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RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

Please provide information on the following:

- 1. The establishment, evolution, ideology, leadership and structure of Ikhwan-ul-Moslemin in Syria.**
- 2. The current estimated number of members, activities, influence, areas of operation and geographical concentration of Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.**
- 3. The treatment of members or suspected members in the 1990's and beyond, including the seriousness with which the authorities view any association with the organisation.**
- 4. Any demonstration or civil unrest in Hasaka in the last 10 years and the government's response.**
- 5. Exit procedures, security controls and the likelihood of a Syrian national suspected of anti-government activities being able to depart Syria for Cyprus (in 1998) and Lebanon (in 2004), particularly if the national in question has been previously detained.**

RESPONSE

Please provide information on the following:

- 1. The establishment, evolution, ideology, leadership and structure of Ikhwan-ul-Moslemin in Syria.**

According to sources the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen) originated in Egypt in the 1920s. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was established in Syria by student scholars returning from Cairo in the 1940s. It participated in elections during the 1950s and early 1960s, establishing itself as a leading opposition bloc in parliament. In 1963 it was banned by the Baath party which had seized power in a coup that year. Forced underground, various militant Sunni splinter groups emerged and an intense terrorist campaign against the regime began. According to Larbi Sadiki, in *Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World*, bloody conflicts were recorded in 1964, 1976-1980, 1982 and 1986. In 1980,

following an assassination attempt on President Assad, membership of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) became a capital offence under Article 49. In 1982 an armed insurrection broke out in Hama. Government forces responded by laying siege to the city for three weeks. The estimated number of casualties ranges between 10,000 and 30,000. Most sources agree that the MB as an organised group within Syria was effectively decimated. The leaders and many members fled the country. The current head of the organisation, Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni, resides in London after being forced from Amman in 2000. Under Al-Bayanouni the Syrian MB has moderated its stated objectives and principles. In October 2005, the group joined other opposition groups in signing the Damascus Declaration, which called for the establishment of a liberal democracy in Syria. In 2006 the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood joined with former Syrian vice president, Abdul Halim Khaddam, and other lesser known secular and Kurdish expatriate dissidents, and announced the formation of a National Salvation Front (NSF), as well as plans to establish a “government-in-exile” (Sadiki, L. 2004, ‘Syria’ in *Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World*, ed B. Szajkowski, 4th ed, John Harper, London – Attachment 1; for more information on the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, see: Gambill, G. 2006, ‘Dossier: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’, *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 1, no. 2, April/May http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0604/0604_2.htm – Accessed 23 April 2008 – Attachment 2; International Crisis Group 2004, *Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*, Middle East Report N°24, 11 February – Attachment 3).

A 2006 *Mideast Monitor* “dossier” on the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood gives a good introductory background. The article follows in full below:

Although nominally a branch of the eponymous movement founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1920s Egypt, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is a creature of the socio-economic, cultural, and political setting in which it evolved. Whereas Banna was a man of modest means who rose up to challenge post-colonial Egyptian elites, the Syrian brotherhood was established in the mid-1940s by pedigreed *ulama* (scholars of Islam) closely aligned with wealthy Sunni landowners and merchants in Hama and Aleppo. This ultra-conservative alliance was cemented by overlapping socio-economic and sectarian fault lines, as the political forces challenging urban notables were dominated by Christian, Druze, and Alawite minorities (10%, 3%, and 12% of the Syrian population, respectively) viewed as heretics by fundamentalist Muslims.

While the Egyptian brotherhood rejected democracy as an import from the West, the Syrian branch participated in Syria’s sporadic interludes of democratic political life in the 1950s, establishing itself as a leading opposition bloc in parliament. The movement was banned in 1958 when Syria joined with Egypt in the United Arab Republic (UAR), but quickly returned to politics after the dissolution of the UAR in 1961, winning ten seats in parliamentary elections.

After seizing power in a 1963 coup, the Arab nationalist Baath Party banned the brotherhood and tightened state control over religious institutions to weaken its influence, while launching major nationalization and land reform programs to weaken the power of Sunni notables. In 1964, the brotherhood network in Hama took up arms in defiance of the new “apostate regime,” but government forces quickly overran the poorly trained and equipped rebels. Brotherhood leader Issam al-Attar was forced into exile, while local organizers of the uprising went underground to prepare for jihad against the Alawites. Wealthy Syrian expatriates in Europe and the Arab Gulf provided financing for the underground, while Jordan and Iraq provided safe havens and specialized paramilitary training.

The Baathist regime further inflamed tensions by steadily concentrating power in the hands of Alawite officers (particularly after the ascension of Hafez Assad as president in 1970), but

outbreaks of the war with Israel in 1967 and 1973 created an inhospitable environment for settling internal scores. Once the dust settled, however, conditions were ripe – the Sunni community was seething with popular resentment toward the conspicuous wealth, corruption, and extravagant lifestyles of the regime's Alawite security barons (especially Assad's brother, Rifaat) and outrage over Syrian intervention in Lebanon in support of Christian militias against a predominantly Muslim left-wing alliance.

In 1976, underground jihadist networks launched a highly sophisticated assassination campaign against prominent Alawite government officials, military officers, and Baath party leaders, as well as pro-government Sunni clergymen. Although brotherhood leaders publicly denied any links to the violence, the government cracked down heavily on the movement, arresting scores of its activists. Following the June 1979 massacre of 32 Alawite army cadets, the regime adopted a new tactic by executing several jailed brotherhood leaders. Unable to root out the cells responsible for the killings, the government henceforth responded with furious retribution. After a failed assassination attempt against Assad in 1980, hundreds of detained brotherhood members were gunned down in their cells. As the scale of violence escalated, mass demonstrations and strikes began erupting in Sunni areas and for a brief time revolution was in the air.

Then, in the predawn hours of February 3, 1982, a Syrian army patrol in Hama stumbled upon the hideout of the city's underground commander, Omar Jawwad (aka Abu Bakr), and was ambushed with heavy losses. As military units ringed the city, mosque loudspeakers once again called for jihad against the Baath. This time, Hama was given no quarter. Much of the city was reduced to rubble and up to 20,000 people lost their lives in three weeks of horrific bloodletting (less than 100 had died in 1964) led by Assad's brother, Rifaat. Organized resistance to the Assad regime quickly disintegrated. Most brotherhood members who weren't picked up by the secret police quietly went on with their lives, while hardcore elements stayed underground and continued to carry out isolated acts of violence (until their inevitable arrests) or found their way to Afghanistan (many of them later popping up in Al-Qaeda).

After eliminating the brotherhood's infrastructure in Syria, government spent enormous sums of money building and upgrading mosques, subsidizing higher religious education, and establishing some 120 Assad Schools for the Recitation of the Koran (informal recitation schools having been key vehicles of paramilitary recruitment for the brotherhood). Cut off from their followers and increasingly bereft of foreign support, the brotherhood's leadership in exile became paralyzed by infighting.

Since the election of Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni as general supervisor (*muraqib am*) in 1996, the brotherhood has negotiated on and off with the government (through intermediaries) in hopes of reaching an accommodation. These negotiations made some progress after the ascension of Bashar Assad, who released several hundred brotherhood members from prison, but the regime remained unwilling to grant Bayanouni's three core demands – a general amnesty that would free thousands of Brotherhood members still in detention, permission for all exiles to return home, and a lifting of the government's ban on the Brotherhood (membership in the organization is still punishable by death under Syrian law).

In hopes of building bridges with secular opposition currents, Bayanouni (who has lived in London since being ejected from Amman in 2000) has steadily moderated the brotherhood's declared objectives and principles. In October 2005, the brotherhood joined other opposition groups in signing the Damascus Declaration, which called for the establishment of a liberal democracy in Syria. Nevertheless, many Syrian Christians and Druze share Alawite fears about Sunni domination, even if a democratic system is put in place.

Because these fears are critical to his political survival, Assad has desperately tried to obstruct the brotherhood's rapprochement with secular opposition forces. In May 2005, Kurdish cleric

Mashuq al-Khaznawi was kidnapped and tortured to death shortly after returning from a meeting abroad with Bayanouni and publicly calling for the brotherhood's re-entry into Syrian political life. A few weeks later, security forces arrested nine members of the Jamal al-Atassi Forum, a secular nationalist political salon, for reading a statement by Bayanouni reiterating the movement's commitment to nonviolence and democracy (they were later released after pledging to cut off communication with the brotherhood).

The level of popular support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria today is difficult to gauge. There are no public opinion polls in Baathist Syria and the movement has not tested its popularity by calling for demonstrations or strikes in two decades. Although Syrian Sunnis are more outwardly religious today than they were then (veiling, for example, is much more common), the movement no longer has a deep social support base or control over religious institutions. There is evidence that radicalism is spreading in government-supervised mosques straddling the line between state and society (last year a preacher in the province of Homs killed a policeman), but it's not clear how extensively the brotherhood has penetrated them.

On the other hand, the brotherhood may not need to rely on traditional vehicles of mobilization in order to reestablish political preeminence in the Sunni community. Having appeared frequently on Arabic-language satellite channels, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, Bayanouni is a far more familiar face to Syrians today than any Brotherhood leader was in the past and his organization communicates regularly with insiders via email.

In today's political climate, the brotherhood's reputation for conspiring with neighboring Arab regimes is no longer a liability. Apart from Egypt (for obvious reasons), most Arab governments do not seem particularly averse to a Muslim Brotherhood takeover in Syria if it comes about peacefully. After the humiliation of Iraq, the Haririst victory in Lebanon gave the Arab world a much-needed dose of Sunni triumphalism and it is hungry for another one even if it comes at Assad's expense. Although no Arab government has publicly received Bayanouni, the Arab press is full of innuendos that something is going on (e.g. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* obliquely mentioned that the brotherhood leader was "outside Britain" when the paper interviewed him in October).

In May 2005, Bayanouni reportedly tried to open a line of communication with the Bush administration through Farid al-Ghadri, the US-based head of the Reform Party of Syria. It is likely that some indirect communication has taken place, though both sides have a strong incentive to deny it – a public relationship between the United States and the brotherhood could risk uniting and radicalizing Syria's fractious Alawite power centers (whether behind or against Assad). Bayanouni's public assurances that the brotherhood is "looking to share power, not to rule the country" appear intended in part to allay American concerns.

However, there is much concern in Washington that a brotherhood-dominated post-Baathist regime will continue allowing terrorists to infiltrate Iraq from Syria. Bayanouni was quick to condemn the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but he has frequently denounced the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and portrayed the United States as a menace to Syria in public speeches. Although such rhetoric usually appears as a prop for his argument that Assad must reconcile with the brotherhood to strengthen the nation against external threats (the "help us help you resist the Americans" appeal has been a common refrain among all opposition currents), he has also berated Assad for "making concessions and more concessions" to Washington. Publicly, at least, he has expressed little willingness to be more accommodating than Assad.

The fact that many Syrian Sunnis deeply sympathize with Iraqi insurgents (no one better understands their fear of being ruled by non-Sunnis) adds to the uncertainty. Even if Bayanouni sincerely commits in advance to halting the traffic, he may find it impossible to control the Islamist underground and politically unthinkable to coerce it. A weak brotherhood at the helm that lacks the ability to rein in radical Islamists would be a nightmare scenario for

Washington. The most critical question mark isn't what Bayanouni's intentions are, but what he's capable of delivering.

Adding to the uncertainty are divisions within the exiled leadership of the brotherhood (mostly in Britain and Germany). One wing, favored by Bayanouni, reportedly believes that Assad will never meet the Brotherhood's core demands and therefore advocates close cooperation with all Syrian opposition currents (Rifaat Assad excepted) and dialogue with Western governments. The other wing, backed by the Egyptian brotherhood, believes that Assad's growing domestic and international isolation will eventually force him to make these concessions and therefore opposes joining the bandwagon against him.

This polarization was evident in the brotherhood's initial reaction to the defection of former Syrian Vice-president Abdul Halim Khaddam early this year. In a January 6 interview with the *Financial Times*, Bayanouni declared that the movement was willing to "work for political transition in Syria with former regime officials who are ready to commit themselves to democratic change," but then changed his tune two days later, calling Khaddam "a partner to the four-decade regime of corruption and despotism in Syria" and demanding that "apologize for his role in the crimes the regime has committed against the [Syrian] people."

Although no apology was forthcoming, Bayanouni met with Khaddam in Brussels a month later and agreed to form a united opposition front. Their sudden marriage happened to mirror a recent alignment in Lebanon between the Hariri family and the Lebanese branch of the brotherhood, known as the Islamic Association (*al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*).

In part because their union seemed so obviously brokered (and probably financed) by non-Syrians, Bayanouni and Khaddam had enormous difficulty attracting other opposition figures to join their ranks. They met again in Brussels in mid-March, this time with a handful of lesser known secular and Kurdish expatriate dissidents, and announced the formation of a National Salvation Front, as well as plans to establish a government-in-exile.

Official American reaction to the Brussels meeting was carefully worded. State Department spokesman Gregg Sullivan called the meeting an "internal Syrian political development," adding quickly that the United States is "interested in hearing a wide array of views from Syrian opposition figures"

Reaction within the Syrian opposition was decidedly more negative. "Anyone who in the past has had a hand in corruption or killings must not be supported by the international community," cautioned Farid Ghadry, president of the U.S.-based Reform Party of Syria. Leading opposition figures inside Syria immediately distanced themselves from the National Salvation Front. "We are not cooperating with Mr. Abdel Halim Khaddam," Syrian dissident Michel Kilo, a major organizer of the Damascus Declaration, told Al-Jazeera. In early April, divisions within the brotherhood itself burst into the open, with Deputy General-Supervisor Farouq Tayfur announcing his withdrawal from the organization (though it does not appear he has actually left) (Gambill, G. 2006, 'Dossier: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood', *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 1, no. 2, April/May http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0604/0604_2.htm – Accessed 23 April 2008 – Attachment 2).

An International Crisis Group (ICG) report on 'Syria under Bashar', released in 2004, states:

Much debate in Syria regarding the Islamist threat has to do with the nature of the Muslim Brotherhood. Clearly responsible for terrible acts in the early 1980s, and suppressed by the regime, the Brotherhood is still viewed by the Baath as a violent foe intent on imposing an extremist, theocratic system. Contacts between the regime and the Brotherhood were initiated in the mid-1990s after the organisation's former leader, Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda, was

granted permission to retire in Syria. But negotiations aimed at allowing members to return failed.

Through its statements and political program, the Muslim Brotherhood clearly has sought to dispel its former image. It has stopped insisting on the right to use violence, no longer calls for the introduction of Islamic law (*shari'a*) and claims to espouse democratic principles. In the same vein, it has ceased to play openly the communitarian card and appeal for Sunni mobilisation against the Alawi – an attitude that backfired in the 1980s. Riyyad at-Turk, along with a number in the secular opposition, believes that the Brotherhood:

has reached a certain political maturity and is prepared to accept the democratic game. Of course, more extreme trends exist among them, but they can be contained through political competition and pluralism. Islamists always prevail during transitional phases because they are the best organised: they have the mosque and do not need to go underground like all other political forces. But I am convinced that their status will decline once democracy is introduced (International Crisis Group 2004, *Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*, Middle East Report N°24, 11 February – Attachment 3).

Most sources concur that, as Larbi Sadiki states, the Muslim Brotherhood “has not been an organized force within the country since Hama in 1982”. Sadiki continues:

Most of its leadership dispersed thereafter to different countries, including in Europe and North America. Its spiritual leader, Sadr al-Din al-Bayanuni, a lawyer, took refuge in Jordan. The thaw in Jordanian-Syrian relations following the passage of power to Bashar al-Assad in Syria (2000) and King Abdullah II in Jordan (1999) translated into greater restrictions on Al-Bayanuni and other Muslim Brotherhood leaders. Sensing danger in the warming relationship between Amman and Damascus, especially after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the USA, leading figures followed Al-Bayanuni into refuge in the UK (Sadiki, L. 2004, ‘Syria’ in *Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World*, ed B. Szajkowski, 4th ed, John Harper, London – Attachment 1).

In a London interview in 2005 the MB leader, Al-Bayanouni, states that they “avoid an organizational presence” inside Syria:

AB: I am the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria (MB). I am responsible for all the global activities of the Syrian MB organization.

MA: What is the nature of your work here?

AB: I lead the political and media activities. More broadly I attend to any other pressing matter relating to the Syrian MB.

MA: Do you also directly supervise MB activities inside Syria?

AB: Law no. 49 in Syria authorizes the killing of anyone affiliated with the MB, therefore we avoid an organizational presence.

MA: How do people inside the country maintain contact with the party?

AB: We only keep general contacts. One month ago a child of 14 was sentenced to death for alleged involvement with the MB after returning from exile, but his sentence was lowered to 6 years in prison.

MA: How extensive are your secret activities in the country?

AB: We have members inside Syria, but we avoid giving these activities any identifiable structure (Abedin, M. 2005, 'The Battle within Syria: An Interview with Muslim Brotherhood Leader Ali Bayanouni', *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 3, issue 16, 11 August – Attachment 4).

In relation to specific ideology, the Muslim Brotherhood's English website, IkhwanWeb, includes a lengthy document summarising the Syrian Brotherhood's "Political Project for the Future Syria". This has been included as Attachment 5 ('A Vision of the Muslim Brotherhood Group in Syria' 2005, The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) Official English Website, 1 November <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Article.asp?ID=5804&SectionID=150> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 5).

IkhwanWeb also gives general information on organisational structure and membership of the MB. It is assumed, however, that this relates to the Egyptian Brotherhood rather than the Syrian Brotherhood ('Muslim Brotherhood: Structure & Spread' 2007, The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) Official English Website, 13 June <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Article.asp?ID=817&LevelID=2&SectionID=116> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 6).

A *Foreign Affairs* article by Robert Leiken and Steven Brooke gives an introduction to the establishment, evolution, ideology and structure of the Muslim Brotherhood as an "international" organisation. Leiken and Brooke note that "the Brotherhood is a collection of national groups with differing outlooks", and state further:

Although the Egyptian branch remains the most influential Brotherhood group, offshoots have prospered throughout the Middle East and Europe. But there is no Islamist "Comintern." The Brotherhood's dreaded International Organization is in fact a loose and feeble coalition scarcely able to convene its own members. Indeed, the Brotherhood's international debility is a product of its local successes: national autonomy and adjustability to domestic conditions. The ideological affiliations that link Brotherhood organizations internationally are subject to the national priorities that shape each individually.

Suppressed throughout much of the Middle East, the Brotherhood spread across the Arab world and, via students and exiles, to Europe. In the early 1980s, the Egyptian Ikhwan sought to establish coordination among dozens of national offspring. But opposition was universal. Right next door, the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood powerhouse Hasan al-Turabi protested, "You cannot run the world from Cairo." When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Kuwaiti Muslim Brothers objected to the acquiescence of the International Organization and withdrew, taking with them their plump wallets. The U.S.-installed government in Iraq is another apple of discord. While Muslim Brothers throughout the Middle East and Europe inveighed against the "puppet" Iraqi government, the Iraqi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood sat prominently in the Iraqi Parliament. More recently, the alliance between the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and Abdel Halim Khaddam, the dissident former Syrian vice president, has been widely offensive to other Brotherhood branches. The war in Lebanon last summer sharpened that divide, as the Syrian Brothers leaped to denounce President Bashar al-Assad's meddling in Lebanon, while the rest of the Brotherhood rallied behind Hezbollah (Leiken, R. & Brooke, S. 2007, 'The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 86, issue 2, 1 March – Attachment 7).

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood website is in Arabic: <http://www.ikhwansyria.com>

The National Salvation Front website is also in Arabic: <http://www.savesyria.org/>

2. The current estimated number of members, activities, influence, areas of operation and geographical concentration of Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.

Very little information was found about the membership and activities of the MB in Syria. Membership of the MB is punishable by death, and the exiled leadership is naturally reluctant to admit to any organisational structure within the country. In the 2004 ICG report, the MB claims to have “thousands of members” but all outside of Syria; while in a 2005 interview Al-Bayanuni confirms that there are members within Syria, but states “Law no. 49 in Syria authorizes the killing of anyone affiliated with the MB, therefore we avoid an organizational presence”. It is generally agreed that the organisation never recovered from the crackdown of 1982. Despite this, MB is often described as the most important Syrian opposition group. ICG states that “from the outset, the regime’s most potent foe was the powerful Islamist opposition led by the Muslim Brotherhood”. According to ICG the organisation’s “social base” appears to be Sunni “urban underclass, urbanised villagers, merchants”. Sources report that the MB strongholds were mainly Hama and Aleppo. It is difficult to gauge the level of popular support within the country, or an estimate of the group’s membership. Alleged members continue to be arrested, as do suspected supporters in Syria. As noted previously, the leadership is currently based in London. Most recently, the NSF has announced it will soon begin operating its satellite television channel, The New Syria. This will be viewed in Syria, and will “feature exposes of the crimes of the Syrian regime and explanations of NSF goals, among other programs” (International Crisis Group 2004, *Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*, Middle East Report N°24, 11 February – Attachment 3; Abedin, M. 2005, ‘The Battle within Syria: An Interview with Muslim Brotherhood Leader Ali Bayanouni’, *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 3, issue 16, 11 August – Attachment 4; ‘Syrian National Salvation Front To Launch Satellite Channel’ 2008, The MEMRI Blog, 8 April http://www.thememriblog.org/blog_personal/en/6708.htm – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 8; also see: Brandon, J. 2005, ‘In exile, opposition groups unite against Damascus’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 November <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1101/p07s02-wome.html> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 9).

A 2005 *Christian Science Monitor* article states the following in relation to the strength and influence of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood:

Although the strength of the Muslim Brotherhood can only be estimated, it probably has more power and influence than all the other opposition groups combined and it is perceived as the greatest military and ideological threat to the regime.

But although Syria’s Law 49 of 1980 still condemns any member of the Muslim Brotherhood to death, “they still have a lot of presence inside Syria,” says Walid Suffour, president of the Syrian Human Rights Committee, who estimates that there are 4,000 Muslim Brotherhood members in prison and thousands more who have been released.

“Officially the Muslim Brotherhood do not exist in Syria but they are still the largest political [opposition] organization,” explains Nahas, adding that they have benefited politically from the increase in grass-roots religiosity in Syrian society (Brandon, J. 2005, ‘In exile, opposition groups unite against Damascus’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 November <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1101/p07s02-wome.html> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 9).

In the 2004 ICG report the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood claims it has “thousands of members” but all outside Syria. The ICG report states:

Political Islamism [in Syria] as such lacks any active organisational structures. The Muslim Brotherhood, plagued by prolonged leadership struggles, forced into exile and with the death penalty hanging over membership, never recovered from the crackdown of the early 1980s. Operating between Jordan and European capitals, it claims “thousands of members” but all outside Syria.

That said, it appears to retain a large reservoir of dormant sympathy, especially among lower middle class Sunnis. A leader of the secular opposition described it as still “the most credible” of Syria’s opposition forces, a view echoed by some religious leaders. This can at least partly be explained by the regime’s almost obsessive denunciation of the party since the 1980s. A schoolteacher recalled, “When I grew up we were forced to shout slogans at school against the Muslim Brotherhood. Not having any idea who they were or what they stood for, we began to like them because it was the regime that was making all our lives miserable”. Over time, the Brotherhood’s social base appears to have changed, from the business classes to the urban underclass, urbanised villagers, merchants, in effect mimicking the Baath’s own populist origins (International Crisis Group 2004, *Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*, Middle East Report N°24, 11 February, p. 15 – Attachment 3).

ICG also states that before the crackdown the movement was circumscribed to Sunni towns in the north. “The rural Sunni population, the minorities, and even the urban Sunnis of Damascus remained supportive of the regime, or at least firmly refrained from acting against it” (International Crisis Group 2004, *Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*, Middle East Report N°24, 11 February, p. 15 – Attachment 3).

An interview in 2006 with the head of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council, Dr. Monir Al Ghadban, is included as an attachment in this response. This describes the recent elections, the leadership, and the workings of the council in exile. He states that activities are happening in Syria, but does not elaborate (Abbady, S. 2006, ‘Interview With The Head of Syrian Brotherhood Shura Council’, The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) Official English Website, 21 October <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Article.asp?ID=3222&SectionID=87> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 10).

3. The treatment of members or suspected members in the 1990’s and beyond, including the seriousness with which the authorities view any association with the organisation.

According to ICG, the regime became slightly less repressive by the mid-1990s. Groups of detainees were released, including some members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Article 49 was not repealed and remains in force. A 2001 Amnesty International report gives details of arrests made during the 1990s. Bashar Assad ushered in a brief period of reform upon taking office in 2000. Hundreds of political prisoners were pardoned, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, ICG states that “after a brief opening, Syria clamped down on dissent”. Sources indicate that this crackdown has increased, especially since the signing of the Damascus Declaration in October 2005. Arrests continue of those suspected of affiliation with the organisation. According to the latest Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) annual report, the “Syrian regime stepped up its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood Movement” (International Crisis Group 2004, *Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*, Middle East Report N°24, 11 February, p. 15 – Attachment 3; Amnesty International 2001, *Syrian Arab Republic. Briefing to the Human Rights Committee 71st Session*, MDE 24/001/2001, March – Attachment 11; Syrian Human Rights Committee 2008, ‘SHRC Seventh Report on the Status of Human Rights in Syria (June 2006 – December 2007)’, January <http://www.shrc.org/data/pdf/ANNUALREPORT2008.pdf> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 12).

The US Department of State's report on human rights for 2007:

Membership in the MB is punishable by death, although in practice the sentences were usually commuted to 12 years in prison. For example, throughout the year, authorities sentenced seven alleged Muslim Brothers, but commuted the sentence to 12 years imprisonment (US Department of State 2008, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007 – Syria*, March – Attachment 13).

In the previously-quoted “dossier” on the Syrian MB, Gary Gambill states that, following the signing of the Damascus Declaration,

Assad has desperately tried to obstruct the brotherhood's rapprochement with secular opposition forces. In May 2005, Kurdish cleric Mashuq al-Khaznawi was kidnapped and tortured to death shortly after returning from a meeting abroad with Bayanouni and publicly calling for the brotherhood's re-entry into Syrian political life. A few weeks later, security forces arrested nine members of the Jamal al-Atassi Forum, a secular nationalist political salon, for reading a statement by Bayanouni reiterating the movement's commitment to nonviolence and democracy (they were later released after pledging to cut off communication with the brotherhood) (Gambill, G. 2006, 'Dossier: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood', *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 1, no. 2, April/May http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0604/0604_2.htm – Accessed 23 April 2008 – Attachment 2).

The US Department of State human rights reports for 1998 and 1999 have been included as attachments. According to this information, there were large-scale arrests of suspected Islamists during this period (US Department of State 2000, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1999 – Syria*, February – Attachment 14; US Department of State 1999, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998 – Syria*, February – Attachment 15).

Amnesty International's 2001 briefing to the Human Rights Committee includes information on the widespread arrests and the treatment of detained political activists during the 1990s (Amnesty International 2001, *Syrian Arab Republic. Briefing to the Human Rights Committee 71st Session*, MDE 24/001/2001, March – Attachment 11).

See also: Amnesty International 2005, 'Unable to Move: Freedom of Movement Restricted for Human Rights Defenders (and Others)', MDE24/073/2005, 12 August <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/073/2005/en> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 16).

4. Any demonstration or civil unrest in Hasaka in the last 10 years and the government's response.

Information indicates that Hassaka province has been the scene of Kurdish unrest and anti-government protests. The worst incident occurred in March 2004 following a soccer match between Kurdish and Arab teams. Over 30 people were killed and more than 1000 Syrian Kurds arrested. According to sources, riots also occurred in 2005 and 2006 (for information, see: Danish Immigration Service 2007, 'Syria: Kurds, Honour-killings and Illegal Departure. Report from a fact finding mission to Damascus, 15-22 January 2007', April – Attachment 17).

The US Department of State's report on human rights for 2004:

On March 12, security forces in Qamishli, in the northeastern Hassakeh province, opened fire on a crowd at a soccer match after clashes between Arab and Kurdish fans. The following day, crowds rioted in Qamishli and the security forces again opened fire on the crowd. Subsequently, riots and demonstrations spread throughout the towns and villages of the Hassakeh Province as well as to cities such as Damascus and Aleppo. Thirty-eight persons were killed during the riots, and security forces detained over 1,000 persons (US Department of State 2005, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004 – Syria*, February – Attachment 18).

For more details of the incident and the subsequent treatment of detainees, see paragraphs 1701-1706 of: UN Commission on Human Rights 2005, 'Civil and political rights, including the questions of torture and detention – Addendum to the report of the Special Rapporteur, Theo van Boven', *United Nations Economic and Social Council*, E/CN.4/2005/62/Add.1, 30 March – Attachment 19.

For more information on this incident, as well as events in 2005 and 2006, see: Danish Immigration Service 2007, 'Syria: Kurds, Honour-killings and Illegal Departure. Report from a fact finding mission to Damascus, 15-22 January 2007', April – Attachment 17.

5. Exit procedures, security controls and the likelihood of a Syrian national suspected of anti-government activities being able to depart Syria for Cyprus (in 1998) and Lebanon (in 2004), particularly if the national in question has been previously detained.

Recent information on exit procedures and security controls was found in a January 2007 Danish Immigration Service (DIS) report on illegal departure in relation to Kurdish dissidents. Previous advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) regarding exit procedures and security at Damascus and Beirut airports, as well as US Department of State information on freedom of movement for the relevant years, have also been included in this response.

Danish Immigration Service

A January 2007 report from the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) includes the following information on exit/entry procedures:

5.2 Border-control and registration

An Embassy in Damascus (2) said that the exit-entry procedure in Syria has been considerably tightened in recent years. The reason for this is among others pressure from the USA not to allow transit of persons related to the conflict in Iraq. Another reason could be the intent on the part of the authorities to limit the entry of Iraqis into Syria.

An Embassy in Damascus (3) observed that the measures regarding border control in Syria have been tightened because the authorities want to keep control with the people residing in Syria since they realize that the influx of foreigners, e.g. Iraqis, can affect the security situation of the country.

An Embassy in Damascus (1) also observed that the exit-entry control in Syria is highly effective. The immigration authorities run an effective computer database.

An Embassy in Damascus (2) informed the delegation that the computer registry of the Syrian immigration authorities will indicate the exit date and place of people leaving Syria. If a person is searched for by the security services, it will be indicated in the registry with information about which security service has requested the search.

An Embassy in Damascus (3) also pointed to the fact that the Syrian (immigration) authorities have a computer registry that indicates the date and place of exit and the issue of a passport of a given person. It is also indicated if the person is searched by the police. The source observed on a general level that there is no central civil registry in Syria.

According to *Brigadier General Mazhar Ahmed, Chief of Immigration and Passports Department, Ministry of Interior of Syria* civil servants, men who are due to do their military service and children need an exit permit in order to leave Syria.

Persons who are wanted or who are subject to a travel ban are registered in a computer database. This computer registry is checked when passport applications are processed.

Persons who have obtained a passport are also checked in the computer registry when they leave Syria.

A local lawyer informed the delegation that an exit-visa is no longer required in order to leave Syria.

Regarding re-entry into Syria *Brigadier General Mazhar Ahmed* informed the delegation that foreigners residing permanently in Syria will only be allowed to re-enter the country if they can provide documentation that they are registered in the Syrian Civil Registry. Persons who can not provide such documentation will not be allowed re-entry (Danish Immigration Service 2007, 'Syria: Kurds, Honour-killings and Illegal Departure. Report from a fact finding mission to Damascus, 15-22 January 2007', April – Attachment 17).

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

In 2004 DFAT advised the following in relation to Syrian security personnel at Beirut airport:

The Syrian security apparatus used to completely control the airport but operations have been progressively regularised and now the Syrian presence is confined to a Colonel and two assistants. They work most closely with airport security and are concerned with issues such as overflights of Israeli aircraft and Syrian passenger movements (DFAT 2004, DFAT Report 342 'RRT Information Request: LBN17079', 18 November – Attachment 20).

2003 advice from DFAT provides information on entry and exit procedures at Beirut Airport (Country Information Services 2003, *Country Information Report: Entry and Exit Procedures at Beirut Airport*, sourced from DFAT advice dated 7 January 2003, 24 January – Attachment 21).

In 2001 DFAT advised "Syrian and Lebanese nationals may cross freely between the two countries on presentation of national identity documents only. They do not require passports/visas" (Country Information Service 2001, *Country Information Report No 43/01 – Ekhuwan Party, current human rights/political situation, Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Lebanese-Syrian border agreement and Horan*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 21 January 2001), 30 January – Attachment 22).

US Department of State

The 2004 US Department of State human rights report includes the following regarding freedom of movement: "The Government maintained security checkpoints, primarily in military and other restricted areas. There were few police checkpoints on main roads or in populated areas. The security services used checkpoints to conduct warrantless searches for smuggled goods, weapons, narcotics, and subversive literature" (US Department of State

2005, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004 – Syria*, February – Attachment 18).

In 1998 the US Department of State provides the following information on freedom of movement: “Citizens must have government permission to travel abroad. Some have been denied such permission on political grounds, although government officials deny that this practice occurs” (US Department of State 1999, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998 – Syria*, February – Attachment 15).

In 1999 the US Department of State report states that many of the travel restrictions were eased:

The Government limits freedom of movement...On November 13, the Government eased many of its travel restrictions, which made it easier for most citizens to travel abroad. Exit visas generally no longer are required for women, men over 50 years old, and Syrian expatriates. In the past, individuals have been denied permission to travel abroad on political grounds, although government officials deny that this practice occurs. The authorities may prosecute any person found attempting to emigrate or travel abroad illegally, or who is suspected of having visited Israel (US Department of State 2000, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1999 – Syria*, February – Attachment 14).

Other information

A 2005 report on state violence in Syria by Committees for the Defense of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria (CDF) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) includes the following information:

Syrian Government forbids many of its citizens to leave the country. This violation of the right to liberty of movement is not based on legal text or judicial decision and it communicated verbally.

This violation takes many forms as alerting the police borders or in dispatching names of the people forbidden to leave the country. On follow one notes the list of categories of people that their liberty to move depend on the authorities will. The following lists the categories of people whose movement depends on the discretion of the authorities:

- Former political detainees;
- Defenders of Human Rights;
- Citizens that have no public activity;

CDF have established a list of the people forbidden to leave the country. Below some of the people forbidden to leave the country:

- Mr. Haïtham Al Maleh, President of the Syrian Human Rights Committee.
- Mr. Mohammad Raadoun, President of Arabic Organization-Syrian Sector.
- Mr. Mahmoud Al Aryan member of general assembly of Human Rights Organization.
- Mr.Fateh Jamous, former political detainee.
- Mr. Abdel Karim Daoun and Mr. Daniel Saoud, members of CDF (Committees for the Defense of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria & World

Organisation Against Torture 2005, 'State Violence in Syria. An Alternative Report to the Human Rights Committee 84th Session', July – Attachment 23).

Also see:

- In 2007 the IRB provided information on procedures for obtaining passports in Syria (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, SYR102526.E – *Syria: Follow-up to SYR102397 of 8 March 2007 on the procedures to obtain, renew and replace a passport; information contained in the passport*, 3 May <http://www.cisr-irb.gc.ca/en/research/rir/?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451201> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 24).
- Amnesty International 2005, 'Unable to Move: Freedom of Movement Restricted for Human Rights Defenders (and Others)', MDE24/073/2005, 12 August <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/073/2005/en> – Accessed 28 April 2008 – Attachment 16.
- Question 8 of *Research Response SYR14966*, dated 14 February 2002, provides information on whether persons who are wanted by the Lebanese authorities or Syrian forces in Lebanon are able to obtain Lebanese passports or depart Lebanon. Question 9 also provides information on exit procedures (RRT Country Research 2002, *Research Response SYR14966*, 14 February – Attachment 25).

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