

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Name: The Muslim Brotherhood in the United Arab Emirates

Year of Origin: 1974

Founder(s): Not determined.

Place(s) of Operation: United Arab Emirates

Key Leaders: Said Nasser al-Teniji¹ [Image not available]

Associated Organization(s):

- Association for Reform and Guidance²
- Da'wat Al-Islah³
- Reform and Social Guidance Association⁴

The [Muslim Brotherhood](#) in the United Arab Emirates is known as al-Islah, or the Association for Reform and Guidance. The group says it shares a similar ideology with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, though it denies direct links with the Islamist movement.⁵ Al-Islah was founded as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in 1974, three years after the UAE's independence from Britain. The group expanded throughout the 1980s as its members filled prominent positions in the government's education and justice sectors.⁶ In 2012, reports emerged that the group had at one time received 10 million UAE Dirham (\$2.7 million) from Brotherhood members in neighboring countries.⁷ Al-Islah's leaders have reportedly promoted the implementation of stricter religious laws, particularly on students and women.⁸

According to Emirati academic and former al-Islah member Ali Rashid al-Noaimi, the group was never "home-grown," instead modeling itself after the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood from its

¹ Said Nasser al-Teniji, "The UAE's descent into oppression," *Guardian* (London), October 2, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/02/uae-descent-oppression>; Rori Donaghy, "Muslim Brotherhood review: A tale of UK-UAE relations," *Middle East Eye*, December 17, 2015, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/muslim-brotherhood-review-tale-uk-uae-relations-378120043>.

² "United Arab Emirates," Freedom House, 2014, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/united-arab-emirates>.

³ "UAE Cabinet approves list of designated terrorist organizations, groups," WAM Emirates News Agency, November 15, 2014, <https://www.wam.ae/en/news/emirates-international/1395272478814.html>.

⁴ Said Nasser al-Teniji, "The UAE's descent into oppression," October 2, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/02/uae-descent-oppression>.

⁵ "Gulf states must tackle Muslim Brotherhood threat: UAE," Reuters, October 8, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-brotherhood-idUSBRE8970SD20121008>.

⁶ Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE," Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>.

⁷ "Brotherhood 'sought Islamist state in UAE'," *National* (Abu Dhabi), September 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/brotherhood-sought-islamist-state-in-uae>.

⁸ Ola Salem, "Islah 'does not represent UAE interests,'" *National* (Abu Dhabi), October 5, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/islah-does-not-represent-uae-interests>.

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inception. Al-Islah's members are reportedly told upon joining that they are part of the larger Muslim Brotherhood movement.⁹

Statements by individuals associated with the Egyptian Brotherhood support Noaimi's claim. Former Egyptian Brotherhood member Tharwat Al Kherbawi has alleged that "Emirati members of the Muslim Brotherhood take a proxy allegiance oath, where these members swear allegiance before another veteran leader in the UAE, who in turn swears allegiance before the Supreme Guide in Cairo."¹⁰ Al Kherbawi, who has written numerous books on the Brotherhood movement, says al-Islah members are recruited for membership as early as high school and college.¹¹

The UAE dissolved al-Islah in 1994 after the Egyptian government issued a complaint that the group had provided financial support to the Egyptian Islamic Jihad militant group.¹² Nearly a decade later, in 2003, UAE authorities met with al-Islah's leadership and urged the group to either renounce its Islamist ideology, or to remain affiliated with the Brotherhood but cease its activities in the education sector. No agreement was reached.¹³

In early 2012, UAE authorities reportedly became aware of al-Islah's alleged financial, operational, and political relationships with international Muslim Brotherhood operatives. Members of the UAE government expressed concerns that al-Islah was inspired by the Brotherhood's political success in Egypt, and similarly sought to foment dissent and seize power.¹⁴ Between March and December of 2012, UAE authorities arrested 94 al-Islah leaders. The defendants were charged with violating article 180 of the penal code, which bans the establishment of a political organization that compromises state security. They were also charged with communicating with international entities in order to subvert the state, communicating with the international Muslim Brotherhood in order to seize power, and investing charitable funds in the establishment of commercial or real estate companies.¹⁵

⁹ Ali Rashid al-Noaimi, "Setting the Record Straight on Al-Islah in the UAE," Al-Monitor, October 15, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/uae-setting-the-record-straight.html#>.

¹⁰ Samir Salama, "Rise and fall of Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE," Gulf News Egypt, April 13, 2013, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/egypt/rise-and-fall-of-muslim-brotherhood-in-uae-1.1170002>.

¹¹ Samir Salama, "Rise and fall of Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE," Gulf News Egypt, April 13, 2013, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/egypt/rise-and-fall-of-muslim-brotherhood-in-uae-1.1170002>.

¹² Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE," Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>; Samir

Salama, "Rise and fall of Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE," Gulf News Egypt, April 13, 2013, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/egypt/rise-and-fall-of-muslim-brotherhood-in-uae-1.1170002>.

¹³ Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE," Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>.

¹⁴ Ali Rashid al-Noaimi, "Setting the Record Straight on Al-Islah in the UAE," Al-Monitor, October 15, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/uae-setting-the-record-straight.html#>.

¹⁵ "Brotherhood 'sought Islamist state in UAE," *National* (Abu Dhabi), September 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/brotherhood-sought-islamist-state-in-uae>; "61 individuals v. Republic of United Arab Emirates, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 60/2013, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/WGAD/2013/60 (2014)," University of Minnesota Human Rights Library, April 2, 2014,

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In September 2012, UAE authorities said that detained al-Islah members had confessed to forming a military wing in order to seize power. Authorities said that members had also admitted to receiving funding from Brotherhood associates in neighboring countries, at one time collecting more than 10 million UAE Dirham (\$2.7 million).¹⁶ In October 2012, UAE Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan stated that al-Islah does “not believe in the nation state. It does not believe in the sovereignty of the state.”¹⁷ Later that month, London’s *Guardian* newspaper published an opinion piece written by al-Islah leader Said Nasser al-Teniji, in which he wrote about the UAE’s crackdown on the Islamist group.¹⁸

The UAE’s federal trial of 94 al-Islah members began in March 2013.¹⁹ In July of that year, the UAE’s Federal Supreme Court sentenced the majority of those individuals to between three and ten years in prison.²⁰ Human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch have decried the UAE’s crackdown on al-Islah, claiming the government has “desperately [clung] to outdated, repressive tactics.”²¹

The UAE designated al-Islah as a terrorist organization in November 2014.²² With most of its former leaders in prison, al-Islah is suspected to have little operational activity.

In June 2017, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic ties with Qatar in response to that country’s ongoing support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist and terrorist groups.²³

<https://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/wgad/60-2013.html>; “UAE coup plot trial begins in Abu Dhabi,” Al Jazeera, March 4 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/20133472546866175.html>.

¹⁶ “Brotherhood ‘sought Islamist state in UAE,’” *National* (Abu Dhabi), September 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/brotherhood-sought-islamist-state-in-uae>; “UAE Islamist group denies reports it has an armed wing,” Reuters, September 23, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-islamists-idUSBRE88M05P20120923>; Agence France-Presse, “UAE Islamists deny forming military wing,” Ahram Online, September 22, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/53525.aspx>.

¹⁷ “Gulf states must tackle Muslim Brotherhood threat: UAE,” Reuters, October 8, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-brotherhood-idUSBRE8970SD20121008>.

¹⁸ Said Nasser al-Teniji, “The UAE’s descent into oppression,” *Guardian* (London), October 2, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/02/uae-descent-oppression>.

¹⁹ “UAE coup plot trial begins in Abu Dhabi,” Al Jazeera, March 4 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/20133472546866175.html>.

²⁰ Yara Bayoumy, “UAE court jails scores of Emiratis in coup plot trial: TV,” Reuters, July 2, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-trial-idUSBRE96105M20130702>.

²¹ “UAE: Crackdown on Islamist Group Intensifies,” Human Rights Watch, July 18, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/18/uae-crackdown-islamist-group-intensifies>.

²² “UAE Cabinet approves list of designated terrorist organizations, groups,” WAM Emirates News Agency, November 15, 2014, <https://www.wam.ae/en/news/emirates-international/1395272478814.html>.

²³ Patrick Wintour, “Gulf Plunged into Diplomatic Crisis as Countries Cut Ties with Qatar,” *Guardian* (London), June 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/05/saudi-arabia-and-bahrain-break-diplomatic-ties-with-qatar-over-terrorism>.

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History:

- **Late 1950s – 1960s:** Muslim Brotherhood members fleeing a crackdown by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser arrive in the Trucial States, the region that will become the United Arab Emirates. The States’ rulers accept the Brothers, believing they will balance the strong tides of Arab nationalism in the region. The Egyptian Brothers begin to recruit Emiratis.²⁴
- **1971:** The United Arab Emirates achieves independence from Britain.²⁵
- **1974:** Al-Islah is officially formed as an NGO with the permission of Dubai’s ruler, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed al-Maktoum. The group is involved in charitable, social, and cultural activities.²⁶
- **1974-1980s:** Al-Islah members assume high government positions in the education and justice sectors.²⁷
- **1994:** The UAE dissolves al-Islah after the Egyptian government issues a complaint that the group provided financial support to the Egyptian Islamic Jihad militant group.²⁸
- **2003:** UAE authorities open talks with al-Islah leadership. Authorities urge the group to either renounce its Islamist ideology, or to remain affiliated with the Brotherhood but cease activities in the education sector. No agreement is reached.²⁹
- **2004:** According to released U.S. State Department cables, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan believes that al-Islah has infiltrated the UAE government.³⁰
- **Early 2012:** The UAE government begins to investigate al-Islah’s leadership on the suspicion that the group is trying to subvert the UAE government.³¹

²⁴ “United Arab Emirates profile– Timeline,” BBC News, April 21, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14704414>; Lori Plotkin Boghardt, “The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE,” Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>; Ali Rashid al-Noaimi, “Setting the Record Straight on Al-Islah in the UAE,” Al-Monitor, October 15, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/uae-setting-the-record-straight.html#>.

²⁵ “United Arab Emirates profile– Timeline,” BBC News, April 21, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14704414>.

²⁶ Lori Plotkin Boghardt, “The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE,” Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>; Ali Rashid al-Noaimi, “Setting the Record Straight on Al-Islah in the UAE,” Al-Monitor, October 15, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/uae-setting-the-record-straight.html#>.

²⁷ Lori Plotkin Boghardt, “The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE,” Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>.

²⁸ Lori Plotkin Boghardt, “The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE,” Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>; Samir Salama, “Rise and fall of Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE,” Gulf News Egypt, April 13, 2013, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/egypt/rise-and-fall-of-muslim-brotherhood-in-uae-1.1170002>.

²⁹ Lori Plotkin Boghardt, “The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE,” Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>.

³⁰ “UAE MINIMIZING INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS,” United Arab Emirates Abu Dhabi, provided by Wikileaks, November 10, 2004, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04ABUDHABI4061_a.html.

³¹ Ali Rashid al-Noaimi, “Setting the Record Straight on Al-Islah in the UAE,” Al-Monitor, October 15, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/uae-setting-the-record-straight.html#>.

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- **March 2012 - December 2012:** UAE authorities arrest 94 al-Islah leaders in waves. The defendants are charged with violating article 180 of the penal code banning the establishment of a political organization that compromises state security. They are also charged with communicating with international entities in order to subvert the state, communicating with the international Muslim Brotherhood in order to seize power, and investing charitable funds in the establishment of commercial or real estate companies.³²
- **September 2012:** Detained al-Islah members tell UAE authorities that al-Islah formed a military wing in order to seize power, according to the UAE. Members also reportedly admitted that the group received funds from Brotherhood operatives in neighboring countries, at one time as high as 10 million UAE Dirham (\$2.7 million). Al-Islah denies the accusations.³³
- **October 2012:** London's *Guardian* newspaper publishes an opinion piece written by al-Islah leader Said Nasser al-Teniji. Teniji, who lives in exile, writes about the UAE's crackdown on the Islamist group.³⁴
- **March 2013:** The trial of 94 al-Islah members begins.³⁵
- **July 2013:** The UAE's Federal Supreme Court convicts the majority of the 94 al-Islah defendants, sentencing them to between three and 10 years in prison.³⁶
- **November 2014:** The UAE designates al-Islah as a terrorist organization.³⁷
- **June 2017:** The UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic ties with Qatar in response to that country's ongoing support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist and terrorist groups. Two weeks later, the four countries issue a list of demands to Qatar, including that it cut ties with the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁸

³² "Brotherhood 'sought Islamist state in UAE,'" *National* (Abu Dhabi), September 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/brotherhood-sought-islamist-state-in-uae>; "61 individuals v. Republic of United Arab Emirates, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 60/2013, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/WGAD/2013/60 (2014)," University of Minnesota Human Rights Library, April 2, 2014, <https://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/wgad/60-2013.html>; "UAE coup plot trial begins in Abu Dhabi," Al Jazeera, March 4 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/20133472546866175.html>.

³³ "Brotherhood 'sought Islamist state in UAE,'" *National* (Abu Dhabi), September 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/brotherhood-sought-islamist-state-in-uae>; "UAE Islamist group denies reports it has an armed wing," Reuters, September 23, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-islamists-idUSBRE88M05P20120923>; Agence France-Presse, "UAE Islamists deny forming military wing," Ahram Online, September 22, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/53525.aspx>.

³⁴ Said Nasser al-Teniji, "The UAE's descent into oppression," *Guardian* (London), October 2, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/02/uae-descent-oppression>.

³⁵ "UAE coup plot trial begins in Abu Dhabi," Al Jazeera, March 4 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/20133472546866175.html>.

³⁶ Yara Bayoumy, "UAE court jails scores of Emiratis in coup plot trial: TV," Reuters, July 2, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-trial-idUSBRE96105M20130702>.

³⁷ "UAE Cabinet approves list of designated terrorist organizations, groups," WAM Emirates News Agency, November 15, 2014, <https://www.wam.ae/en/news/emirates-international/1395272478814.html>.

³⁸ Patrick Wintour, "Gulf Plunged into Diplomatic Crisis as Countries Cut Ties with Qatar," *Guardian* (London), June 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/05/saudi-arabia-and-bahrain-break-diplomatic-ties-with-qatar-over-terrorism>; "Saudi-led bloc modifies demands to end Qatar crisis," BBC News, July 19, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40654023>; Eric Trager, "The Muslim Brotherhood Is the Root of the

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Violent Activities:

In 2012, detained al-Islah members reportedly told UAE authorities that al-Islah had formed a military wing in order to seize power.³⁹ According to reports, the members further revealed that the military wing had sought to recruit young Emiratis and retired military officers to its ranks.⁴⁰ Al-Islah denied the accusations days later in an official statement, asking, “How is it possible that a group of civilians consisting of university professors, teachers, lawyers and businessmen turn into a military organization?”⁴¹

Al-Islah had been previously accused of financing foreign terrorist organizations. In the early-to mid-1990s, Egypt’s government accused al-Islah of providing financial support to Egyptian Islamic Jihad, a jihadist group responsible for the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. The assertion led the UAE government to officially disband al-Islah in 1994.⁴²

Ties to Extremist Groups: Not determined.

**Designations by Governments and Organizations:
United Arab Emirates**

The United Arab Emirates designated al-Islah as a terrorist organization under Federal Law No. 7, issued by President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, November 15, 2014.⁴³

In Their Own Words: Not determined.

Qatar Crisis,” *Atlantic*, July 2, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/muslim-brotherhood-qatar/532380/>.

³⁹ “Brotherhood 'sought Islamist state in UAE',” *National* (Abu Dhabi), September 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/brotherhood-sought-islamist-state-in-uae>; “UAE Islamist group denies reports it has an armed wing,” Reuters, September 23, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-islamists-idUSBRE88M05P20120923>; Agence France-Presse, “UAE Islamists deny forming military wing,” *Ahram Online*, September 22, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/53525.aspx>.

⁴⁰ “Brotherhood 'sought Islamist state in UAE',” *National* (Abu Dhabi), September 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/brotherhood-sought-islamist-state-in-uae>.

⁴¹ “UAE Islamist group denies reports it has an armed wing,” Reuters, September 23, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-islamists-idUSBRE88M05P20120923>.

⁴² Lori Plotkin Boghardt, “The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE,” Washington Institute, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>; Samir Salama, “Rise and fall of Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE,” *Gulf News Egypt*, April 13, 2013, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/egypt/rise-and-fall-of-muslim-brotherhood-in-uae-1.1170002>; “Brotherhood 'sought Islamist state in UAE',” *National* (Abu Dhabi), September 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/brotherhood-sought-islamist-state-in-uae>; Holly Fletcher, “Egyptian Islamic Jihad,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 30, 2008, <http://www.cfr.org/egypt/egyptian-islamic-jihad/p16376>.

⁴³ “UAE Cabinet approves list of designated terrorist organizations, groups,” WAM Emirates News Agency, November 15, 2014, <https://www.wam.ae/en/news/emirates-international/1395272478814.html>.