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IN THE ARAB
WORLD AND
THE 2006
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Amr Hamzawy

Dina Bishara

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Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Publications Department
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-483-7600
Fax: 202-483-1840
www.CarnegieEndowment.org

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About the Authors

Amr Hamzawy is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C., and a noted Egyptian political scientist. He received his Ph.D. from the Free University of Berlin, where he taught Arab politics. Previously, Hamzawy taught at Cairo University and acted as an external expert on Middle Eastern Politics for the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. His research interests include the changing dynamics of political participation in the Arab world, with a special focus on Egypt and the Gulf countries, and the political role of Islamist movements. He is the author of *Contemporary Arab Political Thought: Continuity and Change* (in German, 2005).

Dina Bishara is a research assistant in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and assistant editor of Carnegie's *Arab Reform Bulletin*. Bishara was a junior fellow in the Democracy and Rule of Law Project in 2005–2006. She graduated from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, with a B.A. in Political Science.

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crossed dangerous lines, polarizing their societies further and jeopardizing cooperation with regimes on significant political reforms.

The intensity and sustainability of the Islamist reaction to regional crises depend on how close the specific movement is geographically to the crisis in question and on how close the movement's historical ties to the Arab-Israeli conflict are. Throughout the five weeks of the Lebanon war the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian IAF were the most engaged among the region's Islamic movements. The Muslim Brotherhood gradually stepped up its criticism of the Egyptian government, Israel, and the United States. The Lebanon war coincided with a period of tense relations between the IAF and the Jordanian regime. The IAF's unusually harsh rhetoric toward the Jordanian government's official position has only exacerbated these tensions. Despite the immediate popular gains for both movements, they have created an environment in which they will have a harder time functioning politically.

THE EGYPTIAN MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, established in 1928, is the oldest and largest active Sunni Islamist movement in the Arab world. Although officially banned since 1954, the Brotherhood has participated regularly in parliamentary elections by fielding independent candidates. In the 2005 elections, it became the most significant opposition group in the Egyptian political arena, having won 20 percent of the seats in the People's Assembly, the lower house of the parliament.

Aside from a few brief periods of relaxation, the Brotherhood has for several decades followed a pattern of controlled confrontation with the regime. The regime has shifted continually between selective repression of the Brotherhood, with legal proscription of the group and punishment of its members,² and toleration of the movement's limited participation in Egyptian politics. The Brothers, having experienced the harshness of the state apparatus, have gradually focused on building popular constituencies through their religious work and the provision of social services. They have come to play an important opposition role, primarily through their participation in elections for parliament and for the leadership of professional syndicates, which play an important role in Egyptian politics. Despite the tensions that have marked relations between the regime and the Brotherhood, neither has sought open confrontation. Each knows that the cost would be high: the regime lacks broad support and thus does not want to face off against a popular movement; the Brotherhood, a nonviolent movement, cannot confront head-on a regime in control of a brutal security police force, compliant courts, and an army trained to fear Islamist sentiments.

The last few years have seen increasing political activity in Egypt, leading to the amendment of the constitution to permit the first multicandidate presidential elections, held in September 2005. The regime, however, ruled out the possibility of a candidate from the Brotherhood, imposing impossible conditions in the amended article. On the other hand, the Brotherhood had unheard-of freedom in 2005 to protest and organize mass meetings in various areas of the country. After the parliamentary elections of November-December 2005, and despite systematic government manipulation, representation of opposition parties and movements rose from 31 seats in the 2000–2005 People's Assembly to 104 seats. President Hosni Mubarak's regime accepted the Brothers' unprecedented electoral gains and has not, as yet, chosen to dissolve the People's Assembly.

Although the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has always been concerned with the problem of Palestine and the twists and turns of the Arab-Israeli conflict, regional concerns had become less important over the last few years. Domestic political change caused the Brotherhood to focus on constitutional and democratic reform at home. Yet events in the occupied Palestinian territories after the victory of Hamas in legislative elections pushed the movement to return to regional affairs. The Brothers viewed the Israeli and Western isolation of the new Palestinian government as a plot to make the first democratically elected Islamist government in the Arab world fail and as a result stepped up their open criticism of Western, primarily American, policies in the Arab world as well as of the Egyptian regime, a friend of Israel and ally of the West.³

The Islamist Resistance Narrative

The Muslim Brotherhood viewed the Lebanon War of 2006 as another round in the confrontation between the *umma* (Muslim community) and “the American-supported Zionist plot” to control the Middle East. From the outset of the military escalation on July 12, the Brotherhood called on Muslims to support what it sees as the legitimate resistance of Hizbollah to “the onslaught of the Zionist gangs” and condemned Arab regimes’ failure to protect Lebanon.

The Brotherhood’s view of the war stems from its belief that Islam embodies a culture of resistance that will free the Middle East and the world from American hegemony abetted by Israel and submissive Arab leaders. Islam, in this view, has been kept down for centuries by Western conspiracies and authoritarian Arab regimes but is now resurgent. The Brotherhood sees Islam, with Hizbollah as its legitimate instrument, spearheading a political and social transformation of the region, as well as global realignment. Foreign as this interpretation of history and agenda for the future may seem to Americans, it resonates with many Muslims.

In an open letter to all Muslims after the deaths of hundreds of Lebanese civilians in Israeli raids, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Mahdi Akif, stressed that “Islam today is reclaiming its role of leadership against the Western Zionist plot. This is the role that the West has long wanted to strip it of.”⁴ The Arab-Israeli conflict is transformed in the Brothers’ rhetoric from a struggle over land and sovereignty into a struggle between Islam and the Zionists and their allies, who, according to Akif, “are consumed with desire for more Arab and Islamic blood to extinguish years and centuries of hatred.”⁵

Thus far, there is nothing new in the essence of the Muslim Brotherhood’s reading of the conflict with Israel, as affirmed since the movement’s founding in the group’s literature and programs. But the qualitative change in the vocabulary and semantic structures used to describe the conflict, and its increased significance in the Brothers’ rhetoric, are worth noting. Expressions such as “Zionist gangs” took the place of the “Zionist entity” in references to Israel, indicating a more thoroughgoing moral and political exclusion of the Israeli state and society.⁶ Instead of being contained within the Brotherhood’s broader narrative on the crises of the *umma*, the Arab-Israeli conflict became the primary issue in which all other issues—reform, development, identity—are subsumed. An examination of the Brotherhood’s electoral platform for 2005, and, beyond that, most of the Brotherhood’s statements over the last two years, especially the weekly messages of the Supreme Guide, reveals that the Brotherhood’s energies had turned to the challenges of reform in Egypt. Consideration of regional issues such as the situations in Iraq and Palestine is not absent, but its limited importance is clear. In fact, such issues are referred to only once in the Brotherhood’s

electoral platform, very briefly, in the context of a discussion on Egyptian national security.⁷ Then the war in Lebanon, along with events in Palestine after the Hamas victory, reordered the Brotherhood's priorities, propelling the "existential conflict" of the Muslim community with "Zionism" to the top of the list.

From the beginning of the war, the Brotherhood used the fighting to justify its criticism of Cairo, relying on popular discontent with the official position. The Mubarak regime held Hizbollah responsible for igniting hostilities with its reckless adventure with the Israeli troops and denied the Islamist resistance military assistance. Nevertheless, in the first days of the war, the Brotherhood limited itself to exhorting Egyptians to protest peacefully, boycott American and Israeli goods, collect donations for the Lebanese people, and implore God for victory for Hizbollah. It refrained from calling for jihad, pointing to the refusal of Egyptian authorities to open the gates to jihad and its own concern for Egyptian lives.⁸

During the first days of the war, the successive messages of the Supreme Guide criticized Arab rulers for not defending the Lebanese people or offering them aid, but it is noteworthy that Akif did not single out the Egyptian government but rather directed his criticism at Arab regimes collectively. In a weekly message published only a few hours after Hizbollah's opening operation, Akif stressed "the retreat of the official Arab position from shameful negligence to suspicious silence on the crimes of Zionism, hinting at the prospect of collusion with the enemy by some of the regimes."⁹ He attributed this to three main deficiencies: lack of commitment to the true teachings of Islam, lack of democracy, and dependency on the West.

As Israeli attacks on Lebanon continued, however, and the majority of Egyptians increasingly condemned the Brotherhood for being satisfied with antiwar demonstrations and charity, the Brothers in the last week of the war called for jihad and announced their ability to mobilize 10,000 volunteers to defend the honor of the *umma* in Lebanon. "The Muslim Brotherhood," Akif declared, "is ready to mobilize 10,000 volunteers and send them to aid Hizbollah and the Lebanese resistance."¹⁰ The Brotherhood's call for jihad, knowing full well that it was not capable of getting many volunteers to Lebanon in the face of government opposition, appeared callow in its assessment of what is and is not possible in politics, in sharp contrast to the movement's reputation for political sophistication. Although the Brotherhood benefited politically by moving to the pulse of the Egyptian masses and of Arab public opinion in other countries, the agitation that roiled the Arab street soon pushed the movement to adopt positions that may prove dangerous and costly, considering the group's current role in Egypt. The Egyptian government and various secular opposition spokesmen have taken advantage of the Brotherhood's statements about jihad to renew their unfounded accusation that the Brotherhood is backed by an armed organization and to cast doubt on its pacifist identity—the basis for the Brothers' role in Egyptian society and politics.

As the war continued, the Brotherhood shifted to casting doubt on the strategic choices of the Egyptian government—once again without specifically naming the regime—represented by reliance on peaceful negotiation to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict and by the avoidance of military escalation. The Brothers demanded a rethinking of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and an immediate suspension of all contacts with Israel. Citing a statement by Amr Musa, secretary general of the Arab League, Akif announced the death of the peace process after it "failed to reclaim legitimate Arab rights and resulted in nothing but Zionist-American control over the capabilities of the *umma* and the submission of Arab governments."¹¹ The Supreme Guide then laid out the duty of Arab rulers

regarding the Lebanon war when they themselves could not act militarily. They must, Akif said, enable “the people to volunteer to defend the community,” end all forms of normalization with Israel, and freeze any peace treaties (“submission treaties,” the Brotherhood calls them) as a step toward abrogating them.¹² The Brotherhood’s parliamentary bloc in the People’s Assembly moved to align with the Supreme Guide, demanding that the Egyptian government boycott Israel and cancel the peace treaty.¹³

In the last week of the war, the Brotherhood’s criticism of the government increased in severity and its language changed as its demands escalated. In an interview with al-Jazeera television, Akif characterized the Mubarak administration as disgraceful, and accused it for the first time of betrayal and of working for the Zionist gangs and the American master in hopes of preserving its hold on power and bequeathing it to the next generation.¹⁴ With such accusations of the regime’s complete moral bankruptcy, the Supreme Guide and other leading figures of the Brotherhood called for true democratic reforms to be implemented, so as to end Mubarak’s despotic rule.¹⁵ Thus the Brotherhood’s handling of the official Egyptian position evolved in tandem with its approach to the war, and the radicalism of its appraisal of the government was yoked to its view of the conflict with Israel.

The Brotherhood’s abandonment at the end of the war of its caution on foreign policy, and its harsh criticism of the Egyptian president himself, represented a clear shift from its approach of the previous two years. Since 2004, driven by aspirations to participate effectively in politics, the Brotherhood had begun moving closer to the official view on regional and international issues in order to demonstrate its readiness to assume a responsible political role. An important line was crossed in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2005 when leading figures of the movement announced that they would respect Egypt’s international commitments and ratified treaties with foreign parties, not excepting the peace treaty with Israel.¹⁶ Although the Muslim Brothers left themselves a wide gray area in which to maneuver, by declining to recognize Israel or to accept the principle of peace as the sole framework for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, they appeared more flexible and realistic. Furthermore, the Brotherhood attempted to maintain a positive relationship with the government, praising different regime figures, including President Mubarak, on numerous occasions. The goal was to project the image of a moderate opposition movement that aspires to participate in legal politics and that will never, under any circumstances, attempt to topple the government.

But radicalization of the Brotherhood’s rhetoric during the Lebanon war undid its previous efforts to reach pragmatic agreements with the government on foreign policy matters in the hope of focusing on domestic democratic reform. The language of betrayal and moral superiority adopted by the Brotherhood created a rift between the two parties that will undermine, for some time to come, the Brotherhood’s space in Egyptian politics.

The Israeli-American Enemy

Along with their caustic criticism of the Egyptian government, the Muslim Brothers adopted an exclusionary rhetoric on Israel, colored by anti-Semitism. In abandoning the term “Zionist entity” for the Israeli state and referring disparagingly instead to “Zionist gangs,” they aimed to wholly eliminate the moral legitimacy of Israel’s presence. In a discussion with a Western scholar published on the group’s website, Akif refused to use the name “Israel,” suggesting that its true name was “the

Zionist gangs” that do not hesitate to perpetrate “destruction, killing and depopulation of Arab and Muslim land, leaving behind them a black history of bloodshed and slaughter.”¹⁷ Within this frame of reference, the Brotherhood viewed the Israeli state as nothing more than a brutal military instrument. It denied Israel’s civilian character and transformed the lives of its citizenry—except for those of Arab origin—into legitimate targets for killing and intimidation. Thus, the movement, without any hint of moral concern, justified Hizbollah’s bombardment of cities and villages in northern Israel as punishment for a criminal society devoid of humanity and herald of the inevitable victory for the *umma* and its vanguard, the Islamist resistance.¹⁸

The Brotherhood completed its rhetorical escalation by stressing the religious dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict to the fullest extent. A few days after the outbreak of the war, the Supreme Guide, citing Quranic verses, announced that it had become necessary for the leaders of all Arab and Muslim nations to return the Arab-Israeli conflict to “square one” and its “chief essence,” the enmity of the Jews toward Muslims.¹⁹ The Brotherhood then loosed a barrage of familiar conspiracy theories, holding the Jews responsible for all the failings of the Muslim and Arabic communities from the fall of the caliphate to continuing Arab backwardness, which it said was due to traitorous ruling regimes whose survival is ensured by the Jews and their American allies.²⁰ Such usages capitalized on anti-Israeli feelings among broad segments of the population and rallied support in Egypt. But the political costs of such an approach are not trivial. For one, the Brotherhood’s call to open the gates of jihad, and its accusations of betrayal against the Egyptian government, gave rise to legitimate concerns about the sense of political responsibility of the most powerful opposition group in Egypt. Furthermore, its behavior and speech proved that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood continues to lack one of the key characteristics of popular movements aiming at political reform—commitment to work democratically to combat ideologies of hatred and extremism rather than using them for political advantage.

The Muslim Brotherhood’s attitude toward the United States—now the most important foreign player in the Middle East—has fluctuated considerably in the past few years, with the traditional view of the United States based on an affirmation of good relations with the American people and respect for their democratic values. However, the Brothers also accused successive U.S. administrations since World War II of hostile policies toward the Arab world including hegemony, aggression, subjugation, partiality to Israel, and hatred of Islam. After the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the United States as the sole global superpower, the Brotherhood became even more suspicious of the U.S. role in the region. It viewed the military interference in the Gulf in 1991, the pressuring of Arabs to accept an “unjust” peace with Israel, and the American alliance with Arab autocratic rulers as clear evidence of the United States’ enmity toward the Muslim community and its attempt to impose control over the region’s resources by any means.²¹

Despite the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, the last two years had witnessed efforts by the Muslim Brotherhood to moderate its criticism of the United States so as to allow channels of communication to be opened. In explaining this change, the Brotherhood pointed to Washington’s stated policy of supporting Arab democracy and its demands that the Egyptian government undertake effective reforms to expand political freedoms and popular participation. Brotherhood officials hoped in so doing to make clear their position on political reform and to rob the Mubarak regime of the chance to raise the specter of Islamism to deter Washington in its support for democracy. During the 2005 parliamentary elections, the Supreme Guide affirmed the Brothers’ openness to all American institutions and nongovernmental organizations and their readiness for

“dialogue with the American administration,” even if through the Egyptian foreign ministry.²² After the balloting, Akif, along with other leaders of the movement, repeated their open statement of support for direct communication between the Brotherhood’s parliamentary bloc and American officials in order to clarify points of agreement and disagreement.²³

However, the opening snapped shut when the Bush administration refused to deal with, and isolated financially and politically, the Palestinian government formed by Hamas after its victory in the January 2006 elections. The equivocation of Brotherhood rhetoric toward the United States in 2004 and 2005 disappeared, only to be replaced by a blistering severity. The American response to the Hamas victory, the Brotherhood said, was an example of the “exclusionary democracy” that the United States supports abroad. In this view, Washington decides in advance, before the people render judgment in fair elections, who has the right to obtain a majority and who must wait forever in opposition: The United States operates according to its own interests in such cases, using simplistic definitions of friend and foe.²⁴ In an angry speech, Supreme Guide Akif stripped the American democracy promotion agenda of any legitimacy, declaring that, “in reality, the American administration does not want to promote democracy or build good governance as they claim. Nor do they preserve and protect human rights ... [They] undertake selective measures to serve their interests and agenda in the region.”²⁵ Akif accused the Bush administration of tyranny, taking advantage of the Palestinians’ reliance on external assistance to attempt to subjugate them and overthrow their elected government.²⁶ In conclusion, the Muslim Brothers saw the Bush administration’s position on Hamas as a declaration of war on Islamists everywhere, making any dialogue between Islamists and the United States impossible.

The Muslim Brothers seemed to rediscover the popular claim of a complete convergence of interests between Israel and the United States and focused on it as the only way to explain the American position during the Lebanon war. The Supreme Guide opened his address at a large conference at al-Azhar in the second week of the war by emphasizing that Muslims are afflicted “with this usurper Zionist entity that was established by the West upon our lands to be a thorn in the side of our community and to expand on our land and establish its glory on our ruins ... and throughout the past half century this usurper enemy has practiced terrorism and gangsterism in the region, defended by the United States.”²⁷ In conjunction with the escalation of rhetoric on the Egyptian government and Israel, the final days of the war saw the total rhetorical identification of the American and Israeli agendas. The latter was seen as serving the interests of the former. Terms such as “the Zionist-American enemy” and “the Zionist-American plot” predominated in the messages and statements of the Brotherhood.²⁸ The Supreme Guide even used the phrase “Western crusaders,” holding the West, with the United States in the vanguard, responsible for the war: “O brothers ... prepare yourselves to battle the Zionist gangs which were planted by Western crusaders in the occupied Palestinian land to kill and drive away its people ... as representatives of the great western powers, at their head the United States of America.”²⁹ The United States, at war’s end, was transformed into the origin and cause of the calamity. The Muslim Brotherhood’s view of America in the Middle East returned to square one.

Hizbollah’s True Islamic Character

Beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Egyptian Muslim Brothers have reacted strongly to the growing tensions in the Arab world between Sunnis and Shiites spurred by the sectarian violence in Iraq. They

have called for Muslims to reject sectarianism and to refuse to be drawn into attempts to partition the community by reviving sectarian strife between Sunnis and Shiites. For instance, after the bombing of the dome of the mausoleum of Imam Ali al-Hadi and Hasan al-Askari in Samarra on February 22, 2006, and the retaliatory burning of some Sunni mosques in Iraq, the Supreme Guide implored all sects in Iraq to work together to prevent civil strife and defend the country from disunion and schism.³⁰

The Sunni-based Brotherhood took the same position during the Lebanon war toward the effort by a group of conservative theologians and progovernment intellectuals in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia to disparage the legitimacy and popularity of Hizbollah in the Arab street. These theologians and intellectuals characterized Hizbollah members as “Shiite defectors”—enemies of the Sunnis—and cast doubt on Hizbollah’s motives and aims in the resistance against Israeli aggression because of the organization’s strong ties to Iran.³¹ The Muslim Brotherhood swiftly released a statement, bearing the signature of the Supreme Guide, responding to this “attempt to sow strife and defeat the resistance” and urging Muslims not to “resurrect ancient animosities and disputes that previously ruined the mind and body of the *umma* and that wise men had agreed to transcend.” Akif also stressed the legitimacy of Hizbollah’s resistance and the necessity of supporting it by all possible means. He upheld the “true Islamic character” of the resistance and the Arab identity of Hizbollah, implicitly accusing the governments of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia of justifying their “softness” on the war in Lebanon by provoking conflict between Sunnis and Shiites and accusing Hizbollah of being an agent of Iran.³²

By their refusal to enter into the maze of sectarian conflict, the Muslim Brotherhood positioned itself as a trustworthy actor working for the well-being of the *umma* and as a true defender of its interests against the Israeli-American hegemony. As recent polls indicate, the Brotherhood also made gains in public opinion in Egypt and outside it for its defense of Hizbollah and, after the cessation of hostilities, for its propagation of a narrative of the Lebanon war 2006 as a clear victory for the Islamist resistance.³³

THE JORDANIAN ISLAMIC ACTION FRONT

The Islamic Action Front, the political arm of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, is Jordan’s largest and best organized opposition party. Much like its sister organization in Egypt, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood—founded in 1945—pursues a religious agenda through political and social channels. Although institutionally separate, the IAF and the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood work together closely. The IAF is poorly represented in parliament, with only 17 of the 110 seats, both because of its self-restraint in fielding candidates for parliamentary elections and of government-erected electoral barriers against Jordanians of Palestinian origins. These constitute more than 50 percent of Jordan’s population and the bulk of the IAF’s constituency.³⁴ Domestically, the party has focused on political reform, corruption, and education and religious issues. The IAF’s insistence on the legitimacy of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and its endorsement of other resistance groups in the Middle East have cast doubts on its declared antiviolence stance, an issue of great concern for the Jordanian government. Nevertheless, the Jordanian Islamist movement has had a predominantly nonconfrontational relationship with the regime. Though openly critical of government policy, the movement has largely respected the red lines the regime has drawn.³⁵

The Lebanon war erupted at a time when relations between Jordan's Islamist movement and the regime were already extremely strained.³⁶ In August 2006, two IAF members of parliament (MPs) were handed 13-month sentences on charges of fueling national discord and inciting sectarianism and lost their parliamentary seats as a result. They were arrested June 11 after paying a condolence visit to the family of Jordanian-born Al-Qaeda-in-Iraq operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and official allegations that they endorsed his ideology. The regime took the MPs' visit as evidence of the movement's radical tendencies and foreign allegiances. The arrests and the subsequent trials set off a confrontation between Jordan's Islamist movement and the government that still has not been entirely resolved. Although the movement offered reassurances to placate officials, the IAF also called into question the basis for the trial and maintained that the overblown crisis was a pretext for targeting the movement. In an expected conciliatory move, King Abdullah issued a special pardoning of the two MPs during the holy month of Ramadan. Although the IAF praised this step, it continued to assert the right of its two MPs to reassume their parliamentary seats.

It is no surprise that the conflict in Lebanon has loomed large for the Jordanian Islamist movement. Regional conflicts, including the thorny Israeli-Palestinian question, the war in Iraq, and the American war on terrorism have constituted much of the movement's public statements in recent years.³⁷ This has compromised the movement's focus on domestic political reform as compared to other Islamist opposition parties in the region. The Jordanian movement's predominantly Palestinian constituency and close ties with Hamas make it impossible for the movement to dissociate itself from the Palestinian cause, although there is an internal debate on the saliency of the issue.

The movement's embrace of regional politics has been a major point of contention with the regime. Officials have found it convenient to accuse the movement of ignoring national interests for the sake of its foreign allegiances, thereby justifying punitive measures against it. Coming during a particularly volatile time in the relationship, Israel's military operations in Lebanon and Amman's perceived complicity—by condemning the resistance and remaining silent on Israel—ultimately pushed the movement to become more radical in its rhetoric on its government's position. This exacerbated the tensions between the regime and the movement.

The IAF's sharp rhetoric during the fighting in Lebanon thus did not signal an ideological shift, as it did with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The party has consistently regarded the Palestinian question as central, dedicating large portions of its electoral programs to clarifying its position. Its 2003 electoral platform asserted that Palestine is "Arab and Muslim" and that "no one has the right to concede any piece of Palestinian land or legitimize occupation." Recognizing Israel, it said, means recognizing the "legitimacy of usurpation." The party has been persistent and vocal in its opposition to its government's normalized relations with Israel and its rejection of peaceful settlements.³⁸

For Jordan's mainstream Islamists, thus, the Lebanon war was yet another episode in the *umma's* struggle against American and Zionist imperialism in the region. Posing the issue in stark terms, IAF Secretary General Zaki Bani Arshid—who is perceived to have organizational ties with Hamas—told a crowd of protesters on July 21, "The confrontation today is clear and does not require explanation: Zion's terrorist star seeks to destroy the resistant crescent, and everyone must determine their stance from the struggle."³⁹ Bani Arshid celebrated the fact that in the current crisis the resistance embraced an abandoned project of Arab rulers: jihad against American and Israeli imperialism in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. The decision to stand up to imperialist provocations,

he added, need no longer be entrusted to weak and submissive Arab regimes whose commitment to negotiations and “adventurous” peaceful settlements has borne no fruit.⁴⁰

Throughout the conflict, the IAF and the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood repeatedly emphasized that the scope of Israeli aggression extended beyond Palestine and Lebanon, making a response from the Jordanian government imperative.⁴¹ They suggested that silence was costly, and said grimly that if official political will and the popular will, which embraces resistance, were not reconciled, “no one will be safe.”⁴² An August 5 IAF statement urged the Jordanian government to provide the national army with the tools to confront external challenges, including the “foremost Zionist challenge.”

Yet the Islamist movement’s prescription for “supporting the resistance” remained vague, even incongruous. Having established that aggression should not be merely condemned but “blocked,” Muhammed al-Buzur, a member of the IAF’s executive bureau, argued that “we do not ask Jordan for more than its potential . . . If the choice of alleged peace is not fruitful or possible, why can’t people be left to lead the resistance and why can’t this resistance be supported?”⁴³ In the same vein, a July 21 statement by the Muslim Brotherhood’s consultative council called on Arab governments to allow citizens to support their “brethren’s [resistance] through all possible means.”⁴⁴ Contrarily, in what could be seen as a bid to prove the IAF’s claim of a nonviolent outlook, Rahil al-Ghorayba, first deputy to the IAF’s secretary general, encouraged people to voice their opposition to the misguided position of Arab regimes “through all peaceful means.”⁴⁵ More specifically, the IAF has advocated opening local offices for resistance groups such as Hamas, Hizbollah, and Islamic Jihad and criticized government restrictions on public gatherings in support of the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance.⁴⁶

Attacking the Jordanian Government

Bani Arshid accused Arab governments of “remaining silent when silence is prohibited and speaking up when silence is due.”⁴⁷ Speaking to Jordanian officials and media, he declared, “Some of you are leading us to defeat for another time.”⁴⁸ In an indirect reference to the Jordanian government’s official stance, Bani Arshid warned against those “who exert pressure on resistance movements to [persuade them] to make concessions that are usually followed by recognition and are paralyzed by the chains of treaties.”⁴⁹

A July 16 statement by the IAF parliamentary bloc charged Arab governments with almost going one step further than American and European governments, since their stance vacillated between condemning silence and blaming the resistance, thus giving a green light to the “Zionist enemy.” In the MPs’ view, Arab regimes had abandoned their duties and severed their bonds with the *umma*.⁵⁰ Following Israeli attacks on civilian targets in Lebanon, the Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement arguing that the events in Palestine and Lebanon “necessitate [an urgent] reconsideration of the devastating status that the official Arab regime has slipped into,” and lamenting the government’s inability to bring about a cease-fire. It suggests that “some” have even gone so far as “legitimizing the Zionist attack” and “prohibiting support for the resistance or even calls for such support.”⁵¹

Nevertheless, the movement mainly refrained from explicit references to the Jordanian government and did not cross the red line of criticizing the king. The most explicit remarks came from al-Buzur, who rejected the Jordanian government’s “confused” response to the crisis and lamented its merely backhand condemnation of Israel and its indirect denunciation of the resistance. “Zionist

aggression has persisted since its inception,” he asserted, “even during times of alleged peace.”⁵² Al-Buzur stressed that the “main issue is not just to condemn the aggression, but to work on blocking it.” This led him to suggest that “it is the right of every Jordanian citizen to know who the strategic enemy that threatens the country is, and what preparations are being made to confront it.”⁵³

The most radical indictment of the Jordanian government came as Lebanese casualties climbed. Bani Arshid declared that the failure of Arab regimes to end their “political and diplomatic adventurism” by severing all relations with the “Zionist entity”—namely, by abrogating peace treaties and shutting down embassies—means “effectively partaking in the crime and bearing responsibility.”⁵⁴ The choice, as laid out by Bani Arshid, was either supporting the program of the resistance or “standing in the trenches with the enemies and criminals.”⁵⁵ It is difficult to imagine such pronouncements helping the Islamist movement’s standing with the regime; indeed, they may well have contributed to the harsh sentence a military court delivered a week later in the case of the IAF’s “condolence deputies.”

Seizing on the Lebanon war as an occasion for voicing domestic grievances, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood declared, “It is now time for the *umma* . . . to cease supporting the enemy by restricting [public] freedoms and repressing opposition.”⁵⁶ The response of Arab regimes to the Lebanon war, the IAF and Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood asserted, reflects the disconnect between them and their people; the state has dismissed both the popular backing for the resistance and the popular calls for domestic economic and political reform. Bani Arshid referred specifically to the urgent need for electoral reform, the release of all political prisoners, and the granting of general freedoms. Although its demands for political reform have been repeated endlessly, the IAF’s protest of the Lebanon war offered an opportunity to increase pressure on the government. On both the domestic and the regional fronts, the IAF argued, the government should take a proactive stance. The government must recognize that the “Zionist threat”—not free speech and political choice among its own people, “is the foremost threat to Jordan and the *umma*,” and should empower citizens to meet that threat.

Views on Israel and the United States

The movement’s perception of intertwined Israeli and American agendas in the Middle East shaped its depiction of the Lebanon war, as it has shaped its outlook from the beginning. It viewed the hostilities as part of an “American-Zionist” plan to redraw the political map of the Middle East and break up the *umma* into various sectarian entities.⁵⁷ In this “new Middle East,” Israel would emerge as a dominant power and Arab and Muslim identity would be overshadowed by the advancement of the Jewish state.⁵⁸

In a clear reference to U.S. policy toward the newly elected Hamas government in the Palestinian occupied territories, al-Ghorayba said it is “evident” that the U.S. administration is “intent on eliminating all forces of resistance and dissent present.”⁵⁹ The IAF’s 2003 electoral platform points out that the world is undergoing a period of “American-Zionist hegemony,” with the conspirators controlling regimes and international organizations and using the “war on terrorism” to serve their interests.⁶⁰ In line with this outlook, during the Lebanon war the IAF recently labeled the United States “the sponsor and supporter of Zionist terrorism.”⁶¹ Bani Arshid has gone as far as to describe U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as the “Zionist minister,” “the bearer of bad news,” who came to the region during the war with another Middle East project that targets the resistance.⁶²

Aptly summing up the IAF's consistent position on Israel, Azzam al-Heinidi stated that "this entity is outside all laws, values, or norms, or what is called international legitimacy, is oblivious to any treaty and understands only one language, that of force."⁶³ During the Lebanon crisis, the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood consistently denounced Israel's strategy, which, it charged, "mercilessly targets civilians."⁶⁴ As is clear from its 2003 electoral platform, the IAF considers resolution of its "existential" struggle with the Jews impossible through peaceful means. When the Jordanian government signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, the IAF, faced with a serious ideological challenge, debated whether it would continue to participate in the political process. After intense discussion, the party decided to continue to take part but to refuse any cabinet positions. The party used its parliamentary representation to register its opposition to the treaty, and its deputies boycotted the vote.

Hizbollah's Resilience

In the context of the struggle against the Zionist conspiracy, Hizbollah was far from a sectarian force in Lebanon, in the view of the Sunni Islamist movement in Jordan. It was, rather, a legitimate Islamist resistance movement, akin to the Palestinian Hamas and to resistance groups in Iraq. A July 31 fatwa issued by the IAF's committee of religious scholars—responsible for formulating the party's religious policies—made it a duty to support Hizbollah's resistance against Israel and unequivocally called for the "unity of action and jihad."⁶⁵ The same document laments the anti-Shiite views expressed by Wahhabi scholars in Saudi Arabia, which it described as serving Israel's agenda of division.

Assuaging fears about Iran and Syria—two countries with which the Jordanian regime has had tensions in recent years—and defending Hizbollah's program of resistance, al-Buzur stated that "the Iran-Syria-Hizbollah alliance is not directed at us and does not warrant our worry." It was time for the Jordanian regime, al-Buzur implied, to recognize that confronting the Israeli enemy is its foremost priority.

The Jordanian Islamists have equated Hamas and Hizbollah, using similar language to celebrate both as resistance forces. After Hamas' January 2006 victory at the polls, many IAF and Muslim Brotherhood leaders praised that movement's firm principles, its resilience in the face of the Israeli enemy, and its refusal to make unwarranted concessions. Using starkly similar wording, the head of the IAF consultative council, Hamza Mansour, said in a letter to Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah that "the spirit of faith and resilience and strong will that characterizes Hizbollah has brought down the enemy's plan."⁶⁶ On another occasion, Mansour congratulated the "heroes" of the resistance for destroying "the enemy's dream for stability on our land" and "steadfastly refusing to succumb to international and regional pressures, urging them to accept Zionist demands to release prisoners without getting anything in return."⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

Reacting to the Lebanon war of 2006, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood crossed red lines that had governed its political role and relationship with the ruling regime in recent years. The vehemence of the Brotherhood's populist criticism of the official position undid its previous efforts to reach

pragmatic agreements with the regime on foreign policy so as to concentrate on bringing about needed domestic reforms. Furthermore, the Brotherhood radicalized its rhetoric on American policies in the Middle East in a way that traded away its significant opening to the United States in the last few years. For its part, the Jordanian IAF used the war to voice domestic grievances at a time of strained relations with the Jordanian regime. The IAF's unusually harsh language on the regime's stand on the war resulted in new escalation of the two sides' most recent confrontation.

That the Islamist movements do not hold power gives them some space for populist rhetoric and ambiguous prescriptions, but their raising of the stakes over Lebanon comes at a price. In both Egypt and Jordan, the reaction of Islamist movements to the Lebanon war further polarized the domestic scene and hurt the chances for consensual politics. It remains to be seen whether it will break settled patterns of interaction between Islamists and ruling regimes—controlled confrontation in Egypt and the guarded long-term relationship in Jordan.

NOTES

- ¹ The Moroccan Justice and Development Party released statements condemning the Israeli attacks on July 14, 29, and 30, 2006, and organized protests on July 14, 17, and 30 and August 1 and 6. The al-Wafaq Islamic Society in Bahrain organized protests on July 17, 18, and 20. The activities of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian Islamic Action Front are described in detail in this paper.
- ² For this, the regime resorts to the wide-ranging powers that the Emergency Law, in force since the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat in October 1981, grants to the executive in general and the state security services in particular.
- ³ Message of the Supreme Guide Muhammad Mahdi Akif on “The Zionist Aggression against our People in Palestine and the Duty of the Muslim Community,” June 29, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ⁴ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Crime of Qana and the Lessons of Resistance and Victory,” August 8, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Compare the references to the “Zionist entity” in the Muslim Brotherhood’s electoral program 2005 under the section on Egyptian national security and the language of the speeches and statements of the Supreme Guide Muhammad Mahdi Akif during the Lebanon war, especially Address of the Supreme Guide at the Azhar Conference for “Aid to the Resistance,” July 21, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com; interview with the Supreme Guide, *al-Safir* (Lebanon), July 24, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com; and Statement of the Muslim Brotherhood on “Military Aggression against Lebanon,” July 25, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ⁷ Electoral platform of the Muslim Brotherhood, 2005, p. 18, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ⁸ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Strategic Choice of Resistance,” July 20, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com; statement of the Muslim Brotherhood on “The Rejection of Sectarianism and Support of the Islamic Resistance,” July 26, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com; interview with the Supreme Guide, “Live with Mahdi Akif,” *al-Jazeera*, July 31, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ⁹ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Failure of Arab Governments between Reality and Solution,” July 13, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ¹⁰ Address of the Supreme Guide at the conference of the Egyptian National Front for Change to “Support the Resistance,” August 5, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com; address of the Supreme Guide at the Teachers’ Syndicate conference, August 1, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com; address of Abd al-Mun’im Abu al-Futuh, a member of the Guidance Office, at the Lawyers’ Syndicate conference in the Egyptian al-Qalyubiyah Governorate, August 8, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ¹¹ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Strategic Choice of Resistance,” *ibid.*
- ¹² Address of the Supreme Guide at the Azhar Conference for “Aid to the Resistance”; message of the Supreme Guide to the “Arab Kings, Presidents and Emirs,” July 20, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ¹³ Weekly reports of the Brotherhood’s parliamentary activities, July 21–31, 2006, available at www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Supreme Guide, “Live with Mahdi Akif,” *ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Address of the Supreme Guide at the conference of the Egyptian National Front for Change to “Support the Resistance,” *ibid.*; interview with the Supreme Guide, *Egypt Today*, July 18, 2006, available at www.masrelyoum.com; address of Abd al-Mun’im Abu al-Futuh, a member of the Guidance Office, at the Lawyers’ Syndicate conference in the Egyptian al-Qalyubiyah Governorate, *ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Interview with Khayrat al-Shatir, Deputy of the Supreme Guide, *al-Arabi Newspaper*, December 11, 2005; interview with the Supreme Guide, *Ahram Weekly Newspaper*, December 15, 2005.
- ¹⁷ Transcript of the Supreme Guide’s discussion with a Western scholar, August 8, 2006, available at www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ¹⁸ Address of the Supreme Guide at the conference of the Egyptian National Front for Change to “Support the Resistance,” *ibid.*; message of the Supreme Guide on “The Crime of Qana and the Lessons of Resistance and Victory,” *ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Strategic Choice of the Resistance,” *ibid.*
- ²⁰ Transcript of the Supreme Guide’s discussion with a Western scholar, *ibid.*
- ²¹ Nifin Abd al-Mun’im Mus’ad and Abd al-Ati Muhammad Ahmad, *The Foreign Policy of Islamist Movements* (Cairo: Center for Political Research and Study, 2000), 131–180.
- ²² Interview with the Supreme Guide, *al-Sharq al-Awsat Newspaper*, December 11, 2005.
- ²³ Interview with the Supreme Guide, *Ahram Weekly Newspaper*, *ibid.*; interview with the Supreme Guide on the Egyptian satellite channel Dream (transcript), June 12, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ²⁴ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The American Exclusionary Democracy,” December 22, 2005, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ²⁵ Interview with the Supreme Guide, *al-Arab Magazine*, July 26, 2006.

- ²⁶ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Zionist Aggression against our People in Palestine and the Duty of the Muslim Community,” *ibid.*
- ²⁷ Address of the Supreme Guide, “Aid to the Resistance,” *ibid.*
- ²⁸ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Crime of Qana and the Lessons of Resistance and Victory,” *ibid.*; statement of the Muslim Brotherhood on “Attempts to Sow Strife and Defeat the Resistance,” July 26, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ²⁹ Address of the Supreme Guide at the Teachers’ Syndicate conference.
- ³⁰ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Events of Samarra,” February 23, 2006.
- ³¹ Al-Jazeera’s coverage of Wahhabi theologians’ views on Hizbollah, July 27, 2006, available at www.aljazeera.net.
- ³² Statement of the Muslim Brotherhood on “Attempts to Sow Strife and Defeat the Resistance,” *ibid.*; interview with the Supreme Guide on support of the resistance and the absence of an Arab strategy, July 17, 2006, www.aljazeera.net.
- ³³ Message of the Supreme Guide on “The Scattered Delusions and the Necessity of Resistance,” August 10, 2006, www.ikhwanonline.com.
- ³⁴ Official accounts cite 43 percent but analysts argue that the number is higher.
- ³⁵ For more background on the movement’s role in Jordanian politics, relations with the regime, and parliamentary participation, see Nathan Brown, *Jordan and Its Islamic Movement: The Limits of Inclusion?*, Carnegie Paper no. 74 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, November 2006).
- ³⁶ The conviction of the two IAF “condolence deputies” is the latest episode in an ongoing confrontation between the government and the movement. In April 2006, the Jordanian government accused the Islamist movement of hiding Hamas weapons, and in July 2006 it replaced the board of the Islamic Center Organization, the largest nongovernmental organization associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, there have been disputes between the government and the Islamic movement over a series of laws, including measures dealing with terrorism and civil associations.
- ³⁷ Brown, *Jordan and Its Islamic Movement: The Limits of Inclusion?*
- ³⁸ The section headed “Palestinian Question and Political Settlement” in the IAF’s 2003 electoral platform, www.jabha.net.
- ³⁹ Speech by Bani Arshid’s, *Assabeel*, July 25, 2006, www.assabeel.info/article.asp?version=6053&newsid=13388§ion=7.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, “Press Statement on the Situation in Palestine and Lebanon,” July 13, 2006, www.ikhwan-jor.org/BAYANAT/bayan_06/13-7-2006.htm.
- ⁴² Bani Arshid speech, July 25, 2006, *ibid.*
- ⁴³ Statement by Muhammed al-Buzur on the “Confusion in the Government’s Official Position,” July 18, 2006, www.jabha.net.
- ⁴⁴ Statement of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood’s Consultative Council on the “Israeli Aggression in Lebanon and Palestine,” July 21, 2006, www.ikhwan-jor.org/BAYANAT/bayan_06/22_07.htm.
- ⁴⁵ Al-Ghorayba’s statement on Rice’s visit to the Middle East on July 23, 2006, www.jabha.net.
- ⁴⁶ Speech by Bani Arshid, *Assabeel*, July 25, 2006, *ibid.*; address by Hamza Mansour on the “Attacks on Gaza and Lebanon,” *Assabeel*, July 18, 2006, www.assabeel.info/article.asp?version=6052&newsid=13345§ion=78.
- ⁴⁷ Speech by Bani Arshid, July 25, 2006, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Address of Hamza Mansour, July 18, 2006, *ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood press release on the “Continued Attacks on Palestine and Lebanon,” August 1, 2006, www.jabha.net.
- ⁵² Statement by Muhammed al-Buzur, July 18, 2006, *ibid.*, www.jabha.net.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ Statement by Bani Arshid, on the “The New Atrocity in Qana,” July 30, 2006, www.jabha.net.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood press release, August 1, 2006.
- ⁵⁷ Al-Ghorayba’s statement on Rice’s visit; and the fatwa by the IAF’s committee of religious scholars, July 31, 2006, www.ikhwan-jor.org/akbar.html/new_006/fatwa.htm.
- ⁵⁸ IAF fatwa, *ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ Al-Ghorayba’s statement on Rice’s visit, *ibid.*
- ⁶⁰ “Foreign Policy and International Relations” in the IAF’s 2003 electoral platform, www.jabha.net.

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- ⁶¹ Statement by IAF on the “Zionist Attacks on Palestine and Lebanon,” July 31, 2006, www.jabha.net.
- ⁶² Remarks of Bani Arshid during a protest in support of the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine, August 7, 2006, www.jabha.net.
- ⁶³ Remarks of al-Heinidi during a protest in support of resistance in Lebanon and Palestine, August 7, 2006, www.jabha.net.
- ⁶⁴ Statement of the Muslim Brotherhood on the situation in Palestine and Lebanon, July 13, 2006.
- ⁶⁵ IAF fatwa, *ibid*.
- ⁶⁶ Mansour’s letter to Nasrallah, July 16, 2006, www.jabha.net.
- ⁶⁷ Address of Hamza Mansour, July 18, 2006, *ibid*.

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