

**National Security Studies Program
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**9/11 Ten Years Later: Evolving Threats and US Responses
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Session1. Terrorist Threat: Global and Regional Groups

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An Overview

Before I get into the discussion of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic activist groups in the Middle East, I would like to spend a few minutes discussing the context of global and regional terrorism.

Islamic activism generally has operated on two broad levels. The first level of unlawful and terrorist groups includes the following:

- **Global terrorism and jihad represented by al-Qa-ida**
- **Regional violence and terrorism represented by such groups as Jema'a Islamiyya in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, and Hizb al-Tahrir in Central Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Europe**
- **In the Middle East and South Asia, franchise terror groups include AQAP in Yemen, al-Shabab in Somalia, Al-Qa'ida in Iraq, AQIM in the Maghreb, The Islamic Fighting Force in Libya, the Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Tehrik-i-Taliban (Pakistani Taliban), the Haqqani Network, and the Kashmiri Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad in Pakistan and other parts of South Asia.**
- **As I said this morning, although available information shows al-Qa'ida Central does not exercise command and control over the so-called SPIN (Segmented Polycentric Ideologically**

Networked) groups, the SPINS espouse the same radical ideology and enmity toward modern, liberal, secular, democratic politics and continue to view the US as their primary enemy.

The second level involves Islamic political parties that for the most part have participated in elections and have rejected the global radical paradigm of violent jihad. These parties include, among others, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Lebanese Hizballah, the Palestinian Hamas, the Bahraini al-Wifaq, the Jordanian Islamic Action Front, and the Moroccan Justice and Development. Other Islamic political parties exist in Muslim countries across the world, including in Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and elsewhere.

- **In the Arab world, the MB, Hizballah, and Hamas are the three most significant political parties.**

Although many of these political parties have been critical of US foreign policy in the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world, they have not engaged in terrorism in recent years. Furthermore, many of them have participated in their political systems through elections. In fact, most of them have elected representatives in their countries' national legislatures. A few points for your consideration:

- **Generally speaking, American policy makers tend to view mainstream Islamic political parties that are committed to peaceful dialogue in their societies and are not bent on undermining the democratic transition as potentially effective political players in the post-autocratic political space.**
- **Islamic political parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood, have quickly realized that if they envision playing an active role in post-autocratic governments, they would need to compete in national and local elections and engage politically and socially with existing and emerging political parties and centers of power.**

- If they desire to help chart the future of their respective countries, these parties also must realize they are only one of many voices on the political stage and that other parties would have diverse political ideologies.
- These parties seem to have passed the test of “one man, one vote, one time,” which bedeviled the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front’s electoral victory in 1991. They’ve participated in multiple national elections in the past two decades—won some, lost some.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Out of the shadows

Since the fall of Mubarak, the MB has positioned itself as a political player in democratic Egypt. The MB has formed a new political party under the name of Hizb al-Huriyya wa al-Adl” (Freedom and Justice Party or FJP) and is planning to enter it in the coming elections. Statements from the MB indicate the new party would be based on Islamic foundations but would be pragmatic and inclusive, meaning it is open to Egyptian Christian Copts.

- According to the MB, the new party is based on the assumption that “Egypt is a civil state with Islamic roots grounded in citizenship or *“muwatana.”* While the MB will focus on da’wa and social services, the new party “will participate positively in the political and social life of the country.”
- Having come out of the shadows and is no longer a banned organization, the MB will try to show in the new Egypt that it can work as a regular political party and offer a positive agenda. Parts of its old agenda during the Mubarak regime are still relevant in today’s Egypt, especially corruption, nepotism, and unemployment.
- Operating as a legal group and no longer afraid of being shut down by the government, the MB’s new party can play a legitimate role in a post-Mubarak Egypt.

- **As new Islamic and secular Islamic parties begin to proliferate in post-autocratic Arab politics, we should expect to see more competition among these parties and between them and secular parties.**
- **Some Egyptians and outsiders view the MB with suspicion because of its strong organization in comparison with newly formed political parties. While they might do well in the first post-Mubarak election, once other parties are created, the MB will have to compete much harder to win votes.**

Collaboration between the Muslim Brotherhood and other secular parties will be driven by three critical criteria:

- **The MB's commitment to peaceful democratization and economic reform**
- **The MB's adherence to the nationally agreed on constitutional process that underpins the post-Mubarak political system, especially transparent government and independent judiciary.**
- **The MB's commitment to inclusion, civil rights, women's rights, religious freedom, and freedoms of speech and peaceful assembly.**

Bottom Line Judgment: Based on our experience with the Muslim brotherhood in the past two decades, especially since it renounced violence in the mid-1990s, it is safe to say that the MB is not a terrorist organization, nor does it subscribe to al-Qa'ida's radical paradigm. Its disagreements with the US are driven by specific policies, not by values of good governance.

Hamas and Hizballah: Pragmatism Trumps Ideology

A review of the political programs of Hamas and Hizballah, two of the Middle East's most active political parties, shows that although both parties initially derided electoral politics, they became avid

players in the political game and participated successfully in national elections in their respective countries.

Hamas, of course, won the Legislative Council elections in 2006, and Hizballah has successfully competed in Lebanese parliamentary elections since 1992. The national political programs of Hamas and Hizballah share two common characteristics: a deep commitment to social justice and community development; and embodiment of “resistance” or “*muqawama*”.

- The religious identity that each espouses is wedded to conceptions of resistance through community service and to the armed opposition to occupation.
- While they strongly draw on their Sunni and Shia religious cultural heritage, neither has made the imposition of Sharia or the creation of an Islamic state their dominant objective.
- Both parties have focused more on politics in their respective countries than on religious or radical ideology.

Although Hizballah and Hams have committed terrorist acts in the past (Hizballah against the US and some Lebanese leaders; Hamas against Israel), in recent years they have redirected their attention to domestic bread and butter issues within their respective societies.

- Both parties are still considered “terrorist” groups under US law. However, their actions have been driven largely by the Israeli Palestinian conflict and the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon from 1982 to 2000 and of the West Bank since 1967.

A Couple of Concluding Comments

Post-Suharto Indonesia might offer an instructive case. The rise of a number of Islamic political parties following the fall of Suharto led many in the West to fear that these parties would overwhelm the system. Yet, an analysis of recent election results shows that

Islamic political parties combined did not get more than 10-15 percent of the total vote in Indonesia. These parties have quickly realized that their Islamic credentials or public commitment to Sharia did not necessarily win them votes. Voters tend to focus on daily issues and community concerns—from jobs to putting food on the table. The Egyptian MB and other Arab Islamic political parties are no exception.

In order to pursue the broad engagement strategy, which President Obama discussed in his Cairo speech more than two years ago and in his Washington speech last May, it is time for our government to engage the MB openly, methodically, and candidly to help bring about a healthy, peaceful, and comprehensive transition to democracy in Egypt. The same should apply to other mainstream Islamic political parties.

The youthful uprisings that toppled the dictators of Tunisia and Egypt and that are struggling to topple other dictatorial regimes in the Arab world will easily see through the promises of Islamic parties and whether they are able to deliver on such promises. If these parties fail to deliver on their promises or commitment to fair and free elections multiple times, they will be rejected by the voters and will become irrelevant in the march for dignity and freedom.

Finally, the Arab uprisings provide the West with a unique opportunity to support comprehensive economic and political initiatives for genuine reform that would ultimately usher in a transition to democracy and human rights. Engaging mainstream Islamic political parties is a sure path to the post-autocracy politics of inclusion.

Thank you.

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