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The Brotherhood after the Transition

Ibrahim El Houdaiby*

The Muslim Brotherhood has maintained organisational cohesion throughout diverse and difficult conditions over the past 80 years, holding onto its conservatism and rejection of violence, which have been crucial for the group's survival since the late 1960s. Yet in the past two years, the Brotherhood has changed in ways that have weakened its connection to its heritage. The ouster of former president Morsi from power and the subsequent violent crackdown on the organisation decimated the leadership structure, paving the entrance for a new cadre of leaders with different ideological positions from their predecessors. It also provoked a crisis of legitimacy within the rank and file, who lost faith in the leadership and who veered increasingly towards advocating violence against the regime.

The Brotherhood has seen a deterioration of centralisation, replaced with "decentralised disorder" in which actions are linked to a variety of factors, including local contexts, the prevailing ideology of local Brotherhood leadership in given areas, and the nature of the Brotherhood's presence in local communities, amongst others. In addition, the Brotherhood's ideological stance with regards to violence has demonstrated a striking rupture with past positions. While the historic leadership has rejected violence, believing this was necessary to ensure a degree of legal protection for the organisation, the new leadership has developed battle tactics, both to minimise their organisational losses and hurt the regime more deeply, leading to a change in the group's traditional stance on this point. Yet the regime's continued escalation has forced even those least inclined to violence within the Brotherhood to reconsider their position, with the leadership seeming increasingly unable to reign in members who desire revenge.

Moving forward, the Brotherhood's stance on violence is one factor that will determine the organisation's future structure. The contradictions among its organisational positions are clear, and their consequences have influenced strategies as well as local, regional, and international alliances in pivotal ways. The leadership's ability to resolve these contradictions has faded, and no one party seems able to impose their views as the group's singular, official position.

* Ibrahim El Houdaiby is a PhD student at Columbia University, New York.

The Brotherhood's increasing inclination towards violence is a source of concern for most observers, yet traditional responses such as security crackdowns are insufficient. Dealing with violence requires much broader social and economic change, as well as a more nuanced approach to the Brotherhood in particular and to various Islamist factions more generally.

A Break with Traditional Conservatism

A conservative stance towards political change and a reticence to engage in radical opposition has defined the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood virtually since its establishment. Sheikh Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Brotherhood, expressed this in a speech delivered to the group's Fifth Annual Conference in 1938, saying, "the Muslim Brotherhood does not think about revolution, they do not depend on it, and they do not believe in its utility or results." This conservatism was vested in the professional middle class that has formed the backbone of the Brotherhood for decades. Through their leadership positions, they have dominated the organisation's ideological discourse, and helped shape its conservative economic and social visions, and relationship with the authorities.

The sources of this ideological position can at least in part be traced to material factors. For years, the Brotherhood invested in social development charities, - hospitals, schools, mosques, amongst others - which were given no legitimacy by the political system. Yet they nonetheless ensured a political presence in government: Brotherhood members were given a number of parliamentary trade union seats, weakening their ability to constitute a radical opposition. Within the last decade, a group of businessmen rose to decision-making circles within the organisation, and their political and economic vision closely aligned with those in power under Hosni Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. These individuals also increased the Brotherhood's engagement with special interests, further precluding the possibility of radical opposition.

Despite these material factors, however, the vast class differences within the Muslim Brotherhood hindered the ability to decisively advance a conservative project; instead, the organisation continued to flirt with proposals for change without clearly espousing them. By the end of 2010, there were no remaining political options. The Brotherhood had no choice but to join the first wave of the revolution in January 2011 -albeit somewhat reluctantly - while not definitively abandoning their conservative stance. On the contrary, they soon resumed their conservative positions and alliances, which earned them the presidency in mid-2012.[1] The collapse of these alliances over the year that followed, however, allowed the army to intervene and overthrow the Brotherhood in summer 2013, to a backdrop of widespread protests. This was followed by a multiplication of human and civil rights violations: their supporters were repeatedly massacred, and authorities took action against them on both collective and individual levels. Collectively, "the Brotherhood was dissolved and declared a terrorist group, the Freedom and Justice Party was dissolved, and charities and service organisations associated with them were put under watch." Individual members faced "vast

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[1] For more on these alliances, see Ibrahim el-Houdaiby, Changing Alliances and Continuous Oppression: The Rule of Egypt's Security Sector. *Arab Reform Initiative*, April 2014, http://www.arab-reform.net/en/file/704/download?token=u_4gvaJ1

killings in demonstrations and at meetings, an increase in death sentences, arbitrary arrests, monitoring of their funds and economic projects, and dismissal from work and university."

These measures challenged the material factors behind the Brotherhood's conservatism, as did the clampdown on the public sphere after three years of mobilisation. Individual and organisational interests tying the Brotherhood to the regime in power dwindled. The Brotherhood's closeness to other Islamic factions - who, during the Rabaa and Nahda sit-ins, employed discourse more hostile to the regime - along with the revolutionary mindset in place since 2011, put an end to the conservative discourse the Brotherhood had relied on for decades. Indeed, a series of statements from various parties within the Brotherhood seem to prove the organisation's divorce from its traditional conservative position, with some even believing that the Brotherhood's year in power was a failure because "the organisation failed to be revolutionary enough."[2]

However, the Brotherhood's departure from their traditional stance does not necessarily mean they adopted a more radical or revolutionary stance. Close examination of their current discourse, and how the Brotherhood evaluated their time in power, reveals three major shifts within the organisation. The Brotherhood has become hasty, confrontational, and rigid, in contrast to its traditional discourse of patience, which it had long been averse to changing. It has become less eager to take the middle ground, and more willing to enter into direct confrontation with the regime. Finally, its flexibility - a component of its pragmatism - has uprooted the "religious constants" that form both the organisation's foundation and its greatest goals.

Changes to the organisation's political imaginary, and recognition of the structural dimensions of the ongoing conflict, do not mean the organisation is more "revolutionary," nor that it pushed for structural changes in state institutions. Instead, it worked to replace a number of corrupt officials in the bureaucracy with individuals deemed trustworthy. This is best understood in the context of what Hazem Kandil terms "religious determinism," the organisation's collective schemata that conceives that conditions will improve in a deterministic way when people become closer to religion and decision-makers become more pious.[3]

These changes within the Brotherhood resulted in rebellion and internal power plays, and produced a clear shift in the movement's strategy. They no longer had room to negotiate with the regime, as they had before, and their discourse of patience and waiting was no longer enough to reign in the desire for confrontation among their bases of support. The Brotherhood lost its internal sense of direction in a more pronounced way than ever before, as a result of injustices, the organisation's increasing reliance on strict binaries of "Islamists vs. secularists; allies vs. enemies," and its religious interpretation of injustice as "a war on Islam." Consequently, its discourse and activities became more sectarian, more hardline towards the community, and thus more isolated from it. The organisation's followers began to see themselves as defenders of Islam against everyone else. There was no room for negotiations or compromise as the organisation was taken over by polarised discourse.

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[2] Brown, N. and Dunne, M. Unprecedented Pressured, Uncharted Course for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 2015.
[3] Kandil, H. *Inside the Brotherhood. Malden*: Polity Press, 2015.

A Break with Centralisation

Since it was established for the second time in the 1970s, the Brotherhood has used democratic centralism as a tool for managing the organisation. [4] Bodies within the organisation are elected, from the lowest to the highest. Consultative operations and decision-making are limited to and centralised within closed circles in the senior leadership, either in the Guidance Bureau (*Maktab al-Irshad*) or the group's Shura Council, according to security conditions. Decisions are carried out in a decentralised fashion; as a result, cadres have a sense of empowerment, and security forces' pursuit has a lesser effect on the group's activities.

The Brotherhood relies on members' trust in the leadership, which is built on a long history of leading "sacrifice" and "Islamic action." Despite significant internal differences, the leadership has successfully imposed a unified, dominant discourse expressing the organisation's official position. Voices - even within the leadership - that differ with this position are those of individuals, singing out of tune with the rest, expressing personal opinions and not the organisation's stance.

During the years of the revolution, the Brotherhood benefitted from this precedent, curtailing rebellion among its base with regards to the revolution. It also eliminated voices of internal dissent to stay strong in its pursuit for power,[5] which required unprecedented reliance and trust in the organisation's internal mechanisms. This was evident in its stance on putting forward a presidential candidate - a decision made by the group's Shura Council, after it had previously vowed that it would not field a candidate. It is also evident in the trust put in the basic abilities of individuals in charge, as well as its stance on the Constitutional Decree that former President Mohamed Morsi issued in November 2012. Here, the challenges of rule - which the Brotherhood was unprepared to face - were linked with organisational challenges. The Brotherhood's failed year in power must be examined not in its political project alone, but in the way its leadership was allowed to rule in the absence of a political project.

As the Brotherhood's political failure became clear, the organisation's leadership bet on "injustice" as a means to postpone internal accountability. They chose not to respond to popular pressure until it was clear the army had mobilised. They chose military intervention - which would once again put them in the position of the oppressed - over a popular defeat that would force the group to make changes, hoping the rally to battle would grow louder, its ranks would hold together, and it could delay self-critique. Instead, the Brotherhood endured an unexpected and unprecedented level of bloodshed and violence at the hands of the police and army generals. Thousands of people were killed and wounded in a series of massacres. Alongside this, there were arrests, the organisation withdrew from public life, and its field commanders and middle leadership fled the country or were killed, leading as a result to the disintegration of the Brotherhood's leadership.

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[4] Trager, E. 2011. "The Unbreakable Muslim Brotherhood: Grim Prospects for a Liberal Egypt." *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 5 (September/October). 114-126.

[5] El Houdaiby, I. From Prison to Palace: The Muslim Brotherhood's Challenges and Responses in Post Revolution Egypt. *FRIDE* Working Paper, March 2013.

Two factors converged, both new for the Brotherhood: the street was boiling with anger after the massacres, and the leadership was nearly completely absent - at least on the ground - during a very precarious time. It was inevitable that new field leaders were selected to direct work on the ground. Indeed, with central leadership unable to coordinate or negotiate, work on the ground was all the Brotherhood could do at that point in time.

As a result of these circumstances, the new field leaders differed from their predecessors. They had no supervision from above; instead they made and passed decisions according to the organisation's strict hierarchy. There were no effective mechanisms for horizontal coordination, and the organisation's base was not ready to comply with top-down decisions, given the mood of anger and rebellion, their disappointment in the leadership's abilities, and the absence of historical legitimacy of previous leaders. A new balance of power between the Brotherhood's leadership and its base emerged, and meant that the leadership no longer held all the cards. The rank and file were now able to participate in decision-making, and refused to comply with decisions made by the "minority" - remnants of the centralised leadership trying to hold on to their positions - or anything they disagreed with given the circumstances.

The new leadership also differed from its predecessors with regards to its ideological approach. The organisation faced clashes, the injury and killing, and extensive arrests on a near daily basis. The leadership had to work harder on developing battle tactics, both to minimise their organisational losses and hurt the regime more deeply, leading to a change in the group's historical stance against violence. The old centralised leadership had been unable to adopt such a position: they understood the balance of power, what adopting violence meant for the group's regional and international position, and what repercussions it would have for the group locally. Those who had withdrawn from public life returned in an attempt to reign in the new leadership.

The Brotherhood underwent one of its greatest organisational crises in May 2015. A sharp division between two factions emerged, with neither able to delegitimise the other. Differences also arose between the internal and external leadership, and between the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the international organisation. The Egyptian group effectively split into groups that each supported different leadership factions with opposing positions on central issues.[6] As a result of security forces' swift intervention and the arrests of leaders who had reappeared, this dispute somewhat faded. Yet it did not prevent the organisation's structure from disintegrating. The organisation had become an amalgam of various slogans, all of which located their legitimacy in the Brotherhood's foundational texts: the writings of Sheikh Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. No faction within the leadership was able to move the organisation in any given direction, whether pacifying members, searching for an opportunity to reconcile with the regime, continuing battles of attrition, or engaging in all-out confrontation with the authority in power. While the group's centralisation may have ended, it was not clear what would succeed it: organisational fragmentation, or the development of new mechanisms that could empower the rank and file.

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[6] For more on this dispute, see George Fahmi's article about divisions within the leadership: Fahmi, G., The Struggle for the Leadership of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. *Carnegie Middle East Center*, July 2015. Available online at: http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/07/14/struggle-for-leadership-of-egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood/idbr.

Stance on Violence

The Brotherhood leadership has taken a firm stance against violence and *takfir* (disavowing others as unbelievers) since the 1960s. Since then, it has defined itself as an Islamic movement seeking reform through "constitutional struggle," using legal discourse to assert its legitimacy and emphasise how the regime has repeatedly violated the constitution and law by banning the organisation.

In the mid-1980s, this led to the Brotherhood nearly completely breaking ties with armed groups, and instead directed its own efforts towards dominating the religious sphere. It took advantage of the state's neglect of important social sectors like education and health and its simultaneous economic reforms. Yet in the past two years, the Brotherhood's position has radically changed.

As ideological and material factors of the Brotherhood's conservatism have eroded, its historical leadership has tried to impose its rejection of violence. They believed this was necessary to ensure a degree of legal protection for the organisation, and to not give the regime a pretext for further escalation. Yet as the Brotherhood's bases of support grew more empowered, and as people continue to lose their lives in clashes with the regime, the leadership has lost control, and has been forced to strike a balance between its rank and file's pressure towards violence and the strategic risks associated with it. They tried to contain their base of support by redefining violence, and spoke of "painful, innovative peacefulness," which regarded "everything short of bullets and killing as peaceful." They did so hoping that this would allow the base to vent its anger, while preventing the organisation from disintegrating - all without being implicated in calls for bloodshed.

As dynamics chipping away at centralised leadership persisted, rationale for the group's conservatism faded and decentralised "disorder committees" in the governorates opened the door to violence. As a result, a type of decentralised violence evolved. There was no longer a systematic thread to the Brotherhood's acts; they were reactions linked to a variety of factors, including local contexts, prevailing ideology of local Brotherhood leadership in the area, the nature of the Brotherhood's presence in local communities, its relationship with security forces there, how much oppression its members had faced, and various possibilities of violence enabled by types of weapons, knowledge of how to hurt the regime, technical knowledge, etc. This has resulted in varying levels of disorder. Clashes continued, the Brotherhood's firm rejection of violence softened, and violence was increasingly tolerated, until - in a state of general hysteria - people were urged to assassinate figures in power and media personalities who incited others against the Brotherhood.

As time passed, the Brotherhood seemed unable to take a firm stance against the escalating violence. When traditional leaders with a degree of influence re-emerged this past May to prevent a further descent into violence, they were faced with a variety of obstacles. The centralised context in which they were accustomed to operating had changed, and they were unable to use the Brotherhood's media tools. People had lost faith in the leadership as a result of their year at the state's helm. They had disappeared for two years, in which time a new leadership more connected to the rank and file had appeared, stripping the old leadership of its legitimacy. It had also become difficult to move between areas of the country; new security

restrictions necessitated a decentralised approach. When they returned from isolation, these leaders - who while not historically moderate, had rejected violence out of strict conservatism - were quickly arrested by security forces.

The regime's continued escalation forced even those least inclined to violence within the Brotherhood to reconsider their position. The Brotherhood was blamed by the media, and often times state officials, and forced to bear the burden of acts by all Islamists and all instances violence in society. As the legal rationale of the state diminished, security forces were allowed to further escalate their measures; they not only arrested and indiscriminately killed people in demonstrations, but also guaranteed maltreatment and poor healthcare for detainees, which resulted in numerous deaths. Many of the organisation's leaders were detained and then "eliminated" at the hands of the police. This appeared to be an act of retaliation by the state for the killing of Attorney General Hisham Barakat, despite the fact that non-Brotherhood parties had claimed responsibility for the attack. This incident was followed by a statement from the Brotherhood, in which they described the elimination of their leaders as "a transformative incident, which brings about a new phase in which the anger of downtrodden and oppressed sectors of society, who will not accept dying in their homes amidst their families, cannot be controlled."[7] This statement was officially issued by the Brotherhood, and indicated that the leadership was increasingly unable to reign in its members who desire revenge.

The Brotherhood's stance on violence is one factor that will determine the organisation's future structure. The contradictions among its organisational positions are clear, and their consequences have influenced strategies as well as local, regional, and international alliances in pivotal ways. The leadership's ability to resolve these contradictions has faded, and no one party seems able to impose their views as the group's singular, official position. This means the time for rejecting violence as an organisation is up, and the Brotherhood is faced with several options. It could split according to factions' stances on violence: those who reject violence absolutely; those who partially reject violence, but accept acts not targeting individuals' lives; those who accept select kinds of violence targeting officers involved in torture and murder (this opinion appears to be the prevailing stance among those who call for violence); and those who accept violence that generally targets people in charge of media, the judiciary, and security institutions that consider the Brotherhood to be in confrontation with them. Alternatively, it could accept violence that targets the state and society together. Or, its leadership could formulate a dominant position that becomes the official Brotherhood stance, and remove people with other opinions from the organisation.

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[7] For more on this elimination and the Brotherhood's statement, see "The Brotherhood Warns of a Dangerous Shift After Their Leaders Are Eliminated". *Al Jazeera*. Available online at:
http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2015/7/1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%B0%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA

Steps Forward

The Brotherhood's increasing inclination towards violence is a source of concern for most observers. Yet this tendency is just the tip of the iceberg. Egypt's political system has undoubtedly played a big part in encouraging violence: it has oppressed and tortured the opposition, closed off the political sphere, and fueled polarisation with legal, media, and social mechanisms that eliminate material and ideological conditions that could enable coexistence. The state has also largely abandoned its social role, under the neoliberal policies adopted most strikingly by President el-Sisi's authoritarian regime. More broadly, the conflicts and general climate in the region have also contributed to the escalation of violence in Egypt. This has been particularly true since the Arab Spring. Major political projects that formed in the wake of colonialism at the end of the nineteenth century - the Islamist movement, national independence, international modernisation, Arab nationalism, amongst others - have failed across the region, while meaningful alternatives are lacking.

While it may seem that violence is inevitable, there are steps that can be taken to reduce it. Real transitional justice is impossible under a regime that belongs more to the counter-revolution than the revolution, and which includes individuals that would be subject to punitive actions among its ranks. Detention conditions must be improved, by allowing detainees food, water, clean toilet facilities, medical care, and regular visits. A maximum limit for pre-trial detention must be established, after which detainees must be released. Arbitrary measures against people, including seizing funds, dismissal from employment and universities, and so on must be reviewed, and the security apparatus must be kept in check to prevent indiscriminate detentions and killing. If there is a desire to break the cycle of violence, people in charge must immediately take such measures, at a minimum level.

In the short term, economic policies, the clear bias towards businessmen, and the state's abandonment of its social responsibilities, must all be reevaluated. Draft laws in which the state forsakes its neutrality and acts as a party to "retaliatory" conflict against sectors of society, stripping away all restrictions on repressive security practices, must also be re-examined. This includes the anti-terrorism law and amendments to criminal procedure codes. We need to move beyond generalisation that paints all different Islamists currents with the same brush. This kind of generalisation not only makes us unable to see the whole picture, but the policies it gives rise to only further obscure the differences between these groups and encourages the Brotherhood towards violence.

An examination of recent history may offer some perspective. In the 1990s, Egyptian security differentiated not only between the Brotherhood and organized currents of violence but also between al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and the Jihad Organisation, two primary factions who used violence during that time, which significantly helped keep violence from spreading. Despite their similarities, these factions were organisationally different. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya had social and proselytising activities that resemble those of the Brotherhood; the Jihad Organization, on the other hand, nearly exclusively engaged in violence in its stance towards society. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya thought it was wrong to target society, and limited its operations to the state figures, security institutions, and tourists, while the Jihad Organisation viewed violence, and targeting a society that accepted an "unjust" authority, as permissible. Consequently, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya used firearms in targeted operations, while the Jihad

Organisation used explosives that killed indiscriminately. Recognising the difference between them made it possible to pressure al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya to reconsider and renounce violence, and a decade later, the remaining members of the Jihad Organisation —most of whom left the country—did the same.

There is no simple solution to Egypt's problem of violence and its increasing espousal by the Muslim Brotherhood; however, it must be dealt with measures beyond a security crackdown and traditional responses that automatically connect broadening spaces of freedom locally with waves of violence.

About the author

Ibrahim El Houdaiby is a PhD student at Columbia University, New York. He holds a bachelor's and master's in political science from the American University in Cairo.

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