Revolt in Egypt: Explaining the Jihad in Egypt
in the 1980s-1990s

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Security Studies

By Daniel B. Fisher, B.A.

Washington, DC
November 18, 2009

Table of Contents

**Introduction**

After assassinating Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat (r. 1970-1981) in

1981, Egypt's militant Islamist groups staged few attacks over the next six

years.[1]  Then, from 1987 through 1991, and much more from 1992 through 1997,

these groups staged scores of attacks resulting in economic damage, a series of

government crackdowns, and over one thousand deaths.[2]  Why did Egyptian

militants "re-activate," i.e., resume regular violence, when they did?  A

combination of underlying and immediate factors, either internal or external to

these militant groups, best explain their return to violence.[3]

Six underlying factors, three internal and three external, will be examined.

On the group-internal side there was, first, the Afghan-Soviet War, in particular

Egyptian militants' involvement in it; secondly, changes in the character of group

membership; and, third, militants' provision of social services and 'law and

order.'  On the group-external side were, fourth, changes in Egypt's economy;

fifth, violent clashes between the state and the people; and, lastly, the decline in

---

[1] Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: repression and resistance in the Islamic world* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 33.
[2] An estimated 1,200+ deaths during 1992-7, at the height of the violence.  Denis J. Sullivan and Kimberly Jones, *Global Security Watch: Egypt: A Reference Handbook* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 48; Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 33.
[3] Two significant research limitations must be acknowledged.  First, the author is not proficient in the Arabic language, and thus has not been able to use the numerous untranslated, Arabic-language resources related to radical Islamist violence in Egypt, or to interview non-English-speakers about the topic.  Second, the nature of the relationship between conditions and events, on the one hand, and the Islamist rebellion on the other often appears uncertain.  That is, did condition "X' or event "Y" cause the revolt, did each cause the other, or were both effects of a common cause?  At minimum, it will be shown that certain factors are, if not direct causes of the rebellion, necessary to its explanation.

the regime's legitimacy.  Two immediate factors – particularly instructive for why violence erupted *when* it did – include one internal, the return of the 'Afghan' mujahedin to Egypt, and one external, government repression of the militants.

The challenge of militant Islamist movements within states remains relevant in the twenty-first century.  The phenomenon has persisted, and will persist for the foreseeable future along with the conditions that produce and sustain it.  Earlier this decade, for example, internal jihadi challenges arose in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.  Today, governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, among other countries, face comparable threats.  Comprehension of why and how Islamist insurgencies arise is necessary, though not sufficient, to avoiding them.  An historical case study, such as this one, that seeks to explain Islamist violence may contribute to this better understanding.

**Historical Background: The Rise of Radical Islamism in Egypt**

'Islamism' emerged as a major force in Egypt during the 1970s.  At its core, Islamism comprises the belief that Islam should govern all aspects of life, including public law and public morals.  The primary aim of Islamists, therefore, is the institution of *sharia*, the Islamic law code, as state law.  Despite the common denominator of sharia, Egypt's Islamists formed a loose 'umbrella' movement containing many strains.  The movement may be divided into two primary currents: moderates and radicals.  Their most important difference is one of method.  Moderates sought to achieve an Islamic state within the political

system, through gradual, legal, peaceful steps.  The most notable moderates during the 1970s were the Muslim Brotherhood or *Ikhwan*.  Radicals, on the other hand, sought to achieve an Islamic state immediately by replacing the political system.[4]  Radical Islamism included both non-violent and violent elements.  It was the latter, the militants or jihadis, who would lead the revolt against the state in the 1980s and 1990s.

Who were the Islamist militants, and what did they believe?  Although their origins are a matter of some dispute,[5] many new militant groups of the 1970s are commonly described as outgrowths of non-violent[6] university student associations (*gamiyat*), particularly in Upper Egypt and Cairo.[7]  Most important for future radical violence would be *al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Group), and *al-Jihad* (Holy War), the latter co-founded by a medical student at Cairo

---

[4] As one prominent militant theorist argued, working for Islamic state through a political party "…means working within and collaborating with the pagan state."  Muhammad al-Salam Faraj, "The Neglected Obligation," in Jim Lacey (ed.), *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America*, 40.
This view was echoed in the early 1990s by militant leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who claimed in his book *The Bitter Harvest: Sixty Years of the Muslim Brotherhood* that Brotherhood leaders neglected "jihad against tyranny (*al-taghut*)."  Quoted in Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli (eds.), *Al Qaeda in its Own Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 163.
[5] For instance, did Muslim Brotherhood members break off to form the Gamaa in the 1970s, or vice-versa, or both?  Sullivan and Jones, *Global Security Watch*, 61.
[6] The gamiyats did engage in "low-level violence on local matters."  Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics (updated edition)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim extremism in Egypt: the prophet and pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 205.
[7] Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 57-8; Kepel, *Muslim extremism*, 129-171; Henry Munson, Jr., *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Wale University Press, 1988), 79.

university, Ayman al-Zawahiri, sometime in 1973-4.[8]  Despite similar origins and

ideology – both began as campus activist movements,[9] and both sought sharia

through violence– the two groups diverged over strategy, with the Islamic Group

seeking mass uprising through mass mobilization,[10] Zawahiri and his associates a

'Free Officers'-style military coup through targeted, secret recruitment.[11]

Militants' justification for violence was both political and religious in nature.  As

the jihadis' most influential contemporary theorist wrote, Egypt's nominally

Muslim rulers were in fact apostates, and as such each Muslim had an "individual

duty" to overthrow them.[12]  The notion of jihad against "infidel rulers" as an

---

[8] Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York, Touchstone, 2002), 204; Lawrence Wright, *The looming tower: Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 40, 42.

[9] Wright, *The looming tower*, 40-1.

[10] In an interview published in 1996, Gamaa leader Talat Fuad Qasim listed "ongoing preparations for a military coup" and "mass mobilization" as the main areas of his group's work, yet offered no evidence for the former.  Hisham Mubarak, "What Does the Gama'a Islamiyya Want? (Tal'at Fu'ad Qasim, interview with Hisham Mubarak)," in Beinin and Stork, 322.

[11] Zawahiri, quoted in Montasser al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda: the story of Bin Laden's right-hand man* (London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2004), 43; Fawad A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 90-2.

[12] Muhammad al-Salam Faraj, "The Neglected Obligation," 36-43.

Islamic duty would inform the militants' revolt, years after they fulfilled their "neglected obligation" by assassinating President Sadat in October 1981.[13]

Ironically, the Islamist militant groups behind Sadat's assassination were the fruits of Sadat's own policies. Beginning in the early 1970s, Sadat had allowed Islamists, moderate and radical, greater freedom of action. The purpose was to create a counterweight to leftist or 'Nasserist' factions as Sadat opened Egypt's economy and reoriented his country toward the West and away from the Soviet Union.[14] At the same time, the self-styled 'pious president' leaned on Islam as a source of legitimacy, instead of the discredited 'Arab socialism' and 'pan-Arabism' of his predecessor Gamal Abdul Nasser (r. 1952-1970).[15] In the university system, the regime's pro-Islamist, anti-leftist approach was both a component and a microcosm of its national policy. On campus, the government not only permitted radical Islamist groups to operate but even, by one account, secretly armed one (the Gamaa) against leftist student activists.[16]

In time, Sadat's Islamist maneuver backfired. Mounting discontent with Sadat's policies and their results meant an Islamist movement that became both

---

[13] Muhammad al-Salam Faraj, "The Neglected Obligation."
[14] John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality? (Third Edition)* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 93; Stephen C. Pelletiere, *A Theory of Fundamentalism: An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of the Movement* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 28, 1995), 10.
[15] Mohamed Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat* (New York: Random House, 1983), 129, 275-6.
[16] Wright, *The looming tower*, 41.

more anti-regime and more popular.[17]  On the militant fringe, a new crop of

groups, and their periodic acts of violence, symptomized a widening gap between

the president's new direction and his people's expectations and sensibilities.[18]  By

the last few years of his presidency, Sadat faced a crisis of legitimacy.[19]  A

September 1981 crackdown against anti-regime activists and critics – almost 90

percent of whom were Islamists – was an attempt to rein in the Islamist upsurge

that Sadat had first empowered, then alienated.[20]  Instead, the president deepened

both Islamist hostility and his own isolation.  Khaled al-Islambouli, one of Sadat's

assassins, would cite the September 1981 crackdown among his motives.[21]

Hosni Mubarak (r. 1981- ), Sadat's successor as president, enjoyed several

years of relative respite from militant violence.[22]  Mass arrests made in the wake

of Sadat's assassination neutralized the jihadi movement as a major threat to

---

[17] The Islamists in particular objected to the secular nature of Sadat's rule, its permission of greater foreign (particularly, Western) investment and tourism, its liberalizing social reforms, and its de facto exclusion of Islamist opposition parties from power.  Egyptians in general, Islamists included, resented Sadat's economic opening (*infitah*) as a cause of rising inequity and corruption at home, and his 1978 and 1979 peace deals with Israel as a betrayal of Egypt's national honor and commitment to the Palestinians.  Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 19; Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, 128, 227.    Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy: Critical Essays* (Cairo; New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 75.

[18] In the Sadat era, militant violence targeted both the state—e.g., a military academy and a former minister—and what they saw as "corrupt," including video stores and tourists.  Munson, *Islam and Revolution*, 79-80; Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, 204.

[19] Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, 227.

[20] Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 21.  Sadat ordered these arrests, 1,536 in number, on September 3, 1981.  Kepel, *Muslim extremism in Egypt: the prophet and pharaoh*, 205; Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, 227-41.

[21] Al-Islambouli cited the peace with Israel, the September crackdown, and ungodly laws (as opposed to Islamic law) as his reasons.  Dilip Hiro, *War Without End: The Rise Islamist Terrorism and Global Response* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 81.

[22] Of the 1981-1985 period, one observer noted "no significant follow-up" to Sadat's assassination and a weakened militant movement.  Kepel, *Muslim extremism*, 241-2.

social peace or to the regime itself.  By 1987, however, this threat had resurfaced

in a new wave of violence, which was surpassed in the 1990s by far greater

violence.[23]  Explaining why large-scale violence resumed – indeed, reached

unprecedented levels – requires reference to general theories of revolutionary

Islamist violence.

**Why Rebellion—and was there one? Competing Theories**

Several theories exist to explain Islamist rebellion in general.  The

dominant theory, according to Mohammed M. Hafez, is "socioeconomic and

psychological."[24]  This approach focuses on relative deprivation, social alienation,

and frustrated expectations as causes of rebellion.[25]  For example, Egyptian

sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim attributes Islamic militancy to relative

deprivation.  As the wealth and privilege of Egypt's upper crust increased rapidly

relative to the rest of society, Ibrahim argues, the lower middle class especially

grew resentful and turned to militancy.[26]  R. Hrair Dekmejian emphasizes the

"social-psychological" sources of Islamic radicalism.[27]  Scholars such as Ansari,

Davis, and Arjomand stress similar causes.[28]

---

[23] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 33.
[24] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 6-9.
[25] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 6-19.
[26] Ibrahim, *Egypt Islam and Democracy*, 130.
[27] R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse University Press, 1985), 25-36.
[28] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 6.

An alternative explanation, proposed by Hafez, is what he calls the "political process approach."[29]  In this theory, whether Islamist movements become violent or peaceful depends primarily on "[t]he interplay among political environment, mobilization structures, and ideological frames."[30]  When Islamists do rebel, the cause is exclusion from and repression by the state.[31]  In the case of Egypt's 'jihad' during the 1980s-90s, all of the above variables and more contributed to it.  Apparently, all were necessary and none alone was sufficient to explain that rebellion.

Another basic point of contention in the literature on Islamic radicalism in Egypt concerns the nature of the violence during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Stephen C. Pelletiere argues that, rather than a fundamentalist revolt, as President Mubarak claimed, the violence was really three separate conflicts: (1) a clash between state security forces and pick-up rebels in Upper Egypt, (2) violence between Muslims and Christians in Cairo, instigated by Islamist radicals, and between people and police, and (3) violent confrontations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime.[32]  The situation, Pelletiere believes, was more anarchy than revolution.[33]

---

[29] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 19.
[30] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 21.
[31] In Hafez's words, "[t]he key to explaining [aggrieved individuals'] militancy is not economic stagnation or excessive secularization, but the lack of meaningful access to state institutions." Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 18, 21-2.
[32] Pelletiere, *A Theory of Fundamentalism*, 12.
[33] Pelletiere, *A Theory of Fundamentalism*, 16.

Most other accounts of the violence, on the other hand—such those by Barry Rubin,[34] Mohammed Hafez,[35] and John Esposito[36]—start from the assumption that at least some of the political violence of this time *did* represent "an organized attempt at revolution," in Pelletiere's words.[37] They cite the stated objectives of the Islamic Group and Jihad, especially, and describe actions—e.g., (attempted) assassinations of high government officials—that served a revolutionary goal. This paper will take the position that what happened was *both* non-ideological people-people and people-state conflict *and* revolutionary jihad. Further, the two were related, as radical Islamist ideology fed the Muslim-Copt battles, for instance. The relation of variables internal and external to the militant groups to the rash of violence, and to one another, gets to the question of why this rebellion occurred when and how it did.

**Underlying Factors: Internal: Afghan-Soviet War**

The Afghan-Soviet War (1979-89) experience contributed to the spike in violence in Egypt, especially in the 1990s. First, Egyptians in Peshawar, Pakistan helped to keep Jihad and the Gamaa alive during the 1980s. For Jihad, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Sayyid Imam Abdul Aziz (aka "Dr. Fadl"), serving as doctors for

---

[34] Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism.*
[35] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*.
[36] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*.
[37] Pelletiere, *A Theory of Fundamentalism*, 16.

the *mujahedin* (holy warriors), orchestrated the effort.[38]  Financially, the

Peshawar branch of Jihad fed its comrades at home, with Zawahiri's brother,

Mohammed, directing funds to Cairo through Saudi Arabia.[39]  Osama bin Laden,

who worked in Peshawar around the same time and whom Zawahiri "courted" as

an ally, gave $100,000 to al-Jihad in 1989.[40]  As for manpower, Zawahiri

recruited highly-educated and -skilled Egyptians, including "doctors, engineers,

and soldiers."[41]  With the help of Zawahiri's propaganda booklets, his allies in

Cairo enlisted other jihadis to fight in Afghanistan.[42]  Lastly, Afghanistan and,

until 1992, Pakistan,[43] simply provided refuge for Egyptian jihadists increasingly

under assault by the state at home.[44]  To the extent that personnel, fundraising,

and safe haven obtained in South Asia enabled Jihad or the Gamaa to stage

operations in Egypt, the Afghan war fueled the war on the Nile.

---

[38] Abdul Aziz was *emir* (leader) of Jihad at the time.  According to al-Zayyat, Zawahiri chose
Abdul Aziz to lead the group, then took over himself in 1992.  Wright, *The looming tower*, 122;
al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda*, 19, 28.

[39] Wright, *The looming tower*, 122.

[40] Wright, *The looming tower*, 138.

[41] Wright, *The looming tower*, 122, 128.
Al-Zayyat observes that "Zawahiri is gifted in individual persuasion and in recruiting new cadres,
because his ideas are very organized and his aims are clear."  Al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda*,
51.

[42] Specifically, members of the jihadist group led by Abbud al-Zomor.  Al-Zayyat, *The road to al-
Qaeda*, 33-4.
It should be noted that some of these Jihad recruits, like Zawahiri himself, would never return to
Egypt, ultimately becoming more important to Al Qaeda than to Jihad.  Wright, *The looming
tower*, 128.

[43] By one account, in 1992, the year the mujahedin took over Afghanistan, "Pakistan started
opposing the Arab presence…"  Jihad leader Ahmed Ibrahim al-Naggar, quoted in al-Zayyat, *The
road to al-Qaeda*, 57.

[44] Hisham Mubarak, "Gama'a Islamiyya," in Beinin and Stork, 323.

**Underlying Factors: Internal: Membership**

The change in composition – that is, membership – of Egypt's radical militant groups represented another factor in the onset of wide-scale violence. During the Sadat era university graduates and/or professionals, especially in the fields of medicine and engineering, predominated in militant groups. Many came from middle-class backgrounds or even, as in Zawahiri's case, wealth and status.[45]

As compared to the 1970s, Islamic militants in the 1980s tended to be younger, less well-educated, and less urban. This trend continued into the 1990s.[46] In the age profile, for instance, the under-20 cohort jumped from 5 percent in the 1970s, to 11 percent in the 1980s, then to 23 percent in the 1990s.[47] In formal education, the share of those with college and postgraduate degrees fell from 79 percent to 59 percent to 20 percent over the same period.[48] In residence, the large-city share shrunk by more than two-thirds, while the share from 'shantytowns' more than quadrupled.[49] The average militant was also more likely to be resident in rural Upper Egypt, as opposed to Lower Egypt or urban Upper Egypt where many earlier militants attended university. A different analysis claims that the typical militant had a lower-middle class background and a higher

---

[45] Wright, *The looming tower*, 32-3; al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda*, 16.
[46] Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 157.
[47] Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy: Critical Essays* (Cairo; New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 75.
[48] Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy*, 75.
[49] Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy*, 75.

education, with a "large" and growing share of militants from the "petty bourgeois" class.[50]

In any case, the new membership changed the character of the militant movement. Many of the new militants, particularly the poorer and less-educated, were less ideological and doctrinaire than university graduates like Mohamed al-Salam Faraj or Zawahiri. More importantly, these militants were less likely to be true revolutionaries, plotting a coup d'etat. Rather, they responded with local-level violence to perceived injustice and/or unIslamic conduct. For example, Upper Egyptians attacked tourists to protest their objectionable ways, then fought the police when the latter characteristically overreacted and overarrested locals.[51] In Cairo, poor "baladi" (rural migrant) Muslims, incited by religious rhetoric, attacked local Coptic Christians, then the police.[52] Spontaneous or self-initiated acts like these lend credence to the conclusion that, as one study held, "the violence in Egypt seem[ed] more a form of anarchy than an organized attempt at revolution."[53] On the other hand, much of the violence stemmed from calculated incitement, a reflection of the revolutionary intent of the Gamaa, Jihad, and other organized provocateurs. These militant groups were in a position to incite

---

[50] The "petty bourgeois" included "artisans, tradesmen and workers in the service sector." Salwa Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt: Discursive Struggle* (Montreal: Montreal Studies on the contemporary Arab world, May 1994), 13-4.
[51] Pelletiere, *Theory of Fundamentalism*, 13-4.
[52] Pelletiere, *Theory of Fundamentalism*, 14-5.
[53] Pelletiere, *Theory of Fundamentalism*, 16.

violence thanks to, among other things, their emerging role as providers of goods and services.

**Underlying Factors: Internal: Social Services and Social Order**

The jihadist groups' provision of social services was a cause of both the changes in their membership and their sway over a growing number of Egyptians. The background to this development was the decline of the social welfare state under Sadat and Mubarak. As the state receded as a provider, private organizations stepped forward to take its place.[54] Foremost among these was the Muslim Brotherhood, which increased its welfare activities during the 1980s.[55] Following the Ikhwan's example—and in competition with it and with one another—the Gama'a and lesser militant groups instituted their own services.[56] In a matter of years, militants across Egypt built "a network of educational and social welfare societies" that represented a power base and direct challenge to the sovereignty of the Egyptian state.[57]

An example of this phenomenon was Ain Shams, whose case was chronicled by scholar Salwa Ismail. Ain Shams was a Cairo suburb first formed of rural and urban migrants, the latter from Cairo slums seized by the government for redevelopment.[58] The neighborhood's uprooted populace and unplanned (and

---

[54] Salwa Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt: Discursive Struggle* (Montreal: Montreal Studies on the contemporary Arab world, May 1994), 14, 16.
[55] Ibrahim, *Egypt Islam and Democracy*, 60-1.
[56] Hiro, *War Without End*, 82.
[57] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 139.
[58] Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt,* 11.

hence, uncontrolled) character made it ripe for takeover by Islamist militants.[59]

According to Ismail, "Jihad members…reappropriate[d] the space and turn[ed] it

into an 'Islamic' territory under…the 'government of 'Ain Shams."[60]  Jihad

delivered social services, raised funds from locals, built mosques with those

funds, and controlled those mosques.[61]  By the late 1980s, when the militant-

government confrontation escalated, Jihad had created a sort of "state within a

state" in Ain Shams.[62]

Similar enclaves cropped up elsewhere in greater Cairo and in Upper

Egypt.[63]  Another was Western Munira, another overcrowded and undergoverned

Cairo suburb.  According to Saad Eddin Ibrahim, this "shantytown" lacked basic

public services, including police, and suffered from "violence and vice."[64]  As in

Ain Shams, Islamist militants filled the dual void of governance and security,

acting as de facto rulers for three years.[65]  State security forces battled the

militants for three weeks before reclaiming – or perhaps more accurately,

claiming for the first time – West Munira in December 1992.[66]  In return, the

'captive' populations gave their loyalty and supplied recruits to their jihadi

masters.  The upshot was the aforementioned change in the composition of the

---

[59] Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt,* 11.
[60] Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt,* 11.
[61] Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt,* 11-2.
[62] Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt,* 11-2.
[63] Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt,* 12.
[64] Ibrahim, *Egypt Islam and Democracy*, 75.
[65] Ibrahim, *Egypt Islam and Democracy*, 75.
[66] Ibrahim, *Egypt Islam and Democracy*, 75-6.

jihadi groups. More than one in three of the militants arrested and charged during

the 1990s came from shantytowns, while fewer than one in ten had during the

1970s.[67] To understand militants' ability to mobilize such elements against

Christians, foreigners, and their own government, one must understand the broad

contributing developments, including the economy.

**Underlying Factors: External: Economy**

Egypt's declining economy was a societal-level factor in the militant

Islamists' move toward violence. According to a 1996 Human Development

Report for Egypt, between 1981 and 1991, poverty rose from 16.1% to 28.6%.

By 1986, substantial drops in revenues from oil, Suez Canal tolls, Egyptian

expatriates, and tourism deepened the nation's economic stagnation.[68] In several

addresses that year, President Mubarak was remarkably candid about his

country's economic crisis. He acknowledged, for instance, the need for more

progress in urban development, infrastructure, agriculture, and other areas.[69]

Mubarak vowed that greater domestic production was the country's "main cause"

and the route to more jobs and wealth.[70] Egypt's president claimed progress

under his tenure in certain areas, including housing, electricity, communication,

---

[67] Ibrahim, *Egypt Islam and Democracy*, 75.
[68] Mubarak blamed the decline in tourism on "terrorism." Hosni Mubarak, "Speech Delivered by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak on the Occasion of the Labour Day, 1 May, 1986," 14; Hosni Mubarak, "Address by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak on the Anniversary of the October 6th Victory, 6 October 1986" (Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Information, State information service), 6; McDermott, *Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak: a flawed revolution* (London; New York: Croom Helm, 1988), 148-9.
[69] Hosni Mubarak, "1 May, 1986," 19-20.
[70] Hosni Mubarak, "1 May, 1986," 10, 18.

15

and shipping.[71] Tellingly, he also lamented "the deceit of slogans," most likely a reference to the Muslim Brotherhood's famous "Islam is the solution" motto.[72]

Yet the appeal of the Islamist message mounted amidst deepening economic distress. Islamists of all stripes promised an Islamic order cured of economic injustice and deprivation, as well as moral vice and other ills. Moreover, both non-revolutionary (e.g., the Ikhwan) and revolutionary (e.g., Jihad) organizations were increasingly delivering social welfare, earning popular appreciation and respect. Islamists organizations' rosy promises and concrete achievements meant greater support and membership. For the militants, this new strength represented a basis for their renewed attacks starting in the late 1980s. As is often the case, an economic crisis became an opportunity for the political opposition.

A primary source of Egypt's economic challenge in the 1980s was demographics. Simply, Egypt's population was growing rapidly, faster than its infrastructure and public services could accommodate.[73] President Mubarak called the rate of population increase "tremendous," "horrible," and "appalling," especially given the steep cost of providing schooling, housing, food, clothes, and

---

[71] Hosni Mubarak, "1 May, 1986," 12; Hosni Mubarak, "Speech Delivered by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak at the Beginning of the New Parliamentary Session of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council," 12 November, 1986 (Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Information, State information service), 22-4.

[72] Hosni Mubarak, "12 November, 1986," 25.

[73] By one estimate, Egypt's population increased by "about 14 to 15 million between 1981 and 1993." Tahseen Basheer, "The Egyptian State in Transition," in Phebe Marr (ed.), *Egypt at the crossroads: domestic stability and regional role* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1999), 12.

health care to millions.[74] Egypt's demographic explosion thus represented a prime source of the nation's economic woes. It also generated social problems, at least one of which contributed to the rise of Islamist violence. This was the conflict between Muslims and Copts in the cities, particularly Cairo. This problem had its roots in rural Egypt, where too few jobs drove people, especially young people, to move to the city in increasing numbers. As country to city migration grew, tensions emerged between the conservative Muslim 'baladis' and their Coptic Christian neighbors. At times Islamist ideologues, especially preachers, inflamed anti-Christian sentiment to the point of violence. The increasing frequency of anti-Copt attacks helped account for the overall rise in violence during the late-1980s and early 1990s.

**Underlying Factors: External: Political Exclusion**

Economic or social problems are not sufficient to explain the anti-Copt or anti-tourist violence, however. The Mubarak regime's continued exclusion of the political opposition from genuine power represented another external factor in the Islamist violence. As under Nasser and Sadat, the Republic under Mubarak was that in name only, with a parliament and elections masking one-party rule. The Muslim Brotherhood, the leading opposition group, was not permitted to register as a political party.[75] Other political parties were allowed to operate openly, to

---

[74] Hosni Mubarak, "1 May, 1986," 19; Hosni Mubarak, "12 November, 1986," 19, 23.
[75] Bjorn Otav Utvik, *Islamist Economics in Egypt: The Pious Road to Development* (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 62.

take part in elections, and to serve in parliament. But the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) manipulated elections in its own favor, and the parliament had become a 'rubber stamp' for the president. As Egypt's accidental president stayed in office, winning re-election in 1987, any hopes for democratic reform faded.[76]

Of Egypt's excluded opposition, by far the most significant element was the Islamists, above all the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood, whose slogan "Islam is the solution" summed up its philosophy, sought to Islamize Egypt. In particular, the Ikhwan called for national rule of sharia, an end to foreign influences in Egyptian life, and a repeal of the peace treaty with Israel, among other things.[77] While officially banned from politics, some Brotherhood candidates ran and were elected to parliament under other affiliations.[78] Yet participation in an impotent legislature brought the Brotherhood no closer to its ultimate goals. Continued frustration and exclusion of Islamists were preconditions for Islamist violence in two respects. First, these facts meant that basic Islamist goals remained unrealized, and had no prospect of realization under the secular regime. Thus, the *raison d'etre* of groups like the Gamaa and Jihad remained intact. Second, the Mubarak government's refusal to share power with the most popular opposition group sapped its legitimacy as the trustee of the

---

[76] Hiro, *War Without End*, 89.
[77] Hiro, *War Without End*, 88.
[78] Munson, *Islam and Revolution*, 81.

public interest, allowing revolutionary militant groups to gain traction and recruits.[79]

**Underlying Factors: External: Regime Legitimacy**

Low regime legitimacy—that is, little public confidence that the regime was representing and serving the people effectively—was the net effect of the socio-economic problems and political defects in Mubarak's Egypt. It must be noted that Mubarak did not start with a clean slate. He inherited the problems and attendant unpopularity of his predecessor, Sadat, who himself had inherited the ills of the Nasser era. Nonetheless, the history did not matter to ordinary Egyptians, who cared only that the state of their nation continued to deteriorate. The monopoly on power of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) meant that Mubarak and his allies took the full brunt of popular ire over the country's ills.[80]

In part springing from, and capitalizing on, Egypt's economic and political woes, the 'Islamization' of society also undermined the legitimacy of the secular state. The Islamic trend manifested itself in several aspects of Egyptian life. In parliamentary elections, Muslim Brotherhood candidates made unprecedented gains in the 1984 and 1987 contests.[81] In professional and student associations, Islamists increasingly dominated—for example, at Cairo University, where they

---

[79] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 155.
[80] Pelletiere, *Theory of Fundamentalism*, 17.
[81] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 42.

won 406 of 466 seats in the 1986-7 student elections.[82]  In the service and

business sectors, the Muslim Brotherhood and, as we have seen, certain jihadi

groups created an alternative network of banks, schools, medical clinics, and the

like.[83]  Finally, in the society at large, popular customs and attitudes became more

Islamic, as shown, for example, in the growing prevalence of Islamic dress and

increasing rates of mosque attendance.[84]  As for the Mubarak government, despite

limited concessions to its people's intensifying religiosity, the regime could never

be more Islamic than the Islamists—a net negative for its popularity.  For their

part, the Islamists helped their own cause by ameliorating some of the problems

which underlay their movement.

Regime illegitimacy was thus bound up with people's hunger for an

alternative.  The same set of social, economic, and political ills fed both, and both

in turn enhanced the appeal of the opposition, especially the Muslim Brotherhood

and the Islamists.  As conditions worsened for many year on year, yet peaceful

Islamists remained shut out of power, the appeal of violent 'jihad' increased.

---

[82] Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism,* 69.
Ibrahim notes that "[h]istorically, [university student elections] have been a sensitive barometer of
Egyptian public opinion." Ibrahim, *Egypt Islam and Democracy*, 47.
For a detailed account of Islamists' ascendancy in the professions during the 1980s and 1990s, see
Carrie Rosefsky Wickham's chapter "Islamic Mobilization and Political Change: The Islamist
Trend in Egypt's Professional Associations," in Beinin and Stork (eds.), *Political Islam: Essays
from* Middle East Report (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997),
120-135.
[83] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 133.
[84] Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism,* 63-78; Hiro, *War Without End*, 94-5.

**Immediate Factors: Internal: The Return of the 'Afghans'**

The return of Egyptian mujahedin from Afghanistan and Pakistan in the

early 1990s probably contributed to the spike in violence around the same time.

The war had provided foreign fighters an education in guerrilla warfare. The

Afghanistan/Pakistan theater represented what Zawahiri described as "an

incubator…where [a jihadist movement] can acquire practical experience in

combat, politics, and organizational matters."[85] During the Afghan-Soviet War,

thousands of non-Afghan Muslims flocked to Pakistan and Afghanistan to wage

'jihad' against the infidel invaders. Among these mujahedin were an estimated

2,000 Egyptians, of whom an estimated 800 returned to Egypt and joined

revolutionary Islamist groups there.[86] These former 'Afghan Arabs' brought

valuable experience in combat, weapons, and bomb-making.[87] In addition, the

foreign mujahedin's victory over the Soviet Union, and its subsequent collapse,

appears to have boosted their self-confidence as holy warriors and solidified their

---

[85] Quoted in Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 154-55. According to Gerges, many foreign volunteers became mujahedin in Afghanistan for this purpose, as preparation for "the real battle to come" against their respective home governments. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 98. Gamaa leader Talat Fuad Qasim cited protection from the Egyptian state and, most importantly, military training as reasons for Gamaa members joining the Afghan jihad. Hisham Mubarak, "Gama'a Islamiyya," in Beinin and Stork, 323. For Zawahiri in particular, al-Zayyat describes "[his] mission of regrouping the *jihadi* movement in Egypt from Afghanistan." Al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda*, 33.
[86] The estimate of unnamed "Egyptian officials." Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 25. By one estimate, 300-700 members of Jihad fought in Afghanistan. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 157.
[87] Miller, *God*, 25. Gamaa leader Talat Fuad Qasim, for instance, recalled that "[p]ractically, militarily, in intelligence gathering, and in the spread of our message, we [al-Gamaa] learned a lot [in Afghanistan]." Hisham Mubarak, "Gama'a Islamiyya," in Beinin and Stork, 323.

belief that God was on their side.[88]  If the soldiers of God could defeat a mighty

empire, the thinking went, surely they could succeed against their native regimes

in generally small countries.[89]

Analyses have differed over the returning jihadis' significance in Egypt's

Islamist violence.  The latter increased, notes one history, when veterans began

repatriating in 1990, suggesting a causal link.[90]  Another study argues that "jihadis

played a pivotal part in igniting the spark that lit regional fires in the early

1990s."[91]  The Egyptian government, and its Algerian and Tunisian counterparts,

likewise saw the influx as an important factor.[92]  With respect to Jihad, one

account relates how its leader Zawahiri reluctantly authorized operations within

Egypt, beginning in 1993, because "[his followers] wanted to put the good

military training they had received in Afghanistan to use."[93]  The CIA's chief

spymaster for the Middle East, on the other hand, held that the radical

insurgencies in Egypt and Algeria were primarily homegrown, and explainable

---

[88] Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 84-5; Preface by Ahmed Fekry and Sara Nimis, in al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda*, xviii.
[89] The same lesson would inform Al Qaeda's war against the U.S. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 84-5
[90] Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, 205.
Perhaps the more significant correlation centers on the year 1992, when (a) Islamist violence in Egypt shot up, and (b) many Arab fighters left Afghanistan in the wake of the mujahidin victory over the Communist government in Kabul in April of that year.  Al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda*, 54-6, and 57, citing Ahmed Ibrahim al-Naggar; Hiro, *War Without End*, 91.
[91] Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 98.
[92] Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 261.
[93] Notably, an additional motive was competition with the Gamaa, which staged numerous attacks in the early 1990s.  Al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda*, 60-1.

without reference to the returnees.[94]  Yet another perspective stresses Sudan and

Yemen, particularly the latter, as refuges for Jihad veterans of Afghanistan and

"temporary stages" for their operations in Egypt.[95]  In all, the evidence appears

inconclusive regarding the effect of the 'Afghan' homecoming.  However, if one

credits Egyptian government claims about hundreds of jihadists returning and

resuming violence just as attacks increased drastically nation-wide, it stands to

reason that the returnees contributed to the upswing.

**Immediate Factors: External: State Repression**

While doubts persist about the Afghans' role in triggering jihadist violence

in Egypt, there can be no doubt about the role of state repression.  In the late

1980s, and again in the early 1990s, police action against Islamist militants

brought forth a violent response from both militants and sympathetic locals.  The

Ain Shams clashes of 1988 represent one example of the latter.  State security

forces, seeking escaped Jihad prisoners, invaded Ain Shams and other poor Cairo

neighborhoods in July of that year.[96]  Mass arrests, mosque closures, a heavy

street presence, and civilian casualties enraged residents, who incurred more of

the same as they protested and resisted the police.[97]  One round of people-police

clashes, in August, occurred when the latter attempted to arrest two accused Jihad

---

[94] Frank Anderson, head of the Near East Division of the CIA's Directorate of Operations.  Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 260-1.

[95] Jihad leader Ahmed Ibrahim al-Naggar recalled being told in 1993 by a fellow Jihad leader in Yemen that Yemen served as a training ground and place of departure for operations in Egypt.  Al-Zayyat, *The road to al-Qaeda*, 55-8.

[96] Baker, *Islam without Fear*, 85.

[97] Baker, *Islam without Fear*, 85-6.

members charged with plotting the assassination of state officials.[98]  Similar

clashes recurred in December.[99]  As scholar of Egyptian Islamism Raymond

Baker observed about the on-and-off conflict, "[c]lashes in the streets, originally

between militants and the police, increasingly [became] little more than a battle

between the regime's security forces and the common people from a poor quarter

of Cairo."[100]

The dual nature of the Ain Shams battle illustrates the entanglement of the

conflict between the state and the jihadis, on the one hand, and the state and

jihadist supporters and suspected accomplices on the other.  Each conflict fed the

other, as government interventions prompted by, and directed against, the militant

threat morphed into a cycle of attack and counterattack between security forces

and impromptu rebels.  The latter were typically motivated by anger toward

heavy-handed security measures—including wounding or killing civilians—and a

desire for revenge against the enforcers.  Moreover, in some cases, such as Ain

Shams, the street fighters and ad-hoc insurgents were products of a radical

Islamist "state within a state."  As such, their militant overlords had likely both

provided for and indoctrinated them along with the whole community.  So

indebted, and influenced, the residents of Ain Shams and comparable

neighborhoods were more likely to defend local jihadis against government force.

---

[98] By one account, the Interior Minister's charges about assassination plots were
"unsubstantiated."  Baker, *Islam without Fear*, 86.
[99] Baker, *Islam without Fear*, 86.
[100] Baker, *Islam without Fear*, 86-7.

State repression likewise precipitated violence by the militants themselves on a number of occasions. For instance, in May 1987, an ex-interior minister who had fought the militants was injured in an assassination attempt.[101] In October 1990, the Gamaa assassinated the speaker of Egypt's parliament as revenge for the murder of a Gamaa spokesman.[102] In addition, the group established an armed wing that year "as a result of growing confrontations with the regime."[103] Several years later, Gamaa leader Talat Fuad Qasim, asked when his group would expand operations to target industry and agriculture, replied that it "depends on government hostility toward us."[104] Yet the relationship between state countermeasures and militant action worked both ways. For instance, Qasim acknowledged that the Gamaa's expansion into Lower Egypt in the mid-late 1980s prompted the initial "clamp down" by state security forces.[105] Mutual provocation appears inherent to insurgency-counterinsurgency, where rebel and state vie for common territory and population, and few injuries suffered pass unavenged. The challenge of low-provocation, high-effectiveness counter-militant operations belongs a broader set of counterinsurgency problems, for which the Egyptian experience provides examples to be emulated and avoided.

---

[101] Hiro, *War Without End*, 89.
[102] Hiro, *War Without End*, 90.
[103] Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 131-2.
[104] Hisham Mubarak, "Gama'a Islamiyya," 321.
[105] Hisham Mubarak, "Gama'a Islamiyya," 323.

**Conclusion: Lessons and Policy Implications**

Egypt's struggle with militant Islam suggests several lessons for governments facing a violent Islamist challenge—in particular how to prevent or contain it. The first is not to create, sponsor, or tolerate Islamist radical or militant groups, as state encouragement tends to backfire when militants turn on the government. In the case of Sadat, the potential of official permissiveness to 'boomerang' was realized with a vengeance, as we have seen. Whatever the short-term benefits of this approach, from a regime standpoint, they were easily outweighed by the longer-term harm wrought by Islamist violence. The problem of an Islamist militant 'Frankenstein'[106] turning on its state sponsor is not unique to Egypt, as witnessed by Pakistan's recent history, for example. Nor is it unique to Islamic countries: Israel initially supported Hamas as a counterweight against Fatah, and the U.S. backed future enemies in the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union. If a state's policies or even existence are anathema to radical Islamists, cultivating the latter is likely to prove a dangerous error.

The second lesson, expanding on the first, is that no government should empower an Islamist movement, or rest its legitimacy on Islam, unless it plans to fulfill the Islamist program. Failure to do so will leave the Islamist opposition strengthened and embittered, at the expense of a weakened regime. In the 1970s, Sadat's readmission of the Muslim Brotherhood into public activism, together

---

[106] This term has been applied to "the new strain of Moslem fundamentalism" fostered by Sadat. Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, 128-35.

with Islamic rhetoric and gestures, created an increasingly powerful and disappointed Islamist movement.  Under Mubarak, there was continued tension between Islamist demands – above all, for the implementation of sharia – and the regime's policies and secular character.  This tension contributed to the resurgence of jihadi groups and radical violence in the late 1980s.[107]

Third, if a violent Islamist threat does materialize, the state should aim to "nip it in the bud."  That means banning meetings and publications, denying militants platforms such as mosques from which they can proselytize and recruit, and arresting key leaders.  During the mid- to late 1980s, the Egyptian government missed a window of opportunity to neutralize the jihadist movement while it was fledgling and vulnerable.  Instead, militants used the time to organize, recruit, build popular support, and establish islands of de facto sovereignty.[108]  Consequently, by the time the government set about destroying the militants in the 1990s, the cost in lives and socio-economic disruption was probably far greater than it would have been a decade earlier.

Fourth, a qualification to preventive suppression, is the caveat that coercion against militants should be as targeted as possible.[109]  In general,

---

[107] As one study perceptively explained, "The state's own contribution to the Islamization of Egypt… has paved the way for increasing the popularity of the Islamists, who will always have a stronger Islamic social and political agenda than that of the government.  This is a battle that the government can never win."  Century Foundation, *Defeating the Jihadists*, 77.
[108] The Gamaa, for instance, was "contained" yet tolerated during the 1980s.  Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 82.
[109] By the same token, non-violent, covert infiltration and disruption of militant groups would be most precise and carry the least risk of backfiring.

indiscriminate arrests and violence play into militants' hands by turning aggrieved

civilians against the state.  Of these victims, many become sympathizers or

supporters of the jihadis.  Some even join their insurgency as pick-up rebels.

Time and again, police actions had these effects in Egypt's war against Islamist

militants.  Most dramatic, if not typical, was the arrest of radical student leader

Mohamed al-Islambouli in Sadat's September 1981 dragnet—an event that drove

his brother, Khaled, to assassinate the president the following month.[110]  In the

end, a mix of precisely targeted round-ups and broader 'sweeps' helped defeat the

revolt.  Yet, counterintuitively, the latter also helped prolong it.  Even the former

can degenerate into a broad people-police clash, as in Ain Shams in 1988.  The

only state response to militants that carries no risk of immediate backlash,

complete passivity, carries a graver risk of an entrenched jihadi movement in the

medium-term.  In order to maximize precision in counter-militant operations,

security forces must be as well-trained and -disciplined for this mission as time,

resources, and competing demands allow.

Fifth, corollary to the imperative for precision in counter-radical

repression, those prisoners who are identified as militants should generally be

kept in prison.[111]  Unless the authorities are confident that jailed militants will not

resume violence or other subversive activity upon release, the risk of 'recidivism'

---

[110] Kepel, *Muslim extremism,* 205, 211.

[111] The caveat to this principle is that the state must take care that prison does not become a nest for further conspiracies or recruitment, as was the case with the jihadis in the early-mid 1980s. The surest route to deny this outcome may be solitary confinement and/or dispersal of militants in the prison system.

will likely outweigh any potential benefits.  In Egypt, the 1984 release of

prisoners implicated in Sadat's assassination allowed many jihadis to "[reignite]

our activities and [regain] our following," as one Gamaa leader later boasted.[112]

Some ex-prisoners became 'Afghans', whose role in anti-state violence has been

analyzed.  The radicalizing effect that prison – and, oftentimes in Egypt, torture –

can have on people is another argument against releasing militants carelessly.[113]

As for the benefits of Mubarak's 1984 decision, Islamist gratitude or placation

was not forthcoming, as evidenced by a surge of calls for sharia law the following

year, or by the rise of militant violence thereafter.  The imprisoned militants'

release demonstrates how complacency and excessive leniency can aid militant

movements, particularly in their initial growth or recovery.

   Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a government threatened by

Islamist revolt must address the underlying societal-level factors which helped (or

may help) give rise to violent movements.  On the socioeconomic dimension, this

means avoiding a sudden increase in inequality, which feeds a sense of relative

deprivation that may, in turn, raise the currency of radical and/or violent

solutions.  Likewise, the government should narrow any gap between popular

expectations and achievable reality.  Frustrated economic expectations or the

prospect of the same, if not always common to Egypt's militants, characterized

---

[112] Hisham Mubarak, "Gama'a Islamiyya," in Beinin and Stork, 323.
[113] Zawahiri, for one, was said to have been transformed by his experience of prison and torture
into a "violent and implacable extremist" with "an overwhelming desire for revenge."  See Wright,
*The looming tower*, 52-8.

their popular supporters.  Certain public demands become fixed, however.  By the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, the Egyptian people had become accustomed to a certain level of state-provided social services.  When public provision increasingly falls short of popular demand, as it did in Egypt at this time, an opportunity exists for militants to fill the gap and gain both a political constituency and a safe haven in the process.  From a counterinsurgency standpoint, the state must deny this outcome by filling the governance gap.  If incapable of doing so, the government should consider enlisting non-violent opposition groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to assume the responsibility for social welfare as a last resort against radical encroachment.

On the political dimension, the challenged regime must weigh the benefits and risks of reforms with potential to avert or weaken an Islamist revolt.  One is sharing power with the Islamists in particular and the people in general, assuming both are excluded to begin with.  Optimally, political reform would isolate 'hard-core' jihadists – whose ideology typically rejects participation in a non-Islamic system – and limit their popular support to negligible levels.  On the other hand, a failed experiment in political inclusion may discredit both democracy and moderate Islamism, strengthening the radical argument that revolution is needed to achieve an Islamic society.  Alternatively, the regime could co-opt the agenda of the radical Islamists, including the militants, by instituting sharia law and other Islamizing reforms.  If perceived as genuine, cooption holds the potential to

30

divide and weaken a militant movement.  In both the inclusion and cooption

approaches, however, the regime must manage expectations so that reforms do

not strengthen rather than weaken the jihadis.

If these lessons apply to 'native' governments directly challenged by

Islamist violence, what are the implications for U.S. policy?  For U.S. friends and

allies, such as Egypt or Saudi Arabia, the American response should have a

twofold purpose: prevention and repression.  If an internal jihad is potential or

incipient, U.S. efforts should focus on prevention.  Prevention entails helping the

foreign state avoid or ameliorate the underlying conditions that may engender

Islamist violence.  U.S. support for insurgency prevention can take three broad

forms: material aid, diplomatic pressure, and counsel or advice.  Material aid—

e.g., loans, debt cancellations, economic aid—allows the threatened state to

enhance both public services and central government presence, thus denying

openings to militants.  Diplomatic pressure would consist in promised rewards or

punishments, such as increased or decreased material aid, depending on the

foreign regime's progress (or lack thereof) in addressing 'root causes' of Islamist

rebellion.  U.S. official advice, finally, would counsel the foreign government

against policies that we believe increase the likelihood of rebellion—for instance,

political exclusion of the Islamist opposition or ceding pockets of sovereignty

(states-within-states) to anti-regime elements.

The limitations to U.S. preventive measures are clear.  Material support

may not reduce socio-economic inequity; rather, it may exacerbate it if foreign

officials use the aid to enrich themselves.  Diplomatic pressure may fail for lack

of U.S. leverage, and hence influence: How credible is an American threat to cut

off an ally when doing so threatens our own interests?[114]  Milder threats carry

greater credibility, but, by the same token, less potential to induce change.

American counsel, detached from rewards or penalties, may safely be ignored by

the foreign government.

If, on the other hand, an internal jihad is fully underway, U.S. efforts

should focus on repression.  American support may include expanded financial

assistance, arms transfers, military training, and intelligence sharing.  The U.S.

supports the Saudi monarchy in these ways, for instance, and could increase or

modify them as needed in the event of a jihadist challenge there.  The

qualification for U.S. assistance against this or any sort of internal threat is that its

acceptance will not harm the foreign regime more than it helps it.  Above all,

American involvement must not do prohibitive damage to the embattled regime's

legitimacy by making it appear to be America's puppet or fighting America's war

(e.g., the Shah's Iran, Pakistan since 9/11).  In light of this risk, discretion or

secrecy in assistance may limit its corrosive effect on the foreign government's

legitimacy.  But the value of concealment is itself limited by two tendencies: for

---

[114] The classic problem of a great power's leverage (or lack thereof) over an endangered ally has confronted U.S. foreign policy countless times, most recently in Afghanistan.  See "In Leaning on Karzai, U.S. Has Limited Leverage," *New York Times*, 11 November 2009.

sensitive intergovernmental security assistance to become publicized, and for exaggerated rumors about U.S. foreign policy to be accepted as fact on Middle East streets. U.S. policy-makers, therefore, should carefully weigh the expected benefit and cost of security assistance to foreign-regime efforts against jihad.

In Egypt's case, once the battle was joined, the government prevailed against the jihadists. By the turn of the century, terrorism and other forms of Islamist political violence were no longer major problems. Mubarak's regime had achieved this on its own, with little if any substantial outside assistance—that is, beyond its usual foreign aid receipts, notably U.S. economic and military aid. Rather than conciliating or co-opting the opposition with greater 'Islamization' or political inclusion, Cairo made few concessions on the former and curtailed the latter. The regime's legitimacy vis-à-vis the jihadists rose as terrorist attacks revolted more and more Egyptians. Mass arrests, jailings, torture, and executions broke the back of the jihadist movement and many individual militants.[115] In essence, the government's victory was one of and for the status quo. Conditions that had helped give rise to militancy, such as the prevalence of political Islam and its exclusion from power, have persisted in the new millennium. Whether Mubarak and his successors can retain a monopoly on power without fundamental reforms or another Islamist rebellion remains to be seen.

---

[115] Arrests of Islamist militants totaled more than 47,000 from 1992 through 1997. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, 86.

**Bibliography**

<u>Books</u>

Beinin, Joel and Stork, Joe (eds.).  *Political Islam: Essays from* Middle East Report.  Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

Bergen, Peter L.  *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*.  New York, Touchstone, 2002.

The Century Foundation.  *Defeating the Jihadists: A Blueprint for Action.*  New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2004.

Coll, Steve.  *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*.  New York: The Penguin Press, 2004.

Dekmejian, R. Hrair. *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*.  Syracuse University Press, 1985.

Esposito, John L.  *The Islamic threat: myth or reality?*  New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Gerges, Fawaz A.  *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*.  Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Hafez, Mohamed M.  *Why Muslims Rebel: repression and resistance in the Islamic world*.  Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

Heikal, Mohamed.  *Autumn of fury: the assassination of Sadat*.  New York: Random House, 1983.

Hiro, Dilip.  *War without end: the rise of Islamist terrorism and global response*.  London; New York: Routledge, 2002.

Ibrahim, Saad Eddin.  *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy: Critical Essays*.  Cairo; New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2002.

Ismail, Salwa.  *Radical Islamism in Egypt: Discursive Struggle*.  Montreal: Montreal Studies on the contemporary Arab world, May 1994.

Kepel, Gilles.  *Muslim extremism in Egypt: the prophet and pharaoh*.  Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Kepel, Gilles and Milelli, Jean-Pierre (eds.).  *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Lacey, Jim (ed.).  *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America*.  Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008.  Chapter 4, "The Neglected Obligation," Muhammad al-Salam Faraj.

McDermott, Anthony.  *Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak: a flawed revolution*. London; New York: Croom Helm, 1988.

Marr, Phebe.  *Egypt at the crossroads: domestic stability and regional role*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1999.

Miller, Judith.  *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East*.  New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Munson, Jr., Henry.  *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East*.  New Haven, CT: Wale University Press, 1988.

Pelletiere, Stephen C.  *A Theory of Fundamentalism: An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of the Movement*.  Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 28, 1995.

Rubin, Barry.  *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics (updated edition)*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Sullivan, Denis Joseph.  *Global security watch--Egypt: a reference handbook*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2008.

Utvik, Bjorn Olav.  *Islamist Economics in Egypt: The Pious Road to Development*.  Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006.

Wright, Lawrence.  *The looming tower: Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11*.  New York: Knopf, 2006.

al-Zayyat, Montasser.  *The road to al-Qaeda: the story of Bin Laden's right-hand man*.  London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2004.

Primary Sources

Mubarak, Hisham.  "What Does the Gamaʻa Islamiyya Want?"  (Talʻat Fuʼad Qasim, interview with Hisham Mubarak).  In Beinin, Joel and Stork, Joe (eds.). *Political Islam: Essays from* Middle East Report.  Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

Mubarak, Hosni.  "Speech Delivered by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak on the Occasion of the Labour Day, 1 May, 1986."  Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Information, State information service.

Mubarak, Hosni.  "Address by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak on the Anniversary of the October 6th Victory, 6 October 1986." Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Information, State information service.

Mubarak, Hosni.  "Speech Delivered by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak at the Beginning of the New Parliamentary Session of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council," 12 November, 1986.  Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Information, State information service.