Politics and terrorism
An assessment of the origin and threat of terrorism in Egypt

Anneli Botha

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It was like war … I'd never seen anything like it before, a child, a baby, blood everywhere, the smell of burnt skin, of burnt hair (eyewitness of the Dahab bombings).[1]

The perpetrators of these heinous acts of terrorism will be tracked down and punished (President Hosni Mubarak in the aftermath of the Dahab bombings).[2]

Introduction

Terrorism is hardly a new phenomenon for countries in North Africa. In addition to the fact that Libya was considered a state-sponsor of terrorism until recently, according to the government, a number of organisations have begun to threaten stability in the country. These include al-Jama'ah al-Muqatilah al-Islamiyah (the Libyan Islamic Group), al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood), Harakat al-Tajammu' al-Islami (the Islamic Alliance Movement) and Harakat al-Shuhada al-Libiyin (the Islamic Martyrdom Movement).

The direct threat of terrorism materialised in Tunisia when a number of explosive devices detonated in hotels and in the ruling party's headquarters in 1988. After a period of calm, the country was again confronted with terrorism when the Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Sites claimed responsibility of a bombing at the Ghriba synagogue on the island of Djerba on 11 April 2002.

Morocco in its turn was confronted with this phenomenon on 16 May 2003 when 12 suicide bombers attacked five targets in Casablanca, and left 41 people dead and more than 50 injured.

The extent of devastation can hardly be compared with other countries in the sub-region when one focuses on Algeria. In a campaign of terror, the Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)),

Armée Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front (AIS)), Group Islamique Armé (Armed Islamic Group (GIA)) and Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)) claimed an estimated 150,000 lives during different periods of the conflict.

Egypt has had its share of acts of terrorism, but with a difference: its long historical development. Throughout the 20th century Egypt had been the birthplace of militant Islamist ideologies. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), founded in 1928, generated similar organisations throughout the Middle East. Sayyid Qutb, in his turn, provided the ideological framework for groups such as al-Qa'eda and Islamic Jihad. Egypt therefore was not only the target of domestic terrorism, it also influenced the development of transnational terrorism with individuals such as Ayman al-Zawahri and Mohamed Atta. With the re-emergence of terrorism in northern Sinai, it became clear that this region had joined Upper Egypt in the south and certain neighbourhoods of Cairo as incubators of Islamist extremism. It is important to focus on the possible reasons for the emergence of militant cells in Sinai, especially since the Sinai bombings and the two April attacks at tourist sites in Cairo signalled that a new generation of militant cells had emerged.

> Egypt was not only the target of domestic terrorism, it also influenced the development of transnational terrorism

Although the threat and manifestation of terrorism in North Africa differ from country to country, a number of similarities are visible:

• Draconian or closed political systems: Democratic transition, to date, has failed to establish institutions to mediate between state and society. Restrictions on basic human rights, including freedom of expression, speech and association, contribute to frustrations and deprive people of the opportunity to change their governments democratically. None of the organisations that had been implicated in acts of terrorism in the past had recognised their

governments as legitimate. The primary aim was to replace existing governments with a form of government that would rule in accordance with the Qur'an. Although attacks were predominately indiscriminate, the primary target was in effect the government itself.

- Religion: In the 1980s the importance of religion as a political tool was recognised, especially among the youth. Although religion had previously been used to justify acts of violence, its value grew as a tool for rallying support against governments that began to lose mass popular support. Egypt's decision under President Sadat to recognise the state of Israel contributed to this development.
- Economic circumstances: Poverty, unemployment and the growing gap between the elite and the overwhelming majority produced people that had nothing to lose.
- Geographic position and alliances, the question of identity and the inability to find a peaceful solution to the Palestinian conflict: Particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, government alignment with the United States (US) in the 'war against terrorism' further influenced the motivation of terrorist organisations. Although people throughout the world expressed their sympathy with the United States in the aftermath of 9/11, this good will was replaced with distrust of US policies in the Middle East, with particular reference to its oil interests as a motivation for the invasion of Iraq. This invasion in particular led to justifiable calls for a *jihad.* Throughout Islamic history a jihad has been justified when an external enemy invades a Muslim country. In other words, a sentiment of bitterness and resentment was developing, especially on communal level.

The aim of this paper will be to provide insight into the underlying reasons for acts of terrorism in Egypt. In other words, the focus will be on identifying and discussing the development of terrorism in that country in an attempt to reflect on the circumstances that made that country vulnerable to terrorism. Clearly Egypt is not only more prone than other countries to being the target of terrorism, but its nationals have also become involved as agents of terrorism or leading figures in al-Qa'eda. In analysing the re-emergence of the threat of terrorism in Egypt, it will first be important to reflect briefly on the development of this threat and on the primary roleplayers in three distinctive cycles of domestic terrorism. The influence of Egyptian nationals in the development of transnational terrorism will also be referred to. It is equally valuable to focus on the manner in which governments and their security forces reacted to the threat, not to criticise, but to learn from these lessons.

The history of terrorism in Egypt

Terrorism in Egypt developed in three clearly identifiable cycles:

First cycle: the love/hate relationship between the government and Islamist organisations

One of the most prominent movements, which influenced not only groups associated with terrorism in Egypt in the 1990s, but also transnational organisations such as al-Qa'eda, is al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin or the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The MB was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, who was influenced by the ideas of Mohammed Abdu (born in Egypt in 1849) and Rashid Rida (born in Syria in 1865, but lived in Egypt), who called for a return to the true principles of Islam. In order to understand the formation of the MB, its development needs to be placed in historical context. At the time the Muslim world, formerly an important empire, was in disarray:

> Ataturk abolished the Ottoman caliphate in Istanbul in 1924, which for so long had symbolised the unity of the faithful, and replaced it with a secular Turkish nationalist republic. The Muslim World was divided up by the Christian (colonial) powers, while at the same time destabilised from the inside by personal not communal interests. In reaction the Muslim Brotherhood called on society to reclaim Islam's political dimension, which had formerly resided in the person of the now-fallen caliph.[3]

The MB drew its members from the professional and working classes, and operated through a network of mosques, trade unions, and charitable organisations. Initially it was more concerned with religious education than with politics, and sought a return to Islamic values in the face of encroaching secularisation, but as it gained popular support, it became increasingly politicised. The MB also sought the implementation of *Shari'a* or Islamic law as the law of the land under the slogan 'The Qur'an is our Constitution'. Central to this is the conviction that Islam is a complete and total system that does not require Western values as a basis of social order, a belief shared by other Islamist organisations throughout history.[4]

During King Farouk's reign MB political parties were denigrated because they (according to King Farouk) weakened unity among Muslims. This philosophy proved useful to both the politically marginalised and King Farouk, who used the MB as a counterweight to secular nationalists. In the last years of the monarchy, Banna was assassinated and 'The Secret Apparatus', the para-military arm of the MB, initiated a campaign of systematic violence. However, immediately after the revolution, the MB welcomed President Gamal Abdel Nasser's accession to political power as an opportunity to build a society without divisions, based on Islamic principles. In reality, President Nasser's nationalist agenda placed the new government on a collision course with the MB.

Adopting a violent approach, members of the MB assassinated Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi on 28 December 1948 and attempted to assassinate President Nasser in 1954. Following three more assassination attempts on President Nasser's life, the government began to clamp down on members of the MB. After it was banned in 1954, over 4,000 members were arrested and thousands more fled into exile, contributing to the establishment of the MB in Syria and Jordan.[5] Treatment at the hands of the security forces in 'concentration camps' influenced MB's attitude to the government, and violence was regarded as the only viable strategy for dealing effectively with the authoritarian state. During this period, members of the MB attacked figures that represented state authority for symbolic reasons – attacks were predominately directed at police officers, government ministers, etc.

Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) was central to the philosophical development of the MB.[6] According to Qutb, the primary struggle was against *jihiliya* (ignorance) and everything that was not Islamic, including a secular state that was based on human law rather than divine or Islamic law. Sayyid Qutb stated that Islam must be re-established as the sole basis of political legitimacy. Until Islamic governments were established, Muslims must take up the struggle to change the status quo. To further this argument, Qutb reminded Muslims of the message in the Qur'an: 'Establish the kingdom of Allah on earth and bring all humanity from the worship of created things to the worship of Allah alone.' For Muslims, this meant to fight until they regained political dominance: 'Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good works that he will make you his vice-regents on earth as he has made others before you. He will surely establish for them their religion ... and exchange their fear for security' (Qur'an 24:55). According to Qutb and other extremists, it was a religious duty to wage jihad against tyrannical governments and replace them with Islamic governments. Furthermore, the distinction between an offensive struggle and a defensive one had lost its meaning; a constant state of war was needed: 'It is a spiritual, financial, and military endeavour undertaken to assert God's sovereignty.'[7]

'Excommunication' or *takfir* (the philosophical framework of al-Takfir wal Hijra) was not limited to the state, however, but included members of society as a whole for supporting Nasser. This step allowed the government to be legitimately overthrown through the use of violence against fellow Muslims. Those who supported Qutb's philosophy offered three interpretations:

- 'Pronouncement of a general *takfir* on everyone else, even fellow prisoners;
- Excommunication confined to the rulers of the state, whom they condemned as impious because they did not govern according to the injunctions obtained in the holy texts; and
- An allegorical interpretation in which the 'rapture of society' or *jahiliyya* should be understood in a spiritual sense, not in a material sense.'[8]

Gradually, within the MB a divide began to develop between the younger, more radical supporters and the older generation, who preferred interaction to exclusion. From Qutb's era onwards, the MB gradually began to accept the secular political process as an instrument for changing the government, therefore discarding a strategy based on violence. Despite this change in approach, Qutb's philosophical principles influenced al-Jihad, al-Takfir wal Hijra and al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group (IG)) in Egypt, and also other extremist organisations outside its borders. In reaction, the Egyptian government and a number of non-Islamic countries regarded the introduction of an Islamic state as a threat, although the two are inter-related in Islamic history, and the separation of religion *(din)* and state *(dawla)* is inconceivable for Muslims throughout the world, including contemporary Islamic revivalist thinkers. Governance *(hukm)* is inherent in Islam; the Qur'an provides the law, and the state enforces the law. Thus, Islam is religion and state *(din wa dawla)*, a system of belief and law *(aqida wa Shari'a)* that governs both spiritual and temporal affairs *(din wa dunya)*.[9]

> Under President Sadat, the government sought the support of Islamist groups to counter the influence of leftists

Under President Sadat, the government sought the support of Islamist groups to counter the influence of leftists. As part of this strategy, the government released hundreds of jailed MB members and even backed the new al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (see above). The government's decisions to introduce an 'open door' economic policy in 1974, to initiate a market economy, and to allow the formation of political parties in 1976 had a remarkable impact. Unlike the middle class, which benefited from these policies, the lower classes did not profit at all. Islamist organisations began to represent the lower classes in their frustration over social tensions, insecurity and lack of self-esteem. The MB, however, decided to oppose the government through political pressure and not through a strategy of violence:[10]

- With the strategic, long-term objectives in mind, the MB sought the establishment of an Islamic state and an Islamic social system that was based on the application of the *Shari'a* to replace the current secular legal system; and

- On a tactical level, to achieve these objectives, the MB focused attention on legitimate political channels and mechanisms. As part of this strategy, it targeted the social consciousness of the masses, in order to gain mass support.

In the 1970s other, more extreme organisations began to emerge, which aimed to topple the regime, despite President Sadat's decision to encourage the emergence of an Islamist movement in exchange for political support. One of the primary reasons for this development can be found in the basic principles of the government's strategy. Government supported the Islamist intelligentsia to 'control' more radical organisations by allowing cultural and ideological autonomy. In addition, the government gave the intelligentsia access to the new privatised economy. Consequently the intelligentsia not only grew out of touch with the younger generation's more radical ideals, but they were regarded as 'puppets' that did not represent the ordinary Egyptian or Muslim.[11]

The Youths of Muhammed Group (Jama'at Shabab Muhammed) was the first to emerge. Members attacked the technical military school in 1974 during a meeting of high officials. In 1977 the Muslims' Group (Jama'at al-Muslimun) kidnapped the Minister of Endowments and later killed him. Both organisations were established along the same philosophical principles and regarded the government and society as a whole as *takfir*. Although both organisations disappeared, their principles and strategy were taken over by the Islamic Jihad Movement (Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami) and al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya.[12]

President Anwar Sadat's decision to sign a peace agreement with Israel in 1979, while negotiating with the MB, led to the final rift between the government and Islamist organisations. While the MB turned against Sadat, al-Gama'a grew so radical that it joined forces with al-Jihad, another militant group, to assassinate Sadat in 1981.[13] But the Islamists were unable to capitalise on President Sadat's assassination by overthrowing the Egyptian government in similar fashion to the Iranian Revolution in 1979. On the contrary, President Mubarak initiated a massive crackdown that temporarily annihilated extremist factions, who kept a low profile. 'A few hundred, encouraged by the regime, joined the Afghan *jihad* by way of Saudi Arabia, while others set about gradually rebuilding the networks dismantled in 1981.'[14] Therefore a process of regrouping, while gaining practical experience in a 'legitimate' jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, gradually prepared and led to the second cycle.

Second cycle: the bloody 1990s

The MB and the two main militant Islamist groups (al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad) accused the

Mubarak government of being an authoritarian, secular regime that did not act in the best interests of the broader Muslim community. All three organisations agreed that transformation of the Islamic world was essential in order to establish an ideal world order. While al-Gama'a and al-Jihad considered violence the only viable option, the predominantly moderate MB attempted to establish an Islamic political identity through reform programmes at grassroots level by non-violent means, inter alia by gaining control over the educational systems, professional organisations and trade unions, increasing the value and visibility of Islamic religious symbols among communities, and distributing pro-Islamic material. Through a bottom-up approach with local communities as the first step, it was hoped that the Muslim international community would re-emerge as a world power. Although the MB initially called for the re-establishment of the Caliphate, its focus gradually changed to the formation of a Muslim block with the interests of the Muslim community at heart and the development of a Muslim identity. In contrast, al-Jihad and al-Gama'a initiated a campaign to overthrow the government through violence. According to them, jihad was essential on three levels:

- At local level to topple existing secular regimes and replace them with a regime based on Islam;
- At regional level to establish the Islamic Caliphate;
- At global level to spread Islam through directly confronting the enemies of Islam.

However, the two groups had different interpretations on the structuring of the organisation and the role of *dawa'a* or preaching in the broader strategy:[15]

- Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya believed that jihad should be waged in conjunction with a campaign of preaching as part of a strategy to enhance control over broader areas and to open up recruitment opportunities. As a result, militants focused on three target areas:
  - Moral targets that included individuals whose morality was suspect, including liquor stores, hairdressers, cinemas, etc.
  - Copts, who were forced to pay protection tax, which was applicable to non-Muslims living in Muslim controlled areas as prescribed by the *Shari'a*;
  - Political and military targets, which included members of the security forces and officials.
- Al-Jihad focused on a small but determined group that would set up an Islamic state through a coup. It had no confidence in preaching, especially since the state had the means to control its success.

Despite the MB's decision to resort to a non-violent strategy, the Egyptian government targeted the organisation. In an attempt to enhance legitimacy

against 'bearded militants' who accused the government of impiety in religious matters, the government encouraged the religious infrastructure to expand. As a result, the influence of the MB, as allies of the religious establishment, grew. The MB presented itself not merely as the only representative of ordinary citizens against a repressive government, but also as the only entity capable of neutralising the extremists. Kepel summarised the strength of the MB:

> They had a solid foothold among the devout middle class; they threatened to take up where the extremists had left off, using their charitable activities to win over the impoverished masses; and they had clearly penetrated the religious establishment, to which the regime looked for support against the Islamist movement.[16]

In reaction, the government referred to the MB as the ideological origin of extremist organisations. The MB, however, split into two factions: the older generation, who believed that the organisation should stay outside institutional politics, which it considered 'foreign to an Islamic state' it intended to implement; and the younger generation, who demanded the legalisation of the MB as a political party. In reaction the government immediately arrested the latter.[17]

Islamist militancy again presented a threat in Egypt in the 1990s. This was particularly evident in a significant increase in violent incidents and armed clashes between the Egyptian security forces and Islamist militants after the end of 1992. Although most of the incidents were limited to Egypt's southern regions, the conflict occasionally escalated to the northern regions and resulted in a recurrence of sporadic terrorist incidents in urban centres such as Cairo and Alexandria and prominent tourist destinations.

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad were responsible for initiating a violent campaign in 1992 with the primary objective of toppling the current government and replacing it with one that was willing to rule in accordance with their interpretation of the *Shari'a*. Influenced by the philosophy of Sayyid Qutb, Islamist extremists in the 1990s were determined to overthrow the 'infidel regime' of President Hosni Mubarak and replace it with an Islamic state in accordance with the *Shari'a*. While Sayyid Qutb and others of his generation came from a professional middle class, extremist supporters in the 1990s were younger, less educated and often came from agricultural areas. In particular they represented small towns and slums that were neglected by the government in the south or Upper Egypt. These local foot soldiers were joined

by hundreds of volunteers who returned from the war in Afghanistan. They were well trained, and they also provided a necessary ideological framework that resulted in a campaign against the Egyptian government, Copts and Western influence.

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya had emerged in the 1970s as a phenomenon rather than an organised group. The organisation worked as a religious committee – central to its development were Egyptian jails and universities. After being released from jail by President Sadat after 1971, several militant groups were formed, including the Islamic Liberation Party, al-Takfir wal-Hijra (Excommunication and Emigration), al-Najun min al-nar (Saved from the Inferno), al-Jihad and al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Each cell operated independently and was self-contained, which allowed the organisation to be structured, but at the same time loosely organised. Organised contact between the leaders of the groups was noticed, but it was difficult to identify a central authority on the direction and activities of these independent groups.[18] In the early 1980s al-Gama'a began to change its modus operandi by attacking cultural and social parties on university campuses. Members also tried to violently impose their interpretation of acceptable social behaviour on students. This change in strategy brought the organisation closer to al-Jihad, with which al-Gama'a began to ally itself until 1981. Sheikh Umar Abdul Rahman, who acted for some time as the religious leader of a joint council that included members of both organisations, began to operate as the sole leader of al-Gama'a. Targets also began to include foreigners and foreign interests, including hotels.[19]

In addition to attacks in Egypt (to be presented below), al-Gama'a was also implicated in the assassination attempt on President Mubarak on 26 June 1995 when his motorcade was attacked in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Al-Jihad

Al-Jihad was founded by two former members of Jama'at Shabab Muhammed in Alexandria in 1977: Abdul Salam Farag, an engineer and founder of the group, presented the group's conceptual framework in 'The Absent Religious Duty', in which jihad was presented as the only strategy; and Abud al-Zumur, an ex-officer in military intelligence, planned the jihad, while Sheikh Umar Abdul Rahman religiously sanctioned its activities.[20] Initially al-Jihad applied a discriminate campaign in which it focused on the assassination of high-ranking officials. In addition to its role in the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, the organisation was implicated in several assassination attempts against other senior Egyptian politicians

> Islamist extremists in the 1990s were determined to overthrow the 'infidel regime' of President Hosni Mubarak

during a Muslim insurgency in the 1990s, including attempts directed at Interior Minister Hassan Alfi in August 1993 and former prime minister Atef Sedki in November 1993.[21] It also claimed responsibility for the assassination of Ahmed Alaa Nazmi, the Egyptian trade representative in Geneva, on 13 November 1995, and six days later for the bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, which served as an indication that al-Jihad had begun to focus its reach beyond Egypt.[22] In other words, in contrast to al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, al-Jihad directed its activities as part of an international network. Ayman Mohammed Rabie al-Zawahri, the current leader of al-Jihad, and the second in command of al-Qa'eda – who was tried and convicted for his part in Sadat's assassination and served a three-year sentence for illegal possession of arms – began to lead the strategy of al-Jihad as a partner organisation of al-Qa'eda.

After his release, he left for Saudi Arabia, from whence he moved to Peshawar, Pakistan, Sudan and later Afghanistan. While in Afghanistan, al-Zawahri re-established al-Jihad in 1990. After the group had been dealt a severe blow in the aftermath of Sadat's assassination, al-Jihad split into a number of factions as a result of two inter-related events: al-Zawahri rejected al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's truce with the government, which influenced his decision to support Osama bin Laden in creating the International Front for Fighting Jews and Crusaders in February 1998. (The influence of al-Zawahiri will be discussed under the following section dealing with the export of terrorism.)

Al-Takfir wal Hijra

The Takfiri ideology can briefly be described as the adoption of a non-Islamic appearance such as shaving off beards, drinking alcohol and dressing in Western clothing in order to blend with crowds and deceive security forces. Those who adopted this ideology believed that any means justified the end, even assuming a non-Islamic lifestyle, and that killing other Muslims could be validated. Al-Takfir wal Hijra in Egypt re-introduced the *Takfiri* ideology in the 1960s, although it was recognised as a threat only when the group kidnapped and killed a Muslim cleric in 1977. In addition to this incident, members who adhered to its principles were implicated in the assassination of President Sadat.[23] The doctrine spread during the Afghan war in the 1980s and was brought back to North Africa by veteran *mujahideen* who preached it to the younger generation. Although Takfiri represents a hard-line interpretation of Islam, the ideology is popular, because it encourages followers to reconfirm their faith by breaking its own rules. That flexibility, coupled with their seemingly deeper integration into Western life, makes it harder for police to detect their presence. Traditionally al-Takfir wal Hijra called for isolation from society, during which violent clashes were limited. It was only after the influence of the

transnational terrorism network in Europe became known that the true extent of this interpretation emerged. These Islamist extremist elements were schooled in al-Takfir wal Hijra and trained by Afghan veterans of al-Qa'eda, who made them think, recruit and operate differently from traditional Islamist extremist networks that acted openly. For Europe, that makes the threat particularly acute. Takfiri theorists overtly advocate the use of immigration to expand their interpretation of jihad into Western Europe. One Takfiri scholar, Abu Basir, wrote in 2001 that '*jihad and immigration go together . . . the one cannot be achieved without the other*'.[24]

Although the primary objective during this period was the Egyptian government, terrorists targeted the tourist industry for two main reasons:

- Propaganda value: attacks against government representatives and the Egyptian population did not receive the same level of news coverage as the targeting of Western tourists. This reality often led to the conclusion that the life of a foreigner, especially a Westerner, was worth more than that of others.
- Tourism is one of the primary industries in Egypt and the inability of the government to protect its economic interests would indirectly weaken the regime in power. It was therefore a strategy that was intended to embarrass the government and its security forces.

The following section provides a brief overview of the development of terrorism in Egypt during this period:

- **21 October 1992:** A British tourist was killed near Dairut in southern Egypt. Egypt's main armed fundamentalist group, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, claimed responsibility. In another attack during the same period, Farag Foda, a writer critical of Muslim extremism, was shot dead by a gunman on a motorcycle
- **26 February 1993:** Two tourists and an Egyptian were killed in a bomb blast in a central Cairo cafe. Nineteen other people, including six foreigners, were wounded
- **20 April 1993:** Gunmen attempted to assassinate Information Minister Safwat el-Sherif near his home in Cairo, wounding him, his bodyguard and driver
- **8 June 1993:** A bomb hurled into a tourist bus near the pyramids in Cairo killed two Egyptians and injured 15 others, including two British tourists
- **18 August 1993:** Militants detonated an explosive device as the motorcade of Interior Minister Hassan el-Alfy drove past in Cairo. The minister's arm was broken, five people were killed and 13 were wounded
- **26 October 1993:** Four tourists were killed and two others injured at the Semiramis Hotel in

Cairo. Police indicated that the attacker had mental problems and was confined to a psychiatric hospital, but he escaped in 1997 and firebombed a coach outside Cairo's Egyptian Museum

- **25 November 1993:** A car bomb was detonated outside a Cairo school as the motorcade of Prime Minister Atef Sedki passed. One schoolgirl was killed, and at least 21 other people were injured. Sedki was unhurt
- **4 March 1994:** Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya claimed responsibility for an attack against a Nile cruise ship in southern Egypt in which a German woman tourist was seriously injured and later died
- **9 April 1994:** Gunmen firing from a motorcycle and a car assassinated Egypt's top anti-terrorist official, Major General Raouf Khayrat, as he left his home in Giza
- **26 August 1994:** Islamist militants on the road between the Nile towns of Luxor and Sohag shot a young Spanish tourist dead during an attack on a minibus
- **27 September 1994:** Two Germans and two Egyptians were killed in the Red Sea resort of Hurghada. Two al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya militants were hanged for the killings in 1995
- **14 October 1994:** Muslim extremists stabbed Nobel laureate Nagib Mahfouz in the neck as he left his Cairo home, but he survived. Assailants were said to be opposed to Mahfouz's novel 'Children of Gebelawi', which refers to Jesus and Mohammed
- **23 October 1994**: Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya claimed responsibility for two attacks in Naqada in southern Egypt in which one Briton was killed and five others, including three British tourists, were injured
- **18 April 1996:** Eighteen Greek tourists were killed and 14 injured in an attack in front of the Europe Hotel near the Giza pyramids. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya claimed responsibility, saying the attack was aimed at Jewish tourists
- **18 September 1997:** Nine German nationals and their Egyptian driver were killed when their bus was firebombed outside the Egyptian Museum in central Cairo
- **17 November 1997:** Sixty-two people, including 58 foreign nationals, were killed in an attack in the southern city of Luxor that was claimed by al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya

Although the Luxor attack was directly ordered by al-Gama'a members, investigations revealed a possible link to Osama bin Laden through Mustafa Hamza. Hamza, an al-Gama'a member who was implicated in the assassination attempt on President Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995, and had received financial assistance from bin Laden. In addition to the financial link, the assassination attempt on President Mubarak was attributed to al-Qa'eda.[25]

Interim period: export of terrorism

On the surface, Egypt's counter-terrorism strategy against domestic terrorism was successful, since terrorism virtually disappeared from Egypt until its re-emergence in 2003. However, in reality the response of the Egyptian authorities to the domestic threat of militants and extremists through its heavy-handed approach under emergency legislation led to a situation where leaders and supporters fled abroad, from whence they not only supported a myriad causes, but also contributed to the establishment of transnational terror organisations. Egypt indirectly exported extremism to the rest of the world. For example, the banning of the MB facilitated the creation of MB 'agencies' throughout the Middle East, as well as the establishment of other organisations influenced by its policies. Members of al-Jihad and al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya fled to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries to unite with other groups and stage bigger attacks on the US. One of the most prominent Egyptian nationals who influenced the development of transnational terrorism and deserves our brief attention was Ayman al-Zawahri.

> Egypt indirectly exported extremism to the rest of the world

In effect al-Jihad illustrates the ideological evolution of Islamist extremism and the central role of Egyptian nationals in transnational terrorism. Under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahri, al-Jihad evolved from targeting the Egyptian government it described as corrupt and un-Islamic to directing its operations against the US as part of a global jihad against the 'Great Satan'. Al-Jihad's influence in Egypt may be described as 'dormant', although it still had support, despite a number of its previous operations being uncovered before they could be executed. Possibly this lack of success could be attributed to operatives being sent from abroad, which led to the observation that the group lacked the operational capacity to function within Egypt. Unlike al-Gama'a, al-Jihad did not engage in social work or preaching activities that allowed it to form larger networks. Its operational character was clandestine and it limited its members in an attempt to prevent infiltration from security forces.[26]

Ayman al-Zawahiri, one of the founding members of al-Qa'eda, played an important role in the development of al-Qa'eda's philosophical principles. On 23 February 1998[27] al-Qa'eda's leaders (Ayman al-Zawahiri included) made a declaration, probably the best known in explaining the enemy

and the responsibility of the Muslim community to wage jihad:

> The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies, civilians and military, is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God: 'And fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together', and 'Fight them until there is no more oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God.'

> This is in addition to the words of Almighty God: 'And why should ye not fight in the cause of God and those who, being weak, are ill-treated [and oppressed]? – women and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will help!'

> Almighty God said: 'O ye who believe, give your response to God and His Apostle, when he calleth you to that which will give you life. And know that God cometh between a man and his heart, and that it is He to whom ye shall be gathered.'

> Almighty God also says: 'O ye who believe, what is the matter with you, that when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of God, ye cling so heavily to the earth? Do ye prefer the life of this world to the hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the hereafter. Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place, but Him ye would not harm in the least. For God hath power over all things.'

> Almighty God also says: 'So lose not heart, nor fall into despair. For ye must gain mastery if ye are true in faith.'

The following statements provide important insights into al-Qa'eda's rules of jihad:[28]

> We find permission to interrogate the hostage for the purpose of obtaining information. It is permitted to strike the nonbeliever who has no covenant until he reveals the news, information, and secrets of his people … The religious scholars have also permitted the killing of a hostage if he insists on withholding information from Muslims. They permitted his killing so that he would not inform his people of what he

learned about the Muslim condition, number [of his captors], and secrets … The scholars have also permitted the exchange of hostages for money, services, expertise and secrets of the enemy's army, plans and numbers.

> When the enemy enters that land of the Muslims, jihad becomes individually obligatory, according to all the jurists, *mufassirin* and *muhaddithin* … When jihad becomes obligatory, no permission of parents is required … Donating money does not exempt a person from bodily jihad, no matter how great the amount of money given … jihad is the obligation of a lifetime … Jihad is currently individually obligatory, in person and by wealth, in every place that the disbelievers have occupied. It remains obligatory continuously until every piece of land that was once Islamic is regained … Jihad is a collective act of worship, and every group must have a leader. Obedience to the leader is necessary in jihad, and thus a person must condition himself invariably to obey the leader, as has been reported in the *hadith*: 'You must hear and obey, whether it is easy or difficult for you, in things which are pleasant for you as well as those which are inconvenient and difficult for you.

These are of particular importance in situations where a Muslim country is invaded by another country – Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Somalia (currently 'invaded' by Ethiopia) – with the subsequent obligation to participate.

Although directed against the Saudi regime, certain principles are applicable to other Muslim governments:[29]

> Ignoring the divine shariah law, depriving people of their legitimate rights; allowing the Americans to occupy land of the two Holy Places; imprisonment, unjustly, of the sincere scholars … Through its course of actions the regime has torn off its legitimacy.
> (1) Suspension of the Islamic shariah law and exchanging it with man-made civil law. The regime entered into a bloody confrontation with the truthful *ulamah* and the righteous youths …
> (2) The inability of the regime to protect the country, and allowing the enemy of the *umma*, the American crusader forces, to occupy the land for the longest of years. As the extent of these infringements reached the highest levels and turned into demolishing forces threatening the very existence of the Islamic principles.

As stated by the people of knowledge, it is not a secret that to use man-made law

instead of the shariah and to support the infidels against the Muslims is one of the ten 'voiders' that would strip a person [of] his Islamic status …

Clearly after belief *(iman)* there is no more important duty than pushing the American out of the Holy Land … There is no precondition for this duty and the enemy should be fought with one's best abilities. If it is not possible to push back the enemy except by the collective movement of the Muslim people, then there is a duty on the Muslims to ignore the minor differences among themselves … Man-made laws are put forward permitting what has been forbidden by Allah such as usury *(riba)* and other matters.

Third, if the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jews' petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there. The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighbouring Arab state, and their endeavour to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal Crusade occupation of the peninsula.

They [the apostate rulers] tried, using every means and seduction, to produce a generation of young men that did not know anything except what [the rulers] want, did not say anything except what [the rulers] think about, did not live except according to the rulers' way, and did not dress except in the rulers' clothes … The bitter situation the nation has reached is a result of its divergence from Allah's course and his religious law for all places and times. That bitter situation came about as a result of its children's love for the world, their loathing of death, and their abandonment of jihad.

Unbelief is the same. It pushed Abou Jahl – may Allah curse him – and Kureish's valiant infidels to battle the Prophet – God bless and keep him – and to torture his companions – may Allah's grace be on them. It is the same unbelief that drove Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, Gadhafi, Hafez Assad, Saleh, Fahed – Allah's curse be upon the non-believing leaders – and all the apostate Arab rulers to torture, kill, imprison and torment Muslims.

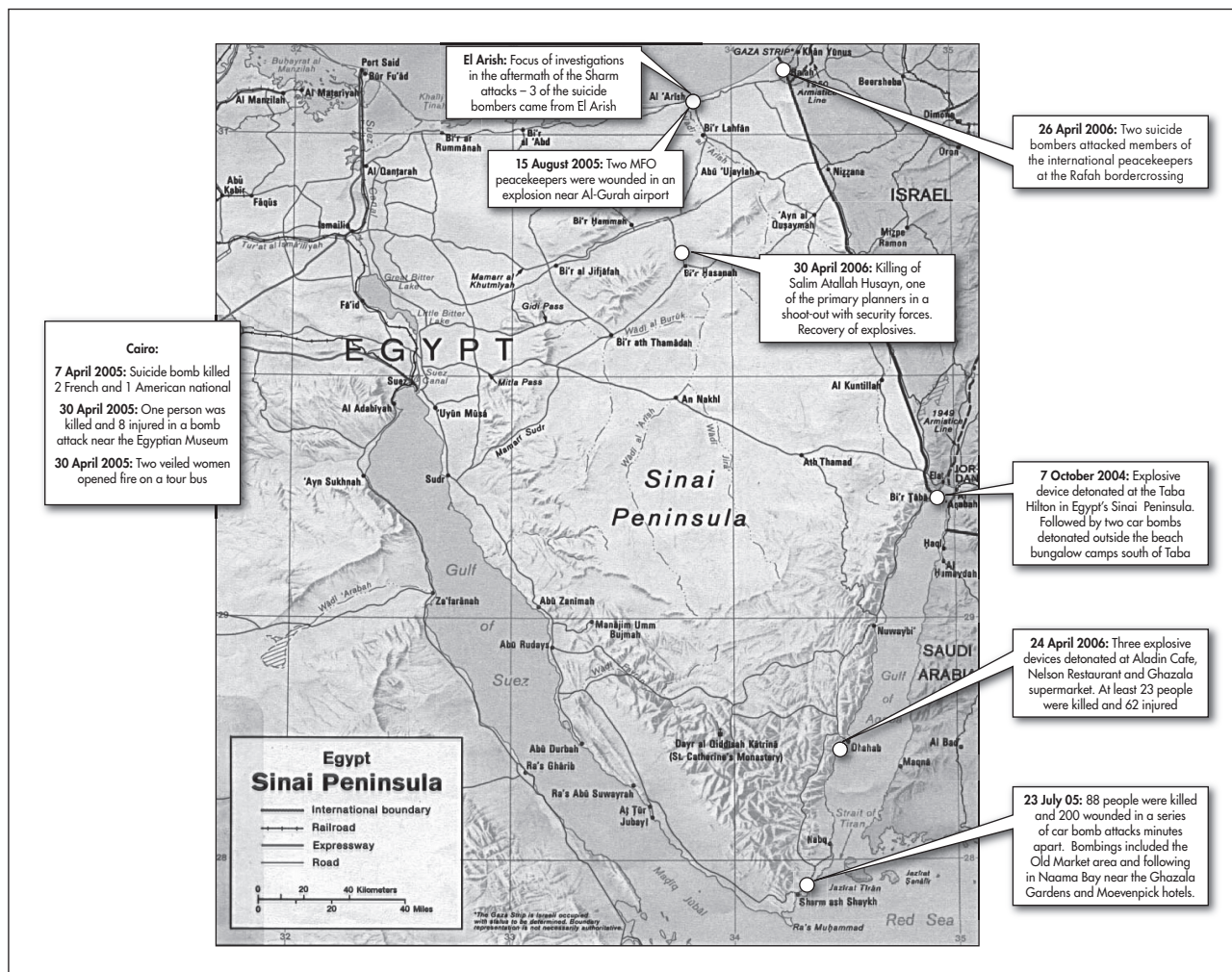In interpreting these statements, certain themes can be identified:

- The enemies of Islam are not limited to a certain group or party; all non-Muslims are enemies of Islam.
- Muslims throughout the world were urged to perform the duty of 'armed jihad' against the enemies of Islam.
- Jihad against Muslim countries that do not adhere to the principles of Islam is justified; countries in North Africa, including Egypt, fall into this category. This explains why the kidnappers of the Egyptian ambassador in Iraq referred to him as an 'ambassador of the infidels'. After the assassination of Ambassador Ihab al-Sharif, the Egyptian envoy in Iraq, al-Qa'eda issued a statement claiming the murder and accusing the Egyptian regime of being under the 'orders of the Crusaders'. [30]
- Attacks against civilians and economic interests are justified (the classical rules of jihad excluded both as legitimate targets).

It is important, however, to note that al-Qa'eda's philosophy is not new, but a combination of the interpretations of earlier radical scholars, which called for the revival of Islam against the enemies of Islam – in particular their own governments. Osama bin Laden explained that to achieve this objective, Islamist forces had to focus their attention on the US and its allies. Although bin Laden and his associates distributed these legal opinions, none were recognised as legitimate religious authorities. Individuals who supported the ideological philosophy and strategy of al-Qa'eda used these opinions to justify their actions and tactics.

In addition to the organisational support of al-Jihad for al-Qa'eda through Ayman al-Zawahri, individual Egyptian nationals were attracted to Afghanistan and the philosophy of al-Qa'eda. Before 9/11 and the subsequent invasion by the US of Afghanistan, it was estimated that of the 3,000 active members of the front in Afghanistan, approximately 1,000 were from Egypt. As well as al-Zawahiri, the following former al-Jihad members became part of the leadership of al-Qa'eda:[31]

- Sobhi al-Sitta, also known as Abu Hafas al-Masri, was the commander of the front's military wing, the Islamic Army for the Liberation of Holy Sites, which claimed responsibility for the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. One of Sitta's daughters married a son of bin Laden.
- Sitta succeeded another Egyptian, Ali al-Rashidi, who drowned in Lake Victoria, Uganda, in 1995, two years after he was sent to Africa to recruit members for al-Qa'eda. The cells al-Rashidi established were later responsible for the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

- Mohammed Atta, who hijacked one of the planes that hit the World Trade Centre, was recruited by al-Zawahiri at the University of Cairo.

Geographic presentation of acts of terrorism in Egypt: 2005–2006

El Arish: Focus of investigations in the aftermath of the Sharm attacks – 3 of the suicide bombers came from El Arish

15 August 2005: Two MFO peacekeepers were wounded in an explosion near Al-Gurah airport

26 April 2006: Two suicide bombers attacked members of the international peacekeepers at the Rafah bordercrossing

30 April 2006: Killing of Salim Atallah Husayn, one of the primary planners in a shoot-out with security forces. Recovery of explosives.

Cairo:

7 April 2005: Suicide bomb killed 2 French and 1 American national

30 April 2005: One person was killed and 8 injured in a bomb attack near the Egyptian Museum

30 April 2005: Two veiled women opened fire on a tour bus

7 October 2004: Explosive device detonated at the Taba Hilton in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Followed by two car bombs detonated outside the beach bungalow camps south of Taba

24 April 2006: Three explosive devices detonated at Aladin Cafe, Nelson Restaurant and Ghazala supermarket. At least 23 people were killed and 62 injured

23 July 05: 88 people were killed and 200 wounded in a series of car bomb attacks minutes apart. Bombings included the Old Market area and following in Naama Bay near the Ghazala Gardens and Moevenpick hotels.

Source: Map: http://www.lib.utexas.edu.maps/middle_east_and_asia/sinai.jpg (acts added by author)

In addition, Ayyub al-Masri, an Egyptian national, took over from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as the senior al-Qa'eda leader in Iraq. According to terrorism analysts, al-Masri has been a terrorist since 1982, when he became involved in al-Jihad under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahri. Before taking over from al-Zarqawi, al-Masri facilitated the movement of foreign fighters from Syria into Iraq. In addition to al-Jihad's relationship with al-Qa'eda the following statistics confirm the involvement of Egyptian nationals in transnational terrorism;[32]

- On the 22 most wanted list of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in November 2001, seven were Egyptian nationals.
- In Iraq, according to US defence officials, approximately 90 of more than 5,700 people in custody in Iraq as security risks were foreign fighters. About half were from Syria and the others were from Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia.[33] On 28 June 2004 Iraqi police arrested Abd al-Qadir Mohammad, an Egyptian national, on charges of arms trafficking. He admitted to the charges.[34]
- According to a high-ranking security official in Iraq on 10 November 2006, most foreign fighters

arrested in the previous four months were Egyptian nationals (estimated at 150), followed by Syria and Libya (estimated at 80).[35]
- On 19 March 2005 Omar Ahmed Abdullah Ali, an Egyptian, detonated an explosive device outside the Doha Players Theatre, Qatar, killing one person and injuring 12 others. Ali was employed by the state-run Qatar Petroleum (QP) company and had worked in the company's information technology department since 1990. Colleagues commented that: 'Nobody expected this of him. He was a decent man and just had a baby a month ago.' 'He was not a loner, but he was not the most sociable person.'[36] The Army of the Levant, an unknown group, claimed responsibility for the attack.[37] It is alleged that Ali associated himself with the MB in Qatar before adopting jihadist principles as distributed through the Internet.[38]
- On 6 November 2006 a court in Milan sentenced two Egyptian nationals for their involvement in the March 2004 train bombings in Madrid: Rabei Ousmane Sayed Ahmed, the accused mastermind, was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for being a member of a terrorist organisation, while Yahya

Mawad Mohamed Rajeh was sentenced to five years in jail.[39]

Third cycle: Terror expansion to the east

A number of attacks have been recorded since 7 October 2004, which itself marked the start of the third cycle of domestic terrorism. Although Egyptian nationals became part of transnational terrorism (as stated above), they were influenced by a number of domestic circumstances, and also the broader al-Qa'eda philosophy. The following section provides a brief summary of attacks to date, possible suspects and the motivation behind the re-emergence of terrorism in Egypt since the 1990s.

- **7 October 2004:** Thirty-four people, including several Israeli tourists, were killed and more than 10 wounded in triple bomb attacks on the Hilton Hotel, Taba, the Ras al-Shitan campsite and a resort near Nuweiba
- 7 April 2005: A blast in Cairo killed two French nationals and an American as well as the bomber in what the authorities insist was an 'isolated' incident
- **30 April 2005:** One person died and eight were wounded in a bomb blast near the Egyptian Museum in Cairo
- **30 April 2005:** Two veiled women open fire on a tour bus in Cairo, then shot themselves
- **23 July 2005:** At least 30 people were killed when an explosive device detonated in the driveway of the Ghazala Garden Hotel, a 176-room four-star resort on the main strip of hotels in Naama Bay. This was one of a series of car bomb attacks minutes apart. According to Egyptian police, 4–7 car bombs killed 88 people in total and wounded 200
- **23 July 2005:** Another car bomb exploded in the Old Market, an area a few kilometres away, killing 17 people – believed to be Egyptians – at a nearby outdoor coffee shop. Three minibuses were set alight, though it was not clear whether they were carrying passengers
- **23 July 2005:** Another device detonated near the Meridian Hotel
- **15 August 2005:** Two people were wounded in an explosion near Al-Gurah airport, approximately 30 kilometres south-east of Al-Arish on the Mediterranean coast of Sinai, which was used by the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO). The MFO is an independent peacekeeping force created as a result of the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, funded mainly by the two neighbouring states and the US. Terrorists planted two gas canisters on the road and linked them to an electrical wire. A group calling itself 'Egypt's mujahedeen,' or holy warriors, claimed responsibility. The group was one of three that also claimed responsibility for the Sharm ash-Sheikh bombings

- **24 April 2006:** Three explosive devices detonated at 19:15 in Dahab on 24 April 2006. The attacks resulted in the death of at least 23 people and injuries to 62, among them 20 foreigners. Two days later, on 26 April 2006, suicide attackers targeted vehicles near the main MFO peacekeepers' base, close to the Rafah border crossing with Gaza

Correlation between the attacks in Taba, Sharm ash-Sheikh and Dahab

First, all three targets were situated in the Sinai Peninsula, which is particularly popular with Western and Israeli tourists:[40]

- Taba, a popular destination for Israeli tourists, is a symbol of the peace that has existed between Egypt and Israel for three decades. It is therefore a symbolic target for Islamist militants. Taba is also situated literally on the border with Israel.
- Sharm ash-Sheikh, in addition to being an attractive Red Sea tourist resort, is where Egypt routinely hosts Arab-Arab and Arab-Israeli summits, global anti-terror summits and other emergency gatherings. It is the showcase of modern Egypt, foreign investment, tourism expansion, foreign currency earnings and, above all, strict security control.[41] For Osama bin Laden, Sharm ash-Sheikh has been a target since March 1996, when the first big Arab-Israeli summit was held there. In other words, to his mind, Sharm ash-Sheikh is a very important symbolic target.[42]
- Dahab, although smaller than Taba and Sharm ash-Sheikh, is as popular with tourists.

It is interesting to note that in accordance with Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel, Israelis are allowed to travel without visas to a zone known as 'Part C', which stretches from Taba to Sharm ash-Sheikh (an area in which Dahab is included), and in which all three cities were targeted. [43]

All three bombings occurred close to or on national holidays:

- Taba was attacked after the commemoration of Egypt's military successes against Israel in 1973.
- The Sharm ash-Sheikh blasts occurred on the anniversary of the 1952 revolution against the Egyptian monarchy. The bombings on 23 July 2005 came one day before a local court heard the case of suspects involved in the Taba attacks in October 2004.
- The Dahab bombings occurred during the festival of Shamm el-Nessim and the Coptic Christian Easter weekend.

Public holidays not only maximise the number of casualties, but also commemorate events of which Egyptians should be proud. One therefore cannot

overlook the symbolism in which Egyptian patriotism was the target.

Security officials revealed that similar explosives had been used in the Taba and Sharm ash-Sheikh bombings and that the type of explosive used in the roadside bomb that injured the two Canadian peacekeepers (15 August) was similar.[44]

Prime suspects?

A number of theories have been formulated as to who might be behind the attacks. In the immediate aftermath of the Taba bombings, certain possibilities were mooted:[45]

• Israeli security officials suspected that a loosely organised network known as World Jihad were responsible, describing the group as 'an octopus' of independent cells with al-Qa'eda at its core.
• Egyptian officials also considered the possibility that the terrorists belonged to new terrorism centres that were not believed to be linked to terror groups that had been active in Egypt in the 1980s and 1990s, but were 'local centres' of terrorism inspired by violence in Iraq and the Palestinian territories. Supporting this theory, a Palestinian refugee plotted the coordinated bombings against Israeli tourists at Sinai resorts and accidentally killed himself while carrying out the attack. The Interior Ministry in a statement also announced that Ayad Said Saleh had been motivated by the deteriorating situation in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip (from which his relatives had fled in 1967).
• Another possibility was that a local sleeper cell linked to Ayman al-Zawahri, the leader of Islamic Jihad who merged with al-Qa'eda in 1998, was responsible for the attacks.

Were domestic terror structures or a broader transnational terrorism network based on the philosophy of al-Qa'eda responsible for the emergence of terrorism in the Sinai? In the following discussion arguments in favour of both will be presented:

International influence

According to Egyptian security officials, the Sharm bombings were probably the work of domestic militants, despite indications that the perpetrators might have had international assistance or influence. For example, in both cases, car bombs and suicide bombers were used, something that had rarely been seen in the campaigns of Islamist militants in the 1990s. Simultaneous blasts had been used in past attacks, but not in Egypt, which reflected possible al-Qa'eda influence (London, Madrid and Iraq). Egyptian security officials also investigated a possible link to Pakistani extremists when they distributed the pictures of the six Pakistanis with more than 30 pictures of other suspects.[46]

In addition to an increasing threat by individuals and groups in the Sinai to direct their attacks within Egypt, a growing concern is that the Sinai and the Gaza Strip could be used as safe-havens for transnational terrorists. Weapons smuggled with the assistance of the Bedouin community in the Sinai Peninsula were used in the bombings in Taba, Sharm ash-Sheikh and Dahab. Through the use of tunnels, foreign currency, weapons, narcotics, alcohol, electronic items and people are being smuggled from Egyptian Rafah to the Palestinian areas of the Gaza Strip.[47] Although these items are smuggled predominately from Egypt to Palestine, there is a threat that individuals trained in explosives could gain entrance through these tunnels to assist extremists in Egypt or direct their attacks against Israel from Egyptian territory. The possibile impact al-Qa'eda associates might have on the region while directing operatives from Sinai into the Negev to make their way into the West Bank's Palestinian population centres is a source of concern for security forces. It is further alleged that militants linked to Hezbollah, al-Qa'eda and other international terror groups are currently in Gaza. General Dani Arditi, the head of Israel's anti-terrorist office, warned that al-Qa'eda had established a presence in Gaza and the West Bank through the Sinai Peninsula after Israeli troops had withdrawn.[48] These groups have set up bases in the Sinai that are still functioning, using tunnels to get into Gaza. It is to be expected that they will not concentrate their attention only on Palestine.

> A growing concern is that the Sinai and the Gaza Strip could be used as safe-havens for transnational terrorists

Confirming the fear of international involvement, a number of organisations claimed responsibility for the attacks in Sinai. One of the groups that claimed responsibility for the Sharm as-Sheikh bombings was the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, al-Qa'eda, in Syria and Egypt. The group also claimed responsibility for the Taba bombings on 7 October 2004. The Abdullah Azzam Brigades are apparently named after Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian militant who led Islamist militants in Afghanistan and was killed in 1989 by a roadside bomb. He was regarded as the former 'spiritual mentor' of bin Laden.[49] The Abdullah Azzam Brigades had previously claimed responsibility for the assassination of Ahmed Alaa Nazmi, the Egyptian trade envoy in Geneva in November 1995, in response to torture and death sentences in Egypt.[50] Although not sufficient to determine responsibility, a

number of other organisations claimed responsibility for the Taba attacks:[51]

- Muhammed's Army (The Military Wing of the Palestinian Resistance)
- Al-Qaeda Information Bureau–World Islamic Front
- Two previously unknown groups:
- The Islamic Unity Brigades
- Jamaa Al-Islamiya Al-Alamiya (World Islamist Group).

The following two groups claimed responsibility for the Sharm ash-Sheikh bombings:

- A previously unknown group calling itself the 'Holy Warriors of Egypt' faxed a statement to newspapers in which it listed the names of five people it said were the bombers.[52]
- Al-Qa'eda Organisation in the Levant and Egypt claimed responsibility in an Internet statement: 'This operation came as part of the response against the global evil powers which are spilling the blood of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Chechnya. The mujahedeen ... have dealt a devastating blow to the Crusaders and the Zionists and the infidel Egyptian regime in Sharm as-Sheikh.'[53]

Al-Tawhid wal Jihad (Unity and Holy War)

Immediately after the bombings in Taba and Sharm ash-Sheikh, security forces exclusively blamed local Bedouins for the attacks, excluding any transnational involvement. On 26 March 2006 (almost a month before the bombings in Dahab), Egypt's High State Security Prosecutor stated that al-Tawhid wal Jihad was responsible for the attacks.[54] Subsequently 13 people were charged with alleged involvement in the bombings in Sharm as-Sheikh and Taba. Egyptian prosecutors had originally charged three men: Mohammed Gayez Sabbah, Mohamed Ahmed Saleh Fulayfel and Mohammed Abdullah Rabaa. Mohamed Ahmed Saleh Fulayfel was killed in a gun battle with police.[55] On 30 November 2006 Younes Mohammed Mahmoud, Osama al-Nakhlawi and Mohammed Gayez Sabbah (accused for their involvement in the Taba bombings) were found guilty on the following charges terrorism, murder, illegal possession of weapons and belonging to a terror group and sentenced to death. A further ten defendants were also sentenced by the court to between five years and life imprisonment for their part in the attacks.[56]

In blaming al-Tawhid wal Jihad, the government opened up the possibility of international involvement in the bombings. Although terror groups are known to adopt or claim responsibility for attacks in 'the name of an organisation' for the propaganda value, it is still unclear who were responsible for planning and financing the attacks behind the scenes. Despite its domestic heritage, possible links with al-Qa'eda and a transnational philosophy can be traced to the name of the organisation: 'Tawhid and Jihad', Arabic for 'Monotheism and Holy War', was the name used by the group led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq.

In the historical development of terrorism in Egypt, attacks were previously limited to Upper Egypt and Cairo. Despite the alleged involvement and/or influence of foreign role players and interests, those directly implicated in recent attacks were Egyptian nationals from Sinai. This development opened the debate on the reason behind the involvement in terrorism of individuals living in this part of Egypt:

Marginalisation of the Bedouin Community

The use of Bedouins in the attacks aroused concern. Re-incorporated into Egypt only in 1982 after Israeli control ended with the Camp David agreement after the Six Day War in 1967, the Bedouins' lack of national allegiance and their nomadic customs made them natural suspects. The Sinai Bedouins know the desert better than anyone, the hidden tracks, the water sources and smuggling routes. Previously a number of Bedouin, isolated from the rest of the country, had been suspected of growing drugs in the valleys or smuggling illegal Russian migrants into Israel. It is estimated that approximately 10 semi-nomadic Bedouin tribes populate the Sinai Peninsula, numbering between 100,000 and 300,000.[57] Equally there is historical distrust on the part of ordinary Egyptians, which commenced with the suspicion that the Bedouin had assisted Israel in the Six Day War. Members of the Bedouin community indicated that their countrymen deal with them as second-rate citizens. Feelings of marginalisation were clearly evident before the bombings. Although Israel launched a number of studies to understand the Bedouin culture, the Egyptian government did not show the same enthusiasm. The impact of the security crackdown in the aftermath (to be discussed below) therefore fuelled feelings of marginalisation.

El Arish, 336 kilometres north-east of Cairo, is effectively the capital of northern Sinai, the biggest city centre in the area, with a population of approximately 120,000 people. Most of its citizens work for the government, farm or herd animals in the desert, or are unemployed. El Arish, just 56 kilometres from Rafa, hosts a large Palestinian community who fled the Gaza

> Immediately after the bombings in Taba and Sharm ash-Sheikh, security forces exclusively blamed local Bedouins for the attacks

Strip after the conflict between Israel and Hamas. This was where the three suicide bombers (Sharm ash-Sheikh), identified as Mahmud Mohammad Hamad, Mohammad Oda Said and Mussa Ghneim, originated. Residents have helped smuggle weapons and other supplies into Gaza. However, for an area known for its poor socio-economic conditions, there is a tremendous amount of construction. With financial contributions from the Gulf, mosques are being built that also provide healthcare and other assistance. Growing political and economic frustration, especially among the younger generation, could explain why members of this traditionally separate community might become involved in acts of terrorism. Since the bombings in Taba, it has become clear that the younger generation have begun to turn against their parents, tribal elders, and anyone who does not share their narrow worldview. Frustration over their immediate conditions and awareness of the suffering of other Muslims in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq further influence individuals who were not involved in the past to engage in acts of terrorism.

Traditionally the Egyptian government's policy towards the Sinai Peninsula could be divided into two sectors:[58]

- Security: Smuggling routes led to the deployment of security forces that could apply instruments provided under the state of emergency to the narcotic trade (similar to terrorism-related cases).
- Economic: The revenue generated by resorts such as Sharm ash-Sheikh, Taba and Dahab was immediately recognised in a country dependent on tourism. It is an industry that the government is willing to protect at any cost. Since the Bedouin community is traditionally nomadic, members of the Bedouin community did not share in the financial benefits of the tourism industry. They witnessed the importation of other Egyptians into their area, who often did not regard them as Egyptians, as well as security personnel to protect the tourism industry. At the same time local communities complained of the lack interest by the government in uplifting and developing the area for the benefit of local communities, while respecting their values and customs.

When one considers this resentment and distrust, it is not surprising that the government does not have a positive image in the Bedouin communities. Bedouins also complained that, in addition to mass arrests, security officials humiliated their tribal leaders and women during their counter-terrorism operations. Bedouin culture places great emphasis on respect. In disregarding this basic element, its members felt

that the basic fabric of their culture and themselves as people were being attacked. To fuel resentment, members of the local community indicated that government presence before the attacks was limited. Since the bombings, police members have been deployed around Bedouin communities. But to gain access to these communities, one has to go through a number of roadblocks, in which corruption is clearly evident. One observer stated that if the military had been deployed instead of the police, one might have expected a more positive outcome. The military distinguished itself in addressing terrorism in the aftermath of the Luxor incident in 1997 and was instrumental in engaging with individuals implicated in acts of terrorism that led to the ceasefire agreement with al-Gama'a. In contrast to the police, the military have a more positive reputation among ordinary citizens. Unlike a reactive strategy, of which mass arrests form the basis, the military concentrates on a proactive strategy based on intelligence. Unfortunately, as part of the Camp David agreement with Israel, military deployment is not allowed in Sinai.

In addition, the government reaction in the aftermath of the bombings in Taba in October 2004 contributed to the spread of extremism. Approximately 3,000 Bedouins, including women, children and elderly people, were arrested.[59] In many cases their only offence was that of being a relative of someone suspected of involvement in the attacks.[60] Security forces blamed the Taba blasts on an alleged terrorist cell based in El Arish, and consisting of Palestinian, Egyptian nationals and Bedouin.[61] Although only nine suspects were named, thousands of people in the North Sinai Peninsula area, which includes El Arish, were arrested, tortured and held incommunicado, while the leader of the suspected group remained at large. Despite mass arrests and widespread reports of torture of detainees, security agents failed to capture many wanted suspects. Instead residents openly confirmed that the crackdown had radicalised public sentiment even further against the government.[62]

The possibility that the attacks in Sharm were initiated in reaction to the government's actions after the Taba bombings was also raised as part of a 'payback theory'. According to Amr el Choubaki, a Egyptian political analyst, the bombers may have been lashing out at the government for its aggressive pursuit of suspects in the October 2004 terrorist attacks. However, if the primary aim of the attacks was to avenge previous arrests, the targets would probably have been security forces and not civilians.[63] It is a matter of concern that after the bombings, when security forces had identified and detained fifteen potential suspects, they continued to round up Bedouin tribesmen and

> Despite mass arrests and widespread reports of torture of detainees, security agents failed to capture many wanted suspects

other Egyptian nationals for 'possibly' having played a role.[64]

The national security forces began with an arrest campaign in north, central and south Sinai. Among those detained were men who had previously been arrested in connection with deadly anti-Israeli bombings on 7 October in and around Taba and recently released. Police sources indicated that they wanted to question the Bedouins about unusual movements in the desert tracks of the Sinai that would have allowed the bombers to evade the security checkpoints on access roads to Sharm ash-Sheikh. Suspicious purchases of explosives, in a region where explosives are frequently used for quarrying and to prepare land for construction, were also investigated.[65]

- On 26 July 2005 police arrested 95 people.
- Hassan al-Arayshi was arrested on 18 August 2005 in a mountainous area near the town of El Arish in northern Sinai for assisting the mastermind of the Sharm bombings to escape. It is alleged that Al-Arayshi had stolen the identification documents of a man who was not involved in the attacks, thus temporarily covering his tracks. The other key suspects who were arrested included Mohammed Ahmed Saleh Felifel, Osama Abdelghani al-Nikhlawi and Khaled Mussaed. Authorities believe that the suspects helped three suicide bombers plan and prepare for the 23 July triple attacks. All three bombers died in the explosions that destroyed Sharm-as-Sheik's Ghazala Hotel and struck a nearby car park and a busy market area.[66]
- Approximately 300 suspects were arrested in the Jabal Halal area (in central Sinai) and another 43 people, among them presumed terrorists, drug dealers and ex-convicts, were arrested while hiding in the mountains.[67]
- In March 2006, Prosecutor-General Maher Abdel Wahed announced that fourteen suspects, including Tamer Yusri Yassin (who was extradited from Qatar for his alleged involvement in the attacks) and two women, had been charged with belonging to an illegal group, using violence to disturb public order, posing a threat to public security, and possessing arms for use in terrorists attacks, in connection with the attacks in Cairo in April 2005.[68] Tamir Yusri is the brother of Ihab and Najat, who were killed in the attacks in April 2005: Ihab was killed at Abd-al-Mun'im Riyad Square when he threw a bomb at a group of tourists visiting the square, while Najat (his sister) died in Al-Sayyidah A'ishah Square with another woman, named Iman, while attempting to attack a bus carrying tourists. Muhammad, the third brother, was arrested in Libya, where he fled

after these incidents. Muhammad, aged 17 years, had already been deported to Egypt.[69]

During a recent visit by the author to the region, it became clear that government interaction in, or rather interference in and supervision of virtually every aspect of people's lives, does not go down well. Lack of respect for tribal traditions by security forces will lead to further marginalisation. Even tribal leaders, who for generations have arbitrated disputes and kept order among families here, must now be vetted by the state.

al-Ta'ifah al-Mansurah

Although the focus of this discussion is predominately on terrorism in Sinai, broader reference is necessary. During the same period, a number of smaller attacks were directed against Egypt's tourism industry in Cairo. Although carried out by smaller cell structures, Egyptian security forces announced on 19 April 2006 that they had successfully foiled a number of terrorist attacks in Cairo. Allegedly Ahmad Muhammad Ali Jabr, known as Abu-Mus'ab (a student at the literature department of Banha University, north of Cairo), and Ahmad Muhammad Basyiuni, also known as Abu-Bakr al-Misri, a preacher, headed a group of 22 members. According to security forces, the group is active in the Al-Zawiyah al-Hamrah, Turah, Hilwan and Ma'adi districts of the greater Cairo area. From documents that were seized, targets included tourist attractions, the natural gas pipeline along the ring road around greater Cairo and Christians as well as Muslims whom they categorised as 'evil'.[70] Although no previous information about this organisation existed in Egypt, organisations with the same name had attracted attention in Jordan and Iraq, thereby introducing the possibility of international links.[71]

The three bombings on 7 October 2004, the first acts of terrorism in seven years, indicated a cycle that was similar to, but also different from, the previous two, although the ideological motivation, target selection and modus operandi might be similar.

- The area of operations: in addition to attacks in Cairo, a number of attacks occurred in the Sinai Peninsula, possibly indicating the impact of growing instability in the sub-region. For example, in the attack on 7 October 2004, a Palestinian driver and eight Egyptian accomplices used simple washing-machine timers, stolen cars and old explosives to detonate a car bomb that partly destroyed the Taba Hilton Hotel. Five Egyptians, including local Bedouin tribesmen, were arrested for their

> The national security forces began with an arrest campaign in north, central and south Sinai

role in the bombing. The Ministry of the Interior announced that, 'The attack was in response to the escalating situation in the occupied territories and aimed at Israeli tourists.' This assessment contradicted statements by Israeli investigators, whose findings suggested that the attack was part of a well-coordinated bombing, similar to the sophistication of al-Qa'eda-style attacks in Turkey and Spain two years earlier. This theory reflected the growing sense among US, European and Arab intelligence agencies that al-Qa'eda has evolved into an ideology, rather than remaining a distinct organisation.[72]

- At organisational level, there is a move away from more definable organisations to small independent cell structures, often involving only family members. Terrorism organisations throughout history have concentrated on friendship, blood relationships and places of worship as a recruitment framework. Since the government's strategy is to monitor and control mosques, it is expected that friends and blood relatives will form the basis of terror operations. Government officials also disregarded the existence of a large militant movement active inside Egypt after an insurgency led by al-Gama'a al-Islamiya and al-Jihad. The latest bombing campaigns fit the pattern of being perpetrated by smaller groups that are inspired by al-Qa'eda's ideology, but without any operational link, which launch attacks on unprotected targets. Related to this development is the growing importance of the Internet. For example, Hassan Rafaat Ahmed Bashandi, who carried out the suicide attack at the old Cairo market on 7 April 2005, began to exhibit extreme viewpoints only after August 2004, when he forbade his family to watch television. After the attack, police found CDs containing data downloaded from the Internet on waging Islamic holy war and building bombs from materials that are freely available.[73]

Underlying reasons for acts of terrorism

Politics: the root of all evil

In understanding the development and threat of terrorism in Egypt since the 1920s a discussion of political developments in Egypt is essential. Throughout this paper reference has been made to the influence of the political system in the development of extremist and/or terrorist organisations. The following discussion will focus briefly on the legitimacy of the political system and government in Egypt; conflict between secularism and theocracy; and representation of the Egyptian citizenry in politics.

Legitimacy of the government and the political system

The weakness of Egypt's multi-party system can probably be traced back to political reform during the presidency of Anwar Sadat, who introduced the leftists, rightists and a central forum, under the stipulation that 'they were not allowed to infringe on national unity, social stability or socialist ethics', which, according to Essam Abdel-Wahab, restricted their activities.[74] In essence, the Egyptian government was in control of the formation of political parties and therefore created the political playing field. After revolts in January 1977 the government introduced regulations to curb political activities, including the right to decide on the formation of new political parties, to dissolve existing parties, and even to confiscate the assets of parties that the government considered a threat to national unity and stability. An even more excessive strategy was introduced in reaction to growing resentment against Egypt's decision to recognise the state of Israel. The hard-line approach against the opposition and the peace treaty with Israel resulted in the assassination of President Sadat. Since then the MB has been banned.

> The latest bombing campaigns fit the pattern of being perpetrated by smaller groups that are inspired by al-Qa'eda's ideology

Therefore the legitimacy crisis was extended beyond the government to include political parties recognised by the political system. With the exception of the MB, which is not recognised as a political party, one may ask how many of the parties are in touch with the needs and realities of the electorate? If political representatives stood for, reflected and protected the interests of ordinary citizens, one might have expected greater participation in the political process. However, only 32 million voters registered (approximately 40% of the total population). Voter turnout in its turn was estimated at 23% or 7.3 million people (of an estimated population of 77 million) for the 2005 elections.[75]

This reality is reflected in the representation of opposition parties in parliament since 1976:[76]

Year	Number of opposition seats
1976	36
1979	33
1984	64
1987	100
1990	7
1995	12
2000	17
2005	14

According to Doaa Hussein Alam, a political researcher in Egypt, the increase noted in 1987 was due to a collective effort against 'a surge in radical Islamists'. Since then 'the opposition parties have been steadily losing their seats in parliament, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is true that the opposition parties have been weakened by the government, but it is equally true that they have also lacked the vigor, the strength and the capacity to challenge the ruling NDP.'[77] Despite the government's decision during the 2005 elections to open up the political system and limit the intervention of the security forces, the number of opposition seats has decreased, and with it the involvement of the citizenry in politics.

Lack of a middle ground to represent the ordinary Egyptian citizen

Between the government elite (which is not regarded as being in touch with the needs of the Egyptian people) and the MB, which is excluded from organised political activities, are the greater percentage of the Egyptian populace, who do not participate in the political process. The success of the MB is based on being open to the needs of ordinary citizens through its social upliftment programmes, which include healthcare and education, but still not all Egyptian nationals have participated in elections.

Government realised that it needed to implement another strategy to address growing political frustration. In February 2005 President Hosni Mubarak announced his recommendation for the amendment of the constitution and listed ten principles to guide the coming phase of national action and reform:

- 'We shall abide by the concept of citizenship as the basis for complete equality in rights and duties between all Egyptians, regardless of beliefs, sex, creed or religion.
- We must strengthen the respect for the fundamental rights of citizens of all strata to a secure life, characterised by freedom and safeguarded by equality before the law.
- We must fortify the principles of the sovereignty of the law, the binding word of the judiciary, and complete and impartial justice.
- We must maximise efforts to modernise the structure of the relationship between the citizen and the state, and double our efforts to improve the efficacy of government bureaucracy in order to alleviate the burden on citizens and raise the standards of the daily services that are provided to them.
- We must increase our investment in our human resources by furnishing them with the means for scientific and technological advancement, so as to keep pace with global advances in science, knowledge, academic research and advanced technology.
- We must stimulate the performance of political parties, and provide incentives for the contributions of civil society bodies to better enable them to undertake their role as essential mechanisms for strengthening democracy, and promoting broader public participation.
- We must press ahead towards the realisation of the economic growth we desire, but without disrupting social equilibrium, or relinquishing the social responsibility of the state towards the limited income and disadvantaged sectors of society.
- We must encourage the spirit of initiative, and augment the intellectual, scientific and creative capacities of our society's individuals and institutions.
- We must work to raise productivity and adopt quality standards as our gauge for augmenting the performance and competitiveness of the Egyptian economy.
- We must continue to enhance communications between Egypt and the world, integrate with the movement of the international community, respond effectively to its changes, and work at the various regional and international levels towards the realisation of our national interests.'

Despite the government's decision to amend Article 76 of the constitution to facilitate the election (not referendum) of the president, this step created expectations and even violence. During the period from 9 November to 7 December 2005, ten people were killed, hundreds wounded, and more than 1,000 arrested, including mainly supporters of the MB. In the northern Sinai town of El Arish, police blocked MB voters from polling stations, which led to violence. Most of the incidents were recorded in rural areas such as Qattawiya, a Nile Delta village in el-Sharqiya province, Zagazig and Damietta.[78] The reactions of the government, particularly through its security apparatus, further emphasised the government's legitimacy crisis:

- Freedom of association was limited, especially the ability to organise and participate in protest marches.
- Freedom of expression was restricted, notably freedom of the media and journalists. In reaction to the new press law, which will permit judges to jail journalists for a number of offences, including insulting public officials and heads of state, the following comment was published in the Wafd Party daily newspaper on 10 July 2006:

    The assembly has forgotten, the government has forgotten, and all the government's legislation tailors have forgotten that victory in the end is for the people, for freedom, and for defence of the funds of the people. Suffice it what they have stolen already. O freedom, how much blood will satisfy you till we bring you victory? Welcome to the

jails and the detention camps, for we are ready to pay any price in defence of the homeland. We shall not allow the crime of pillaging the homeland to continue, whatever the price will be. We shall not be terrorized by a law cooked by the government and approved by the People's Assembly, for we do not recognize this government, nor do we recognize the People's Assembly, for both of them are now working against the interest of the nation.[79]

Another factor that influenced the political reform process was the election of Hamas in Palestine in early 2006. Since Hamas had been established according to the principles of the MB, its success as part of the political process served as a wake-up call. Subsequent to the growing popularity of former radical Islamist organisations throughout the Middle East after they indicated their willingness to participate in the political process, governments are increasingly being pressured to initiate political reform in allowing these organisations to participate in the political process. In addition to their resolve to introduce political and social reform, these groups have an advantage: their policy on the security situation in the Middle East, in particular Israel. In the aftermath of growing conflict between Israel and Hamas and Hizbollah, it has become clear that organisations such as the MB represent the interests and concerns of ordinary citizens. Governments, especially the governing party in Egypt, traditionally follow a more conservative approach when it comes to Israel, which is considered passive and weak among ordinary citizens. In addition to ideological similarities, the MB recognised the political advantage in supporting Hamas and Hizbollah. In mobilising support and gaining further recognition, the MB arranged countless demonstrations, despite being illegal, in support of these organisations. This led to a catch-22 situation: if the government should react by arresting organisers and demonstrators, more ordinary citizens will support the MB. The government also fears that this situation might be used to further fuel instability.

Fundamentalism and extremism

According to Sidahmed and Ehteshami,[80] certain factors have stimulated Islamist revivalism and extremism:

- The weak legitimacy of regimes and states, even in the very idea of a nation: this is manifested in the permanence of autocratic regimes and the influence of tribal, ethic and religious segmentation;
- Population growth;
- Destitution of the middle classes;
- Unemployment of the educated;
- Growing ranks of the masses who live in cities, but are poorly integrated;

Transition from fundamentalism to extremism

Fundamentalism, revivalism, extremism, etc, are more likely to experience an upsurge anywhere that people perceive the need to fight a godless, secular culture – even if they (in the minds of fundamentalists/extremists) have departed from orthodoxy. In fact, what fundamentalists everywhere have in common is the ability to adopt their messages to fit the times. In other words, fundamentalists see themselves as the guardians of the truth, usually to the exclusion of the interpretations of others. All religions (formal identified religions as well as sects) and their religious texts are open for interpretation – which in essence makes them vulnerable to 'misinterpretation' by individuals and groups that need acceptance or justification for their actions or activities. Fundamentalism is often a response to the loss of traditional influence or status. The key to understanding fundamentalist movements lies in the careful investigation of their history and of the contemporary conditions that bring about their emergence at particular times. In essence, most of these movements have arisen as a consequence of change. For example, when a group in society perceives that its power and authority are being usurped in the course of social change, the group blames internal and external causes for its fall from power.[81]

- Internally, the group may blame itself for its decline. Its leaders often point to internal decadence as the principal reason. They accuse members of society of becoming weak and irresolute to the point that they let others oppress them.
- Externally, the group targets the 'other', and identifies it as an oppressor, or the reason for everything on all levels of existence that might 'have gone wrong'. Usually the movement advocates resistance, including violent resistance against the 'oppressor'. The core operations of the fundamentalist/extremist movement may vary, ranging from guerrilla warfare, attacks on public figures or facilities (illegal dissent) to more peaceful protests and non-violent action (legal dissent).

Members of fundamentalist/extremist movements see themselves as saviours of society. This enables them to justify almost any action, however extreme, even personal sacrifice, however great, for their cause. In other words, there is a tendency to see the world in black and white terms. People are clearly enemies or friends. In Islam for example (although developed in another historical context) the world is divided into the world/realm of Islam *(dar al-Islam)* and the world/realm of war/unbelief *(dar al-harb)*, explaining the constant battle against war and unbelief with the objective of redeeming the world of Islam. Historically, although conquests have been conducted in military terms, the primary focus has been to redeem the world of unbelief (primary focus on non-Christians and Jews) through missionary work. For extremist movements, from the MB in the 1920s to al-Qa'eda, this objective can only be achieved through a violent campaign.

Eric Sharpe,[82] in a study of the development of fundamentalist movements, identified three phases during which fundamentalism/extremism develops:

- Social change produces cultural tension among members of society. The first phase is *rejection,* when traditionally accepted authority is challenged.
- Cultural tension produces an attempt to accommodate, leading to distortion and change in social patterns, causing social disruption. In the second phase, *adaptation*, an attempt is made to accommodate the old philosophy with the new.
- The third phase, *reaction*, is when fundamentalist practice arises. As a response to cultural tension, fundamentalism/extremism emerges in the form of an orthodox restatement of cultural patterns. This is spread through evangelism, often through the offices of one or more charismatic figures.

- Inability of models such secularism, Marxism and nationalism to provide solutions to daily struggles, which has led to a call to 'return to Islam';
- North-south tensions, which will long remain vital, fuelling a resentment that can easily be seized by religious scholars under the guise of being religiously sanctioned.

Another important event that facilitated growing conservatism and the movement from fundamentalism to extremism was the humiliating defeat to Israel in the 1967 War. A similar trend was detected in the aftermath of the First Gulf War in feeding resentment towards Muslims who were not portrayed as Islamic enough.

All of these factors are still evident in Egypt. Although most Egyptians appear on the surface to care little about political reform – being far more concerned about the depressed economic situation – the poor economic situation propels people towards religious conservatism. Conservatism has manifested itself throughout society, from university students to the government to more radical organisations.

Counter-terrorism strategy

Despite the long historical development of terrorism in Egypt, one might question whether policies adopted to deal with terrorism and extremism have been successful in the short, medium, and long term.

During the first cycle, neither King Farouk nor President Nasser knew how to react to Islamic revivalism. Their reactions led to a situation in which the MB gained support and legitimacy. With the adoption of a violent strategy came harsher counter-measures that included mass arrests and 'concentration camps', which ultimately led to the spread and influence of Islamist extremism. Although successful in the short term, the government was unable to prevent the re-emergence of terrorism in the second cycle.

Government and security forces built on this strategy during the first cycle by using emergency legislation, which had been in place since the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Egyptian security forces launched a stringent crackdown against radical Islamists after the attacks at Luxor in November 1997. Sweeping and mass arrests were the hallmark of the government's response to terrorism in the 1990s. Government decided in the late 1990s to enhance its intelligence-gathering strategy, with the objective of denying extremists the opportunity to gain influence among the public. Included in this strategy was the monitoring of individuals – as well as their family members – previously involved in terrorism.

The attack in Luxor, however, served as a watershed for al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya for two primary reasons.

First, a number of extremists could not associate themselves with the nature of the attack, which led to a decline in support. Second, even leaders in custody distanced themselves from the attack, which led to 'negotiations' with the government.

A number of factors and developments have helped curb the activities of terrorist elements since this incident:

- Egyptian security forces apprehended several fugitive terrorists, mainly in Upper Egypt.
- Public sentiment turned against the terrorists, especially after witnessing the negative impact of terrorism on the tourism industry.
- Communication and funding channels between leaders abroad and their elements at home were intercepted.
- The government began to assume direct control over mosques in 1996, as one facet of its war against militant Islamists. Under the supervision of the Waqf ministry, religious leaders were appointed and mosques were officially funded. It was therefore expected that the message delivered at these mosques would be in line with the philosophy and political agenda of the government. According to the Minister of Awqaf, Mahmoud Hamdi Zaqzouq, in a statement issued in August 2003, the ministry essentially controls the content of Friday sermons, since it issues a list of suggested topics to mosques each Friday. Government-approved topics include themes such as Islam and life, freedom in Islam, and democracy in Islam. It was estimated in 2003 that the Egyptian government did not control approximately 20,000 of Egypt's estimated 83,000 mosques.[83] Government control over mosques, however, has a very interesting history. Since the early 19th century, the Egyptian government had built, financed and thus controlled the mosques. But in the 1970s, under President Anwar Sadat, Egypt faced an economic crisis and a growing threat from the left. In addressing this situation, the government encouraged private individuals to build mosques by offering tax breaks. Sadat hoped this would lessen the financial burden on the state and appease the Islamists. However, small private mosques multiplied and spiralled rapidly out of government control and became breeding grounds for militant groups. After the assassination of Sadat, the government began to crack down on these private mosques.

Although considered a successful strategy to prevent and combat terrorism at domestic level, the government's crackdown on al-Jihad, and to a lesser extent al-Gama'a, forced operatives to direct their operations from overseas, particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the aftermath of 9/11, the harbouring of individuals that received political asylum in Western countries such as Canada, Britain, Denmark,

Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands proved an essential element in the transnational terrorism network. It is important to recognise, however, although it might be considered a sweeping statement, that not all individuals who received political asylum will resort to terrorism. In spite of this, Egyptian nationals were arrested in the following countries a month after 9/11:[84]

- A Canadian court upheld a deportation order on Mohammed Mahjoub, an alleged leader of the Vanguards of Conquest, who was sentenced in absentia to 15 years imprisonment by an Egyptian court in 1999. Another Egyptian suspected of links to al-Jihad, Mahmoud Jaballah, was arrested in Toronto.
- Bosnia announced that it had handed over three alleged Egyptian militants believed to be linked to bin Laden.
- Uruguay authorised the extradition of Al-Said Mohammed Ali Hassan Mokhles, who was wanted for the Luxor massacre. Mokhlis was arrested in early 1999 when he tried to enter the country from neighbouring Brazil, using a false Malaysian passport.
- Azerbaijani authorities handed over an unidentified suspect to the Egyptians, the second such extradition in a month.
- Syria extradited Rifa'i Ahmed Taha, the former leader of al-Gama'a (before he was replaced by Mustafa Hamza), who was implicated in the Luxor incident. Taha was also convicted for his role in the assassination of President Sadat, after which he left Egypt for Afghanistan in 1987. In 1998 Taha signed an alliance with Osama bin Laden, although al-Gama'a later withdrew its support.[85]

Despite the heavy-handed approach to terrorism, the government interaction with al-Gama'a presented a positive lesson on engagement with individuals suspected of being involved in terrorism as part of a proactive strategy. Egyptian security forces and al-Gama'a members in custody interacted in persuading the remaining al-Gama'a members to cease their violence campaign. Although the government will deny that it negotiated with terrorists, a situation favourable to dialogue developed after an extensive security campaign in the aftermath of the Luxor incident. During this period members of al-Gama'a in custody were visited by Al-Azhar scholars, who introduced a more tolerant form of Islam. Al-Gama'a initiated a ceasefire agreement in July 1997 that came into effect in March 1999. This agreement was approved by eight of its leaders in custody, including Sheik Umar Abdul Rahman, the spiritual leader of al-Gama'a, who is currently serving a life sentence in

the US on charges of conspiring to blow up New York landmarks.[86] Karam Zuhdy, the leader of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and chief theologian Nageh Ibrahim, for example, announced that they had 'misinterpreted the Islamic concept of jihad to justify the killing of Christian Egyptians, tourists and police officers, and renounced strategies to force women to respect Islamic dress codes'.[87] It was also in the aftermath of 9/11 that the government increasingly publicised the fact and allowed members and leaders of al-Gama'a to publicly present their changed viewpoints. For example, in May 2003, members of al-Gama'a urged the youth not to become involved in acts of terrorism, with specific reference to the activities of al-Qa'eda.[88] Government in its turn gradually released al-Gama'a members. In June 2002 the government announced that it has offered amnesty or reduced sentences to more than 1,500 members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya who had renounced violence.[89]

Despite this engagement, one wonders why this strategy was not extended to other organisations such as the MB, which had already ceased its violent campaign. A possible reason might be that the government interacted with al-Gama'a from a superior position, which it did not have in relation to the MB.

With the re-emergence of terrorism as a third cycle in 2004 came the well-known strategy of mass arrests and the deployment of security forces to contain the threat. Although effective in the short term, this development fuelled feelings of marginalisation and resentment, instead of building bridges and winning the hearts and minds of ordinary citizens to isolate local radical elements.

Final observations

Terrorism cannot be studied or understood in isolation. It is essential to assess its development and impact in a historical context. Individuals will not become involved or resort to extreme tactics such as terrorism without reason or prior indication. In addition, literature that became available in the aftermath of 9/11 revealed that collective amnesia is the order of the day, when it comes to the study of terrorism. Acts of terrorism are almost immediately attributed to al-Qa'eda, as the beginning and end of all terrorism, without recognising domestic terrorism and its long historical development. Transnational terrorism develops and is predominately motivated by domestic circumstances. It is only after addressing these conditions that the cycle of violence and terrorism can be broken.

In essence, the underlying reasons for terrorism throughout Egypt's history were not addressed, which

> Terrorism cannot be studied or understood in isolation

led to three cycles of violence. Emergency legislation that was last extended in 2006 allows security forces to detain anyone deemed a threat to state security for renewable 45-day periods, without the permission of the court. Legislation also grants military courts the power to try civilians. Because public demonstrations are banned, this threatens the expression of basic freedoms, including freedom of association. Most notably, the banning of the MB (owing to a ban on the formation of religious-affiliated political groups) had a medium- to long-term impact on political reform in Egypt. Without the possibility of participating in legitimate political dissent, it is almost expected that individuals and groups will resort to violent means to communicate and ultimately change the existing regime. The political situation in Egypt is therefore one of the primary factors that influenced the resort to terrorism as a strategy.

The decision of the government after the bombings in April 2006 to extend emergency legislation for another two years placed a question mark on its commitment to political reform. It also deepened reservations about the government's announcement that it was to replace emergency legislation with anti-terrorism legislation currently being drafted. Human rights groups and opposition groups in particular raised the possibility that anti-terrorism legislation will institutionalise existing emergency legislation.

The Egyptian experience indicates that, in addressing the threat that organisations might pose, it is important to differentiate between the following types of religious organisation:

• Movements and organisations that attend to the welfare of ordinary citizens in reaction to the inability of the state to provide basic services;
• Organisations that adopt a liberal agenda based on religious legalistic arguments against the perceived authoritarian governments;
• Organisations that call for preservation and a collective identity. These are mostly found in countries where the particular religion is in the minority;
• Organisations that adopt a violent and confrontational strategy to gain political power. These organisations believe that once political power has been seized, a truly religious government can be introduced that will govern in accordance with religious principles.

It is also important to recognise that religious organisations can transform themselves from one category to another. The MB probably serves as the best example of this. It transformed from a welfare organisation to a violent organisation to one that supports a liberal agenda within the political framework. Two primary aspects are important when analysing the influence and potential threat of religious organisations: the agenda and modus operandi. Traditionally governments in the Middle East and North Africa have feared the emergence of organisations that structure and base their activities on Islamic principles, especially when they have a political agenda. In summary, not all religious-based organisations should be considered a threat to security, and government monopoly over a religion requires attention.

Related to Egypt's legislative framework, the deteriorating security situation in Egypt revealed that counter-terrorism operations based on a strategy of mass arrests are counter-productive for specific reasons:

• This leads to the radicalisation of those targeted, that is, the specific community (the Bedouin community in the Sinai for example), religious or ethnic group (Muslim community or people with Arab distinguishing features) or members of the family. Radicalisation in itself implies that those affected will 'change sides' from being neutral or law-abiding citizens to having 'sympathy' with the cause of terror groups that have an impact on the level of support, which may be:
  ○ In principle;
  ○ Financial;
  ○ Logistical, and will include the provision of safe-havens for suspects, training or material to conduct future operations;
  ○ Direct, in which those targeted by the government will become directly involved in future terror operations.
  Since the greatest challenge in preventing and combating terrorism is to win the hearts and minds of those not involved in terrorism, this strategy implies that this round will be lost to the terrorists.
• Mass arrests drive perpetrators 'underground' and export individuals and the philosophy of extremists (or terrorists) to other countries and regions. The history of the MB and more radical groups such as al-Jihad serves as an example of this effect.
• Mass arrests reflect negatively on the government's capabilities, especially intelligence and criminal investigation techniques. In theory, intelligence and investigations should be accurate and sufficient to identify those directly involved in terrorism, upon which the state could arrest and successfully prosecute (within the boundaries of the rule of law). In effect, mass arrests give the impression that security forces have no idea who was involved or responsible. In addition to constituting arrest without charge, mass arrests introduce torture as the next logical step, since the state is well aware that those arrested will not be tried owing to a lack of evidence, and because the real intention of the arrest were not to prosecute, but to gather information against the person arrested or a third party. In effect, the psychological impact of torture,

in addition to being morally unacceptable, leads to radicalisation.

Growing instability in Palestine and Lebanon will have a ripple-effect throughout the world. The growing divide between the government, with its more conservative policy on Israel and as an ally of the US, and ordinary Egyptian citizens who openly protest against Israel and US policy in the Middle East is further proof that the government does not represent the ideals, fears and interest of the Egyptian people.

In summary, if there is one lesson that one could learn from Egypt's confrontation with terrorism, it is that history repeats itself – urging governments and scholars to learn from previous mistakes. Egypt's confrontation with terrorism since the beginning of the previous century should show that an excessive strategy is not the most effective medium- to long-term solution to terrorism. It might be time to consider engagement with those opposing government and individuals that resorted to acts of terrorism, as part of a strategy to address the underlying causes of terrorism. Without oversimplifying the issues, terrorism is often a manifestation that indicates a greater illness. Addressing it in isolation, without dealing with the root causes, means that the war against terrorism will be never-ending.

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About this paper

The threat of terrorism is not new to Egypt. This paper will attempt to shed light into the historical development of this phenomenon: since the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 till the latest bombings in Dabah in April 2006. In addition to a reflection on the three cycles of terrorism, the paper will also focus on the primary role-players, the reasons and an evaluation of government's reaction to the threat. In addition of Egypt being a target of terrorism it is equally important is to recognize the influence of Egyptian nationals in the development of transnational terrorism.

About the author

ANNELI BOTHA is a senior researcher on terrorism at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Pretoria. After completing an Honours Degree in International Politics she joined the South African Police Service, Crime Intelligence in 1993 during which she *inter alia* focused on terrorism and religious extremism. She holds a MA (Political Studies) degree at the Rand-Afrikaans University obtained in 1999 that focused on the historical development of terrorism, religious extremism and PAGAD. She has a specific interest in research on the underlying causes of terrorism, including the stages in the development of terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies

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