**Introduction: the shallow enigma of the Muslim Brotherhood**

1. The Muslim Brotherhood sometimes appears to be moderate political organisation; the reality is far more sinister.
2. It is true that Brotherhood has roots in the Egyptian anti-colonial movement. It was involved in both the 1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine and the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. It was suppressed by several Arab regimes. More recently, it was closely associated with the 'Arab Spring' – despite having opposed it at first – and following the ouster of Egypt's dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the Brotherhood dominated parliamentary elections in the guise of the Freedom and Justice Party. The following year, the Brotherhood's candidate Mohamed Morsi was briefly elected President of Egypt.
3. It is thus easy to mistake the Muslim Brotherhood for a political organisation well adapted to modern democracy. In fact, it is anything but. In Syria, for example, the organisation was suppressed only after turning to violence in the 1960s. And Morsi's presidency in Egypt was short-lived because he soon showed the organisation's true colours, granting himself new powers, silencing dissent and proposing a new constitution that for critics amounted to 'an Islamist coup'. [[1]](#footnote-1) The result was widespread protest and violence, and eventually the military stepped in to depose the government.
4. These events deeply disappointed all who had put faith in the Arab Spring, but the true nature of the Muslim Brotherhood had never been a well-guarded secret. Its flag is emblazoned with symbolism that makes a mockery of the idea that it stands for liberal democracy.
5. The flag features the Qur'an, symbolising its commitment to Sharia Law. Two crossed swords represent Jihad, holy war against infidels and apostates. Meanwhile, the words 'And prepare' are a reference to a surat in the Qur'an: *'And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom Allah knows*'. Around this is written: *'Allah is our objective; the Prophet is our leader; Qur’an is our law; Jihad is our way; Dying in the name of Allah is our greatest hope*'. The message could hardly be clearer.
6. This is an organisation that is unabashedly *Islamist*: for the Brotherhood, Islam is not merely a religion, but an all-encompassing ideology. In the words of its own Deputy Guide, Khairat al-Shater, the organisation's goal is: '*Restoring Islam and its all-encompassing conception; subjugating people to God; instituting the religion of God: the Islamisation of life, empowering of God’s religion; establishing the Nahda of the Ummah on the basis of Islam*'. [[2]](#footnote-2)
7. In other words, the goal is to restore an Islamic Caliphate under Sharia Law. Indeed, its founding in 1928 was as much in response to Kemal Ataturk's abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 as opposition to British rule. The goal was never democracy; it was Sharia.
8. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood is prepared to take a more subtle approach than other Islamist groups, favouring a form of ‘creeping’ Islamisation, working within rather than explicitly against the democratic tide. But in less guarded moments, the Brotherhood makes no secret of its plans for non-believers, ‘apostates’ and ‘infidels’.
9. In 2010, future president Mohamed Morsi called on Egyptians to “nurse our children and our grandchildren on hatred” for Jews. [[3]](#footnote-3) He also described Jews as "descendants of apes and pigs".[[4]](#footnote-4) In 2013, Islamic theologian Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi, long-recognised as a spiritual leader among followers of the Brotherhood, called on Sunni Muslims to join the rebels fighting in Syria, and to kill all those who back the regime, including civilians.[[5]](#footnote-5) He effectively served a death sentence on the entire Alawite sect, by describing them as 'more infidels than Christians and Jews'. [[6]](#footnote-6) Earlier, he urged the Brotherhood to apply Sharia Law *gradually* in Egypt, which he defined as not cutting off hands within the first five years. [[7]](#footnote-7)
10. He is also on record arguing that the killing of apostates is essential for Islam to survive[[8]](#footnote-8), and that Hitler was imposed on the Jews as a punishment from God.[[9]](#footnote-9) There is clearly nothing democratic, ethical or peaceful about this.

**Blood on the Brotherhood's hands**

1. The current turmoil in Syria is especially horrific, but the political tensions and sectarian dividing lines that underlie it have been in place for decades. In an interview on Al-Jazeera, Adnan Saadeddine, the Superintendent General of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria from 1975 till 1982, admits that, in the guise of the Fighting Vanguard, the organisation carried out numerous terrorist attacks throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. [[10]](#footnote-10)
2. The Brotherhood began to develop into an opposition party in Syria after the secularist Ba'ath Party came to power more than half a century ago in 1963. [[11]](#footnote-11) The following year saw the Brotherhood take up arms for the first time in the Hama Riot. According to a 1982 report from the US Defense Intelligence Agency (declassified in 2012), it began to expand its 'Secret Apparatus', a covert arm for non-attributable political violence, using such noms de guerres as the Youth of Mohammed, Soldiers of Allah, Faithful Youth and Islamic Vanguard etc, setting a chilling precedent for the plethora of sometimes mysterious armed groups at work in Syria today.
3. Their opposition intensified after the 23 February 1966 seizure of power by a faction within the Ba'ath Party including Alawite Muslims, whom the Brotherhood consider to be Apostates. Early in 1979, emboldened by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood attempted to trigger a similar popular revolution in Syria to oust the regime. The offensive began on 15 June 1979 with the massacre of dozens of Alawite cadets at the Artillery School in Aleppo.
4. In 1981, a coup plot was discovered by Syrian security, forcing the hand of the organisation, which prematurely initiated an uprising in its stronghold of Hama, beginning on 2 February 1982. . The Brotherhood then used its network of mosques both to conceal arms and to call for Jihad. It is estimated that around 2000 people on both sides of the conflict were killed as a result; 300-400 of these were members of the Brotherhood's Secret Apparatus. Although the uprising was put down by the regime, its brutal methods left it increasingly isolated. As Lord Alton noted in a recent parliamentary debate, it was an assassination attempt on Assad by the Muslim Brotherhood that drove him to form closer ties with Iran[[12]](#footnote-12). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the failure of the rebellion indicated that there was little popular support for the Brotherhood, even among Sunni Muslims and those who oppose the regime.
5. The Muslim Brotherhood also has long-standing links with Hamas, which describes itself in its charter as 'one of the wings of the Muslim Brothers in Palestine'.[[13]](#footnote-13) Moreover, their support for Hamas is not merely political; Hamas newspaper editor Sheik Yazeeb Khader has acknowledged the role the 'international Muslim Brotherhood' has played in providing funds for the purchase of weapons. [[14]](#footnote-14)
6. The Brotherhood is also intimately connected to al-Qaeda, which was founded by Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian member of both the Brotherhood and Hamas who was active in Jordan before going to fight with the Mujahideen in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he served as a mentor to Osama bin Laden.[[15]](#footnote-15) Azzam was also associated with Sheik Marwan Hadid, a Syrian Brotherhood leader in the 1970s whose name was later taken by Jihadist brigades active in the current conflict.[[16]](#footnote-16) Video footage shows the al-Qaeda founder praising Hadid for refusal to give up arms even when offered an opportunity to negotiate, insisting that he would only do so once an Islamic State was established. He also poured scorn on Alawites (referred to as Nusayris).[[17]](#footnote-17) In another film Azzam can be seen quoting the surat in the Quran used on the Brotherhood's flag.[[18]](#footnote-18)
7. More recently, it is alleged that before the fall of President Mubarak, the Egyptian Brotherhood under Morsi had been working directly with foreign terrorist organisations, including al-Qaeda, against the national security of Egypt, and that even as president, Morsi was in contact with Muhammad Zawahiri, brother of al-Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahiri.[[19]](#footnote-19)
8. The Brotherhood is also linked to Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, an al-Qaeda-inspired terror group based in the northern Sinai region of Egypt, which has carried out numerous terrorist attacks, killing both Egyptians and foreign nationals. [[20]](#footnote-20)
9. In Syria, the Brotherhood was in dialogue with the regime, having suspended its opposition in response to Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip in 2009. But it changed policy at the beginning of the uprising – setting up a Facebook page called Days of Rage choosing the anniversary of the Hama uprising to evoke memories of the incident – and then lead the Syrian National Council formed in Istanbul with the help of its ally Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ali Sadreddine Bayanouni, the former leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, has publicly highlighted the Syrian National Council’s Islamist credentials, explaining that Burhan Ghalioun was chosen as its leader at the time, only to make it more acceptable to the West.[[21]](#footnote-21)
10. At the same time however, a militia calling itself the Armed Men of the Muslim Brotherhood is active in Damascus as well as Homs and Idlib. Hossam Abu Habel, whose late father was in Syria's Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s, has reportedly been raising $40-50,000 a month to supply Islamist militias in Homs province with weapons and other aid.[[22]](#footnote-22)

**The Brotherhood and politics: the myth of moderation**

1. The Muslim Brotherhood has been surprisingly successful in portraying itself as a moderate organisation. In part this is because of its suppression by authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Syria, which gave the false impression that the Brotherhood was on the side of freedom and democracy.
2. In fact, the Brotherhood was able to take on the mantle of 'opposition' only because of its unrivalled organisation. Despite representing a tiny minority of Egyptians and Syrians, it was able to use mosque networks and *zakat* funds (Islamic alms) to punch well above its weight, giving the appearance of being much more representative. This narrative has been reinforced by the organisation's powerful media ally, the TV station Al-Jazeera through which the Qatari regime seeks to convert its money into international influence. Al-Jazeera is consistently sympathetic to the Brotherhood, portraying it as a democratic popular movement, and lending mainstream credibility to its claims.
3. Moreover, the organisation has shown itself well able to 'talk the talk' in terms of liberal democracy. For example, the Brotherhood's so-called 'Covenant and Pact' for a post-Assad Syria promises, 'The establishment of a state based on a constitution arrived at by national consensus, drafted by an elected constituent assembly so as to guarantee equal representation for all citizens' and 'A state characterised by equality for all citizens, providing equal opportunities for appointment to the highest positions and equality between the sexes' etc . [[23]](#footnote-23)
4. Nevertheless, there are ample reasons to doubt the organisation's willingness to 'walk the walk' given that it hijacked the revolution. Indeed, the organisation's very name is divisive given its rejection of Muslims who do not share its ideology. In a country with such a mosaic of identities, no democratic party can be based on a particular religion, sect or ethnic group.
5. The Brotherhood's allies in Turkey and Qatar ensured that 80% of the Syrian National Council were members of the Brotherhood from the start. Two thirds of the Syrian National Council members invited to the ‘Friends of Syria’ conferences were members of the Brotherhood, making the initiative anything but representative of the full diversity and plurality of the actual Syrian people. Even more tragically, the West has largely accepted the extremist-led 'opposition' as the legitimate voice of the people. It took then US Secretary of State 18 months to recognise that the SNC does not represent the Syrian people.
6. Despite all that is known about the Brotherhood, Western governments continue to display a disturbing naiveté about what it stands for. After the fall of Mubarak in 2011, it was clear that the Brotherhood would be the primary beneficiary. But at a US House of Representatives Intelligence Committee hearing on 10 February 2011, James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, incredibly described the Muslim Brotherhood as a *'largely secular'* organisation with *'no overarching agenda'*. [[24]](#footnote-24)
7. It is no secret that the Brotherhood is anything but secular, and that its overarching agenda is to restore the Islamic Caliphate and impose Sharia Law. In August 2010, Mohamed Morsi had explicitly stated that the 'freedom' he had in mind for his country meant being *'governed by Islamic principles to be implemented in the constitution'*.[[25]](#footnote-25) If that was not clear enough, he later chanted on the campaign trail, *'The Sharia, then the Sharia, and finally, the Sharia!*'[[26]](#footnote-26)
8. As Robert R Reilly says in his recent review of two important books about Islamism, *'Sharia is inimical to freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, equality before the law, and just about all the other elements that undergird democratic constitutional rule. It codifies the inequality of men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, free and slave*.'[[27]](#footnote-27)
9. The speed with which the Morsi regime sought to put this into practice in Egypt, revealing the Brotherhood's true intentions, led to popular outrage and the fall of the government. As Tony Blair explained in a speech at Bloomberg in London this April, *'The Muslim Brotherhood government was not simply a bad government. It was systematically taking over the traditions and institutions of the countr*y.' [[28]](#footnote-28)
10. While the Brotherhood hijacked the revolution in Egypt after great social upheaval, and operates in the context of civil war in Syria, in many ways its true nature is revealed even more clearly in a more peaceful context. Over the past decade, the once secular nation of Turkey has been undergoing a slow-motion version of what the Brotherhood attempted to do at breakneck pace in Egypt.
11. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 'Muslim Democrat' AKP (the Justice and Development Party) claims not to be affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, but there are clear links[[29]](#footnote-29), and more importantly, the shared goals and strategy are undeniable. In 1998, Erdogan notoriously announced, *'Democracy is just the train we board to reach our destination'*.[[30]](#footnote-30) He also publicly recited a poem, *'The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers'*.[[31]](#footnote-31) He was punished by the military, whose job it is to uphold the secular republic, and served four months in prison. But he learned his lesson, and was far more cautious when elected prime minister in 2003.
12. Nevertheless, Erdogan's programme of creeping Islamisation accelerated with his growing electoral success, reshaping the judiciary, the press, the business world, education, and even the military. US-based watchdog Freedom House downgraded Turkey from 'Partly Free' to 'Not Free' in its 'Freedom of the Press 2014' report.[[32]](#footnote-32) The country's foreign policy has also been affected, with Erdogan effectively attempting to rebuild what was once the Ottoman Empire; he even hopes for Western backing for this enterprise, as a counter to Iranian hegemony.
13. Turkey remains a secular state, and although Erdogan has increased the role of religion in public life, he is some way short of imposing Sharia Law and will struggle to do so. Nonetheless, the transformation of Turkey in recent years serves as a case study of what Islamists can do by purely political means.
14. In contrast to Saudi-backed Salafists who openly declare Jihad against liberal democracy and fight under the black flags of al-Qaeda, the Qatari-backed Brotherhood is skilled in the art of 'Taqiyya', or 'concealment' of its Islamist objectives. While it makes no secret of its ultimate goal, it is quite happy to give the impression it is compatible with democratic means and values. It has shown in Syria, Egypt and Turkey, however, that this is far from the truth.
15. Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi has made no secret of his movement's intention to claim the West for Islam, albeit by 'peaceful conquest'.[[33]](#footnote-33) There is also evidence of extensive Brotherhood activity in the United States, explicitly taking advantage of democratic freedom to further the Islamist agenda.[[34]](#footnote-34) We can be sure that there would be nothing democratic about the Brotherhood's wished for Islamic super-state.[[35]](#footnote-35)

**Conclusion: enemies of democracy**

1. The steady metamorphosis of the Arab ‘Spring’ into something much more sinister demonstrates what can happen when militant Islamists are funded, encouraged and set loose. Liberal causes have been hijacked by extremists across Egypt, Libya and initially Tunisia, as well of course as Syria, while Turkey shows even established democracies are not safe from Islamist influence.
2. It is understandable that Western governments are attracted to parties and movements who claim to represent the non-violent, moderate face of Islam. But not all those who claim to speak for them have a genuine mandate to do so. Western observers are wrong to imagine Islamists are in the majority in the Muslim world; they are simply better-organised, united by a perverted ideology – and funded by the wealthy government of Qatar.
3. We must be especially cautious when organisations claiming to represent the people in fact have contempt for democracy as an ideal, aspiring instead to force all Muslims and even non-Muslims to submit to Sharia Law. The West has its own history of sectarian war and more recently extremism, which culminated with the Nazis – who had so much in common with today's Islamists in terms of ideology, organisation and clever use of propaganda – so we should not be naïve about how such movements arise, why they gain support, and how to counter them.[[36]](#footnote-36) The world must not make the same mistake twice.
4. To the Brotherhood, democracy is no more than a means to an end. They have exactly the kind of long-term political strategy that Western nations lack today. To take seriously its claims to be a moderate political movement is to play into its hands, as too many people across the Muslim world have already discovered.
1. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/feb/07/egypt-rule-brotherhood/?pagination=false [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/will\_egypt\_become\_a\_totalitarian\_state [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.frontpagemag.com/2013/dgreenfield/president-morsi-we-must-nurse-our-children-and-grandchildren-on-hatred-for-jews/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/morsi-called-israelis-descendants-of-apes-and-pigs-in-2010-video-1.491979 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-e-J2977xB4 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/07/opinion/abdo-shia-sunni-tension/index.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/3287.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huMu8ihDlVA [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6lZJ-M9xbQ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASg0On4bKbk [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp\_uploaded\_documents/DIA-Syria-MuslimBrotherhoodPressureIntensifies.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/140227-0002.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. http://www.acpr.org.il/resources/hamascharter.html [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. http://www.globalmbwatch.com/2007/06/17/hamas-official-acknowledges-role-of-muslim-brotherhood-in-financing-weapons-purchases/ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Abdullah\_Yusuf\_Azzam [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/marwan-hadid-brigades?ip\_login\_no\_cache=b54c7dc9b147ca640a257c79d5bf107c [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eya\_pywAb3c (translated at http://forums.islamicawakening.com/f18/abdullah-azzam-on-marwan-hadeed-2222/) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVeqPXjLD4A [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. http://www.frontpagemag.com/2014/raymond-ibrahim/exposed-the-muslim-brotherhoodal-qaeda-connection/ [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4297/muslim-brotherhood-ansar-bayt-al-maqdis [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. http://middleeastvoices.voanews.com/2012/05/viewpoint-from-exile-i-ribal-al-assad-offer-a-peace-plan-for-syria-17485/ [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
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23. http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=48370 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. http://dailycaller.com/2011/02/10/muslim-brotherhood-a-secular-organization-says-clapper/ [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. http://www.hudson.org/research/9791-egypt-s-looming-competitive-theocracy [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. http://www.frontpagemag.com/2012/ryan-mauro/the-makeover-of-mohammed-morsi/2/ [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. http://www.claremont.org/index.php?act=crbArticle&id=144#.U3dNSPldWQ4 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/apr/23/tony-blair-battle-islamic-extremism-political-agenda [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. http://www.globalresearch.ca/turkey-and-the-muslim-brotherhood-the-social-uprising-against-brother-erdogan/5338628 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. http://www.claremont.org/index.php?act=crbArticle&id=144#.U3dNSPldWQ4 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2270642.stm [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. http://www.todayszaman.com/news-346618-freedom-house-report-categorizes-turkey-among-not-free-countries.html [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdsQGhiBkSI [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/the-muslim-brotherhood-in-america/ [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL08EubD3bQ [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ribal-alassad/understanding-and-treatin\_b\_4548261.html [↑](#footnote-ref-36)