

# The Muslim Brotherhood: Vanguard for Political Islam

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## Objective

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- explain the nature of political Islam
- analyze the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood as agents for socio-religio-political Islamic reform:

## Materials

Student Handout: **The Muslim Brotherhood: Vanguard for Political Islam**

## Key Questions

- What is political Islam?
  - What role does Egypt play in the rise of modern political Islam?
  - What is the Muslim Brotherhood?
  - How have Sayyid Qutb and Hasan al-Hudibi contributed to the ideological foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood?
  - What impact does the Muslim Brotherhood have on U.S. Foreign policy in the Middle East?
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## Suggested Readings

Al-Hudibi, H. *Preachers, not judges.*

Al-Misri, A. 1368. *Reliance of the traveler: A classic manual of Islamic sacred law.* (translated and edited by Nuh Ha Mim Keller). Beltsville: Amana Publications, 1994.

Ayubi, N. 1991. *Political Islam: Religion and politics in the Arab world.* New York: Routledge.

El-Hodaiby, M. M. 2004. 'Islamic fundamentalism does not foster violence in the Middle East', in W. Dudley (ed.), *The Middle East: Opposing Viewpoints.* Farmington Hill, MI: Greenhaven Press.

El Fadl, K. A. 2005. *The great theft: Wrestling Islam from the extremists.* San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers

Esposito, J. 1998. *Islam: the straight path.* New York: Oxford Press.

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**Suggested  
Readings  
(continued)**

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- Kepel, G. 2002. *Jihad: The trail of political Islam*: Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Khan, M. A. 2002. *American Muslims: Bridging faith and freedom*. Beltsville: Amana Publications.
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- Kriesberg, L. 2003. *Constructive conflicts: From escalation to resolution* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Mamdani, M. 2004. *Good Muslim, bad Muslim: America, the cold war, and the roots of terror*. New York: Random House.
- Nasr, S. H. 1995. *Muhammad: Man of God*. Chicago: Kazi Publications.
- 2003. *Islam: Religion, history and civilization*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishing.
- Qutb, S. 1953. *Social justice in Islam*. (Revised Edition). (translated and revised by John Hardie and Hamid Algar). New York: Islamic Publications International. 2000.
- 1964. *Milestones*. (Revised Edition). Indianapolis: American Trust Publications. 1991.
- Ramadan, T. 2004. *Western Muslims and the future of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- The Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*) Official English Website (eds.), *Pursuing Muslim Brotherhood*. < <http://www.ikhwanweb.com> >
- The Middle East*. 2005. Tenth Edition. Washington: CQ Press
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# The Muslim Brotherhood: Vanguard for Political Islam

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## Political Islam

Islam lives and breathes within a dual worldview, private and public, encapsulated by the core foundations of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. Within the public domain, Islam emphasizes equilibrium and justice in all aspects of human life which includes social, economic, legal, military, and political realms. According to Islam, the Oneness of God is therefore contained in all things. There is no separation between religion and politics from an Islamic perspective. Islam is a complete and total way of life, where both entities share the same world. The marriage between religion and politics is formally contained within *Shariah* (Divine Law of Islam). *Shariah*, which is based on the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, provides Muslims with Islamic political and legal guidance. Comprised primary of the four schools of Islamic law, *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i*, and *Hanbali*, the *Shariah* provides guidance on everything from dietary obligations, purification baths, burials, banking and financial issues, conditions of divorce, to forms of punishment, justice, rules of warfare, and *jihad*. The *Shariah* is the official political or governmental authority of Islam.

In general terms, political Islam or Islamism is based on the premise that the foundational textual sources of Islam (*Qur'an* and *Sunna*) should shape society and politics worldwide. Political Islam represents the manifestation of the interplay between religion and politics. The first issue to confront Muslims after the death of the Prophet Muhammad was in fact a political problem, deciding on Muhammad's successor, which eventually lead to the division of Sunni, Shi'i, and Karajite Muslims. Political Islam is the creation of an Islamic State, which is elevated by using the legal guidance of the *Shariah*. It provides an Islamic system of governance for Muslims, as a legal and moral guide both in their private and public lives. Therefore, political Islam refers to Muslims and social movements who actively seek to implement Islam in the public as well as the private realm. What has become a matter of debate and concern is how *Shariah* will be implemented in non-Muslim countries.

Many Muslims subscribe to the philosophy of political Islam, which entails using the core principles of Islam to solving contemporary problems such as drug and alcohol abuse. However, they differ in the methods and styles of incorporating *Shariah*. However, Islamic socio/political movements who advocate the use of force or violence to implement an Islamic governance or *Shariah* fall under the philosophy known as radical political Islam.

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**Egypt and the  
Rise of Modern  
Political Islam**

*“There is no war without Egypt...and there is no peace without Egypt.”* Yasir Arafat 1998

Unlike many Arab states that are the product of political unification in the twentieth century, Egypt has existed as a political nation-state since ancient times. Egypt has a civilization that has been continuously recorded for more than five thousand years, which includes attaining significant political and cultural heights as a premier Islamic nation-state. Today, Egypt is regarded as the most influential and powerful Islamic nation-state in the world regarding Middle East policy, with an Arab-Muslim population exceeding 80 million. As chairman of the PLO Yasir Arafat once indicated when referring to the multi-faceted political and religious conflicts of the Middle East, “There is no war without Egypt...and there is no peace without Egypt.” However, from 525 B.C. when the last pharaoh fell to Persian invaders, until the Free Officers Coup organized by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1952, Egypt was occupied under the imperial and colonial rule of foreigners. The fallout from protracted imperial rule and subsequent decolonization of Egypt, triggered a worldwide Islamic reform movement shaping what we know as modern political Islam.

During this time-period, the social and political system of Egypt, long considered by Muslims worldwide as the “modern-day Mecca” based on its claim as the gatekeeper of the oldest and most important educational institution in the world specializing in Islamic scholarship, *Al-Azar* University in Cairo, the colonial government in power permitted alcohol, prostitution, gambling, and other activities strictly forbidden by Islam. During colonial occupation, which was highlighted by Napoleon’s conquest of Egypt in 1798, the *Shariah* was excluded from serving as the constitution and law of the state. Since the overwhelming majority of Egypt’s population was Muslim, homegrown social and political movements began to immerge, focusing on removing imperial powers from Muslim lands, restoring correct Islamic thought amongst its population, and applying the *Shariah* as a form of Islamic governance. Among the strongest and most influential of these social movements advocating religious and political reform was the Muslim Brotherhood.

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**The Muslim Brotherhood**

Modern Islamism as a political ideology and source of political activism originated in Egypt in 1928 when Hasan al-Banna established the Muslim Brotherhood (*Hizb al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*). Arguably the most influential, effective, and powerful Islamic socio-religio-political movement in the world today, the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood was a direct response to the oppressive imperial and colonial influence on Egypt's rich Islamic heritage and culture. Although technically banned in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood is represented in over 70 countries worldwide, including Europe and the United States of America, and has spawned generations of Islamic activists, both peaceful and violent, around the globe.

The goal of the Muslim Brotherhood is based on two essential principles: First, to institute Islamic *Shariah* as the fundamental governmental religio-political ideology for controlling state and society. Secondly, to help liberate Muslim countries under the control of foreign imperialism.

A number of sub-goals exist based on these two basic principles:

- Building the Muslim individual
- Building the Muslim family
- Building the Muslim society
- Building the Muslim state
- Building the *Khilafah*
- Mastering the world with Islam

Under these principles, goals, and sub-goals, the Muslim Brotherhood also supports an eight-point agenda:

1. A *Salafi* Movement.
  2. Following the *Sunna*
  3. Living the *Sufi* Way
  4. Political Activism
  5. Physical Health
  6. Scientific and Cultural Study
  7. An Economic Foundation
  8. A Social Ideology
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**The Muslim Brotherhood Creed**

*“Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.”*

The Muslim Brotherhood has historically been involved in a wide-ranging system of highly successful social programs, initiating grassroots efforts targeting the improvement of education, health, and employment training opportunities for marginalized Muslim populations throughout world. Within this framework, members of the Muslim Brotherhood have reiterated their commitment to achieving social reform under the auspice of political, legal, and nonviolent methods. Although linked by a foundational ideology, what must be clearly understood is that the Muslim brotherhood is not a monolithic movement that can be lumped into one worldview, but a social movement made of diverse cultural, ethnic, and national identities & agendas.

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**Sayyid Qutb**

Historically, various members of the Muslim Brotherhood have advocated for acts of political violence. Sayyid Qutb, historically one of the most influential members of the Muslim Brotherhood, is considered the “father of radical political Islam.” Among the many Muslim Brothers who were imprisoned under the reign of Egyptian President Nasser, Qutb produced *Signposts on the Road*, or what is more commonly referred to as *Milestones*. In his writings, Qutb elaborates on the ideas of previous Islamic political reformers such as Abdul Ala Mawdudi and Muslim Brotherhood member Hasan al-Banna; however, Qutb focused his ethos on reformulating the interpretation of the Islamic concepts of *jihad* and *jahiliyya*.

Qutb’s understanding of the Muslim obligation of *jihad* (struggle in the path of Allah) was a significant departure from traditional understanding. Qutb argued that the concept of *jihad* not only involves matters of self-defense (lesser *jihad*), but it involves the Muslim community’s ability to “freely practice Islamic beliefs” even if it entails the use of physical force to remove the political, social, and economic obstacles for establishing *Shariah*. Qutb challenged the “defensive” view of *jihad* for Muslims and argued that *jihad* is a mandatory proactive activity that seeks to establish *Shariah* on earth.

Qutb also took aim at the concept of *jahiliyya* (ignorance in the ways of Allah). Qutb re-defined *jahiliyya* under a political context, suggesting it was the corrupt modern-day sovereignty of man over man, in matters of governance. Qutb declared that all existing modern-day political institutions are unacceptable and antithetical to the spirit of Islam, and that the only acceptable political systems must be guided under the tenets of foundational texts of Islam, the *Qur’an* and *Sunna*. In this worldview, Qutb believed that any Muslim who did not follow his extreme ideology would be considered *takfir* (the act of declaring another Muslim an apostate).

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**Hasan Al-Hudibi**

Imprisoned and tortured with Sayyed Qutb in an Egypt jail was al-Banna's successor as Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hasan al-Hudibi. But from his own cell, Hudaybi wrote the text, *Doua laysa Qudah* (Preachers not Judges), condemning the use of political violence and disputing many of Qutb's extreme ideological conclusions. Al-Hudibi wrote, "only Allah could judge faith," and rejecting Qutb's notion of *takfir*, and insisting, "whoever judges that someone is no longer a Muslim deviates from Islam, and transgresses God's will by judging another person's faith." Thus, according to al-Hudibi, Muslims need to preach and educate, not condemn and threaten societies to make themselves more Islamic. would be considered *takfir* (the act of declaring another Muslim an apostate).

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**The Muslim Brotherhood and U. S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East**

The impact of the Muslim Brotherhood on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has been a topic of increased interest since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Officially banned by the Egyptian government since 1954, President Hosni Mubarak's believes the Muslim Brotherhood represents an ongoing threat to Egypt and its citizens. Using Emergency Law No. 162 of 1958, which provides the authority to arrest, detain, and interrogate Egyptian citizens suspected of terrorism-related crimes for prolonged periods of time without adhering to international standards of due process, thousands of Egyptians have been taken into custody for suspected involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood. Various Human Rights organizations have accused President Mubarak of abusing anti-terrorism legislative powers to suppress rival political parties, specifically targeting members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite the official ban and accusations of governmental abuse against the religio-socio-political movement, the Muslim Brotherhood have captured 20 percent of the seats in the Egyptian Parliament running as independents in 2005, and continue to hold prestigious position in various professional organizations throughout Egypt. As well, the Muslim Brotherhood has members actively involved in influential political positions in various Middle East countries such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. In fact, the Iraq's vice president, Tariq al-Hashemi, is the leader of Iraq's chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood's political influence also extends to Palestinian's *Hamas* and Lebanon's *Hezbollah*- both represented in their respective countries political parliaments. This places the Muslim Brotherhood's political influence at the center of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The Muslim Brotherhood is not on the U.S. State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO's), which opens the door for direct political dialogue between the United States and members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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