The Rise of the Salafists

Religious Politics, Institutional Changes and Democracy in Egypt

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NEGOTIATING ISLAM IN SECULAR STATE:

An Approach to the Politics of Identity in Egypt

Recent trends in the emergence of salafist politics in the Middle East have posed a striking puzzle in political science. From the 1980’s to the early 2010’s, puritan interpretation of Islam—be it in social, economic and political realms—has challenged the very foundations of nation-states in the Muslim world. Since the early 1990’s, Egypt has witnessed an unprecedented expansion of salafi networks in social and economic sectors. The collapse of Mubarak in 2011 has shaped the salafis to enter electoral politics with the establishment of the An-Noori Party as a powerful force in the nation’s democracy contending the Islamist traditional control of Ikhwan Muslimun (McCants, 2012).

Salafism or puritan Islamic style of life is not new to Egypt. Indeed, in Egypt the powerful Salafi institution, Ansar al-Sunna, established in 1926, two years before the founding of the Ikhwan al Muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood), considered the archetypal Islamist group. What is appealing in the recent salafists’ organizational development is much different from their origins (Roy, 2014). For this particular reason, Salafism is notoriously difficult to define because its practitioners prefer to say what it is not rather than what it is. Salafism broadly as a method of modeling one’s thought and behavior on
Muhammad and the first three generations of Muslims, called the “forefathers” \textit{(salaf)} (Wahid, 2014; Jahroni, 2015). Salafists refuse exclusively follow the legal rulings of one of the four Sunni schools of law \textit{(mazhab)}, although they revere the ninth-century founder of the Hanbali’s school of law, Ahmad bin Hanbal, and adhere to his theological teachings. Ibn Hanbal’s legacy received a strong ideological boost from the Damascene scholar, Ibn Taymiyya, in the fourteenth century, who elaborated the school’s doctrines and refuted its critics.

The collapse of Mubarak in early 2011 provided window of opportunity for the Islamists to transform the Egypt’s constitution to an Islamic constitution, facing the uncertainty of situation, especially during the 2011 political campaign for election. In a pamphlet published by the MB, the organization seeks to create a “… republican system of government that is democratic, constitutional, and parliamentary and that conforms in Islamic principles” (Mubadirat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin, 2011:1).

As part of the Salafists’ main concern with the new wave of democratization, the first aspect of the Salafists’ commitment was a demand for the constraints on State power. But this institutional commitment must be derived from Islamic constitution. In An-Noori’s view, governments are formed through a contract between rulers and ruled, that is “established by the \textit{ummah} and carried out by the civil institutions of the state” (Afaq al-Arabiya, 2012:18). Within this arrangement, the ruler or the government functions as an agent (\textit{wakil}) of the people. To this issue, the Salafists’ places particular emphasis on limiting the power of the president. The FJP and the An Noori Party conceived that “…the president is a symbol for all Egyptians and not the head of any political party”.

The second issue is the legal aspect of the Islamic state. This especially formulated by the FJP. The MB’s documents published on the eve of the electoral campaign stressed the centrality of law for political order that they hoped to create. Similar to the nature of statehood in the liberal conception, law applies equally to ruler and ruled, and is the
primary means for achieving a more just society (Mubadirat, 2012:80). Yet, the MB insists that the Parliament must adopt laws that are “within the framework of Islamic shari’a” (Mubadirat, 2011:81). This framework is to be delineated by elected representatives of the people. According to the MB, these representatives may consult with religious scholars or ‘ulama’, but the ‘ulama’ have no authority to issue legislation or to declare legislation invalid.

Such Islamic transformative programs echo the MB’s ideology and framework of statehood, that the state plays the central role in this process of moral transformation. The new constitution promulgated by the elected constituent assembly in 2012 has been perceived as the mechanism for ensuring that people “worship, practice good manners, and act honorably” (Mubadirat, 2004:19). It protects the morality of individual Muslims by “purging the media of material that runs counter to the rules of Islam and the values that it instill.” The state achieves “godliness and religiosity in society” by “constructing an individual with Islamic principles and values that are deeply rooted in his character” (Mubadirat, 2004:22).

**Religion and the Politics of Identity**

Secularization theorists in the twentieth century confidently predicted the decline of religious influences on society and politics with the advance of modernization (Berger, 1967, Cox, 1966, Martin, 1978, Smith, 1974). However, since the 1980’s, when religious revivals such as the Iranian Revolution and the rise of the Christian Right in the United States challenged predictions of the death of religion, social scientists and policy makers are alike to abandon the secularization thesis as a valid paradigm to explain religious developments (Stark, 1999; Mayer, 1999). Today, religion is as strong as ever, with religious movements leading calls for political and social change around the world, and wielding great influence on political leaders.

With the demise of secularization theory, the debate about the proper relationship between religion and state in democratic societies
revived. While most scholars argue that some degree of separation between the public and secular spheres is necessary to safeguard democracy, the actual configuration of church-state relations differs widely across the world’s established democracies (Monsma and Soper, 1997). Fox (2007; 2010) shows that, in fact, most contemporary democracies do not have a strict separation of religion and state, and argues that researchers should instead focus their attention on which forms of state institutions and government regulation on religion are compatible with democracy.

Underpinning his theory on actual instances of the relationship between religion and the state, Stepan’s “twin tolerations” model describes how church and state can coexist successfully not through strict separation, but through cooperation where each show mutual respects that they occupy autonomous spheres but that they can overlap in certain settings. For instance, many states in advanced democracies allow religious groups to organize in civil society or other voluntarily autonomous organizations (Stepan, 2001; Hashemi, 2010). Yavuz (2009) argues that this model is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in Muslim societies because Islamists perceive secularism as an attack on Islam as well as liberal democracy as too dangerous in its lack of limits on the will of the people.

Our hypothesis is that, the force that seems to have driven these processes in Egypt was the interaction between the institutional design of the nation-states and the considerable expansion of opportunities for change—in particular political crises. That is to say, the challenge of secular regimes and of the nation-state were both abrupt and long in the making; and both sets of events spoke to the power regimes’ institutions even as these regimes were in crisis. Elections, as one of the most important institutions guaranteeing the political legitimacy of ruling regimes in nation-states, serve as a window that may be used by the elite to uphold political mobilization defined within the framework of the nation’s religious markers.
Embedded in the issues of regime and institutional challenge, however, is another series of important questions that this research will also address. Why did the Egyptian salafists grow rapidly and emerge as a powerful political force in democratic Egypt after the transition to democracy?

Why did regimes or governments that promoted secular ideologies in Egypt, despite their differences in political learning and opportunities, lose their hegemonic position? The answers to these questions are also largely historical-institutional.

Salafism treated as identity politics, and the existing literature on the study of identity politics in the third world largely favours a cultural approach to the phenomenon (Hasan, 2006; Waltzer, 1958)). The literature established frameworks for understanding and managing multi-ethnic states that stress the inherent strength and meaning of culture. As such, theories on identity politics favor an interpretation of the meaning of cultural identities and suggest strategies to deal with their claims rather than explaining how identity politics created and made politically relevant. Our argument is that research on identity politics should begin with questions concerning their creation, transformation and mobilization. Gaining insight into these questions requires one to adopt a political approach, and, more specifically, to focus on political institutions. That is to say, if political institutions shape social and political outcomes, they necessarily affect people's behavior as reflected in the politics of identity.

Historically, different models of religion-state relations have been followed in many countries in the world. Our argument will be built on the fact that religious symbols such as Islam (not so much different from Hinduism, Christianity of Buddhism in the respective countries) have become part of the powerful imagination of an Islamic state represented by modern Islamist movements such as the Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. Their emergence were centrally informed by the challenge of the rising political movements that emanated from the struggles against colonial rule--nationalist, socialist, communist, and liberal (Ayoub, 2008:4-10). Salafism, above all, represented a religious
awakening. However, as it became politically distinctive, it also represented a specific response in politics and ideology to the process of state transformation (Berman, 2003:258).

Social sciences have frequently relegated the theme of religious politics to the sideline of the story in the theory of state formation, focusing instead on material factors such as the economy, territory, and military competition. In the developing world, however, the trajectories of state formation have often been shaped and reshaped by conflicts among nationalist groups mobilized around the sentiment of ideological attachments, whether religion, ethnicity, or other cultural loyalties (Geertz, 1968). In the cases of the late colonial period in Egypt, religion was often steeped into organizing imperatives for an alternative state formation. This research project then, at the general level, aims to offer historical exemplars in which religious forces situate the trajectories of transformation of the state and political process of democratization.

The debate on the relationship between Islam and secularism and the role of Islam in politics has been extremely heated during the process of democratization in Egypt (2011-2013). The experience of Egypt is not unique, indeed. As occurred in other democracies such as France or the United States, the state of the Muslim world is now in the process of determining the proper role of religion in their own democracy. The short-lived experience of democracy in Egypt can help inform the debate that continues in academia and among policymakers on the relationship between religion and state. The historical role of Islamists in this country and their trials and tribulations with the secular state have allowed for the development of a new balance between religion and politics. In the current setting, while religious groups are not allowed to organize independently outside of the state’s purview and politically into parties, their influence can be seen in other sectors of society, especially within the Islamist foundations and associations.
The Ikhwanul Muslimun’s development after the July 1952 coup by the Free Officers, which initiated a project of political transformation through a “revolution from above”. My narrative will situate the MB within the context of this change in regime. The focus on how events surrounding the revolution have had far reaching institutional consequences for state-Islamist relations, especially from 1954 onwards. The beginning with the conflicts between the MB and the Free Officers over state alternatives, through the stabilization of Nasser’s political system, and ending with the emergence of Islamist radicalism in the late 1970’s.

I contend that the historical process of state formation in Egypt constituted a “critical juncture”, whose most crucial aspect involved the expansion of the political opportunity structure, which led to an open struggle between competing groups regarding the constitutional order of the state, particularly between 1952 and 1956. The extent to which – and the manner in which – these conflicts were resolved is responsible for the ensuing patterns of Islamist mobilization. Three significant factors identified in terms of triggering the emergence of radical Islamist alternatives in Egypt: institutional exclusion of the Islamic state alternative from the constitutional blueprint after 1953, persecution
and suppression of the Islamist opposition, and the state’s use of long-established religious institutions in effectively undermining the vision of an Islamic state. Thus the rise of radical organizations should be looked at through an analytical frame that combines the relative power of key institutions (power that flows largely from institutional legacies and the effects of political changes), and the availability of particular resources for mobilization that take shape shortly before the occurrence of a critical juncture.

This chapter’s main findings reflect the insight that radicalization of Islamism constitutes a long-term process of political change. Thus rather than following analyses that explain Islamist radicalization as an outcome of political economic factors, this study argues that shifts in Egypt’s Islamism from the relative moderation of the MB toward the emergence of radical organizations took place incrementally. These shifts began during the formative period of the MB-Free Officers conflict in 1954, and consolidated through the second wave of crisis in 1965. Relying on narratives provided by Muslim activists in this period, I examine the resistance strategies pursued by the Islamist networks during periods of persecution and imprisonment, and the ways in which those strategies contributed to the radicalization of later generations of Islamists. What emerges is that the rise of jihadi organizations in the decades that followed was not a sudden explosion – as many have postulated – but was an outgrowth of complex interplays involving a variety of tensions, conflicts and conciliations between various Islamist generations. I am thus highlighting the role played by the “vibrant internal struggles” within the MB’s leadership, which intended in the beginning as a deliberate effort to circumvent the “leadership gap” of the organization (Zollner, 2009). From 1958 to 1966, mainly due to Nasser’s persecution and repression, the MB leadership was unable to sustain its organizational activities, thus bringing its vast networks and social services to near collapse. In response, a resistance strategy evolved that set into motion a clear intensification process of purist ideologies as part of opposition strategy against Nasser’s state. This process included the formulation of new religious and political ideas in prisons, new
techniques for disseminating these ideas, and new mobilization strategies centered on underground activities.

**Nasser’s Regime and its Consequence for Islamic Activism**

Egypt’s historical process of modern state formation, which gave birth to a new, sovereign state, greatly impacted by the “colonial departure” or “imperial collapse” (Herb, 1999:34; Owen, 1991:12). But this process did not begin with the July 1952 bloodless coup by middle-ranking military officers, called the Free Officers (*Al-Dhubbat al-Ahrar*). Instead, the configuration of power contestation immediately after the coup must be traced back to unresolved crises in politics and the economy from the time of the Egyptian monarchy, particularly the strong demand for change that followed the 1948 victory over Egypt by Israel (Herb, 1999:111-12). As early as January 1951, it was clear that the demand for change was quickly outpacing the potential for reform from within the system (Gordon, 1992:15-17).

Three revolutionary organizations were operating at this historic junction: the Muslim Brotherhood, the Free Officers Movement, and – in less organized form – the Communists (Harris, 1964). The first two organizations were widely seen as the most capable of bringing about real political change. Both harbored ill feelings toward the Egyptian regime and Britain, but differed in terms of their ultimate goals. The Muslim Brotherhood was a civilian organization that, at least until the early 1950s, remained the only mass-based opposition whose aim of establishing an Islamic state well known. The Free Officers was an organization put together by 200 dissident military officers following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war (Gordon, 1992:19). This organization, disgruntled by power competition in the monarchy, especially between parties and the King, vowed to carry out a *coup d’etat* (Batatu, 1983:1). Led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Mohammad Najib, Anwar Sadat and other middle ranking officers, the Free Officers launched a bloodless coup on July 23rd, 1952.

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1 The Communists were resurrected shortly after the lifting of the ban on them in 1951. By the time of the coup, it was difficult to estimate the strength of communist organizations in Egypt. See, Harris, *Nationalism and Revolution*, pp. 109-111.
against King Farouk’s regime. Within hours, Nasser and his comrades had put an abrupt end to two centuries of monarchic rule in Egypt.

One of the most significant challenges to the Free Officers after the coup came from the well-organized MB (Hennisbuch, 1988:15-16; Shamir, 1978:36-37). The most crucial aspect of the struggle between the two organizations involved differences over what form Egyptian society would take: Nasser’s plan was to restructure Egyptian society and politics along socialist and ‘secular’ lines (Kassem, 2004:21), while the MB emphasized a state based on the implementation of shari’a in guiding the people. Because of the importance of this struggle in shaping the MB, it is useful to briefly recount the political opportunity structure for the most politically active organizations prior to the July 1952 coup. Considering the strength of the MB relative to other organizations at the time, what factors led to them missing such a golden opportunity to take power in the face of the collapsing monarchy?

**Political Opportunity and the Brotherhood’s Dilemma**

Scholars continue to debate the Brotherhood’s role in the 1952 coup (Harris, 1964; Permulter, 1979; see also, Malek, 1978). While earlier accounts pointed to indecisive involvement in the event due to the spontaneity of the Free Officers’ initiative (Gordon, 1978; Malik, 1978; Harris, 1966; Mitchell, 1968). More recent studies have uncovered that the coup was in fact the result of well planned, or at least coordinated, operation between the MB leadership and Nasser’s Free Officers (Kassem, 2004; Brownlee, 2007; Ashour, 2009). These latter studies have also emphasized that it was the military factions of the MB that firmly opted for working with Nasser to help launch the coup (Rutherford, 2000:170; Ashour, 2009:88-90).

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2 It must be noted, however, Nasser’s ideology was initially not clear. His socialist and secular-leaning political system was adopted later when the conflict between Free Officers and the MB escalated.
The fact that the MB did not take a lead role in pushing for revolutionary change in the crucial period of state decline may be surprising. King Farouk’s legitimacy following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war was very low, particularly between November 1951 and March 1952 (Brownlee, 2006:42:43). This period was marked by riots and demonstrations in Cairo, Alexandria and Ismailiya. For instance, on January 25 and 26, 1952, as a reaction to deadly clashes between British and Egyptian soldiers, riots against the King and the British broke out in Cairo, eventually leaving a “greater part of the city’s business district” in ruins (Gordon 1992: 27; Zaki 1995: 11). Such events offered the MB an opportunity to restore public order and thus to take an even more dominant position in the country, from which it could push that much harder for its vision of an Islamic state.

The opportunity in early 1952 was not only available to the MB. Indeed, a number of organizations, such as the Wafd, Motherland Party, Sa'adist Party, and a few other organizations, could have rushed to harness it. However, none of these organizations had enough resources to institute order and end the crisis (Aly and Wenner, 1982:339). At the same time, the country’s unstable and often tumultuous situation meant that “… demand for restoring order was quickly accompanied by the need for radical change in the political system” (Gordon, 1992:17; Vatikiotis, 1980:165). With the pressure from these twin forces increasing and the traditional opposition failing to advocate effectively on behalf of the public interest, options for non-revolutionary political change steadily dwindled. The anti-monarchy and anti-British riots in January 1952 served as a final blow to the declining constitutional monarchy. They also created an uncontrolled situation in which it seemed as if an active and powerful opposition movement like the MB—which had nation-wide cadres and which commanded paramilitary units – would be able to seize power and bring about revolutionary change in Egypt’s political system.

Why then did this not occur? To answer this puzzle, it is useful to take a step back and examine the MB’s main organizational problem in the early 1950’s, one that presented its leadership with a dilemma and that
eventually led to a missed political opportunity to take the initiative in this critical moment of state crisis.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the late 1940s was a period of organizational anarchy for the MB. Organizational crackdowns and feuds over leadership after al-Banna’s death led to internal rivalry and factionalism. This took place most notably between the Guidance Bureau of the organization and its military units (the Secret Apparatus, or SA), and caused the Guidance Bureau to increasingly lose control over the SA, particularly while it was under the command of Salih al-Ashmawi (Shadi, 1981:21-24; Kamal, 1987). Consequently, when a more ambitious commander named Abd al-Rahman al-Sanadi took over as commander of the SA, the organization quickly established a high degree of executive autonomy (Mitchell, 1969:58).

After al-Banna’s assassination in 1949, the MB became highly secretive. That year saw the leaders of internal factions, namely Salih al-Ashmawi, Abd al-Hakim Abidin, Abd al-Rahman al-Banna, and Shaykh Hasan al-Baquri, seem to put aside their differences in the interests of organizational unity. In 1951, a new leader was selected: Hasan Ismail al-Hudaiby. The July 1952 change in the Egyptian political regime allowed the MB to reappear on the political scene, seemingly renewed. The overwhelming impression was of a united and harmonious organization capable of being a powerful political force.

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1 Signs of factionalism and rivalry actually dated back to Al-Banna’s era in the late 1930s. Although the organization was at the height of its political significance, there were already signs of discontent and internal friction in its ranks. For instance, tensions regarding a disagreement over the absolute power of the Supreme Guide in 1940 and again in 1946. See, Mitchell, The Society, pp. 52-55; Salah Shadi, Safahat min al-Tarih: Hasad al-Umur, Kuwait: Sharikat al-Su’a li al-Nasr, 1981, pp. 32-34.

2 For a detailed account of this period, see Abd al-Halim, al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, 1991, pp. 422-24; Shadi, Safahat min al-Tarih, 1980, pp. 79-80. Mitchell noted that Salih al-Ashmawi represented the extremist fraction of the Brotherhood and took leadership of the Brotherhood after al-Banna’s death. Hasan al-Baquri was a trained scholar in Islamic theology who graduated from al-Azhar and was a member of the guidance council; he stood for the middle of the road tendency and was al-Ashmawi’s major contender. Abd al-Rahman al-Banna was Hasan al-Banna’s brother; he represented the conservative wing. Abd al-Hakim Abidin was the secretary general and al-Banna’s brother-in-law; see Mitchell, The Society of the Muslim Brothers, pp. 84-85.
But this view of the MB, while supported by most scholars focusing on the group, is inaccurate. I wish to argue that the image of organizational strength and unity in 1952 in fact hid the unresolved internal power struggle, which simmered until 1954. Moreover, the internal strife between the new Supreme Guide Hudaybi and the SA was only one aspect of a much larger struggle over influence, strategies, and political convictions within the MB, one that engulfed the leadership and the membership (Rais, 1981:169-173; see also, Mitchell, 1968:118-122). This struggle led to a clash between those supporting continued Islamization of society as a route to peacefully transforming the regime over time, and those who favored more revolutionary and confrontational tactics that included violence.

The clash was underlined after Nasser’s invitation to participate in the coup in late March 1952, with the military factions opting to participate in the revolutionary plan and the members of the Guidance Bureau opting to not participate (Ashour, 2008:90; Rais, 1980:165). The group’s official position was dictated by Hudaybi, who offered support to the Free Officers on the condition that the revolutionary transformation under the upcoming regime be compatible with the MB’s goals. The coup on July 23, 1952 was thus supported by some leaders in the MB.

Chief among the MB’s concerns was the belief that Egypt needed to return to stability before it could operate effectively as a democracy. The Free Officers welcomed the group’s support at first, but once Nasser had taken control of the government and consolidated his regime, he turned on the Islamists with a vengeance. Asserting his right to rule by referring to Arab nationalist and socialist ideals (Rutherford, 2000;

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1 Although al-Hudaybi repeatedly fended off challenges from within the organization, his support was fading, particularly following the 1954 incident in which the Brotherhood was accused of an assassination attempt on Nasser. The continuing internal dissent in the leadup to the incident was thus a contributing factor in Nasser’s decision to purge the whole structure of the Brotherhood, including the SA-military organizations.

2 The underlying concern for the Brotherhood leadership in response to Nasser’s coup was that the objective of this plan was considered “not for an Islamic cause”. Meanwhile, Nasser’s invitation was well calculated: to stir up internal conflict and use it for his initial plan. From this point on, the Brotherhood were forced to submit and to cooperate with the new military regime. See, Vatikiotis, Nasser and his Generation, 1978:67-69.
Dekmejian, 1995; Abed-Kotob, 1996), Nasser tried to undermine the Islamists’ challenges and subvert the notion of an Islamic state through the co-optation of the long-established institutions of the ulama.

The Failure of an Islamic State

The Free Officers’ coup of July 1952 was distinguished by its lack of ideological content. The character of the new military regime was thus shaped almost entirely by the leadership’s pragmatic policy choices (Beattie, 1994:71; Gordon, 1992:54), particularly the desire to stay in power. The Free Officers were committed to several broad goals: achieving national independence from Britain, improving the country’s military preparedness, reforming the political system to stamp out corruption and opportunism, and achieving a higher level of social justice (Ramadhan, 1968:127-130).

These goals were largely compatible with the short-term plans of the MB, which included ending the British occupation, establishing a stable and clean political system, and narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor (Ramadhan, 1968:84). But the political processes aimed at constitutional reform led to a series of events that fed a relentless pattern of power competition between the Free Officers and other revolutionaries, particularly the MB.

The Free Officers’ concern was that the impressive popularity of the Islamic opposition in the early months after the coup posed some degree of threat to them. The Muslim Brotherhood’s explicit role in politics prior to the coup was well acknowledged. On each of the key goals mentioned above, the Brotherhood had a longer and more impressive record of achievement than the Free Officers. It also had greater popularity, better organization among the masses and cells of supporters in the army and police. See Harris, 1964, p. 198-91; Mitchell, 1968, p. 211-214.

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7 This means that, compared to other organizations, the Free Officers had no clear guidance for its platform. A good illustration of this can be found in a statement made by one of the earliest members of the Free Officers, Mustafa Kamel Murad. In the early weeks after the coup, Murad criticized political parties, which cannot be expected to deliver significant change. As Murad put it, “The Wafd was too corrupt, other groups were too weak, and we had lost all faith in the parties and the King. We wanted a change. What kind of change we didn’t know, but we wanted a big change.” See, Kirk J. Beattie, Egypt during the Nasser Years: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Society, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p. 54.

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not only represented a powerful opposition that advocated a clear ideology of the state, but also enjoyed better organization among the masses, commanded effective armed units (that is, the SA), and had even established cells in the military and police (Gordon, 1992: 44-45; Mitchell, 1968: 81-82). By early 1953, it had become clear to the Free Officers that unless the MB could be forced to cooperate with the new military regime, a transition toward an Islamic state was almost inevitable. It was this view that prompted the Free Officers to court the MB while simultaneously assessing their threat to the new regime’s developing secular agenda.

Aware of its strength, the MB began to mobilize its supporters to press the Free Officers for a prominent role in regime decision-making. On August 2, the MB published a manifesto spelling out what it saw as the reforms that the regime should pursue. It called for an attack on the corrupt political parties, promulgation of a national constitution based on the Qur’an, nationalization of the Ahli Bank, outlawing of interest, closing of the stock exchange, land reform, expansion of free education, and free public health services (Beattie, 1993:73). One week later, the MB formally asked for the role of “guardian” of the revolution. It was expected that this role would empower the Brotherhood to monitor the policies of the Free Officers. Hudaybi explicitly said that his organization sought to “ensure that they [the Free Officers] were consistent with Islam ... and [constantly asked for an] Islamic constitution to be the stated objectives of the government” (c.f. Rutherford, 2000:183; also Gordon, 1992:53).

As open conflict between the Free Officers and the other revolutionaries drew ever nearer, Nasser began to prepare to launch strikes against opposition forces. First, he took steps to attack the

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1 In the agreement made by Nasser and the Brotherhood before the coup, it was said that the Brotherhood had sought this guardianship role. This posture led to some tension with the FO, especially after Nasser denied such an agreement. See Gordon, Nasser’s Blessed Movement, 1992, p. 53. The Brotherhood again asked to take on a guardianship role when Hudaybi met with Nasser and other leaders in the Free Officers on July 30, 1952, one week after the coup.
Communists. In early August, Nasser dissolved the Communist organizations. Throughout 1953, the regime worked to destroy two leading left-wing organizations, the Democratic Movement for National Liberation (DMNL) and the Egyptian Communist Party (ECP). Nasser’s moves culminated in military trials for the Communists in July 1953 and September 1954. Efforts on the part of the DMNL to unite the Communist movement with other opposition groups in a unity front that would include the Wafd proved elusive. By the end of 1954, the Communists had been removed from Egypt’s political scene.

The Free Officers’ attempt to moderate the MB’s demands for an Islamic constitution was more complex. It is useful, therefore, to describe the sequence of events that led to Nasser’s showdown with the MB, as well as how the Free Officers overcame the challenge from their “most viable rival within the new regime” (Brownlee, 2007:24).

After taking over the government, the Free Officers expressed their commitment to maintaining a liberal constitution (Beattie, 1992:59). Nasser himself claimed that the coup makers were acting in the name of the 1923 Constitution. At the same time, the Free Officers were intense critics of the Wafd, which they accused of having betrayed the national cause by approving of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement on the Suez

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11 It must be noted, however, that some factions in the Free Officers had contacts with the Communist movement prior to the coup. However, they feared Communist influence on campuses and in factories and the regime took strong measures against Communist affiliated organizations. The crucial point that sparked this first crisis can be seen in the strikes at Kafr al Dawwar, Cairo, around August 1952. Nasser initiated a sweep against organizations and figures associated with the Communists. These strikes, which ended up in bloodshed, mass arrests, and a military trial, underscored the mobilizing capabilities of the Communist organizations. See Gordon, Nasser’s Blessed Movement, 1992, pp. 27-31; see also, El-Said, The Rise of Communist Movement, 1990, pp. 76-77.
12 It is estimated that of the 90 individuals at the core of the Free Officers in 1952, 60 supported the protection of the liberal constitution. Based on the interview by Beattie, their stated objective at the time of the coup was to purge the political system of corrupt politicians, and to undertake constitutional reform to ensure that the system could not be abused in the future. Beattie, 1992, p. 60.
Canal in 1936 (Beattie, 1992:61-62). This conviction caused the Free Officers to take their first steps against the party system in January 1953. All parties were banned indefinitely, their newspapers were closed, and their leaders were arrested and put on trial (Rutherford, 2000:185). Another decisive step taken by the Free Officers, one that was at odds with the liberal constitution, was land reform. This has been described as “the most decisive act” of the Free Officers, since it weakened the traditional landed elite that had supported the monarchy and helped the regime to reach out to the countryside through populist gestures at redistribution (Hudson 1977:239).

Nasser then announced a three-year “transition period”, during which the military would rule under martial law. The Free Officers went on to transform their organization into the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), and formalized their own power with a temporary constitution that was promulgated in February of 1953. The regime briefly tolerated some opposition during March 1954, before a final crackdown in April. This latter move stripped all opposition political leaders of political rights, and led to the arrest of critical journalists, the dismissal of university professors opposed to the regime, and the closing of university campuses. By August 1954, Nasser had given up on the idea of ruling with the assistance of civilians. After this point, all key cabinet posts and control of the national state apparatus were assigned to the military (Gordon, 1992:134-36). All the committees that Nasser had previously created were also now effectively dissolved.

It is within this environment of a power transition that the Free Officers sought to resolve the issues surrounding the Islamic state alternative advocated by the MB, and more fundamentally, the position of the MB vis-à-vis the regime. Due to the movement’s popularity and non-party activity, the MB was exempted from the 1953 ban on political parties. However, Nasser rejected its request for veto power over legislation (Gordon, 1992:134). In September 1953, the Free Officers entered into a power

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13 The Wafd also participated in the British-inspired war cabinet of 1942 that hurt the military, especially Nasser’s generation.
sharing arrangement with the MB by offering it several ministerial posts. The regime also worked to include the MB within its new umbrella organization, the Liberation Rally. But the MB leadership vigorously rejected this offer because they saw it as an attempt to dilute their power within a larger, secular group (Rutherford, 2000:171). The MB leadership decided not to participate in the Liberation Rally. Instead, they maintained their focus on effecting an Islamic constitutional transformation for Egypt. As Hudyabi stated in October 1953, “we [the Brotherhood] demand that the stipulation of the Qur’an in the Constitution be put into operation immediately. If the goals of our Revolution are for [an] Islamic cause, the Brotherhood will support this revolution and become the backbone of the government.” (Revolution Command Council, 1955:94).

With the new regime consistently rejecting the call for an Islamic constitution, the MB began to demonstrate its power through street demonstrations in the closing months of 1953. By December 1953, the Free Officers were deeply worried about the MB’s consistent opposition. Meanwhile, the MB had also begun to realize that the regime had no intention of governing according to Islamic principles, and moreover seemed to be signaling that they would have only marginal power at best. Disillusion thus grew between the two groups. After a particularly unruly demonstration at Cairo University in January 1954, the Free Officers took the risky step of dissolving the MB. The regime

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14 Some members in the MB Guidance Bureau, including Sayyid Qutb, initially supported Nasser in the RCC. But there was no official statement that the MB joined the RCC. Harris (1964:110-114) noted that after the coup, Nasser offered a member of the MB the opportunity to serve as Minister of Endowments. Nasser also pardoned all MB members imprisoned for attacks on the pre-1952 regime.

15 The Liberation Rally was designed by Nasser as a mass organization with an Islamic orientation. At least in the beginning, this organization incorporated the Brotherhood’s nationwide branches into the state apparatus. However, the MB leadership perceived that the regime’s creation of this mass organization was an attempt to undermine their organization. It is for this reason that Hudyabi vigorously resisted. Interview with Mahdi Aqil, Cairo, December 28, 2007.

16 As the power competition between political parties, the MB and Free Officers escalated, Nasser thus chose to reject the Islamists’ demands. He realized that the MB was the most credible advocate of this form of constitutionalism. A decision to base the regime on Islam would have effectively strengthened the regime’s best organized and most popular competitor for power. From this point, the relationship between Nasser and the MB began to deteriorate, and reached its end in 1954.
justified this by arguing that their Supreme Guide Hudaybi had attempted to put the regime under his tutelage and spread anti-regime propaganda within the armed forces (Mitchell, 1968:281; Harris, 1964).

This conflict was furthered by the MB’s involvement in the contest over leadership within the RCC. Thus while Nasser was attempting to effectively control the military, he also moved to challenge Nagib and his authority. One of the most crucial issues triggering the conflict was Nagib’s address to the Free Officers, in which he called for them to step down from their political and administrative positions and to replace themselves with a civilian government. From the MB’s point of view, tensions with Nasser made it necessary to strengthen their organization by seeking out closer ties with Nagib, “whom the Brotherhood regarded as more committed to building an Islamic society than Nasser” (Gordon, 1992:118). As the contest between Nasser and Nagib over the leadership of the RCC grew increasingly heated, the MB also organized rallies in support of Nagib (Brownlee, 2007:64). But it was the events of October 1954 that lead to the main showdown between the regime and the MB.

It began when Hudaybi wrote a public letter protesting the terms of the Suez evacuation agreement. The regime saw this act as an attempt to undercut its legitimacy and to destabilize it. At stake was the regime’s hold on political power. A crisis “then mounted as the regime and the MB were again on a collision course” (Gordon, 1992:191). The decisive rupture between the Free Officers and the MB occurred shortly after the signing of the agreement, when a member of the latter organization attempted to assassinate Nasser in Alexandria. The regime moved swiftly, banning the

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17 General Naguib, who was formally declared as President of the Egyptian Republic shortly after the coup, made a bid to convert his formal position into permanent influence over the Command Council of Revolution (CCR). See, Ramadan, *Abdel Nasr wa Azmat Marz*, 1978, pp. 143-47; p. 149.

18 After becoming President, General Naguib was a leading advocate of the return to parliamentary rule. Nasser then deposed him and placed him under house arrest in 1954.

19 Whether or not the assassination attempt was undertaken with the Brotherhood’s approval or was orchestrated by the Nasser regime as a pretext for a crackdown has been a source of controversy. For a discussion of this point, see, Joel Gordon, *Nasser’s Blessed Movement*, New
movement on October 29, 1954, and undertaking mass arrests. After trials in early 1955, approximately 7,000 MB members were jailed and Hudaybi was sentenced to hard labor for life. The Free Officers also took over the MB’s network of social services. In January 1955, six MB leaders were executed, a huge number of activists fled Egypt, and the Brothers “disappeared from the Egyptian political map literally overnight” (Rubin, 1991:12).

The long struggle for constitutional reform also ended in late 1954, with both the former liberal constitution and an Islamic constitution being ruled out as organizing frameworks for the new Egyptian state. The decision to jettison the Islamic constitutional option was undoubtedly influenced by Nasser’s realization that organizing the regime according to Islamic principles would have dramatically strengthened the MB, at a time when this organization was a serious contender for power. At the same time, the MB’s unwavering support for an Islamic state organized according to shari’a law caused them to consistently reject compromise on this issue, for instance by acceding to some sort of power sharing arrangement.

Mobilizing the Religious-Establishment

It was at this highly contentious moment that Nasser’s struggle to define the revolution gradually took shape. In 1955, the Free Officers definitively committed to six objectives that would guide their revolution: the battle against imperialism, the abolition of feudalism, an end to monopolies and the domination of foreign capital, social justice, the strengthening of the military, and the establishment of a sound democratic system. Enacting these measures entailed a concerted effort, as Kassem points out, to expand state control of Egyptian society and “to


See, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Tahrir al-Misr, Cairo: Ministry of Information, 1954. It is interesting to note that, just like many authoritarian regimes of the period, Nasser only mentioned in passing a clear conception of governance. The six objectives appear to lean toward socialism, but even this tendency is played down by Nasser’s most senior economic adviser, Aziz Sidqi: “I knew Nasser’s economic thinking very well. He had two major ideas: develop the country as fast and as well as possible; and, do this in a way that brings social justice. How to do this? Nasser didn’t know at all. He had no fixed ideological position—no ideological blueprint in mind”. See, Beattie, 1992, p. 137.
restructure economic and social relations along socialist and ‘secular’ lines” (Kassem, 2004:21). It also entailed a concerted effort to build a populist, national basis of support. Indeed, two features would come to define post-1954 Egypt: an emphasis on a strong, centralized state, and the continuing struggle to cultivate popular support for military rule (Beattie, 1992:61; 64-65).

Nasser’s centralization of political control went hand in hand with the effort to construct a new basis of state authority. After its success in centralizing power within the RCC, the Free Officers undertook a number of public speaking tours and used the mass media to communicate directly with the Egyptian people, thereby bypassing traditional political channels (Brownlee, 2007:91; Jankonski, 2002). The dissolution of parties and the subsequent development of a single mass political organization was a central part of Nasser’s strategy. By removing the channels through which alternative political interests could be channeled, Nasser was able to control opposition groups.

This success enabled the Free Officers to strengthen their authority by creating a series of organizations, including the Liberation Rally (1953), the National Union (1956), and finally, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU, 1962). While the first two parties floundered, either for the lack of an agenda or due to problems with timing, the ASU proved quite effective (Brownlee, 2007). The underlying purpose of these organizations was not to facilitate political participation, but was rather a mechanism for building consent and...
support for the regime, as well as to provide a link between the
government and the people.

Such populist appeals and mass mobilization strategies were
also reflected in Nasser’s approach to dealing with Islamist politics
(Waterbury, 1983:314-315). While he adopted oppressive measures in
dealing with the MB, Nasser strengthened his legitimacy relative to
Islamist challengers by building cooperation with – and also by
subordinating – the most important religious institution in the country:
the ulama of al-Azhar. As Moustafa (2001:12) points out, “relying on the
authority of al-Azhar ulama was the most effective means available for
strengthening resources and power in Nasser’s political order” vis-à-vis
Islamism.

Recalling our earlier proposition about the importance of
institutional contexts for Islamist political mobilization, the Egyptian state
was richly endowed with an elaborate network of Islamic-religious
institutional systems (Moustafa, 2001; Zeghal, 1999). This context
provided Nasser with the means to counter-balance the Islamic state
alternative through the mobilization of the ulama – and indeed the wider
Islamic religious establishment – in the service of the regime and its
policies. This mobilization began with land reform. In the 1954 land
reform law, Nasser placed “waqf” properties – land associated with
religious endowments – under the control of a new government
ministry. Since the religious institutions of the country, particularly al-
Azhar, relied upon income from such land for their operations, the land

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Very early on, the Free Officers sought to mobilize popular religious
sentiments on behalf of the regime. In the Liberation Rally, the Free Officers worked with
local religious leaders, preaching in various mosques at Friday prayers, and otherwise using
religious actors to emphasize the compatibility of Islam with Nasser’s socialist policies. See,
for instance, Anwar Alam, Religion and State: Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia, Delhi: Gyan

It must be noted, however, Nasser’s move to appropriate Islam and the ulama
in the efforts to stabilize his political order was not an accident. It had been part of
the agenda since the Free Officers’ early challenge against the demand for an Islamic constitution
in 1952. Such an appropriation intensified in the absence of legitimating principles for the
Revolution. As we will see, this culminated in 1961, in which Nasser took steps to introduce
institutional reforms over al-Azhar. For more on this, see Jakob Skovgaard-Peterson, Defining
Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta, New York: E.J. Brill Press,
reform law severely curtailed their autonomy by making them reliant upon the state for financial support. It also allowed the regime to distribute *waqf* resources in such a way as to “reward those who followed [its] lead ... and punish those who did not” (Moustafa, 2001:5).

The second action by Nasser in this vein came in 1957, with the abolishment of the *shari’a* courts. These courts, which had operated as a parallel court system since the 19th century, were made a part of the national judiciary (Cercelius, 1966:16). While the stated objective of this reform was to unify a fragmented judiciary, it had the effect of bringing this alternate religious court system under the direct control of the state.

The final action was Nasser’s 1961 law that radically re-organized al-Azhar University by placing it under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Endowments (Moustafa, 2001; Cercelius, 1959:417-418). This re-organization entailed the introduction of modern courses of learning into the university’s curriculum, as well as the establishment of entirely new faculties (including medicine and engineering) into the university structure. The reforms also transformed the administration of al-Azhar, and gave the president of Egypt the power to appoint the Sheikh of al-Azhar. By introducing modern courses and faculties, and by bringing the university under the control of a state bureaucracy, as Zeghal noted, Nasser could bring the ulama to heel, without completely annihilating them” (Zeghal, 1999:374). Admittedly these reforms were met with strong opposition from conservatives, who resisted the governmental control being imposed on al-Azhar. Nonetheless, between 1958 and 1964, Nasser undertook a series of actions to enact the reforms. These included removing the ulama who were opposed to the reforms, and replacing them with those that were more supportive of the regime and of its

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24 Previously, the court and educational systems in Egypt had been divided between the private, Islamic and national systems. Both the reforms of the *sharia* courts and of Al-Azhar were meant to end this separation, and unify both systems under the control of the state. See, Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam*, 1999, pp. 159-162.
programs (Cercelius, 1966:34-37). Clearly therefore, the reforms were not only an effort to modernize al-Azhar, but were also a bid “to control the religious sector” by transforming “…al-Azhar from madrasa [learning institution] to political vehicle” (Skovgaard-Petersen, 1999:186).

The increasing control over Egyptian Islam’s most influential institutions enabled Nasser to contain the mobilization toward an Islamic state. The nature of the reforms also showed that their underlying purpose was not simply to transform the religious sector in accordance with Nasser’s state building project (Ismail, 1995; Rais, 1981:171-177), but also to capture the sector’s resources, which were being used by the remnants of the MB to oppose the regime.

As was noted earlier, the years between 1954 and 1960 were a crucial period for the Free Officers in their search for the ideological content of the revolution. Within this context, the ideas of the Islamic state as introduced by al-Banna came to represent one pole of Egypt’s Islamic aspirations, while the traditional ulama came to represent the other, regime-supported pole. As Crecelius has noted, prior to 1952, these two poles of religious politics competed over who were the “true defenders of Islam …and fought bitter pamphlet and verbal wars over their respective interpretations of Islam” (Crecelius, 1966:34). Indeed, the MB had long held that “[the ulama of] Al-Azhar had not been able to defend Islam or to convey an active and vital faith to the Egyptian masses” (Petersen, 1997:157). Al-Azhar therefore benefited from the MB’s dissolution in 1954.

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25 Tamir Moustafa (2001:5-6) noted that in implementing the reorganization law, Nasser was forced to appoint a series of temporary directors from the military. These directors of al-Azhar affairs were charged with removing all resistance to government control. From 1959 to 1963, the number of faculty members at al-Azhar dropped from 298 to 215. It can be assumed that the ulama who were removed were the most vocal in their opposition to government control. Between 1963 and 1970, the regime set up committees that were designed to purge al-Azhar of all faculty members who were unwilling to support the reform programs. See also, Daniel Cercelius, Al-Azhar in the Revolution, in *International Journal for Middle Eastern Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966, pp. 39-43.

26 One of the most important consequences of the reform was that the government let the ulama of al-Azhar have ministerial posts dealing with religious affairs, and allowed them to set up institutions for charity and other endowed religious properties. See, Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam, 1999*, p. 184.
Situated in this institutional environment, Nasser increased his persecution of the MB while enlisting the ulama of al-Azhar in his campaign to adapt Islam to the demands of the modern state. In so doing, the ability of Islamist groups to charge Nasser’s regime with working against the interests of an Islamic state was gradually undermined (Ismail, 1995:45-48).

There are numerous examples of the regime’s efforts to ally itself with al-Azhar’s ulama. For example, in a speech on the occasion of the signing of the Suez evacuation agreement, Nasser championed al-Azhar’s ulama as the historical defenders of Islam against colonialism (Skovgaard-Petersen, 1999:161). He proclaimed that the nation was again requesting that al-Azhar emphasize that “religion is love, not terrorism and fanaticism” (Ahmad, 1991:329). The regime also used the ulama to spread the idea that the MB’s leaders were not operating in accordance with Islamic ethics, and that they were instead using Islam for their own political ends (Harris, 1964:211). Indeed, a sermon-like newspaper piece by an al-Azhar professor of tafsir (Quranic exegesis) elucidated Islamic law’s judgment on the Brothers: they were “enemies of God” who resorted to “criminal methods that contradict the essence of the Islamic message” (Al Jumhuriya, October 2, 1954).

This religio-political strategy had one clear result, that is, it increased the state’s control of al-Azhar and of its institutions, which meant that religious institutions had become a part of the bureaucracy and had thus been incorporated into the state’s institutional structure. Nasser believed that creating a state-controlled monopoly on religion would be useful in defending his regime against Islamist opponents. It was therefore important that the

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27Nasser’s moves to control this influential Islamic institution can be seen in many of the contexts in which the regime used Islam to legitimize a secular political system. While invocations of Islam may or may not have been intended to be simply “lip service”, they gradually situated Al-Azhar and ulama as key sources of ideological support for the regime. In 1962 for instance, the regime and the shaykhs at Al-Azhar were mainly arguing that Islam and socialism were compatible. But by the late 1960s Islam was being touted as the religion of socialism. An important spokesman for the regime’s Socialist Union claimed: “There is no contradiction at all between Islam and socialism, because Islam since its origins has advocated socialism. Accordingly, socialism is one of the principles of Islam”. See, Al-Mulhaq Al-Dini, Al Jumhuriya, No. 28, July 1, 1966, as cited in Haddad, 1982, p. 212.
ulama not be eliminated, but rather that they be subordinated to the regime. Nasser fostered this institutionalization of the religious sector by gaining ever-greater control over mosques throughout the country. Thus both public and private mosques were placed under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Religious Endowments from 1957 onwards (Alam, 1998:86-87).

Accordingly, between 1957 and 1962, the government built or helped fund upwards of 1,500 mosques, and virtually doubled the personnel levels in government mosques (Berger, 1991:18; Bianchi, 1989:190; Alam, 1998:85). In the absence of a clear alternative to the MB’s insistence on an Islamic constitution, the Free Officers eventually found it most useful to combine a modernist vision of development with a vague appeal to religious tradition. Cultivating a modernist Islam, while suppressing the radical Islamic alternatives through the appropriation of the religious class, was thus an essential element in Nasser’s regime-building strategy. Ultimately, it is reasonable to say that far from being hostile to religion, Islam became integrated into Nasser’s state apparatus and provided it with ideological support.28

As a result of being integrated into the formal political system, the Islamists’ articulation of the institutional structure of an Islamic state began to shift. Indeed, the cumulative effects of conflict with Nasser’s regime even caused Islamist leaders to begin searching for ideological alternatives (Ashour, 2008:181-182). By the mid-1960s, following the government’s severe persecutions of the MB, Islamists were fragmented

28It is interesting to note that Nasser’s effort to mobilize Islam was also important in the international arena. Nasser was concerned with the conservative monarchs of the Gulf region, who were opposed to his socialist-Republican ideas. This rivalry became more serious in the early 1960s, when the competition between Saudi Arabia and Egypt for regional leadership intensified. Saudi Arabia was deeply troubled by Nasser’s populist rhetoric, particularly since such rhetoric was spread through the legitimating institution of Al-Azhar. Nasser, on the other hand, perceived Saudi Arabia as a bastion of conservative reaction actively working against his interests. Both the Saudis and the Egyptians subsequently sought to offset the other’s influence in the region by setting up competing Islamic institutions to promote their respective agendas. The culmination of this war of words was the outbreak of war with Yemen in 1962 (where they each fought each other through the use of proxy armies?). See, Malcolm Kerr, The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.
into two broad camps: Those who preferred the moderate path through education and missionary works (Abed-Kotob, 1995:313), and those who favored “radical and revolutionary” strategies for Islamic transformation. This latter, radical strand included those who believed in “… overthrowing regimes that failed to fulfill their system of governance in accordance with the shari’a” (Scott, 2003). The former represented the official leadership of the MB, the latter were radical organizational fronts that throughout the 1970s developed an understanding that jihad (holy war) was the only feasible solution for securing the Islamic state interest.

I will discuss the moderate alternatives later in the next chapter. In what follows, I will explore the historical transition from state persecution of the MB to the development of jihadist politics by focusing on the role of ideas, institutions, and rising problems associated with the decline in Nasser’s order after the 1967 war.

Transitions to Violent Politics

The stabilization of Nasser’s political order was finally achieved through the promulgation of a new constitution in 1964. This was the successor to the June 23rd, 1956 constitution, which had guided Egyptians through the initial post-monarchy period. For the Free Officers, the 1964 Constitution outlined “the legitimating principles for the Revolution” (Rutherford, 2008:51). And while its content was overly influenced by the interest of the Free Officers in securing power, it also represented a new formulation of the 1923 Constitution, one that provided for a greater concentration of power in the office of the president, and which as a result enabled Nasser to establish a highly

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27 The 1964 Constitution marked the final outcome of the ideological battle that had raged since 1952. In 1956 Egypt held a referendum to approve the “temporary” national constitution, followed by the declaration of the National Charter in 1962 as the ideological basis for the Revolution. The 1964 Constitution can be regarded as the formalization of the Charter. However, the 1964 constitution apparently represented a final effort to institutionalize the broad vision outlined by the regime to resolve the problem “... of legitimating principles [for the Revolution] that had been contested amongst political groups since July, 1952.” See, Gordon, 1992, p. 173. On the development of Egypt’s constitution, see also Rutherford, Egypt after Mubarak, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
centralized, statist regime that controlled the country’s politics, economy and society.

Settling Constitution through Persecution

The 1964 Constitution’s preamble – a series of statements beginning with the phrase “We, the people of Egypt” – reminded Egyptians that they had “wrested [their] rights to a life of freedom”. This liberty was based on a “sacred belief in equality, justice, and dignity.” These principles, moreover, were derived from the “ideals proclaimed by the masses”, for which Egyptian martyrs had given their lives in the struggle for national dignity. The result promised to be a society that “assured... freedom of thought and worship in an atmosphere where there are no dictates save those of conscience and reason.”

In the context of these rights, Article 3 of the Constitution also established “Islam as the religion of the state”. Importantly however, there was no stipulation that the state had to implement Islamic law.

The Constitution defined Egypt as a “democratic republic” in which sovereignty lay with the umma or nation, although it bears underlining that this term was also officially translated as “people” (Gordon, 1992:101). This declaration of sovereignty also mentioned that “liberty, security, safety, and equality of opportunity” among the people are guaranteed (Articles 1; 2; 5). In a further elaboration of legitimating principles reflecting democratic norms, the Constitution established the equality of all Egyptians before the law, and endowed citizens with the rights of freedom of opinion and expression (Articles 31 and 44). These principles were subsequently bolstered with institutional arrangements such as those found in Articles 45 and 47, guaranteeing freedoms of the press, assembly, association, and an independent judiciary (Article 175). Concurrent with the promulgation of this document was Law 73/1956 – “On the Exercising of Political Rights” – that codified the procedures for

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eligibility for the right to vote, as outlined in Article 61 of the Constitution.

Regardless of the regime’s motivations, the legitimating principles outlined in this constitutional order were impressive. But those motivations did certainly shine through particularly brightly in the greater concentration of power in the office of the president (Articles 71 and 73). Consequently, the new constitutional order also allowed Nasser to establish a highly centralized political regime that controlled society both politically and economically (Rutherford, 1999: 197-199).31

An important feature of this control was the reinforcement of legal restrictions on political participation. Throughout the 1960s, the core institutions of the new state remained the armed forces, the newly expanded mukhabarat (state security services), and a single organization, the ASU, through which all public participation was channeled.32 Associations for workers, professionals, and judges were prohibited. They were replaced with a vast corporatist network of state-controlled unions and professional associations (Bianchi, 1996; Baer, 1988:18). From 1960 onward – especially after the enactment of the Emergency Bill in 1958 – the Free Officers regime governed under an authoritarian system with repressive elements that were a legacy of its formation. Thus the stabilization of Nasser’s political system came to be characterized not only by the successful promulgation of the new constitution, but also by the institutionalization of a political structure that persecuted and repressed opposition forces, particularly the MB.

The wave of persecution of the MB began in late 1954, following the assassination attempt on Nasser. Shortly after the incident,

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31Part of the reason for Nasser to arrive at such an arrangement was that the 1964 constitution was also a pragmatic response to internal and external challenges facing Egypt after the 1952 coup.

32From 1957 to 1960, the Free Officers began a gradual incorporation of its members, networks and clients to be transferred into the state. In 1962 Nasser completed this incorporation effort in which the Free Officers’ network controlled the bureaucracy, military and other nation-wide political institutions. This network helped them to run the government. See, Springborg, 1987; Waterbury, 1991, pp. 34-36; Hennisbuch, 1988, pp. 17-20.
the MB was rounded up in what appeared to be a well-planned action. Thousands were sent to prison with or without trial, and a number of leading figures were sentenced to death by military tribunals, while many others managed to leave Egypt for Jordan, Syria, countries in the Gulf, and most notably, Saudi Arabia (Gomaa, 1997; Rais, 1980:181-83). For the MB members who remained in Egypt, the years between 1955 and 1962 were characterized by “internal struggles for organizational survival” (Zollner, 2009:412; Hafez, 1987) in the form of underground activism, partly because of the state’s close surveillance of its activities and partly because of the execution or imprisonment of its leading figures. In using the term “underground activism”, I am referring to a set of mobilization strategies relying on hidden resistance, informal networks, and covert leadership operating under the constraints of repressive institutions (Scott, 1993).

During the early stage of Nasser’s persecution, the MB’s strategy was meant as a deliberate effort to cope with its own lack of leadership. But this strategy also caused the group’s leadership to turn inward and to engage in self-assessment, thereby setting into motion a process of intensification of their purist ideology and programs. This led to the growth of a radical political alternative in opposition to the secular state system that eventually culminated in the establishment of vanguard Islamist organizations in the 1970s. That is to say, during this period of persecution, certain properties of purist Islamic ideology introduced by al-Banna were reproduced and disseminated in response to the repressive, centralizing Nasser’s secular state.

**Leadership Gap and ‘Organization 1965’**

The leadership gap in the MB was almost exclusively the result of imprisonment, torture, and isolation carried out as part of Nasser’s persecution of the group. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that a clear ideology and set of guidelines for relations with the new state were not available. The problems flowing from this lack of new directives

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33 The *Mukhabarat* (state security services) was notorious in post-revolutionary Egypt for controlling public activities.
were compounded by the fact that Hudaybi, who was under house arrest from 1955 to 1964, had concentrated his efforts on writing official addresses and rasail (statements) between 1952 and 1954 that were concerned with the political developments flowing from years of relative cooperation with Nasser’s regime (Zollner, 2009). The net result was that there were no long-term strategies, policies, or spiritual advice to provide guidance to the group after 1955 (Kepel, 1985:71).

In the absence of direct guidance, the MB came to increasingly rely upon Islamism’s basic ideological tenets. These included the concepts of nizam al-Islam (a holistic Islamic system) and harakat al-Islamiya (Islamic activism), which had been propagated by the group’s founder, Hasan al-Banna. They also included the ideas of one of the most famous ideologues from the 1930s, Abd al-Qadir Awda, who emphasized that it is “a religious duty to actively oppose state control if its leadership is not subscribing to shari’a” (Islamic law) (Ramadhan, 1968:116; Kepel, 1985:80). Although Awda’s interpretation was not new – in that it was grounded in classical Islamic theories of the state – it gained increased stature among the MB’s members in the 1950s.

Beginning in 1958, there were efforts amongst the imprisoned members of the MB to address the leadership vacuum by making Sayyid Qutb a leading figure able to dispense spiritual advice. These efforts were relatively successful, and thus the early 1960s became a turning point within the MB’s trajectory, in which signs of revival began to replace disillusionment (Ashour, 2008:171). There are three major indicators of this change: first, during this period, prisoners started to exchange and discuss ideas, especially related to opposition strategies. Second, a communications network was built up, linking prisoners, and notably Qutb, to members and leaders on the outside. Third, Nasser relaxed his tight grip on the Brotherhood and released members with shorter prison sentences (Ashour, 2008:121-126; see also, Ibrahim, 1990:132).

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34 Abd al-Qadir Awda was the co-founder of the Brotherhood and one of the most influential ideologues after al-Banna. He was executed by Nasser’s regime in 1955.
Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) is perhaps the most important theorist of contemporary radical jihadist politics. But his relationship with political Islam, especially the MB, was a complex one. Qutb was a moderately liberal-leaning intellectual during the 1940s. A literary critic by training, he returned to Egypt from a year-long stay in the United States as a committed Islamist activist. His interest in joining the MB grew in the early 1950s, when he regularly contributed to their publications, including *al-Da’wah* (The Call) and *al-Muslimun* (the Muslims). In those publications, he harshly criticized the British occupation of Egypt, even calling for Muslims to form *Kata’ib al-Fida’* (Sacrifice Battalions) to fight against the British. Qutb’s insightful works led to his being elevated to the rank of editor of the MB’s publications, and beginning in 1951, he was elected as the Head of the Information Department. By the time of the 1952 Coup, Qutb was a member of the Guidance Bureau. It was during his time in the Bureau that Qutb supported Nasser’s transformative ideas in the RCC, and he even once served as a leading adviser to the Free Officers’ constitution committee (Ramadhan, 1968:76).

Qutb was among the MB leaders arrested in the first wave of persecution in 1954. He spent only eight months in prison until he was transferred to the Liman al-Turra prison hospital in 1956 due to ill health. It was in this prison hospital that Qutb was able to work on a number of projects. He continued his voluminous Qur’an commentary *Fi Zilal al-Qur’an* (Under the Shade of the Qur’an), revised his renowned book *al-Adalat al-Ijtima’i fi al-Islam* (Social Justice in Islam), and wrote short manuscripts (Shepard, 1989:35-36). Qutb’s most important work, *Ma’alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones), although published after his release, was most probably written during these prison years (Kepel, 1989:50). The

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prominence of Qutb’s various works put him in a position of intellectual leadership within the organization, and made him central to Egypt’s Islamist ideological transformation in the crucial years of Nasser’s persecutions.

The move toward Islamist ideological transformation in Egypt was facilitated by prisoner networks, which played a crucial role in elaborating and disseminating Qutb’s ideas. Qutb was able to communicate and exchange thoughts with other prisoners during his hospitalization in the Liman Tura prison (Kepel, 1989:28). This enabled the prisoners to discuss and learn from Qutb’s ideas, and upon their return to their various “home” prisons, they further engaged with the ideas. Hudaybi, who held the de jure leadership of the MB, definitely knew of these activities. Indeed, Qutb admitted in his memoirs that the Brothers had begun to engage in discussion groups and to propagate his new approach with approval from the Murshid (Ashour, 2008:92). According to Farid Abd al-Khaliq and Abd Azim Ramadan, as well as Qutb himself, there was a steady diffusion of his ideas. It is quite clear that by 1958, Qutb’s ideas had become the central discourse among the prisoners, which helped infuse a new spirit within the organization. Moreover, Qutb’s ideas were also discussed outside the prison walls (al-Ghazali, 1989; Ramadhan, 1989:311; Khaliq, 2004), via the efforts of members who regularly visited Qutb in prison and then spread his ideas amongst those outside prison.

The wider dissemination of Qutb’s ideas was greatly aided by the relaxation of Nasser’s persecution measures and the release of MB

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Between 1950 and 1960, the younger members at Qanatir prison were particularly inspired by Qutb’s ideas. They began to adopt (do you mean ‘preach’?) the concept of takfir (accusation of unbelief) to other Muslims and government.

Zaynab al-Ghazzali, leader of al-Sayyidat al-Muslimat (the Muslim Sisterhood), provided a detailed account of the MB’s efforts to circumvent the leadership gap that eventually led to the close association with Qutb’s ideas. She mentioned that a number of the Brothers and Sisters visited Qutb and other prisoners and discussed many issues with them. These people included Amina and Hamida Qutb (Qutb’s sisters), Hudaybi’s wife and his daughters Khalida, Aliya, and Tahiya, Anal al-Ashmawi. The discussions are a crucial link in understanding the spread of Qutb’s ideas, and how they were adopted by the members of the MB outside prison. See, Zaynab al-Ghazali, Ayyam min Hayati, Cairo: Matba’a al-Adabiya, 1987, pp. 57-60.
members with minor prison sentences in 1957 and 1958 (Ramadhan, 1989; al-Ghazali, 1996:28). These important political developments were a result of the rise in Nasser’s popularity – largely due to his victory in the 1956 Suez crisis and his appeal as a leader in the Third World – which meant that the regime no longer considered the lower ranks of the MB to be a threat.

But an unintended consequence of the relaxation of Nasser’s policy was the formation of a new group within the MB. The group, which was later to be named in court as “Nizam 1965” (Organization 1965), was largely composed of former prisoners – some of whom had been incarcerated in the aforementioned prison of Qanatir – as well as a large number of Brothers who had escaped the 1954 wave of arrests (Ashour, 2008:92; Kepel, 1989:20-23). The new group was in close contact with Qutb, who acted as their spiritual guide (Qutb, 1965:36). It soon became the most important forum for the new generation in the MB to disseminate and expand Qutb’s political ideas about the strategy for Islamist opposition. Organization 1965 also became the launch pad for forms of underground activities that echoed the purist organizational strategy introduced by al-Banna (Dekmajian, 1992; Davis, 1996). Moreover, the group saw itself as the vanguard of Islamist activism called for by Qutb. As Haddad points out, “a member [of this group] needs to pass through several challenging stages of study, preaching, and persecution in order to reach their goal of establishing a just Islamic society” (Haddad, 1993:90; see also, Asour, 2008:92).

Arguably, the organizational development of the MB and the leadership role of Qutb in that development were not a secret to either Hudaybi, who remained the official Supreme Guide, or to other members in the organization (Zollner, 2009). Moreover, it seems that Hudaybi was aware of the ideological foundation of Organization 1965, and made no effort to disband the group or to object to Qutb’s theories. The underlying reason for Hudaybi’s decision was likely related to the fact that while the Brotherhood experienced very tight political constraints under Nasser’s regime, the activities of Organization 1965 and the expansion of
Qutb’s ideas became viable means for preventing the MB from entering into a terminal decline. This seems to underscore the preference given to the restoration of the organization by the MB’s leadership. It is only in the late 1960s, when Organization 1965 organized an armed insurrection against the regime, that Hudayby began to take steps to denounce it. More accommodating principles regarding the Islamic state alternative were then adopted by Hudaybi’s faction (Abed-Kotob, 1996). One of the most important efforts in this de-radicalizing initiative was the publication of a book entitled Du’at la Qudhat (Preachers, Not Judges), which went on to underpin the MB’s long-term moderation. This marked the historic rupture within Egyptian Islamism that led to the official leadership distancing itself from the radicals.

The response of the regime to Organization 1965 was swift and brutal. The group was brought to court, with members and collaborators accused of planning to overthrow the state system. At the same time, another massive purge of Islamist activists and the MB was launched. This wave of persecution resulted in the execution of six leaders of the MB, including Sayyid Qutb, in mid-1966, as well as the imprisonment and torture of thousands of rank and file members (Rais, 1981:211-13; Beattie, 1997:79).³⁸

The fact that the group subscribed to a radical ideology and had a militant method in its struggle for an Islamic state was undeniable. For Organization 1965, the absolute character of state power was the prime target of criticism, while the state system under Nasser represented the epitome of un-Islamic conduct. Thus although Qutb’s theories did not explicitly mention about Nasser and his regime, he charged ‘secular

³⁸According to the Brotherhood’s estimates, the number of people detained by the regime in 1965 reached 20,000, of whom around 1,000 were brought before a military tribunal. It must be mentioned that it is unlikely that Organization 1965 (let alone the Brotherhood as a whole) had concrete plans for terrorist activities. There was no evidence that the group had the military capacity to organize a plot, even though both Qutb and the Brotherhood did admit that the group attempted to build an armed organization. Based on this assessment, after its consolidation in the early 1960s, the regime still perceived the Islamists as a serious threat to their power. See, Ashour, 2008:183; Mitchell, 1968:112-113; Kepel, 1989:117.
regime’ with the ultimate crime of apostasy. Furthermore, Qutb’s total rejection of the existing political system implied that the use of violence in order to bring about an Islamic transformation was legitimate. Qutb’s Ma’alim fi al-Tariq contained an ideological commitment that said that “…violent struggle for an Islamic state is legitimate” (Omar, 2007:612), and that Nizam 1965 constitutes an organizational model for the jihadist struggle in Egypt.

Since Qutb’s message was central to the MB’s internal struggle during these crucial years, an outline of his religious and political ideas is useful. My analytical goal in the next section is to explicate the role of ideas in underpinning Egypt’s Islamist changes.

From al-Banna to Qutb: a Reproduction of Purist Islamism

Many scholars have tended to emphasize the psychological experience of imprisonment and torture in interpreting Qutb’s ideological development. It is not difficult to see how his prolonged torture and incarceration might have convinced him that the state-system – and particularly Nasser’s state – was evil (Ramadhan, 1989:119-120; Ashour, 2008:169-170). But it is important to emphasize that Qutb’s ideas on society, politics and governance are firmly grounded in purist Islamic ideology, albeit an extreme form of it, and that they are related to al-Banna’s own ideas (Cane, 1995:205; Goldberg, 1991:14-16). The two works that are primarily responsible for the perception of Qutb as a radical Islamist thinker are Under the Shade and Milestones, which are in essence a concrete elaboration of al-Banna’s strategy and program for an Islamic state through the purification of society. But while al-Banna was the product of the 19th century “ancient regime” and the British colonial state, Qutb focused far more on Nasser’s nationalist state (Cane, 1995:203; Mousalli, 1994:112; Ismail, 1995:48).

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Footnotes:


40 Qutb’s ideas were also largely influenced by modern Islamist interpretative literature. This included Pakistani thinker Maududi’s concept of hakimiyat Allah (“absolute”)
Qutb’s understandings of community and agency were profoundly conditioned by the experience of witnessing a powerful, absolutist and secular state “… intrude into society as the colonial regime had never been capable of doing” (Mousalli, 1993:37). Qutb evoked evil as an active and insidious force identified as taghut, by which he meant “deception that cannot endure the mere existence of truth . . . for even if truth wished to live in isolation from deception – leaving victory to the decision of God – deception cannot accept this situation” (Qutb, 1974:vol. 3, 1306; See also, Makin, 1999:61).

Building upon these religious themes, Qutb sought to describe human political power by conflating the words: taghut and tughyan. Tughyan has to do with overstepping boundaries (including “going beyond disbelief”), whereas taghut is associated with “that which is worshipped other than God” (Qutb, 1974: 1307). Here the notion of a modern Pharaoh that emerged during the Islam-liberal debate in the 1920s reappeared as a fundamental theme in Qutb’s interpretation of the penetration of Nasser’s regime into Egyptian society. Qutb argued that the arbitrary power of the state symbolized by Pharaoh could be conflated with Nasser’s absolutist regime. Underlying Qutb’s political ideas was a conviction that the ordering of human affairs is the exclusive domain of God, and that “all other forms of human governance, as the source of authority and commands, are therefore equal to shirk (polytheism)” (Kepel, 2000:87).

Effectively, Qutb drew upon al-Banna’s ideas to envisage a far more intolerant, sophisticated, and exclusivist Islamic state. There are three main themes within Qutb’s ideas that were influential in shaping the organizational imperatives of radical Islamist groups in the 1970s. The first is the concept of jahiliya, which refers to the immoral, polytheist society of pre-Islamic Arabia, and which Qutb interpreted to also describe a state of being (Mousalli, 1993:76). According to Qutb, any

sovereignty of God).

Maududi also mentioned the binary distinction between jahiliya (ignorance) and Divinely-ordained political order. Two writers from South Asia, Abul A’la al-Maududi and Abul Hasan al-Nadhvi, were among those to reformulate a set of ideas with regards to an Islamic state. See, Haddad, 1994.
individual, group or society that did not live according to Islam based on the shari'a was living in jahiliya. This included those citizens of Muslim countries who were not living according to shari'a’s tenets. Qutb argued that jahiliya was “a destructive and corruptive force intent on eradicating the true Islamic path” (Qutb, Ma'alim, 1993:23).

Second, Qutb characterized the world as being polarized into dar al-harb (house of war), which was every part of the world that was non-Islamic, and dar al-Islam (house of Islam), which was the Islamic world. He argued that the dar al-harb was to be fought against and destroyed, and then replaced with a Muslim state based on the shari’a.

In his notions of al-jahiliya and dar al-harb, Qutb was highlighting the universalism of Islam, which made it well-equipped to take over all other societies. Echoing al-Banna’s vision, Qutb proclaimed Islam to be a complete system, and argued that the main purpose and message of the Qur’an was “political and social, not just spiritual” (Davis, 1985:153). This political and social order would liberate humanity from the yoke of a secular system of state. Kepel (1989:153) noted, Qutb’s polarization of the world into two systems made his “ideologies appealing, since they provided guidelines for analyzing the [Nasser’s] declining regime.”

The third main theme in Qutb’s ideas was his interpretation of al-Banna’s concept of jihad to constitute a “revolt against [unbelieving] rulers” (Milestones, 1993:91). Making a point that still resonates today with the radical Islamists, Qutb stated in the mid-1960’s:

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41 Unlike al-Banna, Qutb did not provide details about the true nature of this Islamic state. The powerful appeal of Qutb’s ideas lay in the fact that he did not ‘openly’ or ‘explicitly’ say that Egypt’s secular regime should be overthrown. But, his concept of al-jahiliya implied such a militant vision that did not allow for the existence of competing visions.

42 In Islamic thought, the concept of jihad is complex and often misunderstood. Linguistically, jihad means ‘to strive’. Some classical jurists saw jihad as a spiritual struggle to attain moral and religious perfection, as opposed to the ‘lesser (military) jihad’. However, the majority of classical jurists also understood the obligation of jihad in a military sense. Drawing upon this view, many modern Muslim thinkers, especially in response to colonial powers, expected that the Islamic state (dar al-Islam) would wage military jihad against the external non-Islamic communities (dar al-harb) and thus that Islam would spread across the globe.
“…we are the umma of Believers, living within a jahili society. Nothing relates us to state or to society and we owe no allegiance to either. As a community of believers we should see ourselves in a state of war with the state and society. The territory we dwell in is Dar al-Harb” (Milestones, 1991:98)

Dissatisfied with the existing Islamist movement, Qutb asserted that social revolution “… provided the means to eradicate this state of jahiliyya and to create the Islamic state mandated by the sharia” (Nettler, 1986:188). Qutb conceptualized the need for revolution in terms of submission to the oneness of God (tawhid). He argued that Islam inherently requires the submission to this oneness, which in turn requires the “positive submission to God and negative revolt against submitting to other authorities, be they concrete, metaphysical, or political” (Mousali, 1999:134).

Arguably, the seeds of revolution would only come about at a suitable juncture: “Qutb impressed upon them [Islamists seeking his approval for anti-state violence] the need for long-term educational endeavors to form cadres and militants while waiting for the opportune moment to strike” (Mousali, 1999:151). The importance of jihad and the need to eradicate jahiliyya societies brought Qutb to consider the necessity of creating “a distinct community of believers” that would take the lead in the destruction of the jahiliyya. His worldview thus depicted the world as in a state of perennial conflict between those of the “party of God” and those of the jahiliyya societies.


43 Qutb interpreted tawhid (submission to the Oneness) as a total rejection of the substitution of any law for divine law, any rule for divine rule, and any subordination but subordination to God. He specifically refers to “a leader who possessed an absolute power” as violating his subordination to God. According to Qutb, to establish a society based on divine law requires action (haraka) of a revolutionary nature to sweep away the jahili elements, which have seduced humankind away from accepting submission to the only legitimate authority. See, Ahmed S. Moussa, Islamic Fundamentalism: The Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy, and the Islamic State, Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1999, p. 134.
These radical ideas, however, were not translated into organizational imperatives until the structural conditions necessary for their emergence appeared in the form of Organization 1965. Nasser’s death in 1971 and the subsequent political development under his successor, Anwar Sadat, provided a new opportunity for the continued growth of these radical alternatives. In the 1970s, as Eric Davis (1984:153) remarked, “political activism of Islam became increasingly bifurcated and … social and economic disorder pressures the activism into new forms of Islamist movements, which are thoroughly divorced [from the MB]”. Egypt’s stunning defeat in the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, coupled with its change in regime after the war, propelled new patterns of state-Islamist relations in which Qutb’s jihadism found fertile ground for upholding revolutionary solutions for an Islamic state.
INSTITUTIONAL ORIGINS
OF JIHADIST IDEAS, NETWORK AND POLITICS

Jihadist organizations were dramatically different from the MB in terms of group leadership and strategies. This is particularly apparent when we consider their public appearances in the 1980s and their violent operations in the 1990s. However, a closer look at the two major jihadist organizations, Jama’at Islamiya (JI, Islamic Group) and Tanzim al-Jihad (The Jihad Organization), it shows that there are similarities between these organizations and Organization 1965, especially in terms of their programmatic-beliefs regarding Islamic transformation.

As highlighted above, there was a tendency over time toward conflict between the radicals and the moderates in the MB, conflict that was used by Nasser to undermine Islamist collective action. Against this backdrop, Qutb’s religious ideas were a catalyst for the consolidation of radicalism, and thus for the later “materialization” of purist Islamism in actual organizational constructs. The role of Qutb’s leadership during this crucial period in the MB’s history was, at least in part, to overcome the radical-moderate cleavages that eventually led to the devaluation of the moderate strategies. Thus the emergence of jihadist organizations after Qutb was about breaking with failed strategies and creating new ones, and, as a result, changing patterns of political behavior.

The next section explores how jihadist groups mobilized and organized to put in place radical alternatives in their pursuit of an Islamic state. As noted above, important to this development were changes in the political landscape after the death of President Nasser in September 1970 and the ascension of Anwar Sadat to the presidency. It is consequently useful to examine this political change in order to map out the political
opportunity structure for key actors in Islamist groups to consolidate their networks. The analysis undertaken here explicates the role of Sadat’s power consolidation, from which Islam re-emerged as politically relevant such that Islamist activists became a major force to be reckoned with.

Sadat’s “Islamic Turn”

The first three years of Anwar Sadat’s presidency represented a crucial period of transition between two different political eras. Two main features characterized this period: First, the political arena was heavily contested by various political forces, with the struggle between the new regime and political forces loyal to Nasser being the most important. This struggle ended on May 15, 1971 with what the regime called “the Corrective Revolution”. The second feature of that period was Sadat’s lack of legitimacy, which prompted him to seek out new sources of legitimacy and thus to distinguish his regime from that of Nasser.

Sadat’s lack of charisma and sense of historical mission as compared to Nasser also posed a problem for the new regime, and were the primary reasons for the “ambiguity, confusion, and inconsistency that characterized the first few years of Sadat’s presidency” (Hopwood, 1992:97; also, Vatikiotis, 1985:424). Sadat’s problems rapidly mounted, and included issues such as economic decline, strong public pressure in 1971-1972 to re-start the war with Israel, the student protests of 1972, and the bread riots. It was under the shadow of these pressures that Sadat determined his main policy priorities: reinforcing the regime by relying on Islam and preparing for a military campaign against Israel.

In order to win Islamist support, Sadat took several steps. Among the earliest was his 1971 amendment of Article 2 of the 1964
Constitution, so that it stipulated, “Islam is the religion of the state... the principle of Islamic shari’a serves [as] a fundamental source of state legislation” (Rutherford, 2008:109; Lombardi, 2000:181). This step marked the beginning of a trend of reconciliation between Sadat and Egyptian religious forces, one that gave birth to new coalitions between the state and the Islamist elite. Not long after the change to this more Islamic constitution, Sadat initiated a rapprochement with the “dormant” MB, as a part of his wider policy of confronting the Nasserist forces.

Sadat’s rapprochement with the MB was important because it marked an effort to expand his “Corrective Revolution” beyond the initial purges of leading leftists from influential positions within the ruling elite, to also take on the strong support for Nasser’s socialism at the local level, in particular from those who had benefited from land reform. Effectively, the regime’s alliance with the MB was conceived as a way to engender grassroots support for its rule while containing the left. Together with the expansion of al-Azhar and the expanded support for the ulama, this pro-Islamist turn was mediated by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and by a few members of the ASU’s ruling elite.44 In mid-1971, an agreement was reached between Sadat and the MB in which the latter agreed to renounce the use of violence and promised not to engage in anti-regime activities. In exchange, beginning in 1971, the regime released thousands of MB prisoners, and most importantly, allowed them to reactivate their organization, restart their publications program, and more generally allowed them to resume their peaceful advocacy of Islam. Between 1972 and 1975, a majority of the Brothers expelled by Nasser’s regime had returned to Egypt.45

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"Interestingly enough, the agreement between Sadat and the MB was mediated by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, who for a long time suffered as a result of Nasser’s international agenda, and Fouad Allam (the head of State Security and an ASU deputy), and Osman Ahmed Osman (a leading businessman and MB member). See, Nemat Guenena and Saad Eddin Ibrahim, The Changing Face of Egypt’s Islamic Activism, unpublished manuscript submitted to the U.S. Institute of Peace, September, 1997, pp. 17.

44 Guenena and Ibrahim (1997) provided compelling evidence regarding Sadat’s rapprochement with the MB. Six points of agreements they signed included the release of prisoners in four gradual terms, allowing the MB to be involved in drafting the 1971 Constitution and Sadat’s invitation to the MB to participate in elections, although not to act as
Containing the Nasserist-left was not limited to the rapprochement with the MB, but was also augmented by Sadat’s increased efforts to develop and promote his own peculiar religio-political identity. This identity was in opposition to Nasser’s secular and Arab-socialist rhetoric, and it figured prominently in Sadat’s frequent use of certain political slogans that had specific religious connotations. Thus for instance his public speeches incorporated such slogans as “the Believing President” (Rais al-Mu’min) and “the state of science and faith” (hal al-ilmi wa al-iman) (Gilsenan, 1990:85; Vatikiotis, 1989; Rais, 1982), along with a variety of other religious symbols (Ismail, 1995:78-82).

This strategy was reinforced by an effort to cultivate a greater sense of religiosity among the population and to connect himself to it, as a basis of populist legitimacy (Ibrahim, 1997; Moustafa, 2000; Zeghal, 2001). This Islamization of the country, which started in 1972, meant that the regime “provided millions of dollars for Islamic education, and promoted a depoliticized Islam through state-run television and radio.” (Ibrahim, 1997:11) Sadat also provided funding for the construction of thousands of mosques, and offered favors – such as land, construction funds, and television airtime – to popular sheikhs, in return for their support (Moustafa, 2000:14). In this context, the war that began in October 1973 solidified such uses of Islamic rhetoric and the construction of a legitimizing religious regime. Sadat’s political strategy, of making pragmatic use of Islam to break away from Nasser’s political order, ultimately contributed to the construction and deployment of a legitimizing religious principle that later came to support delegitimizing policies and practices.

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46 It must be noted, however, that under Sadat, the basic contours of Egypt’s political system remained the same with Nasser. The only difference lay in the fact that previous commitments to a secular-socialist vision of development were abandoned. This resulted in the subsequent adoption of a more religious institutional construction of state policies, which greatly benefited the Islamists. For a critical review of this change, see Nazih N.M. Ayubi, “The Political Revival of Islam: The Case of Egypt, in International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 12, No. 4, December 1980, pp. 480-497. See also, Tamir Moustafa, “Conflict and Cooperation”, 2000, pp. 7-10.
which threatened the very foundation of the regime's existence. Sadat thus contributed to the construction of the very political order that would later provide the basis for the challenges to his rule, as well as his own assassination.

**From Study Clubs to Jihadist Fronts: The Jama’at Islamiya**

One of the most crucial aspects of Egypt’s Islamic turn was the effort to Islamize university students. This effort was aimed at fanning the increasing religious awareness among the youth, which had emerged in the wake of the Arab defeat in the 1967 war. Thus while in the early years of Sadat’s presidency the Nasserist-left dominated the Egyptian student movements, by 1972, new “families” (ursāḥ) and “associations” (jama’āt) were beginning to surface for the first time. These groups had a religious character, and had their roots in “religious study clubs” on university campuses (Ashour, 2007:607; Kepel, 1989:127). They soon began to sponsor Islamic education programs, as well as such miscellaneous activities as producing publications, putting on summer camps, and organizing journeys to Mecca.

Sadat’s effort to mobilize Islam on university campuses was beginning to bear fruit by the time the 1973 war was launched. As Kepel (1989:25) has pointed out, “university life became more religious… largely with encouragement from the new [Sadat’s] regime.” As a result of the state’s continuing support, Islamist groups varied and expanded the scope of their activities to include more political ones. Again according to Kepel (1989: 137), these religious “families” in Egypt’s universities were the sites where the young Islamist sympathizers and activists that later

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47 Observers (Ibrahim, 1998b: 29; Hinnebusch, 1988:58-59; Davis 1984:160) have pointed out that the October War was painted as an “Islamic war” due to the use of religious symbolic mobilization strategies. Waged during the month of Ramadan, Sadat sought to compare his war against Israel to the first war in the history of Islam, between the Prophet and Meccan-jahiliya. From such slogans it appeared that Sadat’s regime had begun a process of relying on rather traditional and religious sources of legitimacy.

48 Kepel (1989:191-2) notes that activities such as summer camps were generously sponsored and funded by the state. These camps were not limited to studying Islamic figh (Islamic jurisprudence) and Islamic rituals, but also included most types of athletic training, especially martial arts and other self-defense tactics. See, Kepel, *Religious Extremism*, 1991.
became the “Jama’a Islamiya” (Islamic Group, GI) first came together. They were the breeding ground for the cadres of the future Islamist groups.

In the mid-1970s, a more systematic and centralized strategy for encouraging Islamist student groups was initiated by their leaders, most notably ‘Abd al-Mun’im, Abul Futuh, ‘Issam al-Aryan, Abul ‘ila al-Madi (Cairo, Alexandria and al-Minya), Nagih Ibrahim and Karam Zuhdi (Asyut University) (Ashour, 1997:606). This centralization was made possible by national student movements that came together around their shared support for the 1973 war (Ibrahim, 1997:17). These groups of Islamist students were distinguished from the MB, and eventually formed a new organization that called itself “Jama’a Islamiya” or “Religious Groups”. But at this time, each university group remained autonomous in terms of its activities, with no single ideology or clear political platform being embraced by them all. What was obvious was their ultimate goal: al-da’wa (proselytizing) and al-amr bil ma’ruf wal nabi ‘an al-munkar (ordering virtue and preventing vice). They were thus “the nearest approach to a youth movement with a religious character” (Ibrahim, 1997; 1996b: 64), and were acceptable to both the regime and the hegemonic MB because of their particular twin focuses.

Egypt’s university campuses were gradually transformed during the 1970s by the increasing dominance of Islamist students, to the point that they came to be almost “governed” by young Muslim activists (Heikal, 1995:133-135; Kassem, 1995:141-144). These students worked to implement changes in the universities, in the curriculum taught, as well as

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49 My personal conversation with one of the most important actors in the student movement in the 1970s, Abu ‘ila al-Madi, revealed that the term ‘Jama’a Islamiya’ sounds problematic, since it was associated with terrorist activities later in the 1980s and 1990s. Egyptians who grew up in this generation and were active in the Islamist student movements on university campuses labeled their groups “Religious Groups” (Jama’at al-Diniya, RG). Interview with Abu ‘ila al-Madi, Cairo, December 9, 2007.

50 In the first national congress in 1974, the leading representatives from the universities agreed to form a well-defined structure for the Islamist student groups. Each university had a shura (consultative) council and an emir (leader). There was also a national emir al-umara’. Since the students were coming from a variety of political convictions and ideologies, each university leadership operated in an autonomous manner. Interview with Abu ‘ila al-Madi, Cairo, December 10, 2007.
by encouraging their fellow students to participate in Islamic activities, by halting lectures and classes during prayer times, by segregating the sexes in classrooms, and by prohibiting concerts, art performances and theatrical productions. A prominent Egyptian intellectual, Mohammad Heikal, described this ‘sea change’ in the environment at universities and more generally in Egyptian culture during the 1970s:

“Knowing they had the support of higher [governmental] authority, the Islamic students began to behave as if it was they who were running the universities. They decided what subjects were suitable to be taught, forcibly preventing, for instance, lectures to be given on Darwinism … it was clear that the Islamist students were not simply tolerated by the authorities but actively encouraged by them.”51

By the late 1970’s, such religious mobilization began to pay off: Egypt’s students were markedly less interested in participating in the activities and demonstrations organized by the leftist student associations. An important phase for political Islam under Sadat was when Islamist groups began confronting leftist activists within the universities in the name of “protecting Islam” (Bayat, 1999; Heikal, 1995:138; Ashour, 2007:607-608). As the leftists withered and Sadat’s support for Islamist students continued, the Jama’at gained strong footholds in almost all of Egypt’s universities.

Yet its rapid success and lack of a clearly formulated vision for society meant that while JI was able to intensify its activism, it simultaneously became an ill-defined web of activists within a stretched organizational body that lacked clear direction for change. This was reflected after the mid-1970s, when the JI activities rapidly moved forward as regards promoting its political agenda outside university campuses. It began to mobilize its members, as well as the religiously inclined townspeople, against what it called “rampant evil behaviors” (Ansari, 1984). Sporadic violence began to occur on university campuses, as well as in the neighborhoods around them. Between 1977 and 1979, after its leaders’ success in

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winning seats on the Executive Council of the National Students Union, the Jama’aat began a public campaign in Cairo University that saw them asserting “… we knew that religion is not only to conduct da’wa, but is also the establishment of the Islamic state … to achieve [such a goal], it is an essential precondition that we work to eradicate those practices of jahiliya” (c.f. Fandi, 1997:77). Simultaneously, similar activities were undertaken on other university campuses, including Asyut University (Anshari, 1984:137; Fandi, 1997:70).

The relative ease with which the Jama’aat activists tapped the use of violence in confronting the leftist organizations and in spreading their religious activism underlined the strong support that they were receiving from the regime. At the same time, the nature and extent of their activities ultimately helped them to guarantee themselves a greater chance of expanding their influence and growth. For instance, in Asyut, one of the organization’s strongholds in Egypt’s southern province, the Jama’aat leaders found themselves with sufficient popular legitimacy to carry out the da’wa and to enforce certain Islamic behaviors (Anshari, 1984:134; Ibrahim, 1996:119; Fandi, 1997:70-74). Yet it bears noting that their desire to do so was also a strong indication that they had begun to adopt a more confrontational and militant strategy. That strategy later turned out to be directed not only against leftists and Nasserists, as well as against Christian Copts, but also against the state authority itself.

As the confrontations and uncontrolled religious activism pursued by the Jama’aat intensified, it became increasingly apparent that clear intellectual guidance was required so as to transform their strength into concrete political achievements. In 1977, a number of the Jama’aat leaders, particularly from Cairo, Alexandria and different parts of the Nile Delta, joined the MB, thereby strengthening the politically moderate wing of Egyptian Islamism. Some other leaders, who were mainly from Asyut,

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52 Three leaders of the Jama’aat who won seats in the National Student Union were Tal’at Qasim, Abu ‘ila al-Madhi, and Abdulghani Taha. Interview with al-Madi, Cairo, 10 December, 2007.

53 In Asyut were Salah Hashim, Usamah Hem, Najih Ibrahim, Ali Shareef, Muhammed Shawqi al-Islambuli and Abu Bala Uthman.
were more inclined to join the jihadist groups that had begun to emerge in 1974. These groups were imprisoned-members of Nizam 1965. Then in 1979, a Cairo-Jama’at leader, Karam Zuhdi, as well as various Asyut-leaders, met Muhammad Abd al-Salam Farag, a jihadist leader released from prison in 1978. The meeting resulted in an agreement to unite and to coordinate their efforts to form a united jihadist organization, the Jama’at Islamiya (JI) (Ashour, 2007:608). The alliance between the Islamist-students and a prominent leader of Nizam 1965 spurred further development of Islamism in which revolutionary jihad came to increasingly define the contours of the mobilization for an Islamic state.

**Building Jihadist Groups**

Jihadist leaders had begun to operate and recruit their cadres soon after their release. Between 1972 and 1974, approximately 20 small factions of jihadist groups operated in Cairo and Asyut, but only three of these later became major organizations (Dekmajian, 1990; Ashour, 2007:608). The first of these is the Technical Military Academy Group (al-Fanniya al-Askariya).54 This group attempted to seize the Military Academy in Asyut in 1974, in order to launch a coup during Sadat’s speech in the Academy. *Their goal was to seize weapons and then assassinate the President.* Although their attempt failed,55 it was the first jihadist group that publicly declared Egypt’s need for an Islamic revolutionary transformation. This group was led by Salih Sirriya, a member of Nizam 1965 who believed that jihad was a tool capable of changing a political system that was deemed jahiliya and ‘infidel’.

In a document entitled Epistle of Faith (Risalat al-Iman), Salih Sirrya asserted that “all of the current Islamic regimes are infidel and jahiliyya regimes” (Anshari, 1984:191). Sirriya regarded the use of violence

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54 This organization was known by several names. Sometimes, they referred to themselves as the Islamic Liberation Organization (since its foundation was closely related to Jordan's Hizb al-Tahrir). Some others called them Muhammad’s Youth (*Shabab Muhammad*). See SE. Ibrahim, *Egypt’s Islamic Militants*, in *Middle East Report*, No.103, February, 1982, pp., 5-15.

55 The leader of the group, Salih Sirriya, was executed after the failed coup, and the other members of the group were imprisoned.
as a legitimate way to change “the dominant rule”, since doing so was justified in Islamic jurisprudence, in order to anesthetize and excommunicate regimes. The document also stated that, “the House of Islam [dar al-Islam] is the one in which the word of God is the uppermost … and rule [government] is conducted according to the Quran … the House of Kuffar [non-believers] is one in which the word of non-belief is the highest and is not ruled by the Quran.” Consequently, the only way to change from “infidel” rule is through “jihad”. What this group meant by jihad is “…a way to change governments and to establish the Islamic state, which is a compulsory duty of every Muslim.”

The second group is Jama’at al-Takfir wa al-Hijra (The Society of Repudiation and Emigration, sometimes called Jama’at al-Muslimun). This group’s name points toward its radical message of “repudiating those institutions and persons deemed unbelievers”, and the need for “withdrawal from jahiliya society” (Ibrahim, 1990:96). The ideology of this organization built upon the model of the Prophet Muhammad’s Hijra from Mecca to Medina to establish a true Islamic order. The group was established by Shukri Mustafa, shortly after his release from prison in 1970, though the initial members consisted of people he had approached and recruited during his six years in prison. The group’s ideology did not differentiate between the state and society, since as Mustafa wrote in his memoir, both society and the state are jahiliya institutions that must be “purified” (Kepel, 1989:198).

It is because of this lack of differentiation that the members of Takfir wa la-Hijra believed that they must maintain their distance from state and society, and indeed should adopt a negative and violent attitude toward them. Mustafa, for instance, adopted Hijra (immigration) and isolation as disciplinary techniques and a necessary strategic step towards the ultimate goal, i.e., the Islamic state. Consequently, the group required its members to isolate (uzla) themselves from government institutions and to completely ostracize society and its members. They also rejected compulsory military service and employment in government departments and institutions (Ansari, 1984; Kepel, 1989).
As part of a disciplinary method for the organization, Mustafa forbade his members from praying in mosques constructed and sponsored by the state. This was because according to Takfir wa al-Hijra, the basic character of the state’s reality was jahiliyya, and this character would infect all of its activities. As such, the only way to escape such an infidel situation was to join the Jama’at. Between his release in 1971 and his execution in 1977, Mustafa succeeded in recruiting approximately 2,000 members to Jama’at al-Takfir, all in Asyut.

The third jihadist group that came out of prison is Tanzim al-Jihad al-Misr (Jihad Organization of Egypt). Muhammad Abdul Salam Farag established this group in Cairo in 1979. Farag’s group and factions began to form after Nasser’s 1966 wave of imprisonment, and expanded in the mid-1970s through the efforts of masterful recruiters such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, Hani al-Siba’i, Anwar Ukasha, and Muhammad Qutb (Ashour, 2008:111; Zogler, 2007:12-20). Farag was the author of *al-Farida al-Ghaiba* (the Neglected Duty), an elaborate book on the strategy and program of Sayyid Qutb that espoused jihad and violence as legitimate paths toward an Islamic state transformation. This book became the members’ intellectual and ideological frame of reference for executing the group’s military and political operations. Farag argued that the duty of *jihad* — understood purely as armed struggle — was a duty that had been neglected by the Muslim faithful. He argued that:

> “Despite its crucial importance for the future of our Faith, the jihad has been neglected, maybe even ignored, by men of religion of our age. They know however, that jihad is the only way to reestablish and re-enhance the power and glory of Islam, which every true believer desires wholeheartedly. There is no doubt the idols upon earth will not be destroyed but by the sword—and thus establish the Islamic state and restore the caliphate. This is the command of God and each and every Muslim should, hence, do his utmost to accomplish this precept, having recourse to force if necessary.”

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Like Qutb, Farag advocated the replacement of the Egyptian regime with a caliphate, that is, a community of believers governed by the precepts of Islam and led by a religious leader (Caliph). To Farag, jihad represented a moral and religious imperative incumbent upon every Muslim (Jansen, 1986:161). He thus specifically called for violence within the context of revolution, arguing that only by armed struggle could an Islamic state ever be realized. He further contended that this view enjoyed solid historical support by respected religious scholars concerned with the creation of an Islamic state.

Farag criticized other Islamist organizations for their timidity and complicity in maintaining the status quo. The Brotherhood incurred his ire for its gradualist approach to the creation of the Islamic state, while al-Takfir wa al-Hijra’s idea of divorcing itself from society before waging jihad was roundly rejected as flawed, based upon the argument that direct confrontation is the only viable means to forge an Islamic society. Farag and his followers believed that only society’s leadership could be considered infidel (kuffar) and thus legitimate targets of jihad, in contrast to ordinary Muslims, who had simply been led astray by their leaders. For Farag, Christians and Jews were enemies of Islam. Islamist attacks on Coptic targets garnered Farag’s endorsement, as he insisted that the forces of imperialism, represented by an obscure but potent conspiracy of Jewish, Christian, and Communist interests, be destroyed locally.

The Abortive Jihadist-Revolution, 1981

As was seen earlier, Sadat adopted a conciliatory stance toward Islamist forces so as to help him build political legitimacy. In the later years of Sadat’s presidency, jihadist organizations that had begun as numerous small groups and factions became well-structured revolutionary fronts in major Egyptian towns, most prominently in Asyut province, al-Minya, Qena, Suhaj and parts of Greater Cairo (Ibrahim, 1982:6-8; Ashour, 2007:609; Ansari, 1984). Not only did these jihadist organizations provide the more decisive and concrete phase in the creation of an Islamic state, but they also promised to erect a just Islamic
political order. Thanks to Egypt’s difficult economic conditions, triggered in large part by Sadat’s 1977 liberalization policies (infitah), a generalized sense of “religious brotherhood” increased among the population, which helped jihadist groups to consolidate their hold. It was within this national context that President Sadat made the 1977 visit to Jerusalem that lead to the signing of the Camp David Peace Treaty in 1979. This sequence of events reshaped the stakes for the jihadist groups, since it provided them with a clear target for total confrontation with the state.

The following section will complement the narrative on the evolution of the radical alternative of Islamism with a more micro-level analysis, to address the mechanisms how revolutionary alternatives of Islamism operate. Relying on documents from jihadists found by the authorities in the massive raids after Sadat’s assassination, it is possible to see the eruption of violence in Egypt, particularly after Sadat’s peace initiative with Israel, as a largely deliberate effort to build an Islamic state through revolution. What follows is a narrative of the abortive jihadist-revolution of 1981.

Reversing Islamic Policies

Observers agree that the assassination of Sadat by members of jihadist organizations on October 6, 1981 was the culmination of a long conflict between Sadat and the jihadist groups that had begun in 1974. Yet it is important to keep in mind that the assassination was also meant to be a prelude to the launch of a coup by the jihadists that would set off the Islamic revolution.

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57 I am indebted to Dr. Omar Ashour, who pointed out to me documents and works written by leaders of jihadist organizations. An important phase in the development of jihadist organizations involved the production of ideological and political works that reflected their point of departure that distinguished them from the Brotherhood. These works were published in different years between the 1980s and the 1990s, but most probably they were written not long before Sadat’s assassination was carried out. They included books like Mithaq al-‘Amal al-Islami [The Manifesto of Islamic Action] (1984); Kalimat al-Haqq [A Righteous Word] (1984); Al-Ta’ifa al-Mumtani’a ‘an Shariah min Shari’i’ al-Islam [The Desisting Party from a Law of Islamic Laws] (1988); ‘Ilahun ma’a Allah? I’lan al-Harb ‘ala Majlis al-Sha’ab [Another God with Allah? Declaration of War on the Parliament] (1990); and Hattmiyyat al-Muwajaha [The Philosophy of Confrontation] (1990).
The late 1970s was a period in which criticism of President Sadat and his regime by Islamist groups, including the MB, increased greatly. Sadat thus sought to reverse his earlier policies and to depoliticize Islam. Beginning in 1978, Sadat took steps to ban the Islamist student activism (Alam, 1995:102; Hopwood, 1990), and also used the state-controlled media to discredit the student groups that were members of the union. Sadat even gave a speech in 1979 where he denounced the student groups by name, and argued that “those who wish to practice Islam can go to the mosques, and those who wish to engage in politics may do so through legal institutions” (c.f. Hopwood, 1990:117) Similarly, the regime sought to constrain the MB by shutting down its publication. It also created a new institution headed by the Sheikh of Al-Azhar to monitor and regulate all Muslim organizations that were not part of the state apparatus.58

Tensions between the government and Islamists began to rise still higher in early 1980, triggered by the lack of clear effort on the part of the government to incorporate Islamic law into the country’s legislation, something that it had promised it would do (Lombardi, 2001:152).59 In 1981, to show that it was still in control of the country and would have final control over the parameters of what constituted an “Islamic state”, the government cracked down on all opposition figures, though focused most of its energies on the MB and the radical Islamist jihadists. The MB’s publications were banned and its leaders imprisoned.

58 In this period, Sadat’s regime also took steps to gain greater control of mosques. It reflected the security services’ concern that Islamic militants were using the mosques as a basis for anti-government activities. (Moustafa, 2000:14-17; Zeghal, 2001). This policy was meant to monitor the sermons and personnel in all government mosques. These regional offices were also in charge of selecting imams (prayer leaders) and sermon topics, both of which were undertaken by local committees of official ulama and representatives of the Ministry.

59 Even when the amendment represented a strong provision for the implementation of the shari’a, Islamists in the Muslim Brotherhood and the jihadist groups continued to be suspicious of the government’s commitment to Islamization. Or, as most observers noted, they at least worried that the government’s vision of Islamization would be very different from their own. Then, in the summer of 1981, sectarian tension between Muslims and Copts erupted in serious violence, especially in the southern provinces. For a list of the most serious riots and terrorist attacks and extensive references to contemporary newspaper accounts of the tensions, see Ami Ayalon, “The Arab Republic of Egypt,” in Middle East Culture and Society, Vol. V, 1981-82, pp. 427-428.
and the well-known leaders of Tanzim al-Jihad were also taken into custody. The government’s crackdown convinced some leaders of jihadist groups to take extreme measures. After a meeting in September 1981, the jihadist leaders of Tanzim al-Jihad decided to assassinate Sadat. They accomplished this on October 6, 1981, during a military parade commemorating the 1973 October War.

A Plan for Uprising

Members of Organization 1965 were serious students of Sayyid Qutb. For instance, Farag based his theory of jihadist revolution on Qutb’s view that there is a “need to build a small, militant number of believers that link [them] with broader Muslim society and mobilize the society’s support for [an] Islamic state [dar al-Islam]” (Milestone, 1991:79). But in al-Farida, Farag elaborated Qutb’s theory, saying that jihad should begin with a careful social, political, and economic analysis of Egyptian society. He argued that such an analysis is necessary for Islamists to “… decide upon and select the most appropriate and most effective method for change” (al-Farida, 1991:234), such as the shape and scale of the Islamic revolution, the forms of violence and the tactics to be used, and the level of mobilization. Farag further underlined the “imperativeness of establishing a secret [purified] society (jama’at)” responsible for penetrating the security forces, the army, collecting intelligence information, and recruiting sympathetic military personnel and officers into the organization, thus facilitating the achievement of a total Islamic revolution (al-Farida, 1991:236).

In the late 1970s, inspired by Farag’s vision and emboldened by the increasing number of jihadists, leaders of al-Jihad shifted their focus to the practical and organizational aspects of their plan to seize control of the jahily state and to establish an Islamic one. Consequently, a middle ranking military officer who had served in the State Security Intelligence

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““The meeting was held on September 28, 1981. Farag and several leading members of the Jihadists such as Ibrahim, Zuhdi, ‘Abbad al-Zumurr, and Khalid al-Islambuli (the executor) attended the meeting and arranged the plan for the assassination. See, Omar Ashour, A World without Jihad, 2008:131.
Abbud al-Zumur was recruited and joined al-Jihad in 1978. Al-Zumur quickly took on a major role in planning and strategy, while the military leaders of al-Jihad, such as Esam al-Qamari, concentrated on the military training of members.

The plans were outlined in a document entitled Pillars of Continuity, which details six major strategies that the Islamists deemed essential for achieving the Islamic Revolution (al-Zumur, 1987:5-17). An in depth description of these strategies was provided in a document entitled The Stages of Islamic Movement Development. The document states that “the plan depended on constructing an organizational structure that is capable, by providing man-power and supplies, of seizing power and completely controlling the vital state institutions and command centers on which the regime relies to rule the country, thereby paralyzing its ability to counter the Islamic move” (The Stages, 1987:5). To protect their leaders, the plan aimed at “preventing the regime from taking certain measures or actions to confront Islamists, such as ambushing, assassinating, and arresting their influential officials and figures.” Furthermore, according to the plan, the organization should “disable the communications and transportation lines and deter the enemy reserve forces from participating in the battle.”

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"Abbud al-Zumur was a highly ranked and decorated officer in the Egyptian Army. He had a long professional career, military training, and extensive experience in the Army Intelligence and other branches of the Egyptian armed forces since the October War of 1973. The background and experience that al-Zumur obtained throughout his military career substantially contributed to the development of the Jihad organizational structure and its military strategy before 1981. See, Kepel, Muslim Extremism, 1989;"

"To briefly outline the six strategies, they include: 1) Coup d’etat Strategy. This strategy emphasizes the necessity of constructing an organizational structure capable of overthrowing the regime and seizing power; 2) Mobilization Strategy. In this strategy, the masses are mobilized to ensure their involvement in the revolution and hence deter foreign intervention in particular; 3) Winning the Islamic support strategy. This strategy aims at gaining the support of all of the Islamist factions within the Islamic movement; 4) Alternative Strategy. This strategy is designed to avoid and/or cure any future defections or failures that might affect the original plan; 5) Contingency Strategy. The strategy aims at taking advantage of any sudden weaknesses or flaws that might arise within the regime before the preparation phase reaches the level of a complete revolution; 6) The Strategy of Deterrence. This strategy aims at deterring security forces from kidnapping Islamist women to pressure their active spouses."
The document also emphasized the urgent task of “preparing Islamist actors to be capable of mobilizing the masses and inciting and goading them into participating in the revolution to demonstrate public support and hence deter foreign intervention... with the necessity of restraining all foreign agents working in the country” (The Stages, 1987:8). Although the role of the masses was not made completely clear in the plan, it is obvious that the strategy depended heavily on the tactics and choices of the organization’s military leaders, who were at that time enlisted in the army.

The original plan for revolution, as designed by al-Zumur, required a three-year period of preparation before undertaking any action. But a series of unexpected events prompted a strategic change in the jihadists’ plan. The first of these took place a few months after the plan had gained an approving Fatwa from Sheikh Mohammad Omar Abdulrahman, when the authorities detected whispers about the planned operation. Sadat’s response was to arrest thousands of members of the political opposition in September 1981, especially members of the Brotherhood and leaders of the Jama’at. The latter group included nine leaders of jihadist organizations and members of its Shura Council (Ashour, 2008:167).

Another significant event that affected the plotters was the arrest of group member Nabeel al-Maghribi while attempting to buy weapons from a local arms dealer in Asyut (Ibrahim, 1982:13). Even more dangerous was that the intelligence and security forces were becoming more aware of al-Zummur’s role in al-Jihad. With the group increasingly exposed and thus endangered, they decided to move more quickly than had been called for by their original, three-year plan. As a result, Farag, after meeting with his fellow jihadist leaders in late September 1981, decided that their first move must be to assassinate President Sadat (Ashour, 2007:606). After the approval of the assassination plan, Khalid al-Islambuli was able to help three members of the jihadist movement to infiltrate his army unit. The assassination was finally carried out on October 6, 1981.
Assassinating to Seize Power

According to the plan, immediately after assassinating Sadat, the organization was supposed to move strategically on two fronts simultaneously, the first in the south and the second in Cairo. The Cairo portion of the plan called for armed units from the organization to seize and hold the television and radio stations, and to broadcast a statement about the “victory of Islamic revolution” (Stages, 1984:12). The move was supposed to be concurrent with another unit’s move to prevent or at least deter the police and state security forces from intervening and thus hindering the plan by attacking them in their barracks and at other locations in Cairo and Giza. The same group was then to take control of Cairo International Airport. In the south, the plan was to seize all of the state security buildings and compounds in Asyut and thus to dominate the south entirely, before moving north to Cairo to reinforce their co-revolutionaries (Ibrahim, 1982).

But aside from successfully assassinating Sadat, the group failed to fully execute any of these moves or to achieve any of these goals. In Asyut, the security forces were able to put down the insurgency within two days, regaining control of the region and arresting many of the Islamist leaders. This included the arrest of Khalid al-Islambuli and two other participants in the assassination. The government then immediately formed different security committees consisting of members from several security forces and institutions (Kepel, 1989:211).

While the jihadists were unsuccessful at carrying out their plan, according to the Minister of the Interior Abu Basha in the 1980s, their readiness for action did take the government by surprise. Basha also noted that the government was taken aback by “the size and sophistication of these militant Islamist groups” (Kepel, 1989:222). He asserted that the security forces realized for the first time that they were facing:
“A pyramid-like organization with several bases and leadership levels that has tremendous resources and capabilities as to members, armaments, and training that exceeded all of the state’s preliminary estimates. Therefore, a race with time became a vital variable to prevent any additional exacerbation, especially after finding new and dangerous evidence about the movement size and capabilities. The evidence included discovering large stocks of weapons of all types… hundreds of machine guns, rifles, handguns, RGB guns, hand grenades...and large quantities of ammunition and explosives” (Basha, 1990:20).

While a detailed and systematic explanation of the failure of the jihadist uprising is beyond the scope of this study, it seems clear that the jihadists were pushed into abortive action due to external factors. Of these, two were particularly important: First, there was the unexpected selection of Khalid al-Islambuli to participate in October’s military parade. Secondly, Sadat’s massive arrest campaign in September 1981 made the group’s leaders increasingly worried that the security forces would discover their plans. They thus reasoned that since the state’s attack on them was inevitable, it would be wiser if they moved first.
Salafism has been one of the most dynamic sociopolitical and religious movements in Egypt since the 2011 uprising. Egypt's Salafists were dealt a difficult hand with the ouster of Hosni Mubarak from the presidency, and, though previously apolitical, they skillfully navigated the stages of the ensuing transition. These included new party formation after January 2011, the 2011 parliamentary elections, the 2012 presidential elections, and the 2012 constitution-drafting process. The ouster of President Mohamed Morsi by a popularly backed military coup in 2013, however, served a debilitating blow to the Islamist project, leaving deep cleavages within the Salafist movement in Egypt.

After decades of shunning politics and rejecting the existing political system, Salafis in Egypt became the “king maker” of Islamist politics in that country after the revolution. Since the downfall of the Mubarak regime in February 2011, Salafis have ardently participated in the political process. They formed three political parties, al-Nour (Light), al-Asala (Authenticity), and al-Fadhila (Virtue), which captured a large number of seats in Egypt's first parliamentary elections after the
revolution. Nevertheless, given the fact that the entire Islamist scene in Egypt is underway, the rise of the Salafi parties can be natural.

Over the past three decades, Egypt was caught between two main Islamist blocs: the long-standing Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which lasted for more than eight decades and is now grabbing more power, and the radical and extreme Islamists who until the end of the 1990s were using violence against the state and society. However, the uprising of January 25, 2011 has ended this dichotomy and restructured the Islamist scene to become more diverse and fluid. Moreover, the advent of Salafis can partly be interpreted as a culmination of the “salafization” process that overshadowed the religious sphere in Egypt over the past decade. As a part of its confrontation with the MB, the Mubarak regime encouraged Salafis, whether intentionally or not, to expand their social presence and influence at the expense of the MB particularly in the suburban and improvised areas in Cairo and other governorates.

The emergence of Political Salafism in Egypt after the revolution is palpable. My argument goes in the fact that the unusual political openness in Egypt has encouraged Salafi movements and groups to become heavily involved in politics. Like other social agents, Salafis consider politics an effective way to pursue social and political change based on their worldview. This book uses Political Salafism (PS) as an “operational” term that captures the Salafis’ inclinations to encounter everyday politics, whether formally or informally. More specifically, PS can be regarded as a socioreligious trend that includes various Salafi groups, parties, and movements who seek to voice their opinion in the public sphere whether through participating in formal politics (e.g., forming parties, vying for office, building allies and coalitions, etc.) or mobilizing in informal networks (e.g., protesting, media appearance, social activism, etc.).

Thus, PS is a heterogeneous phenomenon that incrementally pervaded Egyptian politics over the past decade. Nonetheless, the involvement of Salafis in politics is a double-edged sword. While the Salafis’ political participation can affect transition in Egypt, the Salafis’
ideology and discourse are prone to change and reshaping. The more the Salafis engage in politics, the more their political and ideological views can be exposed and publicly judged.

Before delving further to the argument, a general overview on Salafism in Egypt will examine the various thoughts associated or attributed to this trend, focusing closely on the theological and ideological framework of Salafis toward democracy before and after the revolution.

The Birth of Political Salafism

The origins of Salafiyya as a culture and ideology in Egypt date back to the end of the 19th century and the outset of the 20th century, when the Pan-Islamism Salafiyya movement, inspired by the thoughts of Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, embarked on its mission in Egypt. However, one should note that there is a major distinction between the early Salafiyya movement of Afghani and Abduh when contrasted with the current trend of Salafism. The discourse of the latter is significantly conservative and to some extent Saudi-Wahabi centric, while the former embraced a more intellectual and modernist approach (Carl, 1999, p. 45). Abduh advocated a return to the pristine faith because he believed it to be in total harmony with scientific positivism and rationality that underpinned modernity (Hourani, 1983, p. 140). The current Salafism trend propagates a more orthodox approach to Islam by returning to the literal understanding of the Islamic teachings through the practice of the Salaf al-Saleh (the early generation of Muslims) (Hasan, 2012, p. 5).

The current trend of Political Salafism has its origins in the 1970s when university students affiliated with al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya decided to break with it and formed a new movement called Al-Da’wa al-Salafiyya (the Salafi Call) (Hasan, 2012, p. 18). The epicenter of the new movement was Alexandria, where it sought to enhance its presence among university students. While most of the leaders of al-Gama’a al-Islamiyyah chose to join the well-known MB, due to its political activism,
others decided to focus on religious education through the Salafi Call (Abulfotouh, 2010, p. 23).

One of the underlying factors behind the founding of the Salafi Call movement was the political and ideological difference with other Islamists, particularly the MB who sought to dominate the Egyptians’ Islamist scene in the 1970s. The chief founder of the Salafi Call was Sheikh Mohamed Ismail al-Moqadim (born in 1952), a surgeon who received his religious education in Saudi Arabia and was influenced by Saudi Salafi thinkers (e.g., Ibn Baz and al-Uthaimin), in addition to the grand Salafi scholars (e.g., Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim, and Mohamed Ibn Abdel Wahab). However, the movement has many other prominent leaders, including Shaikh Ahmed Farid, Said Abd El-Azim, Mohamed Abdel Fattah, and the political ideologue Sheikh Yassir Borhami.

Unlike the MB, the Salafi Call did not have a formal organizational structure. It relied primarily upon preaching (da’wa) activities and student outreach through the distribution of Islamic leaflets, organizing Islamic camps, and presenting religious talks and lectures in the city’s mosques. In 1986, the movement founded the al-Furqan Institute for Preparing Preachers, an Islamic school focused on religious education. Al-Furqan was the main venue for those seeking to affiliate with the Salafi movement. In addition, the movement newly founded “Executive Council” directed its activities across the country through different committees (e.g., social, youth, and district committees, etc.). The movement also issued a monthly magazine called al-Da’wa, which became the group’s main media outlet. Through its active religious education network, the Salafi Call disseminated its ideology across much of Egypt during the 1980s and 1990s.

According to Yassir Borhami, one of the movement’s most influential ideologues, the group’s activities irritated the security forces, which responded brutally and closed the al-Furqan Institute, dissolved the movement’s executive council, and banned its monthly magazine (Abdelal, 2011). Before the revolution, many of the Salafi Call leaders were arrested and tortured despite their political apathy.
Therefore, until the January 25 uprising against Mubarak, the movement leadership kept a relatively low profile to avoid security repression. Moreover, the movement remained silent when one of its members (Sayyid Bilal) was arrested and tortured to death in January 2011, a month before Mubarak was toppled. Apart from the aforementioned Salafi Call, the main Salafi trends in Egypt could also be divided into *al-Salafiyya Al-Madkhaliyya*, which reflects the extreme radical approach of the Saudi-oriented trend of Salafism that is attributed to Sheikh Rabi’ al-Madkhali in Saudi Arabia ( Jamestown Foundation, 2011). This group adheres to the idea of absolute obedience to political authority, hence opposing the political activities of other Islamic groups, mainly the MB. This group is also known for their harsh criticism of other Islamic groups. Probably the best-known preacher of this group is Sheikh Mahmoud Lotfi Amer, head of the local *Ansar al-Sunnah* branch in coastal Buhayra province. There are also two other groups with less influence in comparison to the two main trends of Salafism, the “active Salafism” (*al-Salafiyyah al-Harakiyah*), and *al-Gam'iyya al-Shariyya* (Hasan, 2012).

Generally, many of the Salafi youths and scholars during the 1980s and 1990s in Egypt studied religion from prominent Salafi scholars in Saudi Arabia, mainly Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, Muhammad bin Saleh al-Uthaimin, Rabi’ bin Hadi al-Madkhali, and ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Barak; in Jordan, from Nasrudin al-Albany; and in Yemen from Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi‘y. Furthermore, the Saudi government also distributed literature written by Salafist scholars for free in many parts of Egypt. The Salafi Call gained momentum in the 1990s during the mass imprisonment of jihadists in Egypt and the constant clampdown of the Muslim Brotherhood by the Egyptian government. This situation afforded the Salafis the opportunity to expand their presence and gain more ground across the country, especially in the northern and middle governorates.

However, Salafi influence was less pronounced in Upper Egypt due to the strong domination of Sufism there. Additionally, Salafism was advocated to the lay Egyptians by individual Salafist preachers, such as
Abu Ishaq al-H. uwayni. Al-H. uwayni was a student of the late prominent Salafi scholar in Jordan, Sheikh Nasrudin al-Albany, who is considered one of the icons of contemporary Salafism. Perhaps al-H. uwayni is the most famous student of al-Albany in Egypt.

Over the past decade, Egypt witnessed a mounting wave of Salafism, and by the end of the decade, Salafi discourse was dominating the religious sphere in Egypt. Many observers have noticed that “Satellite Salafism,” which rocked Egypt in 2003, was the starting point of the growing support for Salafism among the Egyptian public (Field & Hamam, 2009). It is partly true, since the visibility of Salafism in Egypt first became apparent after the advent of Satellite Salafism. With approximately 10–12 Salafi-themed satellite TV channels broadcasting from Egypt on Nilesat, Salafi ideology became a “fad du jour” of those who were inclined toward religiosity on the streets of Egypt, and among university students alike.

The role of these channels in expanding the Salafi appeal in Egypt is considerable. They were reaching out to the masses in ways that conventional mosques and local preachers never could. Lectures and sermons on the Salafis’ ideology, along with topics that focused on issues of social justice by prominent Salafi preachers, such as Mohammed Yaqoub and Mohammed Hassan, were among the highest rated programs aired on the channels. Among all the channels, the most popular was Al-Nas (the People) that first began broadcasting in 2006. This channel contributed toward the creation of a popular Salafism culture in the way normal Egyptian people practice their religion.

This wave of salafization reshaped the religious sphere in Egypt to become more conservative and less progressive in terms of political and religious views. In parallel, Salafis benefited from the constant confrontation between the Mubarak regime and the MB. To diminish the political and social appeal of the MB, the regime gave more space and venues for the Salafis to spread their views and expand their social network. Moreover, Mubarak employed the political quietism of Salafis to counter-balance the MB. Another plausible factor which
explains the rising popularity of Salafism among Egyptians was the return of many educated middle-class Egyptians who were working in the Gulf, and brought Salafi culture and views with them to Egypt. Some observers implicate “the total lack of credibility of the traditional scholars of Al-Azhar religious establishment” as creating a vacuum of religious leadership that Salafi preachers were filling (Field & Hamam, 2009). The widely held perception among Egyptians was that “Al-Azhar has no legitimacy,” and “it is viewed as just being a government agent” (Field & Hamam, 2009), and most of their decrees and opinions were regarded as pro-regime fatwas to be declared whenever Mubarak wanted it. This led to the lack of credibility of Al-Azhar leadership which resulted in the many disenchanted Egyptians seeking religious guidance (The Telegraph, 2011).

The third factor behind the spread of the Salafism culture among the Egyptians can be attributed to the extensive charitable networks of the Salafi movement. The main bulk of Salafi supporters originate from young educated Egyptians within low and middle classes, particularly those at universities or recent graduates. They benefit from the social and subsidized services provided by Salafi organizations. In addition, Salafi networks provide medical treatment and educational assistance for underprivileged and lower income Egyptians all over the country. In addition, the Salafis provide free educational services and courses in the improvised rural and suburban areas alongside with religious classes. This can be seen in the nature of their mandate, whereby the two largest Salafi organizations in Egypt, al-Gama’iy al-Shariyya and Ansar al Sunna, are both registered with the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

The dismal educational level of some quarters of Egypt’s younger generation led many of these jobless youth to flock to the Salafi movement, less out of conviction and more out of a desire to escape their economic burdens (Field & Hamam, 2009). Critics point out that funding for both groups comes from Saudi Arabia, as has happened in many other countries, and also from wealthy Salafi Egyptians living in the Gulf (The Telegraph, 2011). This hypothesis was reiterated by Hamdy Zakzouk,
the Minister of Islamic Endowments (Awqaf), who was quoted in the press as stating that both organizations, as well as Al Sunna Al Mohammediyya, another Egypt-based Salafi NGO, “receive significant funding from Saudi Arabia” in the Wikileaks document dated April 2, 2009 revealed by The Daily Telegraph on February 15, 2011 (The Telegraph, 2011).

The current post-Morsi Salafist crisis is key to understanding the future of the movement and whether ongoing Salafist revisions can redress its previous shortcomings. At the heart of that is the weakening of the shared long-term ideology of iqamat ad-din, or the application in Egypt of Islamic sharia, in favor of a more realistic short-term vision. The greatest aspiration of that vision is for Salafists to monopolize the Islamic public sphere, disregarding all but their own religious authorities. At the very least, the short-term ambition is to politically secure the social, religious, and proselytizing networks developed during the Mubarak years. The ideological coherence that long characterized Islamist movements has faded away in the wake of the political populism of the 2011 uprising. Political instrumentalism has deferred any serious intellectual deepening of Salafist ideology.

Moreover, the current regime’s crackdown on the Muslim Brothers and the political sphere—and the rise of angry waves of revolutionary Islamists—has left Salafists factionalized and drawn into the cauldron. The pro-Brotherhood Salafists diluted their differences with the Brothers and joined forces with their post-2013 confrontational politics out of ideological solidarity, while pro-regime Salafists feel compelled to engage in politics, if only to counter secularists and keep radical Islamist factions from gaining religious appeal. At the same time, they have yet to resolve how to stay true to their Islamic sharia ideology and to address such real-time nationalist concerns as socioeconomic distress. Their future, and to some extent, Egypt’s future, is uncertain.
Salafists: Historical Origins and Doctrine

Salafism, like other movements, has a long and complicated history. In Arabic, “salaf” means “the past,” and “Salafists” means “the ancestors or predecessors.” Each school of Islamic thought has its own salaf that is venerated to the exclusion of the others. Moreover, the term has been used by different intellectual movements in the modern age. By the early twentieth century, influential “national Salafist intellectual schools” were operating in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and North Africa. They endeavored to reexplore Islamic heritage through both conservative understandings (like those of Shehab al-Din al-Alousi, Muhammad Rashid Rida, Moheb al-Din al-Khateeb, Tahir al-Jazairi, Ahmed and Mahmoud Shaker, and others) and more modernist, rationalist ones (for example, Muhammad Abduh). Periodicals and publications carried Salafist labels. Unlike the religious partisanship of Najdi Salafism (better known as Wahhabism outside the Arabian Peninsula), these reformist and conservative schools emphasized integrating within the modern urban society and engaging with its problems via culture, intellect, and education.

By the second half of the twentieth century, however, the term Salafism came to exclusively describe another religious revivalist doctrine that claimed lineage to a particular ancient school of Islamic theology, the Ahl al-Hadith, members of which described themselves as Ahl al-Sunna. This brand of Salafism prioritizes an orthodox literalist following of Islamic texts (including the Quran, valid sunna, and the Prophet’s companions’ heritage). Unlike more rationalist schools of law and theology, Salafism limits free reasoning, and it considers Muslim heterodox schools such as the Sufis, Gnostics, and philosophers to be full of bidah, or incorrect religious innovations.

This new literalist return to the Islamic original scriptures is allegedly exactly how al-Salaf al-Salih interpreted these texts. Al-Salaf al-Salih, according to the Salafists, are the revered Muslim ancestors of the early centuries of Islamic history. They include the Prophet’s companions, the companions’ followers, and selected scholars (largely
from the Ahl al-Hadith school, including Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya).

Their body of teachings and rulings are considered the ultimate point of reference for deducing opinions on Islam as a religion, worldview, value system, legal order, culture, and social tradition.

Modern scholarly and ideological contributions have also been influential, particularly scholarship from contemporary Najdi Salafists, and the work of Nasr al-Din al-Albani and the radical, controversial theorist Sayyid Qutb. The Salafist mission, which is predicated on education and preaching, is to create an audience committed to Salafist teachings. Salafists consider spreading the word of Islam a religious duty. So, too, is creating a society of exclusive followers of the Salafist manhaj (system and method of action).

Contemporary Salafism has shared with other Islamic revivalist movements an antagonistic relationship with inherited Islamic scholarship and jurisprudence. Revivalists saw these traditions as too stagnant and outdated to bolster the role of Islam in contemporary Muslim societies. Instead, revivalism needed simpler, more relevant, and practical understandings of Islam. Three routes were possible in this context. The first was to create a modernized version of Islam through a rational historicist reinterpretation of the original scriptures. Muhammad Abduh and his disciples pioneered this intellectual school. The second was adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood: to forgo intellectual debates and pursue action-oriented engagement with society to change it at all levels. The third route was to return to early ancestors’ understandings of original scriptures and to reproduce them literally, projecting them on reality as the ahistorical and correct monolithic practice of Islam. That last one was the Salafist option.

Salafism: Manhaj, Ideology, and Sub-Schools in Egypt

The current wave of Salafism in Egypt is an offspring of the Islamic Sahwa movement, or Islamic Awakening, that was started in the
1970s by a broad array of religiously inspired actors in Egyptian universities, civil society, politics, and other arenas of Egyptian public and private life. The Salafists share the fundamental goal of the Islamic Sahwa: the revival of the central role of Islam in Egyptian life according to a scripturalist approach to Islam. Salafist activity in Egypt has largely taken form as a loose movement, under which diverse activities are carried out independently in areas of proselytizing, education, charity, religious media, cyberspace, and social work.

With its doctrinal understanding of Islam, Salafism has arguably been antitradition. By returning to ancestral scripture, Salafists have tried surpassing the diverse heritage of Muslim law, jurisprudence, and theology developed cumulatively over the later centuries. This has placed Salafists in clear conflict with al-Azhar, the official religious institution and the representative of such traditions in Egypt, and its new master—the modern state of Egypt.

Salafists have generally rejected democratic participation because it does not rest on God’s sovereignty and is considered to foment divisive partisanship, endless opposition, and social strife. Democracy is seen as equating men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, Sunnis and non-Sunnis, Islamists and secularists, as well as promoting rule by demagogic masses instead of a sharia rule guarded by ulema (religious scholars). Parliaments are considered human-made creations that wrestle the right to legislation from God.

Many Salafists believe that living under illegitimate rulers is a test of piety for Muslims. Political rebellion is discouraged; indeed, it is considered worse than the original evil of an un-Islamic ruler. Such political quietism generally fits with mainstream traditions of Sunni Islam, which has also discouraged revolt and political infighting.

Under Mubarak, favorable conditions such as intermittent toleration by the state, the regime’s focus on combating a politically active Brotherhood, and dwindling jihadist popularity created opportunities for Salafists to grow in religious influence and secure considerable popularity.
Even before the 2011 uprising, however, and apart from a general commitment to the purification of the Islamic creed and the general puritanical behavioral similarities, Salafists were intolerably divided on various lines. Different Salafist sub-schools have debated the detailed implementation of their manhaj, questioning how far variations in methods of change, standpoints on political participation, and gradualism in the application of sharia can be tolerated.

Different Salafist sub-schools include:

1. Scholastic Salafism (al-Salafiyya Almiyya), which believes in the primacy of religious education. Key manhaj is al-tasfeya, liquidating religious innovations, and al-tarbeya, raising people on monotheism or tawhid (the core of the Islamic creed, the oneness of God). This sub-school implicitly recognizes the Islamic illegitimacy of ruling regimes but does not believe in political engagement or collective action, instead exclusively focusing on scholasticism and proselytizing. In Egypt, clusters of such scholarly communities have emerged in the last few decades, modeling Saudi scholastic icons.

2. Madkhali Salafism, also referred to as Jameya Salafism, disagrees with other schools’ standpoint on rulers, hailing the religious legitimacy of current regimes via a minimalist definition of what is a legitimate political order in Islam. Obedience to ruling regimes, even if they are unjust and do not apply sharia, is a religious obligation as long as they are not committing a clear act of infidelity. The Madkhali Salafists reject oppositional politics as a violation of sunna, viewing collective partisan action as religiously innovative, power-seeking, and evil. Their manhaj of change is exclusively an educational one. Madkhali Salafists regard themselves as the guardians of true Salafism and aggressively debunk other Salafists. Extremely loyal to regimes but intolerant of other Salafists and any opposition, Madkhali Salafists are responsible for the reputation of Salafists as submissive regime proxies.
3. Jihadist Salafism equates monotheism with combatant transnational jihad against un-Islamic regimes to establish a purely Islamic state that upholds religious sovereignty and undoes injustices inflicted upon Muslims.

4. Traditional Salafism, including al-Jamiya al-Sharia (Sharia Association) and Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyyah (Guardians of Prophetic Sunna), dates back to the early twentieth century and is mainly occupied with religious pedagogy and charitable work. Closely screened by the state as early as Nasser’s era, adherents have no political capital.

5. Like Scholastic Salafism, Haraki (active) Salafism considers the Islamic illegitimacy of ruling regimes clear, but it also considers organized collective action necessary to replace, albeit peacefully, any existing un-Islamic status quo. The Salafist Call, among other groups, represents this subschool.

Beginning in the late 1970s, these Salafists have adopted a unique manhaj haraki, that is, a special method of change distinguishable from both the gradualist reformist politics of the Muslim Brotherhood and the violent insurgency plans of jihadists. Organized change, according to this thinking, should be peaceful, normative, and from below. Haraki Salafism thus can be seen as a selective merging of the Salafist creed and the Brotherhood’s manhaj of action.

The Salafist Call for Politics

The key proponent of the haraki manhaj in Egypt is the Salafist Call, originally founded as the Salafist School in the 1970s in Alexandria. It has become the most powerful Salafist group in Egypt over the past three decades. Though it shares general characteristics of the Salafist manhaj, the Call maintains considerable differences with other subschools: with Madkhalis on opposing rulers and methods of action; with takfir (excommunication) supporters and its conditions; with Cairo Haraki Salafists on issues of religious sovereignty and collective action; with
jihadist groups on questions of belief and the use of force; and with the Muslim Brotherhood on methods of change.

The Call’s agenda focuses on four main stages:

- Constructing a standardized Islamic doctrine according to the Salafist framework, methodology of inference on questions of theology and law, and dismantling existing heterodox Islamic beliefs

- Engaging in spiritual refinement of ethics and worship, and religious education through Islamic socialization

- Preaching the Salafist manhaj across society, trying to spread Salafist values peacefully and curb the ones deemed un-Islamic, including laws, habits, dress codes, and social, gender, and family relations

- Applying sharia and the rule of Islam when conditions have become ripe as a product of previous stages; collective action should bring together existing work on charity and social welfare, social and communal solidarities, initiatives for commanding good and forbidding evil, and sharia-based conflict resolution and alternatives to secularist financial transactions.

As for the most appropriate shape of this collective action, the Call favored the creation of a disciplined organization long before the 2011 uprising, probably under the influence of the literature by Brotherhood ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb and his brother Mohamed.

The Call also spurned the notion of collective action within state-controlled religious structures and went on to establish its own independent organization with key distinguishing conditions. Among them are publicity, peaceful action, and no secrecy in transparent collective action; no conflict with the regime to prevent any damage or costs; and—unlike the murshid (supreme guide) in the Brotherhood—no oaths of allegiance to top leaders. Also, decisions are to be justified
through rigorous religious decision making, rather than elite command; respect must be shown to sheikhs while keeping legitimate disagreements; and pluralism of duties, tasks, programs, specializations, views, and cooperative integration are to be based on the same manhaj and fundamentals of al-Salaf al-Salih. There is to be no group fanaticism: the Call exists for administrative purposes not political leadership or power; loyalty to it is not a condition of Muslim faith.

This last description, however, it is worth questioning. The Call’s literature often refers to itself as a microcosm of the state rather than simply an administrative institution.

**Pre-2011 Organization**

The organization long predated the 2011 uprising. It made various attempts at legalization in 1985–1986 by creating al-Furqan Institute for preachers and Sawt al-Dawa (the Voice of the Call) magazine. Social committees became increasingly active after the 1992 Cairo earthquake, providing charity and relief until 1994. The regime initially left the apolitical Call alone. Indeed, the regime even benefited by the Call taking upon itself to combat jihadist and Qutbist influence.

In 1994, however, the regime cracked down on the organization for security reasons. Its institute for preachers and its magazine were shut down. Many important sheikhs and activists were temporarily arrested and later banned from traveling without prior permission or appearing on religious TV channels. Some sheikhs were forbidden to give sermons except in a few mosques in Alexandria.

Afterward, some sheikhs called for suspending the Call’s administrative structure. But Sheikh Yasser Borhami, a founding father of the Call, and his protégés decided instead to move the structure underground. By evading security forces, the Call’s networks survived a 1994 official ban and subsequent waves of suppression in 1998 and 2002.
By 2004, all arrested sheikhs and activists had been released from prison. Between 2004 and 2011, the Call maintained a decentralized administrative structure with limited communications. During this period, Borhami engaged in exceptionally active networking and recruiting across the country—enabling his future domination over the Call.

In April 2011, the Call was finally legally licensed in Alexandria as al-Dawa Association. It followed national social associations laws, and its structure and budget became subject to legal oversight. In contrast to the Brotherhood, this was a distinguishing step toward normalized relations with the state. The Call restructured its organization and formalized its register, incorporating several local charities that were loosely affiliated with it and briefly considering business investments to finance the association.

During this period, the Call has thrived in different spaces. Its significant social capital has been based on widespread mosque networks and its role in mediating local conflict resolution processes. Its inclusion of youth and women into a clear, singular educational and intellectual framework has been unique among Salafists. Its organizational upward-mobility work with youth has also been notable. The Call’s scope of activities has stretched across Alexandria, Matrouh, Beheira, Beni Suef, Fayoum, and other Delta governorates. The Amreya district west of Alexandria offers an example of the Call’s organizational capabilities, developing popular trust by immersing itself in local culture and vernacular politics. In Amreya, the Call’s most significant tool has been the sharia conflict resolution committee that has mediated conflicts over land, family feuds, crimes, financial quarrels, and sectarian strife. The committee’s appeal stems from its rigorous methodologies for adjudication, impartiality, attention to local traditions and family networks, reputation of moral integrity of the Call’s sheikhs, an incompetent state judiciary, and a lack of other nonstate alternatives. Similar patterns were common in other zones.
Current Official Organization

The association is structured according to governorate, sector, neighborhood, zone, and mosque levels. Three official bodies are particularly important:

1. A 220-member shura council acts as the Call’s parliament and general assembly. It is elected by local governorate shura councils and is responsible for major decisions and the board of directors.

2. A sixteen-member board of directors acts as the executive body. Parallel structures are created at the local level in different governorates. After deliberation, decisions are made according to majorities.

3. A six-member board of trustees presides over the association and is authorized to call for a general assembly to change the board of directors. The board of trustees’ membership is exclusive to the six founding fathers. Currently, the organization’s head is Mohamed Abdel Fattah, commonly known as Abu Idris. Of the five other founders, Muhammad Ismail al-Muqaddim and Yasser Borhami act as deputies, and Said Abdel-Azim, Ahmed Farid, and Ahmed al-Houtaiba are members of the board. (A seventh founding father of the Call, Emad Abdel-Ghafour, left the country in the late 1980s.) The six are widely revered religious sheikhs and preachers. Individually and together, they act as the religious points of reference for the Call.

Unofficial Hierarchies

Notwithstanding this official structure, powerful hierarchies exist within each tier. Within the first tier, al-Muqaddim and Abdel-Azim have little real organizational clout. The rest enjoy both religious and organizational power. Borhami has the most significant support because he has been the main architect of the organizational networks of the
movement since the 1980s. The sheikhs and leaders of key organizational portfolios who make up the second tier are largely his associates. The third tier is mostly executive administrators and activists in charge of running the association’s daily affairs. Finally, groups of professionals in the business and private sector are also loyal to the Call’s sheikhs.

They act as effective liaisons with politicians and media in the interactive political sphere. The key criteria for upward mobility within the movement are religious scholarship, personal trust, and organizational agility.

The Call’s organizations in many ways attempted to mimic that of the Brotherhood’s, but the Call was not as successful. This could be attributed to the inadequacy of its networking methods on university campuses, lack of strong allegiance to leaders, and comparably lower logistical, communication, and financial resources. Furthermore, this “MBification” of the Salafist Call diverted the focus from initial Salafist concerns like scholarly production.

**Post-Uprising Change of the Salafist Networks**

A revolt that flouted the Salafists’ expectations and even drew considerable participation among the Salafist grass roots left clerics in disarray. Madkhalis and many Scholastic Salafists preferred to resume their pre-2011 apolitical profiles.

Harakis were initially reserved about electoral political participation, but, out of fear of losing youths to other emerging Islamist parties, they agreed to immediate participation within the new democratic politics. Reconfiguring the religious-political sphere was seen as a nightmare that needed to be countered by all possible means. Besides, participating within the newly established democratic system was clearly preferable to dictatorship. Democracy would provide for the public and private freedoms needed to allow for Salafist proselytizing, as well as an inclusion within national policy making processes to counter the influence of secularists.
Salafists were left with three recourses: First, rather than compete among each other, they could support fellow Islamists against secularist competitors. Unorganized Salafists in Cairo and the Delta region, with little organizational competency and meager resources, initially opted for this choice, allying with the Brotherhood for their political experience and competence. Second, they could welcome a role as Islamist transnational revolutionaries. Radicalized youth as well as ex-jihadists and Qutbists opted for actions ranging from violent jihadism to revolutionary protest politics, championing uncompromising interpretations of “Islamist politics.” (The most notable example was the popular campaign of ex-presidential hopeful Hazem Salah Abu Ismail. In the lead-up to the May 2012 presidential elections, an extremely popular Abu Ismail phenomenon—modern in tools, Salafist in appearance, populist in discourse—claimed to best appreciate the revolutionary potentials of the country and the capacities of Islamist mass mobilization to undermine the old state. While other key Islamist actors had opted for the electoral compromise as early as March 2011, Abu Ismail’s campaign signaled a challenge to formal politics by young Islamist networks who shunned formal Islamist organizations.)

Third, they could create a Salafist party and compete with the Brotherhood. Though the Call did not command the support of the Salafist majority, it was the only organization with the nationwide network, organizational leadership, and unified manhaj needed to create such a party.

A history of animosity and lack of trust between the Brotherhood and the Call led the latter to adopt the third option and create a political party, Nour, with a mission to: endorse sharia as an absolute framework of reference; gradually apply sharia according to local conditions, safeguard the Salafists’ gains in society; defer to the old state and its institutions; and discredit the legitimacy of violent confrontations among Islamists and in society at large. Though substantive controversial issues—tolerance, pluralism, and religious and gender equality—remained taboo, to justify their political engagement, these Salafists argued for the
many positive electoral, participatory, and checks and balances mechanisms of an inclusive procedural democracy.

The Call also argued that a modern party would be different from the Salafist understanding of a *hizb* (party) as corruptive and conflict-ridden; the creation of different Islamist parties would then be legitimate and even useful. The Call then in many ways adopted the Brotherhood’s strategy of using “necessity” to legitimize actions—temporarily suspending dogma rather than revising it. People might not be ready yet for the rule of sharia. Although Salafists believed that sharia should not be subject to popular opinion, they agreed to recognize this reality and act accordingly. Any violations of Islamic sharia, according to the Salafist framework, such as the nomination of women on the Nour Party’s lists (mandated by law), are justified as a lesser evil than nonparticipation and leaving the political stage open for the secularists. By law, the Nour Party had to open its doors to Copts as well. The Call justified this, to the fury of many Scholastic Salafists.

**The Nour Party**

The Nour Party was created in June 2011. Its initial affiliation with the Call was limited; most of the burden fell on party founder Emad Abdel-Ghafour and his close advisers. As the party started receiving greater public attention and political command, however, the Call increasingly exerted meaningful control over the party’s structure. The party quickly established itself as the major Salafist party—and second-largest party—in Egypt, winning 24 percent of the seats in the 2011–2012 elections. Though the Call’s experience with electoral politics was limited, the role of its preexisting informal networks was remarkable.

**Platform**

The Nour Party’s platform identifies six pillars for its political activities:

- Preserving the Islamic identity of Egypt against Westernization, corruption, and moral degradation
Pursuing political, constitutional, and legal reforms necessary to secure foundations of a sharia-based political system

- Spreading Islamic values against secularist distortion in society, economy, education, family life, and culture, and presenting alternative Islamic models
- Promoting national economic development, independence, and social justice through anti-poverty policies
- Safeguarding freedoms, rights, and diversities in accordance to sharia
- Creating parallel civil society organizations

The platform considered sharia a “public order and a regulative framework inclusive of all legal, political, economic, and social state decisions and policies.”

**Competing Visions on the Party Structure**

The 220,000-member party has developed two major viewpoints on questions of party discipline and relations with the Call. The first suggested that success would depend on horizontal expansion, bottom-up representation, and a capacity to be inclusive of a variety of Salafist actors. The second viewpoint believed that the Nour Party should function as the political wing of the Call, having a vertically drawn structure with a clear hierarchical, decision making apparatus. Each vision had supporting evidence.

Proponents of the first believed that a pluralist party was necessary given diverse and loosely organized Salafist networks; they argued that the Nour Party’s 2011 electoral success was attainable through the mobilization of Salafist grass roots nationwide, not just supporters of the Call. And if conditions changed, these swing voters could support another Salafist party.

Proponents of the second vision believed the 7 million votes for the party in 2011 came from the Call’s power base—and that most other Salafists supported the Brotherhood. As a result, they argued that
the political outlook of the party should conform to that of the Call. A broad Salafist outlook would render the party insignificant. This second vision subscribed to the Brotherhood’s model of relations between a political party and an Islamist religious group: functional separation but political and ideological domination of the movement.

The Nour Party ran candidates in the 2011 elections without resolving these differences. Within a year, beginning in September 2012, it was hit by a wave of internal conflicts over the party’s chairmanship and the composition of its executive authority. Proponents of the pluralist vision, led by Abdel-Ghafour, accused the Call’s leadership, particularly Borhami, of undermining the party’s autonomy and filling party echelons with the Call’s trusted proxies in order to control the party’s funds. Historical hostilities between the two figures soured the tension even further. Reconciliation attempts by sheikhs and the party ombudsman failed.

Abdel-Ghafour’s supporters, in a minority position, quit and formed a separate party in early 2013. Happy to see its major opponent weakened, the Brotherhood embraced the new Watan Party.

The Nour Party’s lack of discipline was exposed during the first round of the 2012 presidential elections. The party leadership supported presidential candidate Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh out of pragmatism—despite his liberal understandings of Islamism, he could counter Brotherhood hegemony and achieve national stability and consensus. But few in the grass roots voted for him. Most either boycotted the election or voted for the allegedly more Islamist Morsi. Nevertheless, Nour Party leaders congratulated themselves on other political achievements. And in January 2013, the party moved forward with internal elections; by electing loyal followers of Borhami and the Call as chairman and deputy chairmen, the party solidified itself as the exclusive political wing of the Salafist Call.
Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood

Salafists maintain an unbending conviction that they are the only trustworthy guardians of Islamic sharia and values in society. Their critiques of the Brotherhood are extensive, both in religious doctrine and in political understandings. For example, they contend that the Brotherhood’s focus on numbers and group loyalty in mobilization and recruitment has led to unorthodox innovations in its creed. Furthermore, they maintain that by embracing democracy in several countries and often endorsing secularist political understandings on gender and religious equality, the Brotherhood has failed to uphold the concept of hakimiya (divine sovereignty over human life).

The Brotherhood’s jurisprudence is viewed by Salafists as often fragmented and lacking in rigor, a result of reformists’ programs and the Brotherhood’s priority of integration in the system. Salafists regard the Brothers as having no real manhaj in religious inference; they refrain from documenting their heritage in political jurisprudence particularly on controversial matters. Also, the Brotherhood does not heed sunna in regard to correct Muslim behavior and appearance, and its relations with Shia and Copts are not conditioned by the injunctions of sharia.

The Call’s perspective on the Brotherhood generally fits with the Salafist critique. In addition, the historical conditions of the groups’ geographical proximity in Alexandria and a clash of influence on university campuses have made the relationship tenser. Among the Salafists, the Call is the closest intellectually to the Brotherhood. The Call was nonetheless critical of the Brotherhood’s reformist vision and politics, which it believed had been politically compromising and inadequate in deterring regime repression and promoting the Islamist cause.

After Mubarak’s downfall, the somewhat stable relationship between the Call and the Brotherhood that had lasted for decades gave way to a complex, often shifting pattern of mixed collaboration and competition. As Borhami explained: “The right way to have a good
relationship with the Brotherhood is to develop our own powerful existence. Only then the relationship will be excellent. This will be better for us and them.”

The Nour Party and the Ikhwan

The Nour Party’s bid to replace the Brotherhood after the 2011–2012 transitional period, as a superior Islamist alternative both religiously and politically, did not prevent the two organizations from collaborating on key strategic issues. Both opposed the candidacy of the controversial Abu Ismail. The parties worked together on the drafting of the 2012 constitution that would secure a dominant role for Islamists in the new political system and enshrine the “Islamic identity” articles in the constitution. Both then mobilized their masses to back the constitution-drafting process in its final stages in late 2012.

This collaboration ultimately alienated the Brotherhood from non-Islamist politicians, raising concerns that the Brotherhood was losing its long-held status as the moderate, key agenda-setter of Islamist politics. At the same time, the Brotherhood and the Nour Party had notable disagreements. A possible electoral alliance during the 2011 parliamentary elections collapsed because of disagreement on power sharing, and the cutthroat competition between the Brotherhood and the Nour Party throughout the campaign made headlines. Wary of antagonizing the old establishment, the Nour Party refused to back a Brotherhood-proposed ban on politicians from the National Democratic Party, the former ruling party.

After the 2012 presidential elections, the Brotherhood reneged on its pre-election promises to offer Nour Party members key positions in the government. Instead, Morsi’s Ministry of Religious Endowments restricted the Salafists’ abilities to deliver sermons and religious lessons. Salafists in general also had other propaganda issues with Morsi, questioning his reluctance to apply sharia (such as his renewal of nightclub licenses), his acceptance of an International Monetary Fund
loan (sharia bans payment of interest), his accommodation of Shia, and his renewed relations with Iran.

In the aftermath of the political polarization that almost paralyzed Egyptian politics in November 2012 following Morsi’s controversial authoritarian presidential decrees, the Nour Party refused to stand by the Brotherhood-led government against the opposition. Instead, on January 28, 2013, the party presented its own initiative for conflict resolution. It reiterated respect for Morsi’s legitimacy yet recognized the opposition’s demands as legitimate and necessary. The list included demands for forming a new cabinet, investigating incidents of violence, replacing the Morsi-appointed attorney general, and introducing fairness protections for the upcoming parliamentary elections. The initiative was rebuffed by the Brotherhood. In the months leading up to the 2013 ouster of Morsi, the Nour Party’s calls for compromise were rejected by the Brotherhood.

The old state–Brotherhood confrontation in the aftermath of Morsi’s ouster left the Salafists with two options, neither of them fully desirable: join the Brotherhood’s cause in a subordinate position or accept being co-opted by the state to secure their own existence. The first option meant political obscurity, while the second would undermine the Salafists’ Islamist ideological character and credibility. Ultimately, organized Salafists—such as the Nour Party—opted for the latter, while less organized Salafists threw their weight behind the Brotherhood. Their support largely continued through Morsi’s ouster and the anti-Islamist crackdown that followed. Caught between regime authoritarianism and the rise of revolutionary Islamists, both groups of Salafists face an uncertain future.

The Nour Party’s Current Strategy

The party and the Call today face various challenges. They need to build new strategies for political participation and *dawa* (social and religious proselytizing) in an authoritarian context and before an anti-Islamic popular audience.
They have to rebuild their organizational and institutional capacity and credibility among Salafists. The state’s bid to nationalize the religious public sphere also offers a daunting threat to the Call.

The Nour Party accepted the fait accompli of the coup.

The party could not join the Brotherhood in its unaffordable and ultimately suicidal battle with the state for fear of weakening its bid to someday succeed the Brotherhood. The Nour Party brought forward both religious and political justifications for this controversial standpoint. Party leaders believed the ongoing “revolutionary Islamist protests” would inevitably be associated with abhorred takfir (excommunication) and destructive violence and that there was no Islamic state under Morsi to begin with. Hence, talk of protests that aimed to defend Morsi’s Islamic order against the enemies of Islam is meaningless.

To defy the old state and its huge popular backing was imprudent; instead, they tried to secure what remained of footholds for Islamist recognition, legitimacy, and participation under the new military-dominated road map. Accordingly, the party took part in the constitutional drafting committee, and it worked laboriously to maintain articles on sharia and Islamic identity in the new 2014 constitution.

The Nour Party has already broken the ideological solidarity of the Islamist bloc vis-à-vis the old state. The party’s decision to participate in the new road map and sell out the “Islamist president” was seen as an act of unpardonable religious treachery. The party, however, maintains organizational comparative advantage over even non-Islamist parties. And it anticipates that since it is the only existing Islamist Salafist party, Salafists will bounce back to vote for the Nour Party, no matter how weak and co-opted it may be in opposition to secularists.

The Nour Party’s capacity to achieve its goals is questionable given the current balance of power. Moreover, some political actors, encouraged by anti-Islamist media diatribes and slander, have been already pushing to ban religious parties altogether on a constitutional basis. The regime still maintains its functional use of the Call as an
Islamist distraction from its authoritarian policies and more threatening conversations about democracy and a failing economy.

To maintain some semblance of legitimacy and to deflate charges of opportunism, Nour Party leaders have opted for a “loyal opposition” profile—accepting the legitimacy of the new road map set out by the regime while occasionally voicing critique. Though they supported the 2014 constitutional referendum and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s presidential election, the party has criticized the regime on two important policies: freedom of religious preaching in mosques and proposed electoral laws and gerrymandering. The party has also condemned the regime’s suppression of the Brotherhood and other Islamists and discouraged participating in the cabinet for the time being. Parliament and municipal politics, it seems, are enough.

As for relations with the Brotherhood, despite internal disagreements, the party favors state-Brotherhood reconciliation, knowing that this would reopen the political sphere. Party leaders believe, however, that such reconciliation is dependent on a revision of the current Qutbist thought and confrontational Brotherhood strategic policy.

The Nour Party’s actual power base among Salafists will be tested in upcoming parliamentary elections, if held. The party is running independently and fielding candidates and party lists across the country (the only party able to field lists across the whole country), but it has pinned its hopes on its key strongholds in Alexandria, Matrouh, Beheira, Fayoum, Kafr el-Sheikh, and other governorates such as Beni Suef, Giza, and Minya.

It is almost certain that the party will not do as well as it did in the 2011 elections, when it garnered an outstanding 7 million votes. The Nour Party has arguably lost the sympathy of a lot of the general Salafist and Islamist masses, pro-Brotherhood supporters, as well as politically indifferent rural communities that heeded the calls of the sheikhs and the “sharia cause” in 2011.
Enduring features of the Call in the eyes of its Salafist critics include favoring quantity over quality and trust over efficiency, a lack of institutionalism and qualified cadres, inadequate tarbeya programs, self-seeking partisanship, elite domination, and an instrumentalization of religious reasoning to justify past political decisions. Critics imagine that the party will be even more exposed without the trust of Islamist masses, and they expect it to receive about 8–15 percent of votes in future elections. They argue for a replacement of the party or a change in Borhami’s clerical type of leadership. One of the founding fathers of the Salafist Call has already broken away, contemplating the creation of new, parallel organizations. In an internal opinion poll conducted by the party, 60 percent of the members disagreed with the official party position on Morsi’s ouster and its aftermath.

Some members of the Call have limited their activities to preaching, severing ties with the Call’s politics. Post-coup resignations, the splintering of the group, and even suspensions of members were reported in Dakahlia and most notably in Matrouh, which witnessed some wrangling with tribal-based local officials. The party branch in Matrouh was unfrozen later. Also, there have been conflicting reports about the real turnout in the party’s strongholds during the 2014 elections.

Salafist Call leaders admit to these challenges, but the Call believes it can survive due to its distinctive character. “The very fact that we find hard times, nowadays, justifying our political decisions before our grass roots vindicate our claims of distinction in character from the Brotherhood,” said Sheikh Abdel Moneim al-Shahat. “Our doctrine is very strict but our political behavior is flexible. The Brotherhood is the exact opposite.”

The Salafist Call is irreplaceable as long as it sticks to its distinguishable non-combative, flexible reformist status. Optimists argue that spread of jihadist and Qutbist thought among Islamist alternatives will again make the Call appealing to both the state and the national audience. Regional political developments could play into the Call’s hands.
as well. Sunni-Shia polarization in addition to the Saudi Arabian–Iranian duel and mobilization against the self-proclaimed Islamic State in the Arab East and North Africa could engender a role for Salafists in a Saudi-sponsored regional ideological crusade against both Shia and takfiri radicalism. In the words of a Salafist politician: “The role played by the type of a group like the Salafist Call, as a social supplement of the state, is too indispensable for the regime to eliminate it.” State-encouraged Sufism’s limited Islamist audience, Scholastic Salafism’s little relevance to youth, and al-Azhar’s outdated curricula and thought, scarce manpower, and lost credibility make them unviable alternatives to the Call.

Despite the gloomy post-Morsi authoritarianism, the Call, then, is keeping up its activities. The party is planning a popular and regime-friendly campaign against “the four dangers on Egypt: takfir, atheism, Shiism, and corruption.” The Call leaders believe they will quit politics if electoral politics becomes totally meaningless as in the Mubarak days. Their heavy investment in politics, however, makes a retreat unlikely.

The Future of Other Salafist Organizations

Al-Watan’s eclectic role within the Salafist field is similar to al-Wasat Party’s relationship with the Brotherhood: heavily based on a desire for a “moderate” pro-democracy struggle against the military regime. Differentiating itself from undemocratic Islamists, al-Watan believes it can avoid militant and illadvised protests. Al-Watan participated within the Brotherhood-led National Alliance for Supporting Legitimacy until November 2014, when it quit over Brotherhood inflexibility. Its leaders are still willing to mediate between the Brotherhood and the regime, but a lack of resources or Salafist constituency leaves the party with limited potential.

The Islamist masses that joined forces with the Brotherhood in anti-regime demonstrations fall into two categories. Some Salafists joined out of emotional solidarity with the hundreds of Islamist supporters of Morsi who were massacred by Egyptian security forces while forcibly clearing sit-ins at Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda Squares in Cairo in
2013, but who were uncomfortable with Qutbism and jihadism and had lost faith in the potential for democratic political participation. Reconciliation with the regime, if it ever happens, would mean a refocus on social and religious activities and rejoining the Scholastic Salafists who refused political action from the beginning, claiming that Egyptian society is not ready for the rule of sharia.

Within Rabaa Islamists, there is also a critical mass of politically active and revolutionary Salafists whose fortunes are tied to Brotherhood inclusion or exclusion by the state. They point to the termination of the Islamist 2012 constitution, exclusion of Islamists from the 2013 constitution drafting process, and the bloody crackdown on the Islamists. All these, they say, prove the existence of a “war against Islam and Islamists” in Egypt and the urgency of revolutionary Islamist action.

Radicals’ standpoint on the Salafist Call is very bitter. For them, the Call’s consistently pro-military positions were more than selling out to the anti-Islamic counterrevolution. The Call’s policy exposed the limitations of the reformist preaching manhaj that was interested in slow but safe growth. This left the Call underappreciating the decisiveness of post-Mubarak political battles.

The group’s unwillingness to revise its unrealistic, preset plans and misreading of the balance of power led the overcautious Call to behind-closed-doors settlements with the military. Yet, the radicals’ organizational inability, their leaders’ refraining from accountability (such as Abu Ismail), lack of workable political vision, and rigorous religious methodology limit their potentials.

These revolutionized Salafists were active during the forty-six-day Rabaa sitin and as members of the National Alliance for Supporting Legitimacy. Their actions suggest that ideological boundaries between these Salafists and jihadist, takfiri, and Qutbist groups will blur over time.
Salafists’ Revisions

The 2011 uprising was a political earthquake in Egypt, and Salafism was no exception, exposing vulnerabilities of the Salafist manhaj. While Salafists agreed on old Islamic schools of thought, their assessments of the contemporary schools—such as al-Azhar, the Brotherhood, Islamic reformists, as well as liberal, nationalist, and leftist secularists—differed greatly.

Despite recent political attention, Salafists have not engaged in substantial intellectual revisionism on issues of sectarianism, women, the arts, censorship, state-religion relations, minorities, international relations, secularism, methods of religious inference, and Islamic behavior. Salafists thus continue to suffer from the inability of their fragments to coalesce around even a minimalist program. New points of reference began to emerge after 2011. Among them were what can be termed “social sciences Salafists,” who situate Salafist ideas within Western social sciences in deconstructing Western modern secularism. Their attempt to furnish fresh intellectual resources to supplement the Salafist Islamist movement is an attempt at reconfiguring the Islamist movement at scholarly, intellectual, and social—rather than political—levels.

New Salafist revisionists have started questioning the type of Islamist consciousness and the merits of self-congratulatory assessments of success in al-tarbeya and dawa. Revisionists believe that Salafists, among other Islamists, had distorted priorities in the wake of the 2011 uprising. Islamists should have used politics in a minimal way to safeguard social activities; this thinking goes, but instead pursued political power, thereby eroding people’s trust, maximizing hostilities, and exposing their incapacities. This strategic blunder rested on an illusion that the modern state could be Islamized if political power is seized.

Salafist revisionists believe that the societal movement should no longer be instrumentalized as a means for political power. Instead, spreading Islam through community-oriented societal activism at ethical,
educational, intellectual, cultural, rights, and communal levels should be the key objective in itself.

This might offer a more effective and less risky Islamic policy. Notwithstanding the depth of such revisions, Salafism still lacks a theory for social change or a cogent understanding of the current public sphere and civil society. Salafist theory has largely ignored challenges introduced by the modern nation-state and subsequent globalization, including failed processes of economic modernization and urbanization that have left deep impacts on the correlation of class, market, finance, consumption, laws, public administration, ethics, identities, media, state-society relations, power imbalances, and resource allocation.

Islamist outreach is limited to hollow preaching and charity work. Islamist doctrine is still attached to abstract jargon about “justice,” “reform,” “Islamist government,” and “struggle against secularism” without appreciation of the contexts and actors of this “secularism” and of how Islam became understood.

Apparently, the Salafist revisionists’ real interest is in diverting the religious masses away from the problematic modern political sphere issues (against which Islamists have proven to be clueless and unprepared and are doomed to fail) and keeping these masses within the bounds of the familiar and controllable domains of religious scholasticism and probably the new ones of Islamic social science intellectualism as well. Revisionist Salafists’ critical arguments of politicized Islamists could have been more meaningful if they had worked at exploring a new creative and less state-centric type of Islamic politics, which has not been the case.

The Distinguished of Islamist Group

As this chapter demonstrated, patterns of conflict and settlement during the crucial period in the struggle for establishing a new constitution has far reaching institutional consequences for state-Islamist relations. The promulgation of the new constitution was characterized by conflict and polarization of the elite in the struggle for domination, especially between Free Officers and the MB leadership. Prompted by its
relative strength in organizational power prior to the 1952 coup, the leaders of the MB consistently urged the new Egypt to adopt the Islamic constitution, which was rejected by Nasser. Overtime, the Free Officers and the MB failed to reach an acceptable power sharing arrangement. Based on this challenge, the state builders in Egypt sowed the seeds of irreconcilable conflict between the state and the Islamist challengers.

The emergence of radical jihadist organizations since the early 1970s in Egypt can thus be conceived as result of three interrelated aspects of the way the Free Officers attempted to stabilize their political order. These results were the exclusion of Islam from the constitutional blueprint after 1956, prolonged persecutions and suppression of the Islamist opposition, and the ability of the state to utilize long-established religious institutions in effectively undermining the vision of an Islamic state. However, the indigenous aspect of Islamist politics was the most decisive factor in bringing about organizational shifts, such as a resistance strategy pursued by the imprisoned networks during persecution, and the ways in which that strategy led to the sequential diffusion of radical generations in the Islamist movement.

The resistance strategy—understood as a set of mobilization activities relying on underground activism, informal networks, and covert leadership—was adopted because of severe exclusion, elimination, and persecution. It functioned from the beginning as a deliberate effort to overcome the leadership vacuum of the organization. But in the process, this strategy structured a distinct form of an organizational outcome that provided a catalyst for jihadist politics to consolidate and, as a result, served as precursors for the “materialization” of militant-purified Islamist groups in actual organizational constructs.

There is a dramatic difference in jihadist organizations that distinguished them from the moderate Brotherhood. This is particularly true in their public appearances in the 1980’s and in their violent operations in the 1990’s. Political developments in Egypt after Nasser and the subsequent crises after the Camp David Peace Treaty with Israel in 1979 propelled these jihadist alternatives to take action leading to
prolonged violent conflicts between Islamist movements and the state. While the ‘official’ leadership of the Brotherhood gradually moved to integrate their organization with Egypt’s political system, during the 1990’s, mostly triggered by accumulation of economic, regional and international factors, the radical-jihadists escalated their actions for total confrontation against the state as part of what they believe is the revolutionary path toward an Islamic state.
Prior to the 2011 uprising, Salafists believed that political participation would inevitably compromise doctrine, maintaining heavy concerns about the Islamic legitimacy of democracy as a mode of political contestation. Salafist purification was aimed at creating community; there was no interest in conflict with the regime, and Salafists were content to be isolated from the larger society and the state establishment. Since the uprising, Salafists have renounced historic taboos over political participation within un-Islamic systems. They have reached out to the broader society and pursued undertakings necessary to persuade political consumers, win voters, and reach consensus with the state institutions.

While pragmatism might be politically expedient in the short term, it could be suicidal for an ideological movement like Salafism going forward. In pursuing an Islamist political system ruled by sharia in Egypt, Salafists have adopted an ambiguous populist discourse that shifted focus from the moral to the political. Salafists, through this ambiguity, sought to Islamicize the post-2011 political process while pursuing political stability, economic recovery, and restoration of public security and order. Mimicking the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafist Call has preached Islamist propaganda while at the same time dodging its application. Aside
from raising Islamism on issues of public morality and in reference to sharia, the Call, like the Brotherhood, has come to terms with normal conservative politics. The gap between doctrine and performance will be a formidable challenge and an ideological deficit amid current state-Islamist relations.

The pivotal aspect that will determine the future of the Salafists is their ability to furnish a unique political model that distinguishes Salafism from the indefensible authoritarian Arab regimes, and also from other Islamists’ failed models. If this was difficult between 2011 and 2013, it might be close to impossible since the coup that ousted Morsi.

Apart from shallow operational statements regarding necessity, little effort has been made to create intellectual frameworks for any of these behavioral transformations. Outreach to diverse and ever-changing audiences is intrinsically incongruent with the rigid Salafist frame. Salafists risk minimalizing their differences with the Brotherhood and undermining their ideological framework for an Islamist utopia. This may seriously call into question the Islamic validity of the Salafist manhaj. More radical actors are candidates to fill this vacuum.

Salafists’ shortcomings in delivering on their political mandate—the preservation of Islamic identity and sharia and attention to socioeconomic concerns—would not be just an ideological loss but a social one as well. Frustration over these failures would undermine grassroots trust, squandering the social capital accumulated over decades of activism among rural and urban lowerclass neighborhoods across Egypt.

How are mainstream political Salafists, notable for their peaceful profile, going to rein in mounting threats from radical Islamist factions that have shunned peaceful engagement altogether? A failure of mainstream political Salafism to implement stricter Islamist criteria (for instance, with regard to tourism, culture, finance, laws, and attaining an influential presence in government) may further compound this threat. So, too, will the hyper-authoritarian character of the current regime.
Finally, in a post-2011 context where dreams of democracy, egalitarian socioeconomic development, and freedoms have been shattered by state-Islamist confrontations, how could Salafist success remain relevant? Salafists have been opposed or at best indifferent to ideals of democratic citizenship in public policy, institutional work, socioeconomic relations, and securing individual rights. Still bound by outdated jurisprudence, Salafists’ political frameworks have not grown to appreciate the contemporary socioeconomic and political realities. Any serious revision to address this contradiction might practically launch a post-Salafist era, something the Salafists are unwilling to accept.

Since its inception, the Salafi Call has eschewed politics for both religious and political reasons (Brown, 2011). Classical Salafism has a long tradition of political quietism (Hasan, 2012, p. 44). Many traditional Salafis believe that political participation is a heresy that corrupts Muslims and rather should be avoided. Due to their religious abhorrence of the rulings of democracy and politics; the Salafis did not have any political platforms and never concerned themselves with establishing a political order (Denoeux, 2011).

Moreover, many traditional Salafi scholars prohibit rebellion or revolution (khuruj) against the ruler even if he is unjust or corrupt, as long as he is formally a Muslim. Borhami has also claimed that the movement shunned politics because there was simply no space for the Salafis to participate in political life under Mubarak (Brown, 2011). When the popular uprising against the Mubarak regime erupted, al-Daw‘a al-Salafiyya criticized protesters and called on the Salafis to refrain from participating in the demonstrations. However, the success of the uprising pushed some of the Salafi scholars to rethink and change their position toward the uprising (Zaghlul, 2012). With time, the Salafis had no option but to support the revolution. In the wake of the revolution, the Salafis rushed into politics enthusiastically and involved significantly in electoral campaigns.

This was a dramatic change in the Salafi mindset and doctrine. Some of the Salafis’ prominent figures felt enforced to engage directly in
politics if they wanted to remain connected with the Egyptian public. This could be seen with the participation of a Salafi prominent figure Muhammad Hassan who shifted his position from avoiding the revolution to support the demonstrations (Abdelal, 2011).

This runs contrary to the conventional Salafi discourse that is well known for its persistent opposition to demonstrations and its antidemocracy stance. This new attitude toward politics among Egyptian Salafis has spurred them to establish political parties. The parties, which mainly represent various trends within the Egyptian Salafi movement, could be seen as part of their manifestation to become active actors in shaping the future of Egypt. According to Mohamed Nour, the spokesperson of the al-Nour Party, the Salafis have decided to establish political parties to voice their opinion and affect the future of the country. As he puts it, “We involve in politics in order to protect Egypt from seculars and liberals who attempt to remove Egypt’s Islamic identity.”

The Salafiyya movement has spawned three political parties, al-Nour (Light), al-Asala (Authenticity), and al-Fadhila (Virtue). Some observers have depicted these parties as ideologically ultra-conservative (Bohn, 2011; Brown, 2011). The three parties advocate a rigid application for Shari’a (the Islamic law), which, according to their interpretation, entails strict gender segregation, restricting women’s dress, and forbidding alcohol (Fadel, 2012). Abdel-Moniem al-Shahat, a senior and controversial figure at al-Daw’a al-Salafiyya, outraged Egyptians when he dubbed democracy haram and kufr (forbidden and blasphemous). He also described the works of Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz as “atheist literature” that promoted “prostitution and drugs.” Another hard-line Salafi leader urged voters not to vote for liberal, secular, and non-Muslim candidates in the elections (Al-Sharq Al-Awasat, 2011). Salafis espouse socially conservative policies, which they believe are based on Islamic morality, values, and ethics. They advocate preserving Egypt’s Islamic identity in the face of Westernization and secularism. And they argue that Egypt’s new constitution should emphasize the role of Shari’a in public
life. For example, during the new parliament’s inaugural session, many Salafi MPs insisted on adding a religious reference to the official oath, declaring that they swore to uphold the constitution as long as it did not contradict the Shari’a.

With time, Salafis have sought to place themselves and their ideas at the center of political debates in the period after Mubarak’s ouster. Despite their political inexperience, Salafis fared surprisingly well in the first parliamentary elections after the revolutions. They employed deeply rooted social networks to encourage citizens to support their candidates. They also built alliances and coalitions with different political forces (al-Saruji, 2012).

Before the parliamentary elections, al-Nour and al-Asala parties joined the Muslim Brothers-led Democratic Alliance, which also included the liberal Wafd Party. However, the Salafi parties withdrew from the alliance on the eve of the elections over political disagreement on distributing the seats. Some of the al-Nour Party leaders pointed out that the MB sought to marginalize Salafi candidates in the elections. Al-Nour and al-Asala parties then formed an alliance with the al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya’16 Building and Development Party (BDP), which received 25% of the popular vote in the first parliamentary elections after the revolution (al-Saruji, 2012).

The factors underlying the startling emergence and electoral success of Political Salafism are numerous. It would be overly simplistic, however, to attribute this success to their religious ideology. Islamist ideologies resonate well with conservative and pious Egyptians; however, the Salafi parties also employed long-standing social networks for support (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Salafis have entrenched, yet loose, networks that have provided social services to the poor and needy Egyptians for several decades. These networks are especially pervasive among lower middle and lower classes, which suffered heavily under Mubarak’s neoliberal economic policies.
Not surprisingly, the Salafis achieved sweeping victories in some rural constituencies and on the outskirts of Cairo. Ali Abdelal, an Egyptian expert on Salafism, attributes the Salafis’ victory in the elections to their long-standing Da’wa networks all over Egypt. He astutely points out the weaknesses of the MB in peripheral areas like al-Arish, Marsa Matrouh, and al-Wadi al-Jadid.

In addition, unlike liberal and secular forces, Salafi parties have been remarkably successful at outreach. They capitalize on social networks involving kinship, friendship, schools, and universities to communicate with ordinary Egyptians. As one of the Salafi leaders succinctly stated, “they [liberals and seculars] didn’t come to our streets, didn’t live in our villages, didn’t walk in our hamlets, didn’t wear our clothes, didn’t eat our bread, didn’t drink our polluted water, didn’t live in the sewage we live in and didn’t experience the life of misery and hardship of the people” (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Mohamed Nour described liberals and secularists’ outreach strategy as merely virtual and not real.19 On another occasion he stated, “Other parties are talking to themselves on Twitter, but we are actually on the streets. We have other things to do than protest in Tahrir” (Bohn, 2011).

The Unavoidable Path

It is significantly important to grasp why Salafis in Egypt rushed to politics despite decades of abstention. Primarily, their rejection of political participation, hence their apolitical conditions, were rationalized with an elaborate ideological argument which viewed political participation within the system of democracy as contrary to Shari’ā rulings. Due to such a position, most Salafis initially stayed away from the January 25 revolution. It was no secret that for decades, the Salafis, with no exceptions, lambasted the Muslim Brothers for their political participation in what they perceived as a secular political system based on the laws of man rather than the laws of God. However, as it now turns out, they are eating humble pie by rushing to join that same system they condemned. The six million pound question would be what they are hoping to achieve through the ballot box.
By studying the discourse of political Salafis in Egypt on the major motivations of their participation, one would summarize that almost all Salafis currently agree on the need to protect and strengthen Egypt’s Islamic identity which, in practice means preserving the second article in the Egyptian Constitution which stipulates that the principles of Shari’ah are the main source of Egyptian legislation. According to them, there is no way to achieve that goal without having an influential and strong voice in Egyptian politics, whether through parliament or protest (Daily News Egypt, 2011). Accordingly, Salafis have become more rationalized due to the new reality in Egypt. They have realized that politics is the only way to achieve their goals in maintaining an Islamic identity of Egypt, thus having a more Islamic Egypt. This has led to their argument that political participation, despite its existence within the framework of democracy, is partly permissible if it is taken for its mechanistic means and not philosophical ones. This relatively new discourse is a marked paradigm shift within Salafi doctrines, which were essentially and traditionally known for their total rejection of the very concept of democracy in whatever form.

A closer examination of the details of each Salafi party’s program and manifesto would reveal the different goals of each, despite their shared aspirations toward strengthening the religious hegemony in the public sphere. As an example, the al-Nour Party explicitly advocated for a civil state, but with an Islamic reference as stated in the Egyptian Constitution. Hence, their aim is to establish a modern state and rejecting the model of a religious state. However, the stance of Salafis, not to mention all Islamists from the concept of a civil state is vague and dubious. For instance, while Salafis stress the civil nature of the state, they deny or undervalue minorities’ full rights. For instance, Salafis, as well as the MB, do not recognize the right of women or Christians to become president. In addition, they both endorse the housewife role of women over their political or public roles.

On the other hand, other Salafi parties developed different platforms. For instance, the Safety and Development Party (SDP)
manifesto as summarized on the group’s Facebook site, included among others: “to give more freedom to religious bodies represented by the mosques through the establishment of an independent body to administer and supervise mosques and religious endowments; to give more Islamic elements in the national educational system in schools and universities, along with the abolishment of all secular elements from the schools and universities” (Social Democrats Party, 2011). They also called for the abolishment of all private universities, hence nationalizing all universities; while on foreign policy, the party called for stronger cooperation of Egypt with other Muslim and Arab countries, and to emphasize support of the Palestinians’ resistance. On the media front, they emphasized the need for more supervision and control in order to maintain the Islamic identity of Egypt. On the economy, the party favored a greater state intervention with the abolishment of interest-based banks; they also pointed out the need for progressive taxation and the establishment of minimum wages. Likewise, the al-Fadhila Party aims to restore Egypt’s leading role in the Arab and Islamic worlds and to launch their reform project in Egypt, which is to be carried through the achievement of justice and equality for all citizens, equal distribution of wealth, and rule of law. Interestingly, the party asserts its call for a civil state with a religious reference without giving any account to hudud (religious punishments) as part of their goals. Similarly, the al-Asala party’s political program aims to work on spreading the values of justice and equality by restoring Egypt’s leadership in all areas that band together with Islamic law (al-Asala, 2011). However, unlike the al-Fadhila Party, the al-Asala Party paid special attention to intellectual and psychological reforms toward attaining refinements in the educational and scientific spheres. The party also emphasized its efforts to get rid of all kinds of tyranny and injustice in order to implement the concept of Shura (consultation) and to achieve the peaceful transition and transfer of power.

However, it is important to realize that not all Egyptian Salafis welcome such a situation. For those preachers who are known for their strict adherence to al-Madkhali’s approach, another rigid Salafi trend, and
the staunch followers of al-Albani like Said al-Raslan, firmly reject democracy, political parties, and any involvement in the current political system based on the arguments mentioned earlier. For them, those who participate in the democratic process are not to be associated with the authentic Salafism methodology despite their earlier Salafi background.

**Between Ideology and Politics**

A critical reading on the discourse of Egyptian Salafi parties and the language applied by their preachers would expose the paradoxical situation of most of the Salafis in their political participation. However, this is not to be a generalization of all Salafi actors, since, as mentioned repeatedly, the Salafis do not belong to one trend or approach. However, it is interesting to know that this new development in Egypt, represented by the participation of the Salafis in the democratic process in the new Egypt contradicts the prevailing discourse of global Salafism in the 20th and the 21st centuries.

Salafism as a global trend is primarily identified with its non-friendly attitude toward democracy and political pluralism as the pillars of the modern political system. For many Salafi scholars, democracy is *bid'a* (innovation) and “Western product” that Muslims should avoid. Moreover, they believe that democracy entails elements that contradict Islam, such as partisan politics (*tabazzub*), which, according to some of them could lead to disunity of the Muslim *ummah* (nation). In addition, Salafis sought to distinguish themselves from prevalent Islamist movements that accepted the rules of the democratic game. Salafis labeled those movements—for example, MB—as “*hizbiyun*” (partisan), which they determined as *haram* (prohibited). This concept has been accepted by Salafi scholars in many places as part of the nonnegotiable primary principles of faith.

Ostensibly, we might conclude that the participation of some Salafis in the post-Mubarak era as a paradigm shift from their initially mentioned position toward democracy and politics. However, the crucial question is: to what extent does Salafis’ participation in the political
process become an epistemological break in their doctrine and theological thought? So far, there is mixed response from political Salafis regarding political participation. However, they all justify it by the principle of "darurah" (necessity). As discussed earlier, almost all Salafis are looking at the political participation as a means to strengthen the Islamic identity of Egypt, and to assert the Islamic character of the society, which they perceive as a legitimate and noble aspiration. They have, however, remained silent on the acceptance of the concept of political pluralism, which is a fundamental building block of democracy.

Not surprisingly, this has led to the accusation that the Salafis are an imminent threat to the spirit of Egypt which supposedly guarantees more freedom and liberty to its people. The assertion of many Salafi parties on the importance of the Islamic identity of Egypt and to impose Islamic elements in the society has intimidated many, especially the liberals who used to enjoy freedom in the field of arts and culture, even during the Mubarak period; and also the younger liberals who were looking toward a more democratic and free Egypt, not only in the political realm but also in their daily lives.

Notwithstanding the barrage of criticism against the Salafis and their vague attitude toward democracy, one should acknowledge the blessings of a free and open environment that has embraced Egypt post-Mubarak, which has managed to tame the radical elements in Salafism or to neutralize some of the hard-liners. This was readily evident when al-Jihad al-Islami abandoned their radical and violent ways and agreed to turn to the ballot box and the electoral system. This should surely be a lesson to many on how a free and democratic ambience in a Muslim country could be one of the remedies of radicalism and extremism.

The new untainted promised fresh air of democracy has managed to push forward the Salafis to leap from mere rhetoric and preaching to the field of charity and welfare activities. The al-Nour Party, as an example, has endlessly helped the community with welfare, charity, educational and health assistance, especially in suburban areas. Some might perceive these as mere competition to the more established Muslim
Brotherhood as part of their political maneuvering; nonetheless, these activities will lead to the flourishing of the third-sector industry toward creating a more independent and self-sufficient Egyptian society.

And in clear reference to the attitude of Saudi Salafi scholars toward political parties, elections and democracy, the Egyptian political Salafis proudly declared that their current position did not resemble the Saudi Salafi trend, and the reality of Egypt was different from those of Saudi Arabia (Ismail, 2011). Their proclamation however does not answer the inherent contradiction because the conventional global Salafis’ attitudes toward these issues are based on principal faith matters and are not a mere elementary legal injunction, which is based on context and reality. Until and unless there is a clear and unequivocal theological position of the Egyptian Salafis on various issues related to democracy, its ideological value, political pluralism, human rights, individual liberty, and authority of rulers, it is too early to predict the future of their new maneuver.

**An Examination of Al-Nour Party**

A further understanding of the transformations of Salafism in Egypt can be best grasped by giving special attention to the case of the al-Nour Party. The party was founded a few months after the ousting of Mubarak; now it is the most popular party among the Salafi parties, with more followers and a greater impact on politics and the public sphere. More than its partners in the Islamic Alliance, the al-Nour Party has demonstrated pragmatism in its political outlook. For example, after parliamentary elections, which guaranteed the party as the second position in parliament, al-Nour leaders reached out to liberal forces in parliament to counter the strength of the MB’s Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which received the largest share of seats. There are also elements of pragmatism in the party’s platform, which calls for establishing a “modern state that respects citizenship and coexistence between all people.” (al-Nour, 2012). The party stresses the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers, and emphasizes social justice and equality
and the rights of people to elect their leaders and to hold them accountable.

The al-Nour Party also appears to be pragmatic with regard to foreign policy. According to its platform, the party calls for good relations with foreign governments and nations based on mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. Although the platform does not specifically address the party’s stance on the country’s peace treaty with Israel, its leaders have committed to respect the agreement (Issacharoff, 2011). In an unprecedented interview with Israeli Army Radio, Yusri Hammad, the party’s spokesman, pledged that the al-Nour Party would respect Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel as part of the country’s international commitments (al-Masry al-Youm, 2011).

However, the al-Nour Party position on minorities and personal freedoms is still ambiguous and worrisome to many as mentioned earlier. Clearly, the al-Nour Party, as well as other Salafi parties, hold illiberal views regarding minorities and personal freedoms and do not subscribe to the principle of full and equal citizenship for all Egyptians, regardless of religion or gender. Nevertheless, one should stress the fact that the al-Nour Party coincides with the conservative sense among many Egyptians toward religious and personal freedoms. The vast majority of Egyptian public, for various reasons, exhibits to some extent a regressive and illiberal stance toward women and non-Muslims. However, with the ongoing political openness and engagement, such position is subject to many changes in the upcoming years. Despite its conservatism and strict interpretation of Islam, the al-Nour Party, in comparison with other Salafi parties, demonstrates a clear propensity to adapt with the new political environment and realities in Egypt.

The Arab Spring has brought forth a new hope for democracy in the region. Quite unexpectedly, it has had the added benefit of taming the ferocious Salafi trend, which has negatively distorted the image of modern Egypt. Not only has the new Egypt promised democratic space for everyone, it has also managed to engulf those who once opposed and considered democracy as blasphemous. Salafi parties, from the far right al/
"Jihad al-Islami" to the populist Salafi preachers, have succumbed to the temptations of politics.

However, despite their new outlook toward democracy and their recent successes in the electoral process, not all Salafis have agreed to adopt them. Moreover, the intra-Salafi feuds would only fracture further the fragile alliance between them and might lead to their premature political downfall. Since Salafis do not really belong to one monolithic group, despite their common theological position, there is little to suggest that individuals within the organizations would be able to agree on the myriad of political issues besetting them. It is not clear whether the different Salafi parties would be able to overcome the deeply ingrained political divides among themselves, which would adversely affect their chance to succeed in the future. In addition, the fluidity of the Islamist scene poses many challenges to Salafis and to what extent Salafi parties can accommodate different voices, particularly among the young Salafis who adopt a more open and moderate vision toward democracy.

To conclude, the result of the Egyptian revolution is that neither Salafis nor other political actors will be immune from the political changes and transformations that are now shaking the country and reverberating elsewhere.


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