in frustration to form the Wasat Party, which has never been licensed by the Egyptian government.

In 2004, Mohammed Mehdi Akef took over as Guide of the EMB and, somewhat surprisingly, ushered in a reformist, politically oriented period dominated by the so-called middle generation. The MB participated in the ill-fated 2005 elections, only to do too well

and suffer a sharp crackdown at the hands of the regime. The group is currently besieged, but shows no sign of abandoning politics or of resorting to violence even in the face of sharp regime provocations. It is worth noting that in this context Al Qaeda has proven singularly unable to find any point of entry into the Egyptian polity. When the leader of one of the radical Egyptian *jihadist* factions declared the creation of an Al Qaeda affiliate in Egypt, he could not even bring his own organization with him and the project rapidly faded from view.

The trajectory of the MB in Jordan was decidedly different. Rather than operating as a de facto opposition, for decades the Jordanian MB was a core part of the Hashemite ruling coalition, with privileged access to government positions and a strong public presence. When Hamas appeared in 1988, many Jordanians viewed the development through the lens of this long-standing positive relationship with the MB (as well as the Hashemites's long-standing rivalry with Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO]). Indeed, the Palestinian MB from whence came Hamas remained a constituent part of the Jordanian MB even after the official severing of ties in 1988—the Islamists were one of the only important forces in the kingdom to not accept this decision, and today continue to be wracked by controversy over the question of Jordanian–Palestinian relations. The MB dominated the first parliamentary elections in 1989, forming the largest bloc, and proved perfectly able to work within the limits of the Hashemite system.

This relationship began to break down in the 1990s when the MB took the lead in opposing King Hussein's peace treaty with Israel. The MB formed the core of the emerging "anti-normalization" bloc, leading numerous protests as well as the parliamentary opposition. Over the course of the 1990s, relations with the Jordanian regime suffered. The real break, however, came with the succession to King Hussein by his son Abdullah, who lacked his father's long-cultivated personal ties to the Brotherhood's leadership, and the eruption of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in the fall of 2000, which aroused fears of the violence shifting to the East Bank of the Jordan River. Over the next decade, the MB found itself under episodic state repression, including growing attacks on its legal infrastructure—particularly over the question of its relationship with Hamas and its opposition to the peace treaty with Israel.

The struggles of the MB with both the Jordanian regime and the Hamas tide coincided with the rising appeal of radical forms of *salafism* in the Kingdom.⁶⁰ The radical milieu from which came Abu Musab al-Zarqawi felt as alienated from the MB as it did from the Hashemite regime. *Salafi-jihadists* such as Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi challenged the MB's accommodating approach, willingness to remain in a parliamentary game, and to implicitly recognize the peace treaty with Israel. Ironically, the backlash against al-Zarqawi's bombing of the Amman hotels in November 2005 caught the MB up in the cross-fire—particularly after several MB leaders publicly paid their respects to al-Zarqawi after his death. The Jordanian MB was also deeply affected by its relationship with Hamas. Jordanian national identity and security are deeply shaped by the Palestinian issue, since the West Bank was part of the Kingdom until 1967 and only formally relinquished in 1988, while a majority of Jordan's population is of Palestinian descent. The nature of the Jordanian MB's relationship with Hamas has been a perennial topic of political debate, which over the last few years has led to a concerted effort on the part of the MB to demonstrate its independence from its Palestinian counterpart. In Jordan, therefore, the MB's declining purchase on official institutions as well as its implicit association with the peace treaty with Israel has likely cost it support in the face of rising *salafi* presence outside of Amman.

The Syrian MB, by contrast, was formed in the 1940s and evolved into an elitist, parliamentary movement. As in Iraq, the Syrian MB had virtually no organization on the

ground since Hafez al-Asad's brutal assault on its stronghold in Hama in 1982. Driven into exile, the Syrian MB shared the general ideological orientation of the wider MB but lacked the organizational infrastructure found in Jordan and Egypt. Its desperate straits and exile orientation led it to adopt a number of problematic positions from the perspective of the wider MB. They even aligned with Saddam Hussein at a time when the Iraqi MB fiercely opposed his regime and suffered at his hands.⁶¹ The Syrian MB also joined a broad national opposition front against the regime of Bashar al-Asad (they subsequently left in April 2009), demonstrated a tactical flexibility, and willingness to align across ideological lines. The defeated remnants of the Syrian MB scattered, and the absence of a grounded organization perhaps explains why significant numbers of members joined the more extreme *Salafi-jihadist* networks, including persons such as the primary theorist of leaderless *jihad*, Abu Musab al-Suri.

Similar comparisons could be made across a range of cases that have featured strong Muslim Brotherhood organizations, including Yemen, Morocco, and Algeria. The Gulf States offer a less frequently studied, but extremely interesting, set of comparative cases that includes even more variation in the nature of the organizations and their relationships with the national political environment. There have been few studies of the MB in the Gulf to this point, due to its underground nature and the absence of good documentary evidence, but this gap has begun to be filled in recent years by a number of Gulf-based scholars.⁶²

The Kuwaiti experience resembles the experience of the Levant countries in important ways, with a well-established MB organization contesting elections and occupying important positions within state institutions. The Kuwaiti MB was founded in 1947, and quickly became one of the strongest and wealthiest of the MB branches in the Gulf. It enjoyed a strong media presence, a thriving public services sector, and a role in various governments and governmental institutions. After long serving as a key location for Palestinian MB members, it reportedly severed its ties with the global MB organization in protest over the general MB support for Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait. After the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, the MB formed the Islamic Constitutional Party, which participated successfully in a series of parliamentary elections (but was shocked in 2008 by the electoral success of its *salafi* rivals).

Bahrain saw a somewhat similar trajectory, with an MB student association formed in 1941 evolving into a potent national organization, becoming the Jama'iya al-Islah in 1980. Even more than in Kuwait, a rising *salafi* trend has overwhelmed the MB to the point of hegemony over the Sunni Islamist field.

Two other key Gulf cases, by contrast, highlight the possibility of influence without an organization. In Saudi Arabia, the MB exists more as a trend than as an organization, since the Saudi government did not allow the creation of an organization despite the large numbers of MB members entering the Kingdom in the 1950s. The King of Saudi Arabia famously (albeit probably apocryphally) responded to a request by Hassan al-Banna to establish a branch of the MB in Saudi Arabia with the cryptic remark, "in the Kingdom we are all Muslim . . . and all Brothers."⁶³ While no formal branch of the MB could be established, a large number of individual Muslim Brothers took on major roles in the Saudi state apparatus and educational system over the course of the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁴ Al-Azzi writes that the MB is less known in Saudi Arabia because of the *salafi* domination of religious institutions and because the MB figures there went by different labels.⁶⁵ Its influence was profoundly felt at the ideological level, even in the absence of a formal organization, while its ideology arguably was shaped more by the local Saudi context due to its own organizational weaknesses and the considerable power of the religious authorities in the Saudi state.

The absence of an organization can also be seen in Qatar where, according to the influential Islamist Abdullah al-Nefissi, the MB formally dissolved itself as an organization. Again, despite the lack of a formal organization, the MB retains a powerful presence intellectually and in the media, where the leading figure, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, is a fixture on Al-Jazeera and in the Doha religious establishment.⁶⁶ Qatar has had only one serious terrorist attack, but this could be explained by a wide range of other factors—including Al-Jazeera's presence or the small size of the country that allows effective security control. The absence of a formal organization in Qatar combined with a strong intellectual presence poses a particularly interesting test of the questions about the relative significance of organization and ideology—to which the next section returns.

Is the MB a Firewall or a Conveyor Belt?

How effective is the MB for combating Al Qaeda and like-minded groups? For counterterrorism purposes, this is one of the most important questions of all: Does the MB—whether through organization or ideology—prevent Islamic-minded individuals from becoming terrorists? How do local variations matter?

The “conveyor belt” approach, popular with students of radicalization, argues that the similarities between the ultimate goals of the movements are more important than their tactical differences, in other words that “nonviolent extremists” are crucial enablers of terrorism.⁶⁷ “The crux of the debate between al-Qa’ida and the MB is not over the ends,” such analysts argue, “but rather the means by which to realize the greater goal of Islamic governance throughout the Muslim world.”⁶⁸ In this view, Brotherhood activism creates stronger Islamic identities and potentially a pool of recruits on which more radical groups can draw. It creates a more Islamically oriented public sphere, establishing the space for Al Qaeda’s mode of argument and strategy. It radicalizes opinion against the West, which can offer plausibility to Al Qaeda calls for violent action even if the MB does not itself support such acts. Ultimately, “conveyor belt” theorists argue, the MB and Al Qaeda share a common goal and their actions are mutually supportive regardless of their intentions. These skeptics argue that at least some individuals and financing move between the milieus, and that addressing the challenge of violent extremism requires also tackling the challenge of nonviolent ideological enablers.

The “firewall” model, more popular among political scientists, places greater weight on the competitive aspect of the relationship between the MB and Al Qaeda. The two movements may both be Islamist, but their doctrines are radically different, as are their views of mainstream society and the legitimacy of the use of force. Whether through the strength of their ideas or the robustness of their organizational structures, the MB in this model forms a “firewall” preventing otherwise susceptible Muslims from descending down the path of radicalization. Members instead are more likely to remain committed to the MB’s methods and doctrines, and to be more able to resist the temptations of the radical path to *jihad*.

Which of these approaches better captures the relationship between the MB and Al Qaeda? It seems likely that there is movement of individuals across organizations, at least at the margins, but unfortunately there is little reliable or systematic (as opposed to anecdotal) evidence either way.⁶⁹ Research into such questions is difficult, given the sensitivity of the topic and the security concerns of both governments and the movements in question. It is far easier to interview senior MB leaders than it is to gain access to reliable information about their members defecting to Al Qaeda. Still, it is possible to at least draw some inferences from available information and point to areas for future research. It is telling, for instance,

that profiles of suicide bombers in Iraq overwhelmingly suggests that they are directly radicalized, and do not come from a MB background—in contrast to the Afghan *jihad* of the 1980s, where the MB played an important role in mobilizing volunteers.⁷⁰

The next step would be to determine mechanisms: How, exactly, does a strong MB interfere with Al Qaeda style movements? MB leaders themselves seem to prefer the “ideology” explanation, arguing that their moderate ideas are the crucial barrier against extremism. But ideology alone does not seem to be enough—ideas tend to be somewhat elastic, adapting to circumstance, and there are lots of different Islamist ideas out there besides those of the Brotherhood. Ideas do not float freely, and much of the MB’s strength appears to be organizational.

The first step in testing the firewall hypothesis would be to examine the importance of organizational strength. A preliminary hypothesis would be that strong and well-rooted MB organizations would lock out more extremist challengers while weaker organizations cannot, thus leaving an open field for *Salafi-jihadists* to recruit among individuals oriented toward Islamic causes. The competing conveyor belt hypothesis would see strong MB organizations creating a fertile ground for Al Qaeda recruitment.

The organizational approach would therefore stress that the key is not so much ideology as it is the MB’s distinctive organization, which allows it to effectively monitor and control social space—through mosques, charities, organizational networks, and widespread networks. Put simply, by this argument the MB is aware when radicals move in to social sectors full of Islamic-oriented and politically active people, and are in a position to lock out their challengers. Of course, the MB is not the only kind of organization that can do this—an efficient *mukhabarat*, tribes or clans, established neighborhoods, gangs, and so forth might all do similar functions. But MB structures have a distinctive advantage with regard to specifically Islamist challengers: the MB is present in the religious, pious spaces where Al Qaeda might get a foothold in a way that unions or secular organizations are not.

This simple comparison is complicated by the variation in how regimes deal with the MB at different stages. Regime repression is particularly significant in affecting the MB “firewall.”⁷¹ Beyond the radicalizing effects of the repression itself, such efforts can degrade precisely the organizational capacity that keeps radicals out of the picture. As Egyptian analyst Khalil al-Anani writes: “The ‘scorched earth’ policies of Arab regimes played a major part in the growth of the Salafi trend in the Arab world. Arab regimes have consistently repressed moderate Islamists, especially those affiliated with the MB, in countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Jordan. . . . The moderates are becoming marginalised, both intellectually and organisationally, and they seem to have lost all hope in ever becoming influential again.”⁷²

The current wave of official crackdowns on the MB in places like Jordan and Egypt might similarly hinder their capability (if not willingness) to act as a firewall. Repression after choosing political participation discredits the pragmatists within the organization, and it is possible to imagine politicized youth growing frustrated at feckless leadership or to see the MB struggle to hold on to some of its constituencies. What is more, the repressive efforts increasingly target precisely the charities (Jordan) and financial underpinnings (Egypt) that make the organization so formidable. There is precedent for such degraded capacity: during the Egyptian insurgency of 1992–97, for instance, the MB found itself caught up indiscriminately by the regime’s repressive response despite its efforts to differentiate itself from the Islamic Group and Islamic Jihad and was thus perhaps less able to contain radical challengers.

It is clear that *Salafi-jihadists* do make appeals to MB members and attempt to recruit them—something taken seriously enough that Deputy Supreme Guide Mohammed Habib was forced to publicly deny reports that MB members were joining Al Qaeda.⁷³

Jihadist forums often contain direct appeals to MB youth. For example, one wrote in the Iraqi context but for a wider audience: “Do you know why the people love the ISI? Because it did not vote for the constitutions . . . because we are a global Islamist jihadist movement . . . and you are a national Iraqi movement which doesn’t accept non-Iraqis and brag about that on satellite TV. . . . Is a government of technocrats better than a government of sharia? . . . Emigrate from the government of technocrats to the government of god.”⁷⁴ “Why does the MB not participate in the jihad of the Islamic umma against the Crusaders in Iraq and Afghanistan,” challenged a typical forum post in November 2006.⁷⁵ Asked another bluntly, “where are the MB youth with the jihad?”⁷⁶ In May 2007, a discussion ostensibly by an MB member about how they had been “deceived by our leaders” circulated on the forums.⁷⁷ *Jihadists* attacking the MB carefully distinguished between the MB leadership and its cadres who are misguided and poorly led, but could be “saved.” For instance, Abu Hadhifa al-Libi suggested that “there is no doubt that there are many strivers in the MB in the field of dawa and Islamic work . . . but many of their leaders, especially in Egypt, know little of sharia or religion.”⁷⁸ This was a bid by Al Qaeda for the rank and file of the MB to defect, against which the MB had to vigorously defend.

Anecdotal evidence on the MB rank and file suggests that there can be a receptive audience for a harder line than that of the pragmatic leadership—but that such temptations can be met through organizational adaptation and the strong face to face relationships nurtured by the MB’s structure of cells and “families.”⁷⁹ In Egypt, MB youth wonder about the political orientation of the Guide’s office and the meager returns on political participation, and push for a more religious orientation. In Jordan, MB youth face the attractions of a strong *salafi* movement, and the distraction of the Hamas movement appealing strongly to more radical Brothers of both Jordanian and Palestinian origin. MB organizations are aware of these challenges and fight back, attempting to retain their own members and to expand their own membership and “market share” among Islamist sectors of society. When the MB found itself coming under fierce state or international repression after participating in elections, as happened in Egypt and Palestine in 2005 and 2006, this clearly weakened the position of the MB organizations who had to answer critics who asked what their pragmatism had accomplished.

The experience in Egypt demonstrates the difficulty of coding the MB’s success and failure at crowding more violent Islamists from the political scene. Many members of the Islamic Jihad movement, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, began within the MB but grew impatient with its moderate, non-confrontational strategy. When the MB opted to reject Qutb’s arguments, many of these more radical members left the organization to create—among other new trends—the Islamic Jihad Organization. The MB remained committed to non-violence and working within the system, but an Islamist insurgency nevertheless wracked Egypt in the 1990s. Is their departure from the MB to form a new trend a testament to the strength of the MB’s organizational firewall or its weakness?

The focus on the organization rather than the ideology would arguably make the global MB less relevant of a “firewall” than specific national MB organizations. It would also raise cautionary concerns about the likely impact of the repressive measures currently being taken by Arab regimes—by weakening the MB organizationally, they could be opening up those spaces for more radical competitors. Jordan seems to be a particularly relevant test case here, with the MB and IAF discredited after the response by some of its members to al-Zarqawi, highly publicized internal splits, the fallout of Hamas over the last few years, its poor electoral performance, and in general the breakdown of the long-standing accord between the regime and the MB. Syria might also emerge as a national arena on which to focus, just as Lebanon has to such widespread alarm over the last year.

Conclusion

The differences between the MB and Al Qaeda go deeper than a simple disagreement over tactics. The two trends embody very different visions of the ideal Islamic state and of the relationship between movement and society. The Brotherhood's pragmatism is rooted in a doctrine of *wasatiya*, which is anathema to the doctrinal purism of the *Salafi-jihadist* trend. This does not make the MB a force sympathetic to American values or foreign policy interests. They are genuinely Islamist, within their *wasatiya* doctrine, in contrast to the "Islam lite" or secularism offered by other trends that the United States finds more amenable. The MB strongly opposes Israel and supports Hamas, and during the height of the Iraqi insurgency supported its resistance to American occupation. There should be no more illusions about the MB's authentic preferences than there should be about its alleged connections to Al Qaeda.

The central question should not be whether the MB is friendly to the United States but whether it represents an effective opponent to Al Qaeda and like-minded movements. Does its ideology and/or organization pose a formidable obstacle to Al Qaeda or does it smooth the path toward radicalization? The evidence presented in this chapter is mixed, but generally supports the firewall thesis. When organizationally robust, the MB is well-placed to act as a barrier to incursions by Al Qaeda. Its hostility to Al Qaeda is not based on a desire to please the United States—which makes it more, rather than less, valuable. The MB recognizes a self-interest in preventing the spread of *Salafi-jihadist* competition, and where it is strong it has effectively prevented the emergence of *Salafi-jihadist* extremist movements. What worked in Iraq can offer support for working with MB organizations elsewhere, or at least allowing them to operate in their own self-interest. This should not extend to active support, however, and American counterterrorism practitioners should have no illusions about the ideological commitments of the MB or about the possible effects of their domination of political and social space. Should Al Qaeda fade as a central focus of American interests, the policy calculations about the MB should change as well.

Notes

1. For background on the Muslim Brotherhood, see Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005), pp. 373–395; Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Bruce Rutherford, *Egypt After Mubarak* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Marc Lynch, "The MB and Reform" *Middle East Brief*, No. 25 (2008); Brynjar Lia, *The Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt* (London: Ithaca Press 1998); Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press 1969).

2. The deep clash between Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups and "*salafi-jihadism*" is a key theme of influential analysts such as the Jordanian journalist Mohammed Abu Ruman and Akram Hijazi (whose writings are widely circulated in a range of *jihadist* Internet forums). See: Hijazi, "Muwajjaha Hasima bayn al-Salafiya al-Jihadiya wa al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin" [Decisive Confrontation between Salafi-Jihadism and the Muslim Brotherhood], 7 May 2007. Available at <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=10436>; and Hijazi, "Response to the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood," 22 February 2007. Available at <http://www.aekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=47638>

3. On Al Qaeda's global vision, see Assaf Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks," *International Security* 33(3) (2008), pp. 46–78.

4. Abd al-Rahman al-Rashwan, "Public Opinion Inside the MB Organization," 21 December 2008. Available at <http://ikhwanyouth.blogspot.com/2008/12/1.html>

5. Mohammed Salah, "The Ikhwan and al-Qa'ida and Other Groups . . . A Complete Guide to Islamist Movements in the World," *al-Hayat*, 26 January 2006.

6. "Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization," Presidential Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (March 2009).

7. 1 January 2007, Quoted in Ikhwanweb.com. Available at <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Article.asp?ID=2758&SectionID=147>

8. Forum contributor "Shamal al-Baghdadi," al-Ekhlaas, 16 May 2008. "Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi al-Alam ya' Ayshun fi al-Batala." Available at <http://www.aekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=147720>

9. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*.

10. Barbara Zollner, "Prison Talk: The Muslim Brotherhood's Internal Struggle During Gamal Abdel Nasser's Persecution, 1954 to 1971," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39 (2007), pp. 411–433; Hossam Tammam, "Al-Ikwhan al-Muslimoon wa al-Sa'udiya al-Wahhabiya" [The Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi Saudi Arabia], *Al-Akhbar*, 22 January 2009. Available at <http://www.al-akhbar.com/ar/node/114449>

11. Zollner, "Prison Talk"; Rosefsky-Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*.

12. On Egypt and Algeria, see Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

13. Al-Zawahiri's *Bitter Harvest* is available at <http://tawhed.ws>

14. Shaykh Abu al-Hareth al-Ansari wrote a brief distributed by the Global Islamic Media Front under the title "Al-Ikwhan wa al-Yahud wa al-Qa'ida," 7 July 2008. Available at www.aekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=158323

15. Shaykh Nasir al-Din al-Albani, quoted on the Muslm.net forum, 21 May 2008. Available at <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?p=1866107>

16. Abd al-Majid Abd al-Karim Hazin, "Mo'amirat Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin ala al-Islam wa Ahlihi" [Conspiracies of the MB against Islam and Its People], al-Ekhlaas, 4 August 2007. Available at <http://www.aekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=73101>

17. "Jund al-Murabitin," al-Faloja, "Al-Ikhwan al-Mustaslamin," 12 March 2007. Available at <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=7187>

18. Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Arabia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Hossam Tamam, "The MB and Saudi Wahhabism," *al-Akhbar*, 22 January 2009. Available at <http://www.al-akhbar.com/ar/node/114449>

19. Mohammed Mehdi Akef denial of any relationship with Al Qaeda, 24 May 2008. Available at <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=37484&SecID=211>

20. Louis Attiyatallah, "The Salafis Will Lead the Muslim Liberation Jihad against the Crusaders," 31 March 2005. Available at <http://majdah.maktoob.com/vb/majdah6564>

21. See comments at <http://www.al-farouq.com/vb/showthread.php?t=2143>

22. Fatah Rahman, "Response to the Statement of the MB." Available at <http://www.tawhed.ws>

23. For example, Youssef al-Dini, "Zawahiri and the Ikhwan," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 13 January 2006.

24. Hijazi article available at <http://drakramhijazi.maktoobblog.com/?post=314380>

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