

- Influential Islamist organization
- Supports imposition of Shari'a law
- Approves of terrorism against Israel and the West

Founded in 1928 by the Egyptian activist **Hasan al-Banna**, the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood is one of the oldest, largest and most influential Islamist organizations. Egypt has historically been the center of the Brotherhood's operations, though the group maintains offshoots throughout the Arab-Muslim world -- including in Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, the Palestinian territories (**Hamas**), Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Sudan -- and is also active in the United States and Europe. Islam expert Robert Spencer **has called** the Muslim Brotherhood "the parent organization of **Hamas** and **al Qaeda**."

The Brotherhood was founded in accordance with al-Banna's proclamation that Islam be "given hegemony over all matters of life." Accordingly, the Brotherhood seeks to establish an Islamic Caliphate spanning the entire Muslim world. It also aspires to make Islamic (Shari'a) law the sole basis of jurisprudence and governance. Toward this purpose -- **encapsulated in the Brotherhood's militant credo: "God is our objective, the Koran is our Constitution, the Prophet is our leader, struggle is our way, and death for the sake of God is the highest of our aspirations"** -- the Brotherhood since its founding has supported the use of armed struggle, or *jihad*. The Brotherhood supports the waging of *jihad* against non-Muslim "infidels," and has expressed support for terrorism against Israel, whose legitimacy the Brotherhood does not recognize, and against the West, particularly the United States.

In the 1930s, the Brotherhood was largely an underground organization. Paramilitary in nature, it stockpiled weapons and operated clandestine camps that provided instruction in military and terrorist tactics. In part due to its call for a return to traditionalist Islamic values, and in part because of the unpopularity of the Egyptian monarchy, the Brotherhood's membership swelled throughout the Thirties, with some scholars placing its net membership at a half a million.

**In the 1940s, the Brotherhood became more assertive in challenging Egypt's ruling authorities. As a result, the government, under the direction of Prime Minister Mahmoud Fahmi Nuqrashi, forcibly dissolved the organization in 1948. In response, a Brotherhood member assassinated Nuqrashi. The government retaliated shortly thereafter: In 1949, Hasan al-Banna was killed by Egyptian police forces in Cairo and an official crackdown was launched against the Brotherhood. Thousands of members were imprisoned and many others were confined to detention camps.**

With Gamal Abdel Nasser's revolutionary seizure of power in 1954, the Brotherhood split into two factions. **One, led by Hasan al-Hudaybi, favored working with the government to gradually move the country toward Islam. A more radical faction, led by the writer and ideologue Sayyid Qutb, advocated armed revolution against corrupt Middle Eastern regimes and more broadly against unbelievers in the Western world. Dividing the world into the "Party of Allah and the Party of Satan," Qutb declared that Egyptian society under Nasser was contrary to Islam, that it would have been opposed by the Prophet Muhammad, and that Muslims therefore had both a right and an obligation to resist it.** A direct challenge to the views of mainstream Sunni theologians, who extolled the Islamic tradition of deference to the state and ruler, Qutb's writings are now cited by many scholars as one of the first formulations of political Islam. A corollary of Qutb's fundamentalist critique of Egyptian society was his abiding contempt for Western society, especially the United States, which he regarded as spiritually vacant, decadent, idolatrous and fundamentally hostile to Islamic piety. Executed in 1966 on charges of plotting to overthrow the Egyptian Government, Qutb nonetheless inspired a widespread following within the Brotherhood. **Terrorist groups like al Qaeda have today embraced his call for violence in the service of Islam.**

Outlawed in Egypt in 1954, the Brotherhood temporarily receded as a political force. It re-emerged under Anwar Sadat, a sympathizer of the group. Taking advantage of the Brotherhood's militant aversion to secularism, Sadat sponsored it against his communist and socialist political opposition. Later, however, the Brotherhood joined the political Left in opposing Sadat's peace treaty with Israel, believing the normalization of relations with Israel to be a betrayal of Islam.

With the assassination of Sadat in 1981 by a smaller radical Islamist group, the Brotherhood charted a more mainstream course, and in 1987 won many government seats in an "Islamic Alliance" with other parties. Although it remains officially banned, the Brotherhood actively participates, with success, in Egypt's parliamentary elections, running candidates as "independents" under the slogan "Islam is the Solution."

In Iraq, the Brotherhood is represented by the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). As a member of Iraq's governing council, the IIP has campaigned for the imposition of Shari'a law and, while publicly distancing itself from al Qaeda, has supported what it calls the "heroic Iraqi resistance" to coalition forces. Banned in Syria, the Brotherhood works clandestinely to foment opposition to the ruling government. In the Palestinian territories, Hamas in January of 2006 defeated the rival Fatah party to win the Palestinian legislative elections, becoming the first branch of the Muslim Brotherhood to control an official government.

Outside the Middle East, the Brotherhood has expanded its operations to the United States. The Brotherhood also reportedly exercises a strong influence in Muslim communities throughout Europe.

In recent years, the Brotherhood has attempted to forge a reputation as a moderate and reformist Islamic group that has renounced its violent past. Lending plausibility to this reputation has been criticism of the organization by radical Islamist groups, who have condemned the Brotherhood's willingness to participate in the political process as heretical. These groups have also criticized the Brotherhood for supposedly abandoning violent struggle as a means of establishing an Islamic empire.

However, numerous statements by the Brotherhood's leadership belie its moderate posture. Ali Sadreddine Bayanouni, the leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, has repeatedly disavowed violence while concurrently pledging his support for the terrorism of Hamas and Hezbollah. Muhammad Mahdi Othman Akef, a prominent leader of the Brotherhood, has expressed his support for suicide bombings in Israel and Iraq "in order to expel the Zionists and the Americans." He has also denounced the United States as a "Satan," saying: "I have complete faith that Islam will invade Europe and America, because Islam has logic and a mission." Many other leaders of the Brotherhood have likewise justified terrorism against Israel and the United States, with many defending the September 11 terrorist attacks against America. Even as it is deemed insufficiently militant by some Islamist groups, the Brotherhood has had a discernible influence on contemporary jihadist terrorism. Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the architect of 9/11, was a member of Muslim Brotherhood. More prominently still, Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood preacher, was a mentor to al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

In May 1991 the Muslim Brotherhood issued to its ideological allies an explanatory memorandum on "the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America." Explaining that the Brotherhood's mission was to establish "an effective and ... stable Islamic Movement" on the continent, this document outlined a "Civilization-Jihadist Process" for achieving that objective. It stated that Muslims "must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and 'sabotaging' its miserable house by their hands ... so that ... God's religion [Islam] is made victorious over all other religions."

