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Below, please find a study of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood by Dr. Israel Elad Altman, Director of Studies at the Institute for Policy and Strategy at Herzliya, Israel. This paper will appear in the third volume of Hudson Institute's journal *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, which will be released in mid-January, 2006. We have also decided to make this study available earlier to our online readers, as it provides an insightful analysis of current events, including the recent parliamentary elections, in Egypt.

~ The Editors

Current Trends in the Ideology of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

Dr. Israel Elad Altman

The American-led Middle East reform and democratization campaign of the last two years has helped shape a new political reality in Egypt. Opportunities have opened up for dissent. With U.S. and European support, local opposition groups have been able to take initiative, advance their causes and extract concessions from the state. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement (MB), which has been officially outlawed as a political organization, is now among the groups facing both new opportunities and new risks.

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The Founding Vision

his generation are generally more zealous, conservative, and committed primarily to long-term religious missionary work (da'wah) and to preserving the movement's unity.

The second or middle generation, by contrast, is made up largely of the student leaders of the 1970s, when Anwar al-Sadat allowed the MB to take over the university campuses. Several of its representatives are more open to change. They assign greater importance to the political than to the missionary role of the movement, see Egypt rather than the Muslim world as the MB's real frame of reference, and show interest in building alliances with other political organizations. The old guard, meanwhile, remains deeply

asked, during a live dialogue on an Islamist site, about disagreements concerning political reform inside the Guidance Bureau, Abu al-Futuh responded:

There are no disagreements, in the sense some may imagine, in the Guidance Bureau concerning the nature of reform. Our vision as the Muslim Brotherhood regarding reform, on which we all agree, was presented in the Initiative announced by the General Guide, hence it defines the positions of us all, and there is no room for any disagreement over political reform.¹⁷

identity of societies. The struggle is between two cultural projects—the Western one and the Islamic one.

Common Ground?

Given this attitude, is there any room for meaningful dialogue between the MB and the American government? MB meetings with representatives of foreign governments can be construed as illegal unless they are attended by Egyptian officials. Reports of a meeting between several MB figures and representatives of European embassies in Cairo led to a wave of arrests of MB members.²⁴ Aware of the risk, MB spokesmen have systematically denied having contact with U.S. officials, even though such meetings have indeed taken place.

Beyond the MB's fundamental animosity toward the United States, then, this risk poses a major obstacle to dialogue at the present time. 'Akif has stated that, if the MB were to become the government or a part of it, it would open a dialogue with the United States if the United States changed its current agenda vis-à-vis Islam and the Middle East.²⁵

indicated to many that the MB was abandoning its traditional strategy of avoiding outright confrontation with the state.²⁸

Yet by the summer of 2005, the MB demonstrations were over. Why were they held in the first place, and why were they stopped? Right from the start, there were signs that the MB did not want a full confrontation with the regime: the demonstrations condemned Mubarak's policies rather than the president personally, and they did not involve massive numbers of demonstrators. As the first demonstrations were taking place, moreover, both 'Akif and his deputy Muhammad Habib announced—on March 29 and 30, respectively—that the MB would support the presidential candidac

21, the MB issued a statement overturning this agreement and urging its members, as well as the Egyptian people at large, to take part in the election. While the statement said that MB members were free to choose their own candidates, its call on them not to support repression and corruption was clearly meant to discourage voting for Mubarak.

Because the participation rate was more important to the regime than Mubarak's margin of victory—that victory never being in doubt—this policy shift actually served the regime rather well.³² MB leaders explained their revised stance on the election in pragmatic terms. While they had opposed the way clause 76 was amended and boycotted the referendum that approved it, once it had passed, it made no sense to let the ruling party monopolize the election.³³

Their decision was widely criticized by the membership, however, particularly on the grassroots level.³⁴ Many argued that, by breaking the boycott upheld by most of Egypt's

the next presidential election. In free elections,

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- 23 "The Global Order: From Chaos to Domination," August 11, 2005, www.ikwanonline.com
- 24 Abdul Raheem Ali, "Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Arrested after Talks with Europeans," April 23, 2004, www.islamonline.net
- 25 'Akif, "The 'Brotherhood's Government' Will Have a Dialogue with the U.S.," April 17, 2005, www.islamonline.net; see also 'Akif: "The Dialogue with America Is Unlikely Until It Changes Its Policies," April 6, 2005, www.ikhwanonline.com, and 'Akif, " We Never Did and Never Will Have a Dialogue with the Americans," June 22, 2005, www.ikhwanonline.com
- 26 'Abd al-Rahim 'Ali, "Abu al-Futuh: Our Coming to Power Now Will Not Serve Egypt," April 17, 2005, www.islamonline.net
- 27 'Issam al-'Aryan, "A Dialogue About What?," al-Hayat, April 26, 2005