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THE CHANGING FACE OF EGYPT'S ISLAMIC ACTIVISM: HOW MUCH OF A THREAT

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I. INTRODUCTION

Concepts and phrases such as "Islamic revival," "Islamic resurgence," "Islamic fundamentalism," "Islamic militancy," "Political Islam" and the like have had wide circulation in academia and in the mass media during the last two decades. Dramatic events in the Middle East such as the Iranian Revolution (1978-79), the assassination of Egypt's President Sadat (1981), the escalating violence in Algeria and Egypt (1992-1994), have added to the growing interest and anxiety at home and abroad, concerning the possible implications of the Islamic phenomenon. Moreover, such events have compounded the confusion concerning the phenomenon associated with the above concepts.

In this paper we have chosen the less value loaded term of "Islamic Activism" to tackle the subject. We use it to refer to "collective socio-political action aiming at changing the status quo in the direction of what is believed to be the proper Islamic order." Such action may be peaceful, semi-violent, or violent. Islamic activism, in this paper, is to be distinguished from the official or semi-official Islamic Establishment, that of Islam as represented by Al-Azhar, the Ministry of Awkaf (MOA), and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA) which are meant to be the extension arms of the state in regulating the spiritual lives of Egyptians in concordance with state objectives. Islamic activism is also to be distinguished from Sufi Islam, represented by many *Tariqas* (orders), which is apolitical, emphasizing religious mysticism. Different as they may be, both Establishment and Sufi Islam pose no political or security threats to the regime or the state. On the contrary, if well tuned and properly functioning, Establishment and Sufi Islams would reduce Islamic activism to political and sociological irrelevance.

Activists who raise Islamic banners in their quest for power have existed since the first *Hijra* century (8th century). In modern Egypt, Islamic activism appeared forcefully in three big waves at the turn of the twentieth century, in its middle, and toward its end. Each wave climaxed in violence and assassinations of top political figures: Prime Ministers Boutros Ghali in the first wave, Ahmed Maher and Mahmoud F. El-Noukrashy in the second, and President Sadat in the third. Like their tidal counterparts, as each wave of Islamic activists tapered off, the genesis of a new one was being laid.

Our research suggests that these waves of Islamic activism are not random in their contextual appearance, the social strata to which they appeal, their religious textual discourse, strategy, tactics, and the action they resort to. Our concern in this paper is with the third wave which started in the mid-1970s; and has escalated in unprecedented manner since the early 1990s. Longer in duration, larger in following, more pervasive in its penetration of society, and more brutal in its violence, the third wave of Islamic activism poses an unprecedented domestic threat to society, the regime, and the modern state in contemporary Egypt.

Since the beginning of this third wave, the Egyptian state has always managed to prevail in the successive rounds of armed confrontations with Islamic militants. There is no compelling reason to suspect that the Egyptian state will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. However, the human price and material is getting progressively more costly.

II. BEGINNING OF THE THIRD WAVE

The symbolic date of the start of Egypt's third wave of Islamic activism is April 18, 1974. On that day, a group of young Cadets aided by some of their civilian comrades (brothers) took over the Technical Military Academy (TMA) in the Abbasiya district of Cairo, seized its arsenal, and prepared to march on the Arab socialist Headquarters where President Sadat and his top aids were meeting. Their plan was simple. They were to arrest (or kill) Egypt's political

elite, take over the nearby radio and television building, and declare the birth of "the Islamic Republic of Egypt."

Their attempt was foiled before they actually marched out of the TMA grounds. Nevertheless, after several hours of shootouts with the state security forces, several people were killed and wounded, the rest were arrested, tried and sentenced to death or long prison terms. Though these youngsters are invariably called the TMA Group, they would turn out later to be the precursors of the violent wing of Egypt's Islamic movement which calls itself the *Jihad* (Holy struggle) organization. It is the same group which plotted the assassination of President Sadat on October 6, 1981.

Other militant Islamic groups have sprung and engaged the Egyptian state in similar violent confrontations during the last two decades (1974-1994). Most known among them are the *Takfir wal Hijra* (TWH) and the *Jama'a Islamiya* (JI). These militant groups are all splinters from the Muslim Brotherhood (M.B.) founded by Hassan Al-Banna in 1928.

The M.B. had itself gone through a violent phase (1945-1965) before most of its leaders decided to disavow violence and pursue their peaceful quest for an Islamic order. This decision was made after heated debates while the M.B. elders were in Nasser's prisons during the late 1960s. At the time, the majority opinion was shaped by the then supreme Guide of the M.B., Hassan al-Hudhaibi whose stand is formulated in a book titled, "Advocates Not Judges." A steadfast minority of younger M.B.s rallied behind the views of another elder, Sayed Qutb. In his book, "Landmarks on the Road," Qutb asserted that the contemporary regime, state, and society are sinfully repugnant, irredeemable and must be destroyed in order to clear the ground for a truly Islamic order.

Following Nasser's death in 1970, President Sadat took over. He wanted to consolidate his power in the face of many detractors e.g. Nasserists, leftists, pan-Arabists. In this quest, he thought of the M.B., negotiated with their remaining elders inside and outside prisons; and concluded a "deal." He was to release them from

prison in return for support against his opponents and a commitment not to use violence against his regime. The M.B.s have in fact honored their side of the deal.

Sadat did not know at the time of concluding this deal, of the split among the M.B.s. Sayed Quth executed by Nasser in 1965, and, his followers were too young and unknown to Sadat or his aids. The young dissidents were, nevertheless, released along with their elders. It is only few years later, too late in fact that the regime discovered the truth about the implications of that split.

III. STREAMS OF EGYPT'S ISLAMIC ACTIVISM

By the late 1970s, Egypt's Islamic activism had unfolded into two broad groupings: non-violent and violent. While having the same ultimate objective, of capturing state and society and transforming them into an ideal Islamic order, the two groups have gone about it differently.

The non-violent mainstream of Islamic activism consists of the Muslim Brotherhood (M.B.), their sympathizers, thousands of Islamic private voluntary organizations (IPVOs), and tens of Islamic investment companies (IIC). Legal and quasi-legal components of this mainstream have managed to dupe the state, to take advantage of its defective performance, and, to slowly and steadily infiltrate Egypt's public space. During the last two decades, this variety of Islamic activism has become particularly entrenched in the mass media, formal education, and community social services, before systematically marching into electoral councils at both the national and local levels. With a definite agenda, the M.B. has manipulated associational Islamic activism and managed to obtain a decent representation in the People's Assembly (Egypt's Parliament) in 1984 (12 seats out of 455) and 1987 (38 seats).

But the more stunning performance of the M.B. has been its growing ability to capture the majority of seats of Egypt's major professional syndicates - doctors, engineers, dentists, lawyers,

pharmacists, commerce, and university professors clubs (see Chart 1). The same applies to university students ~~clubs~~.

While not organically linked to the ~~M.B.~~, Islamic PVOs registered with the Ministry of Social ~~Affairs~~ (MOSA) now outnumber the secular ones (8,000 out of a total of 14,000). IPVOs are generally better financed and managed. In times of crises, e.g. Egypt's earthquake in October 1992), IPVOs ~~and~~ M.B. controlled professional syndicates, out-performed not only their secular counterparts, but also the state itself, or so it ~~appeared~~ to the public at large and to the foreign media.

Though much smaller in numbers, the ~~variety~~ of the more militant Islamic activism is the one that has captured the headlines, thereby embarrassing the Egyptian state. The three main Islamic groups which have engaged in violent confrontations with the Egyptian state since 1974 have been the Jihad, ~~the~~ *Takfir wal Hijra* (TWH), and the Jama'a Islamiya (JI).

To be sure, politically motivated violence has not been the monopoly of Islamic militants. In modern Egyptian history, other political groupings have done so on and off. But it is the militant Islamic activists which have appropriated for the ~~lion's~~ share of it.

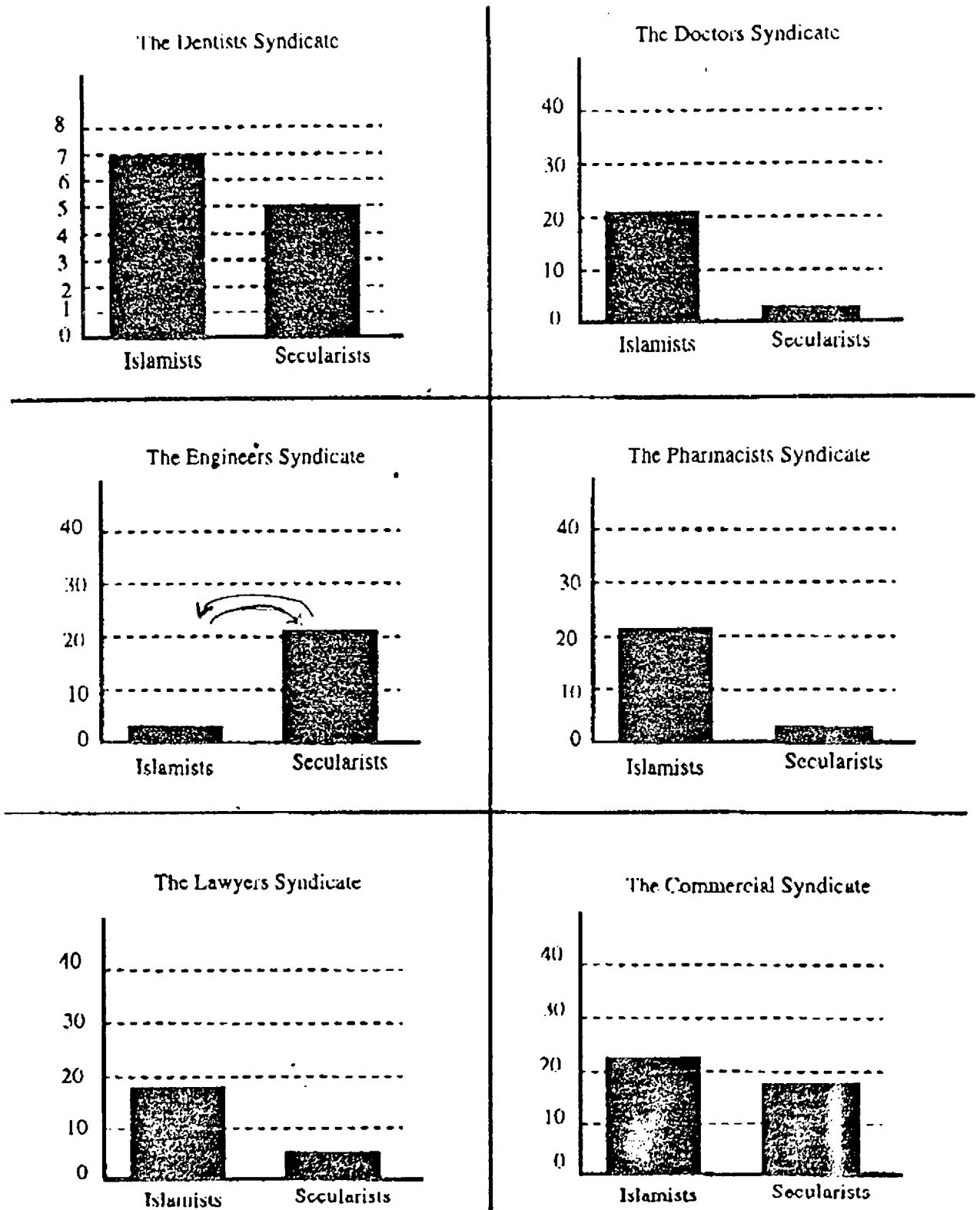
Table (1) shows selective indicators of socio-political unrest in Egypt since 1952. Some of this unrest was of a spontaneous type (e.g. riots), while some were instigated by interest groups (e.g. workers and students). However, much of the socio-political unrest it relates to Islamic activists during the three successive regimes of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. Table shows indicates a quantum jump in the incidence of unrest from one regime to the next. The annual average of such incidents has doubled between the Nasser and the Sadat years; then tripled between the Nasser and Mubarak years. It may legitimately be argued that the rise of unrest is commensurate with that of Egypt's population (from 22.0 millions in 1952 to 66.0 in 1994). However, like all averages (arithmetic mean in the statistical sense) conceals the specificities of particular years and sub-periods within each regime. In the Nasser period,

Table (1)
Selective Indicators of Sociopolitical Unrest 1952-1993

Indicators	§1952-1970		1971-1981		1982-1993		Total	
	Nasser		Sadat		Mubarak			
	Years	(%)	Years	(%)	Years	%		(%)
1- Demonstrations	10	16	16	26	36	58	62	100
2- Strikes	2	7	13	42	16	52	31	100
3- Riots	3	5	6	9	55	85	64	100
4- Attempted coups	2	50	2	50	0	0	4	100
5- Attempted Assassinations	2	13	2	13	12	75	16	100
5- Assassinations	0	0	2	11	16	89	18	100
7- Arrests (detention orders): 14,000		24	19,000	33	25,000	43	58,000	100
8- Hard Labour sentences	42	24	69	40	53	36	174	100
9- Death sentences	27	37	20	27	27	37	74	100
10- Casualties	49	3	265	11	1557	86	1811	100
11- Total	14,137	24	19,315	32	26,772	45	60,218	100.0
12- Annual Average	783		1737		2231		1423	

Source: Ibn Khaldoun for Development Studies, Files of Islamic Activism Research Project

Chart (I)
Islamists and Secularists Representation on the Board of
Major Professional Syndicates in 1993



Source: Division of Minorities Affairs (DMA), Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies

much of the unrest was in the early years (1950's); that of Sadat was in the later years (1974 to 1981); and that of Mubarak is also quite recent (since 1986). This observation renders the sheer demographic explanation of the volume of unrest less important.

This point is further illustrated by a closer examination of data related to politically motivated violence during Mubarak's twelve years presidency. For example, row 10 of Table (1) shows the number of casualties (killed and wounded) resulting from politically motivated violence. During the forty-one years since 1952, there were some 1811 casualties, 86.0 percent of which occurred in the last twelve years - i.e. during Mubarak's presidential tenure. More dramatic still, is the fact that during the first four years (1952-1985) of Mubarak's, there was hardly any violence - a total 333 casualties, averaging 8 casualties annually. The third four years (1990-1993) were by far the bloodiest, not only during the Mubarak presidency but also in this century. There were 1164 casualties --- averaging 291 casualties annually. To put it differently, of the twelve years of Mubarak's presidency, the last four have appropriated nearly 92.0 percent of all the casualties due to politically-motivated violence involving Islamic activists.

The specter of political violence has taken its worst turn in the last two years. Tables (2) and (3) give the details of the casualties of security forces, Islamic activists, and civilian bystanders. Some ominous observations are worth noting:

First, the number of total casualties in 1993 was nearly four times that of 1992 (1106 compared to 322).

Second, while the total number of casualties of Islamic activists was twice that of the security forces in 1992 (122 compared to 61) in 1993, the two figures indicate a growing parity (363 vs. 301). In terms of those killed there were more policemen (120) than Islamic activists (111) in 1993.

Table (2)

YEAR	POLICE			EXTREMISTS			CIVILIANS			Total Killed	Total Wounded	Total Casualties	ARRESTED	
	Killed	Wound	Total	Kill	Wound	Total	Kill	Wound	Total				Civil	Extrem
JAN.	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	--	2	2	--	2	--	27
FEB.	--	--	--	--	8	8	--	4	4	--	12	12	--	15
MARCH	1	--	1	--	--	--	3	11	14	4	11	15	--	32
APRIL	1	--	1	6	5	11	--	2	2	7	7	14	--	11
MAY	--	1	1	--	7	7	--	2	2	--	10	10	--	17
JUNE	6	4	10	4	18	22	8	12	20	18	34	52	--	47
JULY	3	7	10	1	--	1	1	8	9	5	15	20	--	25
AUGUST	1	9	10	14	37	51	5	--	5	20	46	66	128	798
SEPT.	6	6	12	1	4	5	1	1	2	8	11	19	--	167
OCTOBER	2	9	11	2	2	4	10	30	40	14	41	55	--	351
NOVEM.	1	1	2	3	2	5	1	30	31	5	33	38	--	283
DECEM.	2	1	3	8	--	8	1	7	8	11	8	19	--	1877
TOTAL	23	38	61	39	83	122	32	107	139	94	228	322	128	3645

*Source: Compiled From The Ibn Khaldoun Center Files of Islamic Activism Research Project

Table (3)

YEAR	POLICE			EXTREMISTS			CIVILIANS			Total Killed	Total Wounded	Total Casualties	ARRESTED	
	Killed	Wound	Total	Killed	Wound	Total	Killed	Wound	Total				Civilian	Extrem
JAN.	6	4	10	4	--	4	12	16	28	22	20	42	159	1231
FEB.	1	1	2	5	2	7	8	28	36	14	31	45	4	1251
MARCH	2	41	61	49	2	51	4	66	70	73	109	182	265	1884
APRIL	23	4	27	2	3	5	4	1	5	29	8	37	--	1407
MAY	5	7	12	1	3	4	10	30	40	16	40	56	2	1049
JUNE	8	10	18	1	--	1	11	40	51	20	50	70	--	1537
JULY	1	10	11	7	2	9	4	17	21	12	29	41	111	866
AUGUST	11	7	18	6	88	94	11	54	65	28	149	177	5	1405
SEPT.	8	30	38	--	72	72	4	45	49	12	147	159	6	2338
OCTOBER	10	36	46	10	57	67	7	12	19	27	105	132	2	1386
NOVEM.	7	12	19	4	15	19	2	1	3	13	28	41	1	1470
DECEM.	20	19	39	22	8	30	24	31	55	66	58	124	3	1277
TOTAL	120	181	301	111	252	363	101	341	442	332	774	1106	594	17191

* Source : Compiled From The Ibn Khaldoun Center Files Of Islamic Activism Research Project

Third, in both years the number of civilian bystander casualties caught in cross-fires exceeded that of both police and activists (139 and 442 in 1992 and 1993, respectively).

Noteworthy also, is the fact that several assassination attempts were made by Islamic activists on the lives of high ranking public figures. Two of them succeeded: Dr. R. al-Mahgoub, the former Speaker of Parliament (October 1970); and Dr. Farag Fouda, Egypt's most outspoken secular intellectual (June 1992). The activists also managed to assassinate four police generals, including the top anti-terrorist ranking officer (General ^{Korint} Khairat on April 9, 1994). There were close attempts on the lives of two cabinet members (of the Information and the Interior in April and August 1993) and on the Prime Minister in November 1993.

IV. THE CHANGING FACE OF ISLAMIC MILITANTS

By all counts, 1993 was the year in which the violent Islamic activists seemed to have had the upper hand in armed confrontations. They were more daring than ever before. They took the initiatives in operations, and often outmaneuvered the government forces. Their choice of targets widened to include Christian Copts, secular Muslim thinkers, foreign tourists, and/or whatever they considered as repugnant objects - e.g. cinemas, cafes, video-shops, and Nile Cruises.

Their methods also showed greater sophistication. Not only did they demonstrate skilful use of arms, explosives, and remote control devices but also manufactured some of it themselves. They displayed remarkable abilities in their intelligence system. Some of these upgraded skills were no doubt the result of experience accumulated over the previous two decades. But equally important is the combat experience many of them acquired as volunteers with the *Mujahideens* in Afghanistan against Soviet occupation forces during the 1980s. As a result, their operations in the last three years became longer and more protracted - i.e. from hours or days in 1970s to weeks and months in the 1990s.

Unlike their counterparts, in the 1970s and early 1980s, Egypt's Islamic militants in the 1990s acquired modern communication skills which were used skilfully in a psychological warfare against the Egyptian state and in getting maximum exposure. For example, among the 1557 casualties during the Mubarak's tenure, only 11 were foreign tourists. But that tiny figure (i.e. compared to what happened in the state of Florida) resulted in destroying two tourist seasons (92 and 93), depriving Egypt of badly needed currency (U.S.\$3.0 billion). In short, the activists confrontations with the Egyptian state have by 1993 become a total "war of attrition."

Table (4)
Socio-economic Profile of Egypt's Islamic Militants
1970s-1990s

Profile Dimensions	1970s	1980s	1990s
A. Age Categories			
1. Less than 20 years	5.0	11.0	23.0
2. 20-25 years	28.0	31.0	48.0
3. 25-30 years	61.0	53.0	24.0
4. Above 30 years	6.0	5.0	5.0
B. Formal Education			
1. Below secondary	5.0	5.0	9.0
2. Secondary	8.0	12.0	29.0
3. Junior college	11.0	24.0	42.0
4. College and post-Graduate	79.0	59.0	20.0
5. Elite majors (e.g. Medicine)	51.0	27.0	11.0
C. Community of Residence			
1. Villages	0.0	7.0	18.0
2. Shanty towns (<i>Ashwa'iyat</i>)	8.0	16.0	36.0
3. Towns	37.0	43.0	31.0
4. Large Cities	55.0	34.0	15.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Ibn Khaldoun Data Files on Islamic Activism Research Project

But the greatest change of all, was that of the socio-economic profile of the 1990s Islamic militants. Compared to their counterparts in the two previous decades, they have become younger, and less educated. Many of them come from rural, small-town and shanty-town backgrounds. Table (4) indicates some

significant comparisons, compiled from available data on those killed, wounded, and arrested

The average age of Islamic militants, arrested and charged for acts of violence, has dropped from 27 years in the 1970s to 21 years in the 1990s. Of the 30 militants arrested, tried and convicted for attacks on tourists, seven were received death sentences in December 1993. Three of them were below the age of 20 (19, 18, and 16, respectively)

Likewise, there has been a sharp drop in the formal education of Islamic activists arrested and charged for acts of violence. In the 1970s, as many as 80.0 percent were college students or graduates. In the 1990s, that percentage dropped to 20.0. Among them, those who were students or graduates of elite majors (such as medicine, and engineering) dropped from 51.0 to 11.0 percent in two decades.

The above data suggests that the degree of alienation and discontent which drives to extremism has now spread to younger and less educated Egyptians. This may in part explain their disposition to lethal violence. And as part of Table (4) shows, that some sense of despair seems to have spread from large cities (55% in the 1970s compared 15.0% in the 1990s) to rural areas and shanty towns in the 1990s (8.0% in the 1970s compared to 54.0% in the 1990s). Ominous is the fact that while there were no rural residents among the arrested activists of the 1970s, Egyptian public opinion began to hear for the first time about villages as small as Sanabou, Walidiya, and Salamoun in the Governorate of Asyout as scenes of sustained armed confrontations between Islamic militants and the state security forces.

Likewise, a new scene of such confrontations has been the so called "*Ashwai'iat*" or shanty towns on the rural-urban fringes of major cities. While these areas accounted for fewer than 8.0 percent of the arrested and charged militant in the 1970s, their share jumped to 36.0 percent in the 1990s. A case in point is a shanty town by the name of Western Munira (W.M.) on the edges

of the old district of Embaba, Giza, across the Nile from Cairo's elite suburb of Zamalek. About the same geographic size (21 square Kilometers), W.M. has more than ten times the population of Zamalek. With no schools, hospitals, clubs, sewage system, public transportation or even a police station, the highly dense area of W.M. had become a "Hobsonian" world of violence and vices by the last 1980s. A small group of Islamic militants led by a 27 year old man, Sheikh Jaber, took over W.M. and practically ruled it for three years - collecting taxes, imposing their own law and order and "Islamic Codes" of morality. In December 1992, the Egyptian state finally took note of what was happening, it dispatched some 12,000 security forces with armored vehicle to conquer W.M. It took three weeks and some 100 casualties (from both sides) and the arrest of some 600 suspected militants before W.M. was pacified.

V. TOWARDS AN EXPLANATION

The data contained in the four tables of this paper sketches only a part of the story of the present wave of Egypt's Islamic activism. We suspect that when the data is more complete and better analyzed, the story of the third wave will not be all that much different in its sociological inner logic from that of the first and second waves of Egypt's Islamic activism. In fact it may not be all that much different from a similar story unfolding in Algeria at present, or, for that matter from other religio-political movements throughout Arab Islamic history in the last thirteen centuries - i.e. politicized Islam as an idiom for expressing profound worldly grievances. *

Staying close to the Egyptian case at hand, it seems clear to us that the swift rise and spread of Islamic activism, with all its violent and nonviolent strands, is associated with real or perceived simultaneous crises - social, economic, political, cultural, regional

* For elaboration of this thesis, see S. E. Ibrahim *Islamic Activism as a Means of Conflict and Change*, in *Security Dialogue* 1994, Vol. 25 (2): 377-381

and international. The **social crisis** has to do with worsening equity, rising unemployment, structural misery, and spreading sense of relative deprivation. The **economic crisis** has to do with Egypt's marrow resource base, and rapidly growing population, external debt, and inadequate investments factors which have depressed the real rate of economic growth to an annual average of 2.0 to 3.0 percent in the last decade. The **political crisis** has to do with the slow and sluggish democratization - i.e. failure to effect a transition from the highly mobilized society of the 1950's and 1960s to a genuinely participatory one in the 1980s and 1990s. The **cultural crisis** has to do with the persistence of the century old, but now flaring, debate between advocates of "authenticity" and "modernity" - i.e. inward and past oriented vs. outward and future oriented value-normative system. The **regional crisis** has to do with the perception of Egypt's declining role in leading or molding the march of events in the Arab-middle Eastern world - i.e. vis-a-vis Israel, Iran and the oil rich Arab countries. The **international crisis** has to do with a growing collective sense that Egypt is become during the last half century more dependent on the West, and is unable to chart a meaningful cause in a fast changing world.

The reality or perception of these multiple crises is affecting Egypt's various socio-economic formations differently, at least in degree if not in kind. The new **middle class** (professional, technocrats, and bureaucrats) is getting impoverished and feels a loss of its century old role as the leading socio-economic-political force in society. The "lumpen proletariat" is the fastest growing of Egypt's socio-economic formations. No longer confined to small packets in big urban centers. The lumpen proletariat now forms about one-third to one-fourth of Egypt's total population, and has spread to rural areas and rural urban fringes of middle size towns. It is the most flammable and manipulated socio-economic formation. Out of its ranks, lower middle class Islamic activists can easily recruit, brain-wash, and deploy followers. The third significant socio-economic formation is the **upper class**; which in the last two decades has grown much richer, thanks to Sadat's open-door policy, and less socially and civically responsible. Internationalized in the sense of connections, multiple foreign

residences and bank accounts, this class has grown more detached from the rest of the society and less culturally sensitive e.g. flaunting its wealth and conspicuous life-style. While concerned, like most Egyptians about the rise of militant Islamic activism, members of this detached upper class would probably leave the country in few days, or even on a few hours notice, should anything too serious occur. In this respect, they would not be much different from their Iranian or Kuwaiti counterparts in 1979 and 1990, respectively.

What makes for a "crisis" is a quantum worsening of a societal "problem," with the state or the ruling elite unable or unwilling to contain, manage, or resolve in time. During the Sadat-Mubarak years (24 years), the state has retreated from Nasser's populist "social contract." Among other things, that contract traded off the provision of immediate goods and services, and promised a loftier future vision in return for the temporary suspension of basic freedoms and democratic participation. For better or worse, the populist social contract seemed to have been consented or complied to by a majority of Egyptians till the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. With the crushing defeat, many Egyptians began to harbor doubts about the populist social contract. When Sadat began to capitalize on these doubts in de Nasserizing Egypt, most Egyptians did not initially object in any serious manner.

However, the state-regime retreat from the populist social contract seemed to be disorganized. Dazzling in the Sadat years and lacking luster in the Mubarak years, the alternative social contract, socio-political-economic liberalization, got bogged down. It has left sizable sections of Egyptian society with neither adequate socio-economic safety nets nor with satisfying political participation. The most adversely affected by this state of affairs have been the young and ambitious members of the lower middle class - a substratum that has always been the "sensitive nerve" of the Egyptian society. From its ranks all of Egypt's potent socio-political movements and articulate leadership have risen in the last century - e.g. Urabi, Zaghloul, Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. At present, this sub-stratum is the most alienated and discontented. From its

ranks, comes the leaders and most cadres of the third wave of Islamic activism. As this substratum and the lumpen proletarians have grown in size and have become more disenfranchised, Islamic activism has also grown in size, outrage, and propensity for violence.

What made the situation even worse in recent years, is the short supply of political imagination of the ruling elite, and the near complete absence of elite circulation. The average age of present cabinet members is 63 (it would have been 67 if it was not for two new ones out of 30 in their forties). The average age of an Islamic militant, as we saw, is 21 - i.e. a gap of 42 years or nearly two generations.

The hardening of Egypt's political arteries is made worse by a heavy and inefficient bureaucracy. Demoralized and increasingly impoverished, its upper rungs have become disposed to grand corruption and its lower rungs to petty corruption. Exaggerated tales of grand corruption have been rampant in the last few years. Petty corruption has long been taken for granted, and even sympathetically tolerated.

Gallant but clumsy Egyptian security forces have had to confront growing Islamic militants practically alone for much of the last decade - i.e. without supportive and politically mobilized public opinion. Two successive ministers of the interior (including the present incumbent) have repeatedly complained in the People's Assembly of the lack of eye witnesses ready to come forth and testify, even when acts of violence are committed in broad day light in a market-place (e.g. the assassination of a police general and his drivers in Manshuta, Assyut in 1993).

However, the situation seems to be slowly getting under control - thanks to strategic and tactical mistakes committed by the Islamic militants, the steady improvement of the capabilities of security forces, a growing (though reluctant) opening of "political dialogue" with opposition parties, but most importantly the uprising

of Egypt's civil society, especially the artistic community.* For the first time in three years, the months of February and March of 1994 witnessed a decline in the incidence of violence compared to the same months since 1991. Hopefully, this will not lull the Mubarak regime into a premature sense of "victory" against Islamic militants or make it oblivious to badly needed socio-political reform.

VI. CONCLUSION

The persistent vibrancy of Egypt's Islamic activism is a cause for concern but not for panic. Despite its marked problems, the Egyptian state remains strong; and will no doubt prevail in the present armed confrontation with radical Islamic militants. The state possesses tremendous resources in this respect, most of which have hardly been tapped: a political culture which values moderation, continuity, and stability; a potent civil society; a powerful media; a cohesive loyal professional army, internal security forces; its own religious establishment; and its good regional and international relations.

The legitimate concern, not panic, is over the regime's inability to mobilize and manage these tremendous resources. So far, the regime has relied in confronting the Islamic extremists only on its security forces. Even with limited use of its resources, the Egyptian state is already turning the corner on them. But the problem is not merely recording a "physical victory" on Islamic extremists in the present round; but in dealing forcefully with the root causes which give rise to extremism. Here, it is imperative that the regime evolves a clear and comprehensive strategy of reform.

So far, the Mubarak regime has been solely obsessed with economic reforms. While necessary and vital, such one-sidedness has had serious negative socio-political repercussions which threaten the positive effects of these economic reform. It may not be a sheer coincidence that the present round of escalating violence

* Reference is to a series of anti-terrorism of T.V. dramas and films which appeared earlier in 1994; and were well received by the public.

has begun in the summer of 1991, three months after signing the structural adjustment agreement with the IMF (April, 1991). The undermining of two successive tourism seasons (in 1992 and 1993) as a result of the escalating violence is estimated to have cost Egypt some \$3.0 billions, (L.E. 10.0 billions). Belatedly, the government is earmarking several L.E. billions for social upgrading of depressed areas in upper Egypt and for creating about one half million new jobs. Belatedly, also, the regime has announced plans for a "National Dialogue" with the long neglected and marginalized opposition parties and professional associations. Had these two measures been averted. Late as they may be, these and similar measures (in education and the media) illustrate the imperative reform - i.e. the social and the political along with the economic.

While evolving a comprehensive reform package is mainly the domestic responsibility of the Egyptian regime, state, and society, there remains a significant role to be played by external actors, especially the U.S., which have a stake in the regional stability of the Middle East and the Arab World. Egypt is the cornerstone of such stability - not only because of its demographic and military weight but more because of its moral and cultural weight. A stable prosperous Egypt is a necessary condition for an Arab-Middle East stability. Hence, whatever comprehensive reform package Egypt evolves, must be fully supported morally and materially by those keen on enhancing the processes of peace and regional cooperation in the area.