



EḲWĀN AL-MOSLEMĪN, JAM'ĪYAT AL-

EḲWĀN AL-MOSLEMĪN, JAM'ĪYAT AL- (Society of Muslim brethren), the first modern religio-political movement in the Islamic world, founded in 1928 by Ḥasan Bannā' (1906-49) in Esmā'īliya Egypt. Mass membership and a forceful stance against the corrupt ruling elite and for national sovereignty gave the EḲwān considerable influence in Egyptian political life between the 1930s and 1950s. In the 1940s the EḲwān engaged in a series of violent acts culminating in the assassination of Prime Minister Fahmī Noqrāšī in December 1948. Two months later Ḥasan Bannā' was assassinated, probably by the Egyptian secret service.

The EḲwān welcomed the coup that brought Jamāl 'Abd-al-Nāṣer to power in 1952. But relations soured in 1954, when, following an attempt on Nāṣer's life, the government banned the EḲwān and imprisoned many of its members. Among these was Sayyed Qoṭb, who became the principal theoretician of the movement until his execution in 1966. Operating underground for the duration of the Nāṣer era, the movement resurfaced under his successor, Anwar Sādāt, who used Islamic groups to counterbalance Nāṣer's leftist legacy. Outlawed following Sādāt's assassination in 1981, the EḲwān regained limited legal status in 1984. The EḲwān continue to be active as a reformist movement and are currently represented in parliament, having ceded much of their former radicalism to new and more extremist groups.



A dearth of information makes it difficult to assess the precise nature of relations between the EḲwān and the Fedā'īān-e Eslām (q.v.). Initial contact may have been established in 1948, when Ayatollah Abu'l-Qāsem Kāšānī met Ḥasan Bannā' during the pilgrimage to Mecca (Howaydī, p. 331). While Persians studying in Egypt apparently joined the EḲwān, the two movements never established formal relations ('Erāqī, p. 145). Aside from a general tendency among Islamic groups to operate separately, incompatible structures and sectarian and cultural differences may have prevented their close cooperation. Unlike the EḲwān, the Fedā'īān-e Eslām was not a broad-based social movement; besides being much smaller, it lacked the oppositional credentials and the intellectual leadership of its Egyptian counterpart (Ferdows, pp. 68-69; Enayat, p. 94). Sectarian obstacles may have been overcome with the establishment in 1948 of a society for Sunni-Shi'ite rapprochement (Jam'iyat al-taqrīb bayn al-maḏāheb al-eslāmīya) in Cairo, with the Persian cleric Moḥammad-Taqī Qomī as founder and secretary-general. Until his death, Sayyed Qoṭb had contacts with the organization and attended some of its meetings (Ende, p. 224).

In a general climate favorable to Pan-Islamic sentiments, the anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist rhetoric of both movements provided common ground (Landau, pp. 257-58). Thus Sayyed Qoṭb expressed his support for the Fedā'īān-e Eslām and their struggle in Persia in a letter published on 25 September 1951 in the weekly magazine *al-Resāla*, in which he discussed the common struggle against foreign domination and emphasized the need for Muslim solidarity ("Nāma"). Nawwāb Ṣafawī, the leader of the Fedā'īān-e Eslām, in turn, wrote articles for the Persian press in which he praised Ḥasan Bannā's anti-imperialism while translating excerpts of his writings (Ḳoṣ-nīyat, pp. 142-43).

The most concrete unifying theme was Palestine. EḲwān volunteers took part in the Palestinian-Arab struggle of the mid 1930s. The proclamation of the state of Israel and the ensuing war in 1948 brought many EḲwān fighters to Palestine and led to the creation of EḲwān branches in Gaza and Jordan. As for the Fedā'īān-e Eslām, Palestine became important in its rhetoric soon after its inception in 1945. The Fedā'īān-e Eslām held its first demonstration protesting the Jewish presence in Palestine in the Solṭānī Mosque in Tehran on 20 Dey 1327 Š./30 December 1947 (Madanī, p. 63). This was followed by another rally on 31 Ordībehešt 1327 Š./21 May 1948, during which 5,000 volunteers reportedly signed up for military action against the newly established state of Israel (Kazemi, p. 162; "Tārīḳ-e peydāyeš," p. 37).



In late 1953 Nawwāb Şafawī visited Jerusalem to attend an Islamic conference organized by the Jordanian Ekwān. During the same trip he went to Syria, where he met with the leader of the local Ekwān, Moştafā Sebāī, and exhorted Shi'ites to join the ranks of the Ekwān (Howaydī, p. 331). He also met with King Ḥosayn of Jordan and visited southern Lebanon, where he stressed the need for Muslim unity. While still in Jordan, he accepted an invitation by the Ekwān to visit Egypt (Koš-nīyat, p. 135).

In Egypt Nawwāb Şafawī spoke at a mass rally in commemoration of two Muslim Brother martyrs held on 12 January, 1954 at al-Azhar University. Arrested during the disturbances following the events of that day, he was interrogated by the Egyptian police. The Ekwān were declared illegal the next day (Mitchell, p. 126). However, rather than being expelled, Nawwāb Şafawī was able to attend the festivities around the second anniversary of the Revolution (Koš-nīyat, pp. 144-45).

In the 1950s and early 1960s the Fedā'iān-e Eslām possibly received some of their funding from the Egyptian Ekwān, in addition to financial assistance provided by Saudi Arabia and the Nāşer regime (Ferdows, p. 67; Haykal, p. 115; PRO, FO 371/114811). In the 1960s Qom was home to a group of Ekwān's Persian sympathizers. Their leader was Hādī Kosrowşāhī, who under the Islamic Republic became its envoy to the Holy See. Kosrowşāhī translated at least one of Sayyed Qoţb's works, *al-Salām al-'ālamī wa'l-eslām*. Sympathies cooled after the Ekwān of Jordan supported King Ḥosayn's move against the Palestinians in September 1970.

The Egyptian Ekwān welcomed the 1357 Š./1978-79 Revolution in Persia and remained supportive as long as its Shi'ite character stayed in the background. In the course of 1980, however, their support gave way to apologetic defense followed by silence, reflecting confusion and disillusionment with the Persian experiment (Matthee, pp. 162-64). The main reasons for this were the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), which created the dilemma of Arab versus Islamic solidarity, the Islamic Republic's alignment with Syria, which continued following the Ḥamā massacre of 1982, and Ayatollah Khomeini's growing emphasis on Shi'ism (Kramer, 1981-82, p. 292; Abd-Allah, 9-16, 186-96). For its part, the Islamic Republic celebrated the memory of Sayyed Qoţb by issuing a stamp in his honor in 1984 (Chelkowski, pp. 564-65).

Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989 was followed by Persian attempts to reach out to the Sunni world and thus set the stage for a resumption of dialogue and



improved relations with the EḲwān. The onset of the Persian Gulf War which placed the Islamic Republic in the same camp as the EḲwān, and the progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict also contributed to a rapprochement. All of this resulted in frequent visits of EḲwān representatives to Tehran in the 1990s (Kramer, 1990, p. 185; idem, 1992, pp. 202-03).

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