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Muslim Brothers between Exclusion and Integration

→ Arab Reform Initiative



epa03809025 Egyptian Muslim men supporting ousted president Mohamed Morsi attend a protest near Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque in Cairo, Egypt, 31 July 2013. The Egyptian government asked police on 31 July to take "necessary measures" to end mass sit-ins by backers of ousted president Mohammed Morsi. Thousands of Morsi's supporters have been camping for weeks in the area of Rabaa al-Adawiya in north-eastern Cairo and al-Nahda Square in the south of the capital to protest his toppling by the army earlier this month. EPA/MOHAMMED SABER



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Ever since President Mohammad Morsi was removed from his position on July 3, a lot of the discussion inside and outside Egypt has centred around involving the Brotherhood in the new political configuration, and avoiding their exclusion from the scene. There are also repeated warnings against the new authority adopting a vengeful and repressive stance aimed at settling accounts with the Brotherhood, a move that could propel the political process into a dark tunnel.

However, some of the statements deal with the situation as if the dust has already settled, the new political configuration stabilised, and the Muslim Brotherhood given in to the new order and its fate sealed with a defeat. It is as if all that is needed now is for the victors and new protagonists to allay the Brotherhood's fears and keep it involved in the political process.

In my opinion this might be a hasty judgment; for although it is true that the Brotherhood and their supporters could neither prevent Morsi's removal nor the detention of senior leaders from the Brotherhood and the Party, it does not mean that they have lost the ability to act or given in to the new political equation. Those who follow the Brotherhood's reaction, escalation on the street and hardening of their discourse and statements since Morsi's demise, arrive at the conclusion that its main aim is not to pile up the pressure ahead of eventual negotiations to guarantee a role in the new configuration, but rather to turn the tables and destroy the fragile political configuration established after Morsi's removal or, at least, impede and obstruct it. The Brotherhood can therefore still act and cause considerable obstruction, meaning that integrating it in the political process depends largely on the Brotherhood as well, rather than only on the actions and intentions of those in power today.

The second remark regarding the numerous statements about the need to integrate the Brotherhood is that some of these statements reduce the struggle to its political dimension and overlook the wider societal implications. The large demonstrations that took to the streets on June 30 did not only include a wide array of political forces, but also large sectors of society calling for Morsi's downfall, and rejecting the Brotherhood's hegemony. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood organisation, widely spread across the country, is now seen by an increasing number of people as a closed "sect" isolated from the rest of the population. This means that the Brotherhood does not only face the danger of



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being politically alienated and excluded, but also of becoming a social and public outcast. Here, as well, the Brotherhood has a considerable ability to act and is unlikely to turn into a defeated player, with no recourse.

It is true that there is a savage assault in much of the media instigating against the Brotherhood, trying to demonise and isolate it and turn public opinion against it. However, the Brotherhood's discourse and the way it is dealing with the current crisis, coupled with its statements from the podium in Rabaa al-Adawiyya, are largely contributing to building a negative image of the movement in the minds of large sectors of society, and increasing the chances of their isolation. The Brotherhood's discourse sees the recent events purely as a coup (Mohammad Ghuzlan's letter to al-Sisi is a good of this discourse), i.e., conspiracies and plots against it by the state's apparatus and failed political opposition. However, although there is in fact some proof that was a certain level of conspiring and collaboration between the state's apparatus and some political forces against the Brotherhood's rule, one cannot reduce what happened on June 30 to that single dimension and ignore the central issue of the day, as the Brotherhood does. Its current discourse almost entirely ignores the widespread public anger against it and refuses to recognise the accumulated tensions and rising displeasure with Morsi's rule, not to mention his plummeting popularity in recent months. Furthermore, the Brotherhood's intentional escalation on the ground is likely to increase its rejection among the public, and turn this rejection into violent confrontations in the street, and we have in fact started to witness altercations and clashes among the Brotherhood's supporters and members of the public in several governorates. The Brotherhood also insists on portraying these clashes as an assault by the "*baltagia*" (thugs) and "*fuloul*" of Murak's regime, both against it and against Morsi's supporters, while totally ignoring other violent incidents that are akin to a civil strife.

The issue of excluding or integrating the Brotherhood largely depends on the attitude of the forces and parties involved in the new political configuration, and the manner in which the current authorities deal with the Brotherhood. However, it also depends on the Brotherhood itself, its positions and management of the current crisis. Continuing to escalate the situation as the Brotherhood is currently doing, insisting on not fully understanding the significance of what unfolded on



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June 30, and ignoring the public anger against it, not only portends its political and social isolation but also increases the chance of violent civil strife that could eventually bring back the “securitocratic” state, and propel the entire political process into a dark tunnel.



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About the author



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The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

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- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region.

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