Name: Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen

Year of Origin: 1960s

Founder(s): Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani, Mohammed Abdulla Al-Yadomi, Abdulla Bin Hussein Al-Ahmar, Ali Mohsen al-Amar

Place(s) of Operation: Yemen

Key Leaders:
- Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani
- Mohammed Abdulla Al-Yadomi: Chairman of the Supreme Authority of Islah
- Abdul Wahab Al-Anesi: Secretary-General
- Mohammed al-Saadi: Assistant secretary-general for political affairs
- Yahya Lutfi al-Fusayl: senior leader

Associated Organization(s):
- Al-Islah
- Da’wat Al-Islah
- Islah
- Yemeni Congregation for Reform

The Muslim Brotherhood first emerged in Yemen in the 1960s and 1970s, when U.N.-sanctioned Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani—the founder of the Brotherhood’s branch in Yemen—led a group of...
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clerics to establish a religious schooling system in northern Yemen. Following the 1990 merger of North and South Yemen, Zindani co-founded Islamist political party al-Islah (“Congregation for Reform”) with the support of then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Since its founding in the 1990s, al-Islah has remained one of the leading political parties in Yemen, vacillating at times between an opposition party and a government ally. Saudi Arabia designated al-Islah as a terrorist organization in 2014. In 2015, however, Saudi Arabia reportedly began providing the group with financial and artillery support to fight Houthi rebels. Al-Islah has longstanding ties to the Brotherhood, but the group declared in 2013 and again in 2016 that it is not associated with the global Brotherhood movement. Al-Islah reportedly declared again in 2018 that it had no affiliation with the Brotherhood.

The history of the Brotherhood in Yemen is intricately tied to the work of its founders and most significantly to Zindani. In the 1960s, Zindani established a number of schools, called “scientific institutes,” mimicking the madrassas school system in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Through an ascetic Wahhabi-Salafist curriculum, the school aimed to counter the wave of secularism coming from the socialist-run South Yemen. In the 1980s, Zindani and a number of his students went to Afghanistan to join the mujahideen in their fight against Soviet forces. In addition to serving as an adviser to Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders in the 1990s, Zindani has also spoken at Hamas events, including at a Hamas fundraising conference in 2006. Zindani was designated by the United States and United Nations in 2004.

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Today, al-Islah operates a number of different wings, including political, charitable, and paramilitary wings.\(^\text{19}\) Islah fighters and Islah-affiliated paramilitary groups are particularly concentrated in the country’s north, where the group—backed by Saudi Arabia—has taken up the fight against extremist Houthi rebels.\(^\text{20}\) The UAE has accused al-Islah of seizing 75 percent of the military equipment provided by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.\(^\text{21}\) Beginning in December 2015 and continuing through 2016, the UAE allegedly contracted a group of U.S. mercenaries to carry out a series of assassinations of al-Islah members in Yemen as part of a mission to “disrupt and destruct” the party. Between 25 and 30 members were reportedly killed.\(^\text{22}\)

In June 2017, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states cut diplomatic ties with Qatar over its support of the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist and terrorist groups. Though al-Islah supports Yemen’s fight against Houthi rebels, the party began to face substantial opposition from the Yemeni state and its Gulf allies, which include the UAE and Saudi Arabia, due to its own links with the Muslim Brotherhood. The UAE and its military proxies in Yemen reportedly began engaging in clashes with al-Islah, and in October, Yemeni security forces raided the Islah headquarters in October and arrested 11 of its leaders.\(^\text{23}\)

In December 2017, al-Islah engaged in diplomatic talks with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and reports surfaced that the party had severed ties with the Muslim Brotherhood.\(^\text{24}\) This was confirmed in January 2018 when Islah leader Mohammed Al-Yadomi stated that the party “has no organizational or political ties with the Muslim Brotherhood” and that its priority was to support Yemen’s internationally recognized government in its fight against Houthi rebels.\(^\text{25}\)


Al-Islah fighters have continued to clash with militants in Yemen. Militants have also attempted to assassinate al-Islah political leaders. In August 2018, local al-Islah leader Arafat Hazam survived after unknown militants attached a bomb to the bottom of his car. Al-Islah blamed the Interior Ministry and the Aden Director of Security for failing to stop assassination attempts against the party.

In addition to acting primarily as a political bloc, al-Islah also maintains a charitable wing, Charitable Society for Social Welfare (CSSW). The CSSW has ties to both Zindani—who reportedly founded the organization—and deceased al-Qaeda operative Anwar al-Awlaki, who served as vice president of the organization from 1998 to 1999. In 2004, New York federal prosecutors charged that the U.S. branch of the organization had acted as a front for al-Qaeda. The CSSW boasts partnership with a number of different international organizations, including UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and others. The organization released a newsletter in 2009 showing that Zindani had been a featured speaker at one of the group’s charitable events.

History:

- **September 13, 1990:** Zindani co-founds al-Islah.
- **1993:** In al-Islah’s first parliamentary elections, the group wins 62 out of 301 parliamentary seats. Zindani founds Al-Iman University in Sanaa.

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- **1997**: After distancing itself from the Saleh government, al-Islah formally joins the opposition movement.36
- **1993-1998**: Zindani serves as an adviser to Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders.37
- **1999**: Al-Islah participates in Yemen’s first direct presidential elections.38
- **December 2011**: Al-Islah joins the coalition government in Yemen.39
- **2013**: Al-Islah declares it has no affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood.40
- **2013—2014**: Participates in the Yemeni National Dialogue.41
- **April 2015**: Aligns itself with the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, in opposition of the Houthi takeover.42
- **2015 – 2016**: The UAE allegedly hires an American security firm to carry out assassinations of al-Islah members in Yemen as part of a mission to “disrupt and destruct” the party. Between 25 and 30 members are reportedly killed.43
- **September 2016**: Al-Islah renounces its association with the Muslim Brotherhood. Yemeni observers doubt the announcement since the party had previously announced it had no ties to the Brotherhood in 2013.44
- **October 2017**: Backed by the UAE, Yemeni security forces raid the al-Islah headquarters and arrest 11 of its leaders.45

**December 2017:** Al-Islah leaders engage in diplomatic talks with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and reports surface that the party has again announced that it has severed ties with the Muslim Brotherhood.46

**January 2018:** In an interview with a Saudi newspaper, al-Islah leader Mohammed Al-Yadomi states that the party “has no organizational or political ties with the Muslim Brotherhood” and that its priority is to support Yemen’s internationally recognized government in its fight against Houthi rebels.47

**July 2018:** U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Matthew Toler meets with al-Islah’s chairman of the Supreme Yemeni Congregation for Reform Mohammed Abdullah Al-Yadumi in Riyadh. Toler praises al-Islah’s role in promoting the political process in Yemen.48

**November 2018:** UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed meets with al-Islah supreme council president Mohammed Abdullah al-Yadumi and the party’s secretary general, Abdulwahab al-Ansi, to discuss developments in the war in Yemen.49

**Violent Activities:**

Many of the militias fighting the Houthis in northern Yemen are affiliated with al-Islah.50 Al-Islah has also been implicated in a series of violent terrorist attacks through its founder, Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani. Among attacks associated with Zindani and the Brotherhood chapter is the October 2000 attack on the *USS Cole*, which killed 17 Americans.

**October 12, 2000:** Al-Qaeda suicide bombers attack the *USS Cole* at a Yemeni port, killing 17 Americans.51 Zindani allegedly issued a religious decree ordering the attack.52

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March 2006: Zindani pays a legal team to prosecute Yemen Observer editor Mohammad al-Asadi for reprinting Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. Zindani’s legal team calls for the death penalty for Asadi.53

January 14, 2010: Zindani threatens to call for violent jihad if U.S. troops enter Yemen to fight al-Qaeda.54

September 13, 2013: Zindani tells Yemenis to emulate Egyptian and Libyan protests in response to the online video “Innocence of Muslims.” Protests erupt in Yemen hours after Zindan’s announcement.55

June 2017: The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states cut diplomatic ties with Qatar over its support of the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist and terrorist groups. Al-Islah begins to face substantial opposition from the Yemeni state and its Gulf allies, which include the UAE and Saudi Arabia, due to its own links with the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, the UAE and its military proxies in Yemen reportedly begin to engage in clashes with al-Islah.56

June 16, 2018: Al-Islah calls on its followers to launch an intifada (“uprising”) against Houthi militants in Yemen’s Al-Hudeidah province where the Yemeni army and militants are fighting.57

April 2019: Al-Islah’s militia clashes with members of the Salafist movement in Taez, killing at least five and wounding 91.58

Ties to Extremist Groups:

Al-Qaeda: The Brotherhood in Yemen is linked to al-Qaeda through al-Islah’s leader, Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani. In the 1980s, al-Zindani fought alongside Osama bin Laden against the

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Soviets in Afghanistan. Zindani went on to advise Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders.

**Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS:** Al-Islah has at times fought alongside AQAP and ISIS in Yemen, according to findings by Saudi Arabia. Since acknowledging the alliance between the three groups in March 2016, Saudi Arabia claims to have reconsidered its strategy in Yemen and its support for the Brotherhood-linked party.

**Hamas:** The Brotherhood in Yemen is linked to Palestinian-based Hamas through al-Islah’s leader, Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani. In 2006, Zindani gave a speech at a Hamas fundraising conference in Yemen. During the conference, the crowd pledged “millions of riyals” for Hamas, according to the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

**Designations by Governments and Organizations:**

**United States**
**February 24, 2004**
The Department of the Treasury designated “Shaykh Abd-al-Majid al-Zindani” as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).

**United Nations**
**February 27, 2004**

**Saudi Arabia**
**March 7, 2014**

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Saudi Arabia lists Al-Islah as a terrorist organization.\(^65\)

**In Their Own Words:**

**Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani, March 1, 2011**

*Addressing several thousand anti-government protesters in Yemen:*

“An Islamic state is coming!... [President Saleh] came to power by force, and stayed in power by force, and the only way to get rid of him is through the force of the people.”\(^66\)

**Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani, January 15, 2010**

“The U.K. request for an international conference on Yemen is meant to pave the way for a U.N. Security Council resolution to approve an occupation of Yemen and to put it under a U.N. mandate.”\(^67\)

**Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani, January 11, 2010**

“We accept any [international security] cooperation in a framework of mutual respect and common interest. But if someone occupies your country ... a Muslim has a duty to defend [against such invaders].”\(^68\)

**Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani, January 11, 2010**

“I am a general lecturer and a writer of books. If someone says they listened to my lectures or read my books, am I to blame if he then, say, divorces his wife, or if he attacks someone? If that’s the case, then all teachers and professors should be accused.”\(^69\)

**Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani, February 2002**

“Who is the terrorist and what is terrorism? I think it applies to anyone who is against Western or American policy.”\(^70\)

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