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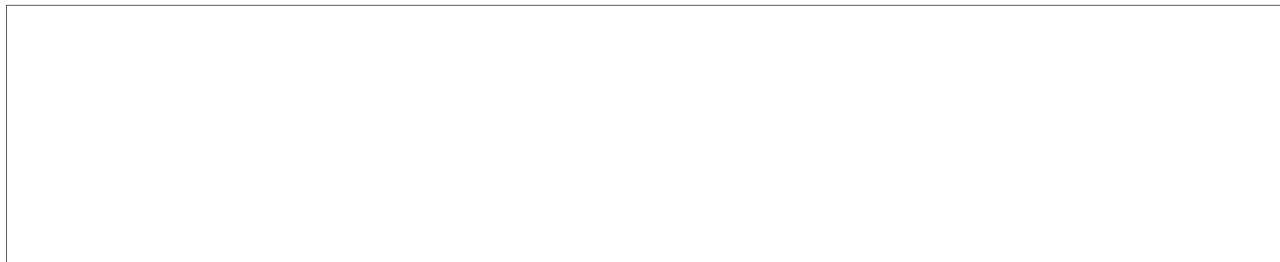
ENVELOPE

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HEADER

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CONTROLS

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SECTION 1 OF 2

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CITE OSC RESTON VA 517128

WARNING: TOPIC: DOMESTIC POLITICAL, INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL, MEDIA

SERIAL: FEA20081006784475

/***** THIS IS A COMBINED MESSAGE *****/

BODY

COUNTRY: EGYPT

SUBJ: BCM: EGYPT'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD USES INTERNET TO GET
MESSAGE ACROSS (U)

- REF: 1. EGYPTIAN PAPER DETAILS CONTINUED CRACKDOWN ON MB GROUP BY SECURITY FORCES GMP20081006035003 AMAL AL-UMMAH WWW-TEXT ARABIC 0000 GMT 06 OCT 08 (U)
- 2. EGYPT'S MB COMPLAINS TO INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT ON GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN GMP20081005035003 IKHWANONLINE WWW-TEXT ARABIC 0000 GMT 05 OCT 08 (U)
- 3. EGYPTIAN SECURITY FORCES CONTINUE CRACKDOWN ON JOURNALISTS GMP20081002035002 IKHWANONLINE WWW-TEXT ARABIC 0000 GMT 02 OCT 08 (U)

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SOURCE: OSC FEATURE - BBC MONITORING 06 OCT 08 (U)

TEXT:

Media feature: "Egypt's Islamist Opposition Maximizes Use of Online Media" (U)

Publications

OSC SUMMARY

(Attachment not included: muslimbrotherhood.jpg)
MB logo from www.ikhwanonline.com

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has been trying to put the Internet to the best possible use to get its message across. Going online was the logical alternative for the legally banned but politically tolerated main Islamist opposition group. It has been denied the chance to have its own publication since the late 1970's.

The MB, which puts media at the heart of its strategy to reach out to people, has several websites serving the group's short-term and long-term objectives. Useful as it was, the internet has proven to be a double-edged weapon for the group, as it has provided young group members with the chance to go against the higher leadership through blogging.

Established in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, the MB has been a key player in Egyptian politics, particularly with the ineffectual performance of the officially recognized opposition political parties. Arrests among group members are almost systematic in Egypt, with the charge usually being belonging to an outlawed group.

Online alternative

The MB status as an illegal organization has been a stumbling block to the group having its own media outlet. The group has not, however, resigned itself to this fact, and has tried to get its voice heard through other alternatives, one of which was the publications of other parties.

Afaq Arabiyah (Arab Horizons) newspaper, which was first published by the Socialist Liberal Party in 1995, represented one such attempt. The paper was mainly written by MB journalists. It was widely known as the mouthpiece of the group.

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In March 2006, the paper was suspended. The group blamed the decision on the government-controlled Supreme Council of the Press, and the council put it down to a dispute between two figures over the chairmanship of the newspaper board. The MB was, therefore, deprived of this media platform through which the causes and messages of the group were brought to the people.

In March 2007, the paper's journalists staged a symbolic mourning ceremony outside the Syndicate of Journalists to mark the first anniversary of the "late" Afaq Arabiyah. This seems to have added to the group's keenness to use the internet as effectively as possible. In addition to the main website Ikhwanonline (www.ikhwanonline.com), the MB is said to have around 30 other affiliated websites operating from Egypt, some of which are in English in order to reach out to non-Arabic speakers.

There are also about 26 websites covering Egypt's governorates, in addition to dozens of forums and blogs.

Objectives

The MB websites appear to serve short-term and long-term objectives. The websites carry up-to-date news about the group's current affairs, including arrests or releases of group members. The websites also devote sections to statements issued by the group on domestic and regional affairs, as well as interviews with key leaders.

In the run-up to the 2005 parliamentary elections, the websites were used to promote the MB platform and individual candidates, since they were not allowed to appear on official television programmes. Part of this online campaign was meant to counter the state control of television broadcasts. The MB also used websites to criticize and publicize alleged election tampering.

MB wiki

The long-term goals are represented in the websites' highlighting of the group's message, ideology, history and political aims. Within this context, members of the MB have created an online encyclopaedia along the lines of Wikipedia to document the group's

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history and activity and promote its religious and political thoughts.

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The website "Ikhwan (brotherhood) Wiki" (www.ikhwan.net/wiki) aims to collect and document the largest possible amount of information and data on the group from its official and unofficial sources, books and relevant interviews on the internet, according to the statement of those in charge of the encyclopaedia cited by Al-Jazeera Net on 4 September 2008.

"The new encyclopaedia does not belong to the group officially and is not linked to its Guidance Office. This will give greater flexibility for browsers and researchers in approaching it," Abd-al-Jalil al-Sharnubi, the editor-in-chief of the MB official website Ikhwanonline told Al-Jazeera Net. "The MB youths see that the group and its historical and current leadership and documents need to have a greater presence on the internet, hence, their move to launch the encyclopaedia," he added.

The encyclopaedia allows internet users, volunteers or researchers to obtain information and contribute by adding articles, studies or research papers or introducing changes. More than 800 articles were published in the first few days of the launch in early September.

MB enters blogosphere

There has been a surge in the number of Egyptian blogs in recent years. Young MB members have joined the wave, trying to make use of this media platform to generate solidarity and support for the group. Many of the younger bloggers are sons and daughters of imprisoned MB members. One blog is dedicated to imprisoned MB member Hassan Malik, one of the movement's leaders arrested in a February 2007 crackdown.

Created by his daughter Khadija, the blog features videos dedicated to the portrayal of her father's suffering. One of these segments entitled, "Return my father," depicts the pleas of his youngest daughter A'ishah for her father's release from prison. Asma al-Iryan, daughter of leader Isam al-Iryan, started blogging in 2007 under the title "Al-Iryan's daughters". The motive behind her blogging was personal; it was to depict a different image of her father, who is a prominent leader in the group, as it focuses on the family and personal side of Isam al-Iryan, Asma told a recent symposium organized by a website affiliated to Islamonline network (www.islamonline.net) under the title "MB blogs orientations and influence".

Blogs backfire

While new media technologies have provided some newfound benefits

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to the MB, they have brought challenges as well. Some young MB members have found the blogosphere a good platform to voice opinions that may disagree with those of the group's higher leadership, which has come under fire from those bloggers on occasion.

A swipe was launched against the MB's general guide or leader, Muhammad Mahdi Akif, after he announced the group's decision to participate in a strike on 4 May in protest against the economic situation in the country.

The independent daily Al-Masri al-Yawm at the time quoted a MB blogger as saying "the guide's decision came to just jump on the bandwagon". Another blogger wrote a blog under the title "the guide is determined to destroy the group". "Until when will the group remain a toy in the hand of the guide who cannot manage its affairs and whose tenure has witnessed the largest number of arrests in its history?" the blogger wondered.

Description of Source: Caversham BBC Monitoring in English -- Monitoring service of the BBC, the United Kingdom's public service broadcaster

This item was originally filed as IAP20081006950095

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