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FROM CONFRONTATION TO DIVISION: THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN EGYPT FROM 2013-2016

RESEARCH PAPER

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HEADQUARTERS
OF
MUSLIM
BROTHERHOOD
المركز العام
لجماعة
الإخوان
المسلمين

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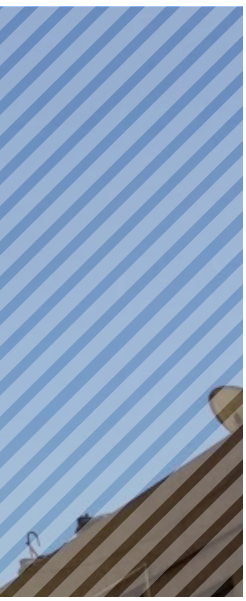

Executive Summary

■ The disruption of the Raba'a sit-in protest in August 2013 came as a major shock to the Muslim Brotherhood Group, disrupting the Group's leadership structure, particularly following the arrests of many of its leaders and figureheads. However, the Group was by no means incapacitated, nor did it collapse. Rather, it managed to continue conducting demonstrations and protests in a spontaneous and decentralized manner. This carried on until the establishment of the 'Higher Administrative Committee' which assumed legitimate leadership in February 2014.

■ In August 2014, the 'Specific Operations' plan was passed, which allowed for the organized use of violence in order to defend protests, and to disrupt police and governing authorities. It was adopted with emphasis on targeting permitted only in specific cases. The aim of this plan was similar to the Six-Month Plan enacted just prior, namely to work towards bringing about change to the political scene, and to further alleviate the widespread violence and exclusion in a manner that would pave the way for democracy to be restored.

■ At the end of 2014, a number of disagreements emerged between members of the Muslim Brotherhood's Higher Administrative Committee regarding the nature of the Group's management and strategy. These differences were not divisive at first, until they reached the governing mechanisms and higher authorities guiding the Group itself .

■ In May 2015, conflict openly erupted within the Muslim Brotherhood, with the Group's deputy leader Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat dissolving the first Higher Administrative Committee headed by Dr. Mohamed Kamal. The latter rejected these decisions, dismissing them because they came from someone he claimed had no legitimate authority. Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat's moves coincided with the sharp increase in state security crack-downs associated with the appointment of Magdy Abdel Ghaffar as the Egyptian Minister of Interior.

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- Due to widespread distrust within the Muslim Brotherhood, the discord was exacerbated with accusations of deviancy, and the undecided nature of the regulatory mechanism they would appeal to. The old guard firmly believed that the Group's legitimacy was established in Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, Acting General Guide inside Egypt, while Mr. Ibrahim Mounir was Head of the Egyptian Association Abroad. For the old guard, this was key to understanding and interpreting its decisions. On the other hand, the opposing party believed that the first step was to appeal to the Muslim Brotherhood in its entirety by holding elections, which would produce consensus on, and entrench legitimacy in the leadership of the Group. The two views clearly could not co-exist.
- In December 2015, an announcement was made by Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rahman, the new Chairman of the Higher Administrative Committee, delegating him with Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat's decision to dissolve the second Higher Administrative Committee and initiate procedures to investigate and suspend associates of Dr. Kamal's administration. At the same time, the office of the Egyptian Association Abroad in London: -under the administration of Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat- announced the dismissal of Mohamed Montaser and the appointment of Talaat Fahmy as a spokesman for the Group. This was followed by the announcement of a new official website, and social media pages for the Group.
- Three key factors led to the escalation of the dispute, and the increased difficulty in containing it between old leaders and the new: Firstly, the inability to adopt new strategies to achieve any tangible political objective. Secondly, the unprecedented escalation of security crackdowns on the Group, which often took the form of arrests, executions or being forced into foreign exile, and weakened its leadership. Finally, the absence of strategic vision during planning and evaluation, adding to limitations affecting procedures and operations.

Introduction

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has existed in a state of political stagnation which has prevailed in Egypt for decades under President Mubarak's rule. For a long time, the MB had adapted to this political environment with a delineated political ceiling, until the situation abruptly changed in January 2011. Since then, the political environment has been characterized by rapid change, volatility and ambiguity. Uncertainty marked the future's horizon, alongside the shifting web of political actors and rivals who were under Mubarak's rule.

The political environment's transformation surpassed the expectations and readiness of the MB and critically challenged its internal organizational culture. Meanwhile, the old legacy of fear, caution and centralization strongly affected their assessment of the present, leading to a hesitant, volatile group acting reactively to external pressures. As a consequence, the MB was forced to abandon its previous designs, while falling prey to reactive politics instead. The MB succeeded in reaching the presidency, but only a year later President Morsi was ousted, while the organization came under unprecedented pressure from a far more oppressive military rule than it had experienced during the Mubarak era. The new regime paid no attention to popular demand, majorities, or democracy. Instead, it was highly proficient at manipulating public opinion, distorting public perceptions towards anyone demanding change, and making threats of the impending risks of a civil war while driving polarization. The subjugations escalated further after the brutal breakup of the Raba'a sit-in, continuing with massacres and violent repressions of peaceful protest. With each occurrence, the MB dedicated itself further to thinking about the best way to deal with the present.

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This paper will discuss the stages which the MB has gone through since the coup, while highlighting the most prominent features and events taking place at the time. This begins in the first phase, characterized by the disruption of leadership and the persistence of the organization's vitality, followed by the second stage where the MB attempted to restore the organization's leadership and search for a strategy to counter the coup. The third and last stage centers around the breakout of internal disputes in the organization and aims to offer explanations for the escalations in disagreements between the leaders.

Phase 1: Disruption of Leadership, not Organization

The brutal dispersion of the Raba'a sit-in on August 14, 2013 was a major shock to supporters of the MB and those of President Morsi. It disrupted the leadership structure of the MB, with many leaders and figureheads being arrested. On August 20, the MB's General Guide, Mohammed Badie, was arrested[1] days after his son was killed in Ramses square.[2] The arrests of innumerable others followed throughout August, including: Ahmed Arif, the MB's spokesman[3], and Dr. Mustafa Ghoneimi, a member of the Guidance Bureau[4], both arrested on August 22. Dr. Mohi Hamid, another member of the Guidance Bureau who was arrested on August 24,[5] while Dr. Mohamed El-Beltagy, a prominent leader of the MB and the Freedom and Justice Party was arrested on August 29[6].

In spite of the power vacuum at the heart of the MB's upper hierarchy, the dispersal of the Raba'a sit-in along with the subsequent arrests failed to cripple, paralyze or demolish the organization

Following the sweeping arrests of August, a leadership group attempted to restore communications within the organization and between its leaders, but the persistent detentions and raids posed a serious challenge. Engineer Jihad al-Hadad, a media spokesperson for the MB, as well as engineer Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim, Dr. Mahmoud Abu Zaid, and Dr. Hussam Abu Bakar (all members of the Guidance Bureau) were detained on September 17.[7] The organization's leader Dr. Essam El-Aryan was also arrested on October 30.[8]

At this point, very few members of the Guidance Bureau who had not been put to death or arrested remained in Egypt. Those that did included; Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, deputy General Guide, Dr. Mahmoud Taha Wahdan, Dr. Mahmoud Kamal, Dr. Mohammed Sa'd Aliwa, Dr. Mohammed Abdulrahman al-Bir, Dr. Mahmoud Ghizlan, and engineer Abduladheem Elsharqawi.

In spite of the power vacuum at the heart of the MB's upper hierarchy, the dispersal of the Raba'a sit-in along with the subsequent arrests failed to cripple, paralyze or demolish the organization. Under these conditions, the Muslim MB operated in a decentralized spontaneous fashion, while confronting the absence of both its upper leadership, communication and strategic vision. Despite this, it still managed to organize furious protests and clung to President Morsi's legitimacy, in the hopes of restoring democracy. This phase was characterized by severe shock to the MB's members and sympathizers due to the brutal and unrestrained violence incurred

during the crackdown on the Raba'a sit-in, and the forcible dissolution of other protests in other areas. These saw no less force used, with security forces repressively breaking-up massive popular demonstrations by any means necessary, including arbitrary arrests, the indiscriminate use of hired thugs, live ammunition, sonic grenades, and gas canisters, among others.

The unyielding refusal to be defeated is visibly apparent in the rhetoric throughout conversations between the organization's intermediate leaders and members. As described by one of the Central Committee members, "There was a furious energy that refused surrender, found in everyone I met at the time."[9] This anger gave rise to an indomitable spirit of non-surrender, while imbuing its members with a sense of deep responsibility towards those who had been killed or arrested. A member of the Group's Shura Council describes how, "the common feeling was being utterly opposed to surrender, for the sake of the Raba'a martyrs whose deaths were hung about our necks, as large angry masses of demonstrators carried on their protests without pause."[10]

Nonetheless, spontaneous uprisings and massive popular demonstrations continued, and so did the frequency of the crackdowns on these demonstrations

As one leader of the Central Committee would later confirm, at the time the prevalent feeling was that there is a great conspiracy looming above the nation and the MB.[11] Large-scale demonstrations took place every day, according to the statement of one intermediate leader: "The number of demonstrators in the governorate I was located in was so large, its protestors could be counted among the tens of thousands in the governorate alone."[12] In the words of another leader; "I saw many different cross-sections of the Egyptian people, many of whom were not supporters of the MB or the Raba'a sit-in."[13]

People's anger was rooted in the painful stories and tragic scenes they had witnessed for themselves, such as seeing the innumerable bodies of those killed during the break-up of Raba'a sit-in and the search for those who could identify their remains. Some estimates put the death toll at more than two thousand. Others witnessed thugs killing or stabbing protestors, even playing with the corpses and, in some cases, this appeared to be under the protection of security forces, or at least given the benefit of a blind eye. In other cases, they received direct support as security forces attacked the demonstrators with white weapons, live bullets and gas cartridges, in shocking scenes that were unexpected for their sheer brutality.

Nonetheless, spontaneous uprisings and massive popular demonstrations continued, and so did the frequency of the crackdowns on these demonstrations. According to multiple

observers, the number of protestors reached an unprecedented level on August 30, 2013. According to the testimony of one of the intermediary leaders: "Since that day (August 30), the number of daily detained in my governorate has been no less than 100, for at least a week. Martyrs fell daily, as security forces became more and more daring in their use of violence and live ammunition.".[14]

Forming an Emergency Leadership

In these contentious times, attempts were made to restore organizational contacts and to try to reinstate internal order, while compensating for the disruption of leadership structures, particularly in the major governorates of Cairo, Alexandria, Delta and Upper Egypt. The organization had achieved decentralization while persisting in protests with a general unwillingness to surrender, giving rise to the need for developing practical leadership of the Group. According to an intermediate-level leader: "We immediately began to organize our ranks regardless of the leadership structure's shape, re-contacting and coordinating with whomsoever we could contact. By September 1st, we had achieved better coordination and cooperation."[15] "Then I gradually began reaching out using the leadership's contacts to members of the Guidance Bureau who were willing and able to move, communicate and coordinate."[16] The most prominent members they reached out to were Dr. Mohamed Taha Wahdan, Dr. Mohamed Kamal and Dr. Mohamed Saad Elewa.[17]

Dr. Wahdan, Dr. Mohammad Kamal, and Dr. Mohammed Elewa were able to mobilize, coordinate and lead under the repressive security climate

Communications took place between these members and various provinces of the organization, alongside Dr. Mahmoud Ghozlan, Dr. Abdel Rahman Albarr and engineer Abdul Azim Al Sharqawi. In the process, they crystallized the need and importance for a fully-fledged management with legitimacy. Moreover, they agreed that Dr. Wahdan, Dr. Mohammad Kamal, and Dr. Mohammed Elewa were able to mobilize, coordinate and lead under the repressive security climate. They also agreed on the need to choose deputies (six individuals) to form an administration for the Group at this stage. Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat was contacted to approve the proposal, with some accounts noting that Ezzat only held one reservation; namely that the committee should not be called a temporary Guidance Bureau, but rather the Higher Administrative Committee. In February 2014, the remaining members of the Group's General Shura Council were invited to convene on three separate sessions to agree on the structure of the New Committee. This would include the three aforementioned Guidance Bureau figures, in addition to other six members. This decision was taken without the nomination of those individuals, giving an authorization to the three Guidance Bureau members to select them.

By the end of this stage, the Group had succeeded in bridging the leadership gap, while wielding an administrative and leadership process imbued with legitimacy

According to the description of one of the participants in the Shura Council meeting: "I attended the Shura Council meeting in February 2014, and the three members of the Guidance Bureau proposed their need for six members to aid them in administering the organization at the time. We agreed to do so without names, due to security conditions."[18] Among the members of the Guidance Bureau were some whose mobility and communications faced difficulties due to either heightened security conditions, pressure, or their inability to move in the environment. This included Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, Deputy General Guide, Dr. Abdel Rahman El Barr, Dr. Mahmoud Ghozlan and engineer Abdel Azim El Sharkawi. Also, in this group was Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rahman whose wife was injured and subsequently died, leading him to excuse himself from coordination at this stage. Some of the most notable names to be chosen later were Mr. Hussein Ibrahim, engineer Abdel Fattah El Sisi (who was later chosen as Secretary General of the Higher Administrative Committee) and Dr. Ali Batikh.

This first phase was characterized by a smooth process of leadership between the three active members of the Guidance Bureau, and the continuation of various contacts and consultations. By the end of this stage, the Group had succeeded in bridging the leadership gap, while wielding an administrative and leadership process imbued with legitimacy.

Phase 2: The Search for a Strategy

The January 2011 Model

The MB's movement adamantly opposed the removal of President Morsi and what it saw as the ending of the path of democratization. It focused strongly on continuing peaceful protests similar to those of January 2011, which had preceded the departure of Mubarak. This focus still lingered among a number of influential leaders, including active members of the Guidance Bureau following the disruption of Raba'a. One of the intermediate-level leaders assigned by Mohamed Taha Wahdan (a member of the Guidance Bureau,) to study this matter reported that:

"Dr. Wahdan's idea was that if we succeed in returning to Tahrir square and the sit-ins, a change may take place within the military establishment and the political scene. I was commissioned to study this matter. Given the severity of the situation and repression, such move would need guerrillas in the fullest sense. According to my study and estimates,

more than 90% of the group attempting to enter Tahrir Square would likely die due to the security cordon. I estimated that at least 300 people would die from the first vanguard attempting to enter Tahrir Square before we were able to secure it, given the intensity of the security presence and their willingness to brutally suppress protestors and kill without any restraint. Dr. Wahdan rejected this proposal, given that it would lead to violence and the further exchange of violence. The dominant feeling that had overcome him was how could the January 2011 model be replicated without cases of violence and death in large numbers".[19]

It wasn't possible to re-envision the Tahrir sit-in, particularly after the severe crackdown that took place in the Raba'a. This represented an unsustainable pressure, especially for the leadership that sought to express the rage of its revolutionary youth, who collectively sought to affect change on Egypt's politics and bring about a new regime, albeit without having any particular vision or model to base their change on.

> ***The pressing priority was the completion of administrative structures and the bridging of any organizational gaps caused by arrests or other absences. This would ideally come about with an increase in youth involvement with a maximized role dedicated to them throughout the various organizational structures***

From here, following the organization's leadership restructure and the establishment of its legitimacy through the Higher Administrative Committee, meetings between members of the Higher Administrative Committee increased throughout various governorates. In these meetings they began to think about a starting point, listening to the pulse of the organization's body, while preparing to conceptualize the new movement and its action plan. While the MB's planning committee was trying to develop a quick plan for the Group to execute, there was keen interest in listening to many young and intermediate leaders, particularly from Dr. Mohamed Kamal, Dr. Mohamed Wahdan and Mr. Hussein Ibrahim. According to most figures, directives were issued by the Higher Administrative Committee on the need for each governorate to provide young deputies to join the Administrative Offices of their area. Moreover, it was often required that a youth who is responsible for revolutionary mobilization in the governorate should appointed as a deputy of the head of the governorate to ensure the presence of the youth in leadership positions.[20]

With the utter confidence of large sectors within the organization falling on their shoulders, the pressures and burdens on the Higher Administrative Committee increased as they found themselves in a position of ultimate responsibility. This pressure implored them to take action even while they faced a central question: What is to be done? And where is the beginning?

The pressing priority was the completion of administrative structures and the bridging of any organizational gaps caused by arrests or other absences. This would ideally come about with an increase in youth involvement with a maximized role dedicated to them throughout the various organizational structures. There was also a need to think about the way the MB would go about addressing and attempting to lay new foundations in order to benefit from the revolutionary spirit of the Group. One of the members of the Higher Administrative Committee described what occupied them at the beginning of their meetings as: "The completion of Administrative structures and follow-up on the situations in the street, squares and demonstrations. Moreover, as different from situations in the past, all members of the Administrative Committee shared a general sentiment and willingness to listen to various sectors of the Group, the youth and intermediary leaders to guide their views and opinions."[21]

The Six-Month Plan

Over time, as the regular leadership structure of the MB fell into place, its members became more tense as they waited for clarity on the movement's views, direction and action plans. According to one of the Group's intermediary leaders, "This was a period of tension and anger. Death was around every corner. The anger had led to a desire to not continue unless the situation continued on clear precepts. I personally decided not to contribute to any work in the committee I was a part of."[22] In this atmosphere, a preliminary plan, dubbed the 'Six-Month Plan' was presented by the planning committee in March 2014. It was met however, with rejection and indignation from most Administrative Offices, committees and members of the Group who described it as "very weak, with vague phrasing without introducing anything new."[23] In other words, "a very weak vision emerged, causing a great deal of internal debate that would lead to the search for a new plan and way of thinking."[24]

According to a member of the administration who objected to the plan: "The essence of the plan was how to reinforce and increase the number of demonstrations, how to convey our views to more people on the streets, squares, transportation. It was not generally reflective of the reality of severe repression and violence, and did not persuade the majority of the MB, who came to see death all around them."[25] As one of the planning

committee members in a governorate described: "The plan lacked clarity of the overall goal it sought to achieve. It generally sought spreading awareness regarding what was taking place through direct conversations and sending messages to various international human rights organizations to publicize violations."[26] The controversy over the plan would continue within the halls of the organization for several months, increasing the burdens and pressure on the Higher Administrative Committee to come up with new plans, visions and strategies.

The August 2014 Plan

Eventually they came up with the August 2014 Plan after this turbulent atmosphere had affected not only the Higher Administrative Committee, but also led to a state of reappraisal at the level of each member of the Group. Members of the Group, especially those within the committees for revolutionary mobilization, awareness, student activism and media, began to look for revolutionary literature to find answers that could inspire them to act in the present. In the words of one of the leaders: "We were going through moments of change, and our personal interests began to change, and I personally began looking for Guevara's memoirs, the psychology of the masses, the capital, the Chinese revolution, the Iranian revolution, as well as a rereading of Sayyid Qutb's books, especially social justice and this religion."[27] This atmosphere coupled with the outbursts and anger of its members and youth, represented a moment of transformation among the majority of the members of the Higher Administrative Committee. One member explained that: "I think that the moments of transformation and change of some members of the Guidance Bureau began at this moment, the traditional ordinary thinking of the MB was no longer convincing in the face of pressure and repression".[28] The pulse of communication with the youth, and the active and angry MB members, was an influential factor on the leadership of the Group which felt that it was at a difficult historical moment in need of doing something different, but not yet aware of exactly what that was.

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One member described how there was a great deal of interaction between the various youth and members of the Group at this time: "There were too many opinions from many members of the Group, and there was a wide-ranging state of activity in presenting suggestions, ideas and visions of what the Group could do, including what

ideas, practices and changes the organization needed."[29] In this climate, the attempts of members of the Guidance Bureau and members of the Higher Administrative Committee to listen to the various committees and youth in different governorates increased, forming a number of adjunct committees and workshops to collect perceptions and suggestions on what could be done. Many of these committees and workshops spoke of the severity of repression and that without a strong supporting force for peaceful protest and action, there could be no change.

The relationship between many of the youth, (who were used by the central committees either as part of the media, youth or revolutionary branches) and the Higher Administrative Committee and its members, was significantly strengthened, leading to a more intimate atmosphere which listened to their views, making them more confident and cohesive. According to a comment made by one of these young leaders, "It was the first time I heard the phrase "I do not know" from a senior MB official. The previous traditional image was that they always knew, so this led to a very positive spirit for us and increased our trust and association with them, as there was a clear interest in young people and in listening to them."[30] Another of the mediators described these meetings and extensive consultations: "This situation has been very positive for us and many members, and we have contributed to the submission of many proposals, ideas and papers. There have been many repeated desires in these proposals that the administration must lead change. The community or the change itself must be respected, and the specialists and experts must be respected, and we cannot move revolutionarily in the same way as the Group's traditional Da'wah committees."[31]

Accordingly, the Higher Administrative Committee formed "a committee to organize a series of meetings and workshops after February to discuss: Does the current revolutionary work remain the same, or do we withdraw, or do we push for another step forward?"[32] This committee was represented by various provinces and governates, from Cairo, Delta, Alexandria, and Upper Egypt."[33] These meetings took place in the presence of members of the Higher Administrative Committee, especially Hussein Ibrahim, Mohamed Kamal, Ali Batikh, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Taha Wahdan and they acted purely as listeners, without imposing direction or management on these meetings.

The result was a recommendation to adopt what was called the 'Specific Operations', which meant the systematic use of some light weapons in defense of peaceful action and demonstrations, confusing police and the ruling authority's administration, while emphasizing that no targeting or bloodshed could be carried out, except in proven cases

The result was a recommendation to adopt what was called the 'Specific Operations', which meant the systematic use of some light weapons in defense of peaceful action and demonstrations, confusing police and the ruling authority's administration, while emphasizing that no targeting or bloodshed could be carried out, except in proven cases of rape, murder or blatant, undoubted killings

of rape, murder or blatant, undoubted killings.[34] One attendee outlined the justification for this recommendation: "We have engaged in peaceful political action and reached high levels in the country, and in spite of this, there was an attempt to remove you and nearly successful attempt to crush you in one instant. Therefore, peaceful action is exposed at any moment to subjugation and complete elimination."[35]

The main premise of this thought was pragmatic and political at its core; asking how change could be realized with the impossibility of holding protests in the face of bullets, murder and severe repression? In other words, it was clear that sit-ins and demonstrations alone were unable to bring about any political change in the landscape, that the size of the sacrifices was too large. The concept behind the plan was, as one member of the Higher Administrative Committee stated: "There is a revolutionary situation, and millions of people are spread on the streets. We need visions and tools to help these millions express their legitimate demands and enable them to achieve them."[36]

Discussions the Higher Administrative Committee (nine individuals) with Guidance Bureau's three members from outside the administration (Dr. Mahmoud Ghozlan, Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Bar and Engineer Abdul Azim Al-Sharqawi) resulted in the acceptance of seven individuals for the August 2014 Plan, and the rejection of a further five. The Higher Administrative Committee looked to broaden the debate and resorted to forming a jurisprudential committee to express an islamically-entrenched religious opinion. It then sought to meet with officials of the Administrative Offices running the MB's work across Egypt, following which detailed discussions on the visions of the August 2014 Plan ensued. Dr. Mohammed Kamal then requested that each governorate send three representative members; either from the General Shura Council, the Administrative Office of the governorate, or the provincial Shura Council. Their final number reached 18 members, representing various governorates, to finalize the approval of the August Plan's vision, as well as the conditions, variables and policies attached to it.

Finally, the committee, which made a recommendation for the Specific Operations, received an approving response from the Higher Administrative Committee, regarding the decision, proposal and outcome of this workshop. The recommendation was not disseminated to regular members,

but rather targeted key individuals with the go-ahead for tactics of confusion and attrition. Despite the formation of a central administration for the Specific Operations, according to many accounts and testimonies, it was often the reality that tactics of confusion, such as blocking roads in front of police convoys or attacking police ambushes that attacked demonstrators, were already taking place in several governorates through individual efforts or the approval of some intermediary leaders in a reaction to the severity of the repression.

The Evolution of the Use of Violence in the Muslim MB

The MB and its supporters were subjected to an unprecedented wave of violence and repression that had gradually escalated since President Morsi's era, culminating in the crackdown on the Raba'a sit-in. This brutality continued and injuries and blood at the hands of thugs or security forces were difficult to bear for many. A number of individual groups in different governorates were already trying to protect themselves and demonstrators with simple tools such as 'Shamarikh' or 'Khartush' fireworks, and occasionally light weapons. According to prevalent views at this time, these made up very limited numbers. Accounts in governorates such as Alexandria, with a high density of MB members and protest movements, saw individual groups of less than 10 or 20 confront groups of thugs supported by the interior forces. Their duty was to try to protect the protestors and demonstrations only if they were attacked. The predominant tactic was to fire into the air to delay the arrival of the aggressors, to ensure that demonstrations could pass or withdraw. However, for fear of a greater number of martyrs they were forced into clashes with onrushing organized thugs and security forces excessively and violently using bullets and live ammunition.

This violence and state brutality helped create a climate of fluidity for some youth who were not willing to accept death or injury so easily. The scenes of violence and their stories were painful, and often motivated many of the MB's members to accept the status quo, as they were practically under abhorrent repression. Each member of the MB has their share of traumatic stories about these oppressive periods of arrest, abuse, molesting of corpses, even the "confirmed rape of a female member of the organization in Nasr city, Cairo governorate by an officer."[37] Nevertheless, in spite of the fluid situation and prior

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to the adoption of the 'Specific Operations' in August 2014, the directions of the Higher Administrative Committee constantly emphasized resisting resorting to arms. During this stage, if they heard of the use of arms Dr. Mohamed Kamal as president of the Higher Administrative Committee, or officials in the Administrative Offices of the governorates issued many directives, reproach, anger, blame and at times investigations, given that this was not the organization's approach, and was not agreed or relied upon. From September 2013, clear directives were issued to prevent any armed interventions, preventing the use of firearms and ensuring that anyone suspected of their use was marginalized, in addition to a pledge to form a commission of inquiry.[38] As a member of the Group confirmed: "I attended a meeting in which Dr. Mohammed Kamal and members of the Higher Administrative Committee were present, and there were members of the Group asking for permission to engage in retribution which he strongly rejected. With the insistence of some individuals, he continued to reject it, declaring that he was not ready to stand before God bearing this blood."[39]

It can be asserted however, that when the decision was taken to approve the so-called 'Specific Operations', the Committee was not issuing the directive without reason, but rather reacting to anger and clashes in the field as a result of security crackdowns. Therefore, much of the Committee's role at this time was to try to contact individuals or groups that were operating in the fluid situation, to try to coordinate with them. Practically, it attempted to control and regulate what was happening on the ground, and not generate more violence.

Alongside a number of central committees such as the media division, which was managed by the Higher Administrative Committee directly, most of the work related to the Specific Operations was managed in the governorates according to directions from the administration, who formed a dedicated body responsible for supervision and follow-up. In this sense, it did not have a strong central Administrative grip, but relied mostly on the decentralized efforts of many youth and members spread out in different localities.

The new vision was included in the plan of August 2014, widely known as the 'Plan of Confusion and Attrition' which was described in interview: "Consultative meetings were held with governorate officials and Group committees, agreeing on ways to strengthen the peaceful popular movement, especially in preparation for the revolution anniversary in January 2015. The aim was to find what could serve as protection for peaceful demonstrations. In this context, slogans such as "Anything but murder is considered a peaceful means" emerged. the evaluation was agreed to be after three months or following the end of the January anniversary events."[40]

Once the plan was initiated, the Group actively took part in peaceful revolutionary events, with protesters growing ever more emboldened and encouraged, resulting in the huge numbers of demonstrators that resurfaced on the January 2015 anniversary. A significant number of members throughout different governorates tried to develop confusion tactics in accordance with each group or region's experiences. Some governorates increased the tactics of banditry and motivated by intimidation and confusion, attempted to attack a number of police ambushes in efforts to prevent the attacks on peaceful demonstrations. Some witnessed abuse of violence,[41] others also reported that there was a growth of banditry, ambushes, or targeting of power transformers to instigate crises.[42] Since there was no targeting directive in the central plan, implementation was largely dependent on the nature of leadership throughout committees in various governorates, which were devoid of comprehensive central preparation for everything.[43]

Organizing the Egyptian MB's Work Abroad

At this time, the Higher Administrative Committee received a number of proposals concerning the MB abroad. For the first time, there were Egyptian MB members in diaspora working in political, media and legal initiatives, while advocating for the Egyptian cause. This was carried out in coordination with the most prominent leaders who fled the country following the coup of July 3, 2013. Among them were Dr. Mahmoud Hussein, Secretary General of the Group; Dr. Amr Darrag, Minister of Planning and International cooperation under President Morsi, members of the Higher Committee of the Freedom and Justice Party; leader Dr. Mohammed Jamal Hashmat; engineer Ashraf Badreddine and others. There was also Juma Amin, the deputy General Guide who left Egypt shortly before July 3 for London. The Higher Administrative Committee wanted to organize this work abroad.

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On January 19, 2015, as the revolution anniversary approached, the formation of what came to be known as the MB's Office Abroad or the Crisis Management Office Abroad was completed. Dr. Ahmed Abdel Rahman was chosen as its official leader.[44] Having identified the need for a spokesperson for the Group, the Higher Administrative Committee also appointed a young man named Mohammed Montaser to the role.[45]

Phase 3: Emerging Internal Organizational Disputes and Descent into Division

The MB entered 2015 with high spirits as a result of a cohesive leadership and the selection of a young speaker from within Egypt, as well as the election of an office representing the Group abroad which aimed to strengthen and protect the revolutionary movement in January 2015. The year ahead, however, would contain a number of surprises and challenges which created differences amongst the leadership and opened up internal divisions. These were increasingly felt, and imposed on the entire organization, both in Egypt and abroad, coming at the expense of attempts to consider the Group's effectiveness in bringing about political change.

On May 24 2015, members of the MB deliberated on a decision by Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, Deputy General Guide of the Group, to dissolve the Higher Administrative Committee headed by Dr. Mohamed Kamal, and form a new committee headed by Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rahman, with Dr. Kamal remaining a member, but not the chairman. Also, it was declared that the MB's newly elected Office of Crisis Management abroad did not fall under the authority of Dr. Mohamed Kamal or the Higher Administrative Committee within Egypt, and it should be subordinate to the Egyptian MB Association abroad, an administration that regulates the affairs of the Egyptian MB abroad and was uninvolved in political action at home throughout the Group's history. The Association was represented by the Office of the MB in London headed by Ibrahim Munir. Two new members were also appointed within the organization by Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat. A decision was also made to investigate practices of the previous Administrative Committee and identify any abuses of power under the chairmanship of Dr. Mohammed Kamal.

According to members of the General Shura Council supporting the decisions of Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, these decisions were adopted through a circular resolution on June 10, 2015, due to the difficulty of meeting under heightened security conditions. Nevertheless, according to members of the Higher Administrative Committee, the legitimacy of the Shura Council meeting was challenged for several reasons. Most importantly, the meeting wasn't held by a legitimate entity as Dr. Mohammed Kamal was technically heading the Higher Administrative Committee approved by the Shura Council, while Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat was only a Deputy General Guide, not actually managing the committee. Accordingly, Dr. Mohammed Kamal lodged an appeal concerning the flawed procedures and claimed that the Group's General Shura council resolution was incorrect due to procedural irregularities.

In the same vein, the secretary general of the Group, Dr. Mahmoud Hussein issued a statement confirming that the Group's deputy General Guide, Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, was the leader of the Group and he was entitled to be the acting General Guide. The statement received a counter-response by Mohamed Montaser, the young spokesman of the Higher Administrative Committee

from inside Egypt: "The Group held internal elections and elected a committee to manage the crisis, and the result of this election was the continuation of Dr. Mohamed Badie in the post of General Guide for the Group, the appointment of a chairman of the crisis management committee, and the appointment of the secretary-general of the Group to run its affairs (instead of Dr. Mahmoud Hussein). The Group also elected an administrative office to manage the MB's affairs abroad."[46] Meanwhile, Dr. Mahmoud Hussein responded by affirming that he was still the Group's secretary-general.[47]

Signs of Discord

After August 2014, the MB's organizational structure had returned to a state of practical and operational frenzy as it prepared for waves of demonstrations and protests on the anniversary of January Revolution in 2015. The executive structures in the organization's administrative regions, as well as the central media, youth, and revolutionary mobilization committees, were all operating smoothly and harmoniously. As one of the leaders of these central committees describes: "We were in a state of preoccupation and focus on a strong and influential wave of January demonstrations. It was not until January 2015 that discrepancies or reservations began to emerge about the plan in some evaluation sessions, where it first appeared to me that there were those who were reticent or rejected this plan despite the majority agreeing to do so."[48] The evaluation sessions were the first to highlight differences among members of the Higher Administrative Committee. This prompted a rethinking of the direction, strategy and manner of the Group's approach at this stage.

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According to one of the leaders: "I heard for the first time then, that Dr. Mohammed Saad Aliwa, a member of the Higher Administrative Committee and a member of the Guidance Bureau, considered that this decision was unwise."[49] There were now clear signs within the MB that discord was emerging, including messages between Juma Amin, the Group's Deputy General Guide (who lived in London following his departure from Egypt in June 2013) and leaders of the Administrative Committee. According to one of the leaders who saw these messages himself: "They implied the relegation of Juma Amin and other leaders of the Group such as Dr. Mahmoud Hussein to advisory roles at this stage, which was severe and inappropriate, with the message sometimes containing harsh language for said leaders".[50]

Juma Amin's final letter on December 27, 2014 hinted at what these differences could later entail. According to one of the leaders who read this letter, Juma mentioned that "...[they] are not the Brothers he knows and used to sit with, and these messages carried serious words, and I announce my retraction while I remain a mere soldier who obeys orders and prays for those in leadership."[51] In addition, he was keen to make sure that these procedures and elections were conducted with the knowledge and approval of Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat.[52]

It appeared that there were many attempts by the old leadership to interfere with the work of the Higher Administrative Committee, or influence it, or - at least - to act as if they were still in charge. As an example, Juma Amin, prior the revolution anniversary in January 2015, spoke to the media without coordinating with or informing the Higher Administrative Committee within Egypt. All these attempts were persistently rejected by the new leaders.

This attitude was confirmed by a central committee official of the Higher Administrative Committee in an interview when talking about Juma's letters "Juma Amin did many attempts to enter into operational details pertinent to the situation on the ground), and the new leadership responded by saying: "We need only prayer and not follow-up and evaluation."[53]

Escalation of the Dispute

Initially, these disparities were not especially divisive, as differences of opinion about the nature of the Group's administration and strategy were normal amid the difficult and repressive environment that had so strained the organization's structure. However, as these differences persisted, disagreements became about the regulatory mechanisms that should be followed to resolve these disagreements. Here, the differences transformed into a genuine crisis because the legitimacy of the Higher Administrative Committee and its chairman, Dr. Mohamed Kamal, was called into question. Previously the legitimacy had derived from the Shura meeting of February 2014, but at the time of the disagreement, the Higher Administrative Committee was taken aback by the fact that Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, the Deputy General Guide who approved of their legitimacy but was not involved in the administration, exercised higher authority over the approved mechanisms. Moreover, he seemed to hold the power to dissolve their legitimacy with a single speech. Accordingly, an escalating conflict arose between those convinced of Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat's authority and those who challenged it and rejected any decisions and procedures based on it.

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This situation made finding solutions difficult given that the root of the conflict stemmed from a lack of confidence in those holding power, and accusations of deviation towards resolutions of the higher organizing mechanism. On one side were those who rejected Dr. Mohamed Kamal's leadership and believed that internal elections at this time would produce the same results of the February 2014 elections. On the other side were those who believed that recourse to one individual above all wasted the collective institutional potential. In this sense, the old guard believed that the higher legitimacy of the organization belonged to Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat at home and Ibrahim Munir abroad, and that this constituted the basic standard for understanding and accepting his decisions. On the other hand, the opposing group believed that the first step would be an appeal to the MB's public by holding elections, and that these elections would be able to produce a leadership with high confidence from the Group. They also believed that the two views were irreconcilable. This is demonstrated in the following cases:

■ **First: The idea of amending the Group's by-laws and paving the way for choosing a new leadership**

At the end of 2014, with a number of disagreements between members of the Guidance Bureau (especially Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Barr, Dr. Mahmoud Ghozlan and engineer Abdul Azim Al-Sharqawi as well as the reservations of engineer Mohamed Saad Elewa on the plan of August 2014), suggestions emerged that the Group was in need of amendments to its regulations. Normally this would require the selection of a new leadership team, but this would not amount to much in the way of change. Members of the Higher Administrative Committee agreed to discuss the issue but only after the end of the anticipated events of the January revolution anniversary.

After January 2015, evaluations of the idea of regulatory reform were reintroduced and the Higher Administrative Committee deliberated on them for more than 3 months. A committee was formed which was headed by Dr. Mohammed Saad Aliwa and included Mr. Hussein Ibrahim and Dr. Ali Batikh. However, instead of agreement on one way forward, two different drafts were proposed: One proposal outlined a vision of the amendments concerning a reduction in the number of personnel in the Guidance Bureau and General Shura Council as well as proposing elections to choose provincial leaders and Shura members, from which the new leadership and a new deputy General Guide would be elected in subsequent elections. The other draft proposed holding elections only through the current Group's Shura councils. At the time the general inclination in the Administrative

Offices throughout the provinces supported the first proposal. Therefore, instead of agreement on one way forward, Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Bar, who had seemed to be enthusiastic for the by-laws reform, changed his stance and rejected this idea.

In the meantime, the distrust of Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat and his communicators inside the country or abroad in the Administrative Commmittee increased, creating a sense that no change or action related to the Group or its leadership should be taken under the existing leadership. In light of the old leadership reluctance, Mr. Hussein Ibrahim drew the conclusion that the discrepancy could only be solved through organizational restructuring. As a result, he collected the required number of signatures (as set out in the MB's regulations,) to enable the Higher Administrative Committee to prepare the proposed amendments. According to one of the leaders close to him: "Mr. Hussein Ibrahim collected the required signatures (more than 20 signatures from members of the General Shura of the Group), and was forced to take regulatory measures because of Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Bar's rejection of the idea."[54] It seemed that any alternatives offered by Dr. Kamal's group would be deemed unacceptable, yet Dr. Kamal was quoted as saying that he had obtained the consent of those who had been contacted by the Group's General Shura Council, and that this consent permitted him to carry on with procedures that would amend the by-laws. This led to Dr.Ezzat's decision to dissolve the Higher Administrative Committee in May 2015.

■ Second: Agreement to hold elections for a new Administrative Committee by geographic provinces[55] of the Group to end the dispute

By July 2015 only three members of the Guidance Bureau remained (Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rahman and Dr. Mohamed Kamal, Chairman of the Higher Administrative Committee, who had been running the Group since February 2014). This was a result of Dr. Taha Wahdan's arrest on May 28 while attempting to resolve the crisis and bring the two groups closer together.[56]More arrests followed, including Dr. Abdel Rahman Al-Barr, Dr. Mahmoud Ghozlan[57] and engineer Abdul Azim Sharqawi'[58] on June 2, 2015. Dr. Muhammad Saad Eliwa was also arrested on June 18, 2015.[59]

Following Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat's decisions in May 2015 to dissolve the first Higher Administrative Committee, security strikes escalated intensely and on July 1, 2015, the Egyptian security forces killed a number of leaders of the Group, including the Secretary General of the Higher Administrative Committee, engineer Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Security pressures on the Higher Administrative Committee then increased further, forcing more members to flee into exile. In this climate, representatives from two of the seven governorates communicated with Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat. A third also communicated with Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat,but concealed his communication from the organization's management and Dr. Mohamed Kamal.

To address the beginnings of this schism, Dr. Kamal urged his affiliated governorates (one of which was secretly communicating with Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat) to elect new officials to represent these provinces and then try to convene directly with Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, perhaps a new agreement could be reached. At the same time, Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rahman, the newly appointed Chairman of the Higher Administrative Committee by Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat's decree, was forming a new Administrative Committee. There was caution against accepting any representatives from provinces aligned with Dr. Mohamed Kamal, even if they elected new representatives.

> ***Clearly the issue now was over control of the Group's leadership, which decides when to call elections, as well as who has the power to choose and amend the executive management of the Group***

At the first meeting of the new Higher Administrative Committee, convened without Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat and headed by Dr. Mohammed Abdel Rahman, there was disagreement over which other central committees would be appointed, affecting the majority of the vote within the Administrative Committee. The majority of attendees agreed to choose a youth committee (closer to the previous administration of Dr. Mohammed Kamal) instead of other committees proposed by Dr. Mohammed Abdul Rahman (who was proposing the education tarbiyya and planning committees which are closely aligned with him and Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat). At the second meeting, attended by Dr. Mohamed Kamal and headed by Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rahman, they agreed on the new composition by a vote of 7-4 (with Dr. Mohamed Kamal voting for and Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rahman voting against). The meeting also raised the issue of choosing the chairman of the committee, discussing whether it should be in accordance with Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat's decision or by the consensus of committee members. At this point, Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat lost the majority of his influence on the new Higher Administrative Committee again. The conflict remained unresolved, and the idea of electing new leaders representing each geographical sector no longer offered a solution to the crisis and internal conflict.

Accordingly, in December 2015, Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rahman announced Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat's decision to dissolve the second Higher Administrative Committee and initiate investigation and suspension procedures into members of Dr. Mohamed Kamal's administration.[60] Meanwhile, the office of the Egyptian MB Abroad in London (aligned with Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat) announced the dismissal of Mohamed Montaser on December 14, 2015, and the appointment of Talaat Fahmy as a spokesman for the Group.[61] This was followed by the announcement of a new official website and social media pages for the Group, which differed from the website and other pages managed by the Higher Administrative Committee and the team affiliated with Dr. Mohamed Kamal before them.[62] In response, the Higher Administrative Committee (Dr. Kamal's group) issued a statement confirming the continuation of Mohammed Montaser as a spokesman for the Group.[63]

The two positions reflect how the disagreement had shifted from views on the effectiveness of the Group and mobilization's strategy, to decisive issues at the highest levels of leadership, about how to manage the dialogue, and consequently, who had the right to control, evaluate, or dissolve the Higher Administrative Committee. According to a Group leader affiliated with Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, "The crux of the crisis came when a few people in the Administrative Committee close to Dr. Mohamed Kamal gave themselves the right to manage the MB Group without any right."[64] Clearly the issue now was over control of the Group's leadership, which decides when to call elections, as well as who has the power to choose and amend the executive management of the Group.

As the dispute continued, with each side continuing to challenge the other's legitimacy, the traditional leadership actively worked to undermine Dr. Mohamed Kamal's leadership and all those associated with him. This may be a result of their innate wariness of attempts to bring about the election of a new Guidance Bureau, or the introduction of strategies and methods unfamiliar to the Group, especially in times of crisis, pressure and repression. Therefore, the traditional leadership prioritized control of the Group's direction and the restoration of the regulatory environment wherever they deemed appropriate.

There were several events that could have helped end the schism, such as the arrests of all members of the Guidance Bureau, some of whom were party to the conflict, or the mediation initiatives of several parties both in- and outside the organization (such as Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who tried to present an initiative in January 2016 with many other iconic figures). Even the decision by Dr. Mohamed Kamal to resign and withdraw from the political scene in May 2016 could have provided a turning point. However, none of these changed the substance of the disagreement. Instead the state of apprehension increased further and was dominated by leaders from the old guard whose influence continued to grow day-by-day whilst Dr. Mohamed Kamal's leadership weakened.

Evaluation of the 'Confusion and Attrition' plan

The growing differences did not arise within the leadership group alone. A number of assessment and evaluation workshops took place concurrently; evaluating the August 2014 plan, or questioning the state of the organization's performance at the time. However, leadership disputes weakened the effectiveness of these assessments, leading to a prolonged state of debate while debilitating the spirit of effectiveness among the Group's members. One leader commented that: "From April 2015, due to discussions and disagreements, the majority of the executive activity of the movement came to a halt, especially with the escalation of arrests affecting all the structures of the Group."[65] These differences made any discussions and evaluations seem politicized and subjective, as if directed by one party against the other. On the one hand, a party would call for investigation of abuses, while another conducted an evaluation of them.

As some Administrative Offices in the governorates began to feel the increased pressure of the escalating violence of security crackdowns, it was natural that discussions and debates took place. Also, impulsiveness of some youth who participated in confusion operations exacerbated security policies in return. This was in addition to a growing number of executions, carried out as warnings to the MB and its supporters that the future would hold even more severe consequences for the Group and its allies.

Although Dr. Mohamed Kamal's group and its administration defended the August 2014 plan, the committees that carried out the evaluation, especially the committee which supervised the so-called 'Specific Operations', held other opinions. It believed that the plan, which nonetheless created a dynamism within the structures of the Group, did not achieve a practical political goal from which the Group benefited.[66] It is true that the Group generated public momentum, as seen in mass demonstrations that took place after its prolonged absence, as well as tactically confusing thugs and security agencies in some governorates. It even succeeded in sending a number of strong messages, putting pressure on the media by targeting a number of power transformers in the Media Production City[67] causing a temporary blackout of screens in April 2015.[68] The result, however, was that the reality did not change, and the organizational body was once again exhausted as security practices became increasingly violent.

Factors resulted in the leadership crisis and the challenge of restoring the Group's effectiveness

The MB's leadership disagreement began over what the Group should do and how to approach an effective counter-coup strategy, before developing into a struggle over the Group's management mechanisms and what the higher administrative authority could do about it. It also delved into whether the Group needed to continue attempts at organizational and leadership development, or revert to its traditionally cautious, centralized approach, avoiding any attempts at change for fear of the consequences. With time, the crisis worsened as leaders failed to maintain the Group's effectiveness or efficiently utilize its dwindling resources. Several factors contributed to the dispute's escalation, and the difficulty in containing it. The three most important are discussed here:

First: Unprecedented and severe security pressure

Security policies piled pressure on the MB, and although arrests, violent demonstrations and the absence of organizational leadership had become something of the norm by 2014, changes in security policies in 2015, contributed further to the conflict and internal disagreement. There are

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many accounts of security forces attempts to provoke some of the Group's detained leaders, urging them to preserve the Group and its approach in the face of recklessness by the youth, or the new Administrative Committee (headed by Dr. Mohamed Kamal).

Many leaders and wide sectors of the MB showed already concerns over distancing the MB from extremism and violence, which were not directly linked to the state's security escalations. However, the security forces arguably tried to exploit this to maximize internal tensions and increase discord within the Group. Many accounts cite examples of such dialogues with leaders from different governorates. Among them is the researcher's documentation of a dialogue between a governmental official and a cadre of the Freedom and Justice Party in one of the delta governorates, who was detained and released in February 2015. Prior to his release, security leaders held isolated conversations with him at the national security headquarters in the governorate for at least eight hours. They warned them that upon their release, they would find that the MB Group had split into two factions, one of which had taken a path of violence. They reminded them that their duty was to preserve the Group and its peaceful approach.[69] This cadre described these dialogues as an attempt by security forces to ferment polarization and internal conflict which was unsuccessful in his case, irrespective of his position on either side of the crisis.

On March 5, 2015, a cabinet reshuffle took place in the Egyptian government, including among others the appointment of Majdi Abdel Ghaffar to Interior Minister.[70] He was previously in charge of the national security sector. Later, he developed new security policies aiming to inflict further pressure on the MB Group, and hence, a new more brutal phase in repressive security policies towards the MB began. On March 7, 2015, the Ministry of Interior carried out the execution of Mahmoud Ramadan,[71] who was accused of throwing children off building roofs in Alexandria during anti-coup demonstrations in 2013. The young man was not a member of the MB, and the charges and trial raised many question marks over the state's approach to investigation and justice. In response, the African Commission for Human Rights called for a halt to the death sentence,[72] signaling a change for the worse in the country's security policies.

On May 7, 2015, further executions were carried out in a case known as 'Arab Circassians', and once again the victims were not members of the MB. The African Commission for Human Rights again called on Egypt to stop the executions, with Zainabo Sylvie, the ministerial committee head, demanding that the government, "achieve the basic standards of fair trial, and suspend the death penalty in

accordance with its obligations to international human rights law."[73] Yet, the execution appeared to support the clear message that increasingly repressive security policies were on the rise, more violent and retaliatory in manner than ever before.

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On July 1, 2015, the Ministry of Interior directly launched a severe and violent security strike for the first time, killing 13 MB leaders following a raid on a meeting in the 'October City'[74]. The victims were in charge of the Central Delta sector and were among the most active members of the MB Group, including Dr. Mohamed Kamal's right-hand man and Secretary General of the Higher Administrative Committee, engineer Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Many MB officials described arrests at this stage as being different to those previously. According to a member of the Higher Administrative Committee, "The arrests after Magdi Abdel Ghaffar took over were more focused on the organizational structure and actors within the organizational structure and aimed at striking effectiveness within the Group. It also pursued the collection of information about the structure and its actors, while attempting to track, eavesdrop and deploy surveillance cameras everywhere."[75]

This atmosphere contributed to difficulties in meeting and communicating, increasing concerns and mistrust, and putting a great deal of pressure on everyone in positions of leadership and responsibility. Despite their nominal unity, and their vast organizational experience, individual responses and reactions to the new pressures varied significantly, given the continued uncertainty, unclear path forward and growing sacrifices.

Second: New plans and strategies failed to achieve their political objectives

The reason behind the assessment of the MB's plans (the Six-Month Plan, which followed by the August 2014 plan), was to work towards a change or an opening in the political scene that could ease the impact of exclusion and violence, and restore the path of change and democracy. Despite the apparent discord among MB leaders, a number of internal evaluations were reviewing previously approved plans, and even sought to amend, correct or suspend parts of the August 2014 plan. This included the committee overseeing the August 2014 plan, which acknowledged that, "the acts of confusion or Specific Operations that took place during the January 2015 events did not benefit the MB Group and had a little political outcome."[76]

Faced with the inability to achieve any tangible political objectives, and with the escalation of security operations, a state of confusion fell upon a number of Administrative Offices tasked with managing Specific Operations. This was largely due to disagreements on the feasibility of these Operations, the individuals who were in charge, and the misconducts that took place during implementation. Such climate of increasing disagreement, sharp internal polarization and security forces' strikes led to the suspension or withdrawal of some of the participants in this plan. Even more importantly, some leaders of Specific Operations took a decision "to leave the MB's organization and completely separate from the Group, which actually took place in September 2015."[77]

The August 2014 plan was an attempt to address the oppressive authoritarian situation in the country differently. Despite some positive outcomes from the successful mass demonstrations in January 2015, (the first since August 30, 2013) the Higher Administrative Committee failed to achieve its objectives. In fact, it was in stark contrast to the lofty expectations of the High Administrative Committee, the hopes and aspirations expressed by youth members of the Group, and the statements of its speaker Mohamed Montaser and his talk of a decisive revolutionary approach. That is why, this plan had a number of negative effects on the Group.

Faced with the inability to achieve any tangible political objectives, and with the escalation of security operations, a state of confusion fell upon a number of Administrative Offices tasked with managing Specific Operations

The Higher Administrative Committee and the majority of members supporting Dr. Mohamed Kamal were impulsively gripped by a revolutionary status, wishing to bring about change in any way to the political landscape. But changing a Group of this magnitude required much more than just election victories, especially when held in an atmosphere of oppression and conflict. The Higher Administrative Committee was the real leadership of the Group, but the nature of the Group was centralized, and the committee was unable to contemplate its rejection and direct confrontation by its traditional leaders.

On the other hand, the MB's traditional leaders did not deal well with the leaders of the Higher Administrative Committee, who were not loyal to any particular individual. So, they could have easily accepted changing Dr. Mohamed Kamal some time before he decided to step down in May 2016. They were also keen on only taking their decisions after constant communication and consultation with intermediary leaders, and were also receptive to taking responsibility and willing to admit mistakes.

Dr. Mohamed Kamal did not travel abroad even after he stepped down, in fact, he repeatedly refused to do so, despite the tightening security, right up until he was killed on October 3, 2016. Mr. Hussein Ibrahim, whose last interview before his arrest on October 26, 2015,[78] demonstrated self-accountability and a willingness to recognize any mistakes. He also emphasized the importance of supporting youth and installing new leaders. According to an interview with a young cadre that met with Mr. Hussein prior his arrest, the latter admitted: "The Higher Administrative Committee did not succeed in resolving or ending the issue of internal differences and did not succeed in influencing the political scene. You have to think differently with different people in the current leadership (He means the pro-Dr. Mohammed Kamal group)."[79]

The impact of murders, torture and executions on members of the MB Group, especially its youth, was enormous and required greater wisdom from traditional leaders in understanding these difficult circumstances and dealing with differences in the Group's visions and trends. Instead, they tried to resolve it in a procedural, regulatory manner, which increased polarization and conflict within the community.

Ironically, the MB Group performed surprisingly well in the absence of leadership and strategy. The differences only arose after the leaders' attempts to experiment new plans and strategies in a highly complex environment and under difficult security conditions. This indicates the complexity of the MB Group, and that the entrenched organizational traditions are difficult to change rapidly, especially if the change does not yield quick successes, while above all maintaining organizational cohesion.

Third: The absence of essential elements in strategizing and evaluation, and focusing on the procedures of confrontations with security forces

In dozens of interviews and dialogues with many of the MB leaders, short-sighted reflections have been made. For them, the issue was simply that the MB had reached the presidency with a peaceful and constitutional means, but was easily removed from office by force. It was not able to protect the nascent democratic process nor to curb the security forces' use of repression, subjugation and exclusion.

From then on, the debate was often focused on executive procedural issues linked to the challenges of the present moment, and the urgent need for a plan implemented by the MB Group to counter the coup. But this debate did not include in-depth insight into the long term strategic flaws— since Mubarak's departure on February 11, 2011 — which eventually led to this situation. For example, the Group did not discuss its strategy for transition, and

From then on, the debate was often focused on executive procedural issues linked to the challenges of the present moment, and the urgent need for a plan implemented by the MB Group to counter the coup. But this debate did not include in-depth insight into the long term strategic flaws— since Mubarak's departure on February 11, 2011 — which eventually led to this situation

how it would deal with the military and security establishments. Moreover, it did not question the kind of relations and alliances it needed at the national, regional and international levels. The Group also failed to address the internal factors causing severe political polarization or reasons why the organization was unable to counter attempts to stir up the people against it. Additionally, the Group could not translate its huge membership into a political reality.

Even in dealing with the challenges of the post-coup era, the MB Group was unable to field the appropriate capacity to face the apparatus of the repressive authoritarian regimes. To that end, how could it penetrate the political system? How could it shake the foundations of the new repressive regime? Did the Group realize the differences between the regime, the head of the regime and the state apparatus between January 2011 and those in 2013?

Reproducing the moment of January 2011 and the Tahrir square sit-in were present in the leadership imagination, but the political reality was altogether different. There were obvious cracks in President Mubarak's regime, and even within his state bodies prior to January 2011, to the point where even the media close to the regime were critical of the regime's leader and his succession plan. That situation totally differs from the moment of July 3, 2013. In the latter, the conflict was led by the head of the military, who had a background in intelligence and controlled the military with an iron grip. Furthermore, the situation prior to 2011 was not as hostile, nor characterized by repression, tyranny, counter-revolutionary brutality and crackdowns on any advocates of change.

The Group also failed to hold objective discussion about its structure, the nature of its members, its composition, its capabilities, what it was qualified for, or the competence of its leaders in political dealings before adopting a strategy and taking political decisions. Nor did the Group discuss its perceptions of governance, change and revolution, or address the critical question: Why was it unable to achieve its goals or even sustain itself, when it had a mass majority? The conclusions drawn by the Group leadership were simple, quick and impressionistic: Some argue that the Group deviated from its original plan, and rapidly moved from the stage of "the establishment of Muslim society"; others say that the crisis is related to the MB commitment to the peaceful means, without a well-studied and practical answer.

The burden of this leadership, be they young or old, was heavy and subject to exceptional circumstances and challenges. They were faced with the overwhelming challenges of trying to rebuild the Group, maintaining revolutionary mobilization, confront the repressive security system, and where possible, to achieve quick victories on all these fronts. This has been extremely difficult and complex, and a series of painful setbacks have been suffered. Although they succeeded in resolving the leadership vacuum that occurred after the dispersal of the Raba'a sit-in, they were not able to develop an effective strategy affecting the political scene, and were also unable to overcome their disparate responses to these pressures, or to overcome their differing opinions, concerns and fears. This thwarted their attempted evaluations, reduced objective efforts to squandering many of its members' hopes, and wasted much of its remaining resources. As a consequence, the MB eventually suffered more damage from within, than from the security policies it was subjected to.

Conclusion

Since the outbreak of the January 25 revolution, Egypt's political landscape has been complex and constantly changing. The MB have been confronted with challenges and pressures, with the Group reacting each time by addressing them only in the present moment or seeking to find a cure-all in the form of an 'instant adjustment'. But this was not possible. Therefore, following the coup against President Morsi and the entire democratization process, and the dissolution of the Raba'a sit-in, some of the MB leaders thought that there was a set of measures which could bring about decisive change; changing leaders, amending by-laws, or holding grassroots elections in a conflict-ridden environment. Others opted for caution and doing nothing as the necessary solution. The political crisis they were presented with was complex and needed a thorough and comprehensive political assessment, equipped with appropriate political minds to deal with a conflict of this magnitude. Even when the Group's leadership opted to change the strategy of confrontation and use violence in an orderly manner in order to defend the protests, confuse the repressive regime and push for a political change; this decision was influenced by extreme anger at the sustained pressure, murders and abuses its supporters were experiencing.

It can therefore be asserted that the crisis of the MB was essentially a crisis of its leadership and elite. Those who sought change within the Group were many, but they did not share a vision, and with increasing pressures, threats, challenges and failures, it was natural that its responses were varied, along with its visions and assessments. The environment of conflict was not conducive to uniting them under one aim, and the Group's leadership was unable to understand this, resulting in division of efforts and wasting of energies.

The internal conflict further diminished the Group's leadership and its ability to objectively assess the Group's performance. Under the title of revolutionary decisiveness and revolutionary options, many excesses and mistakes were committed, resulting in further exhaustion of the Group, and increasing sacrifices with a little political impact. The escalation of this conflict increased mistrust, with no mechanism or initiative able to dispel these fears and concerns. The traditional leaders who rejected the administration of Dr. Mohamed Kamal were willing to end the idea of political mobility altogether.

On the one hand, Dr. Mohamed Kamal's administration, which held organizational legitimacy in February 2014 and succeeded in building a structure that represented its youth within Egypt and abroad, sought regulatory amendments and comprehensive grass-roots elections. This succeeded in bringing the youth closer and also enacted new concepts and strategies from August 2014 onwards. It did not succeed however, in achieving a political objective appropriate to its high-brow revolutionary rhetoric and was unable to manage conflict or maintain its capabilities within the organization. Moreover, the administration was unable to manage the necessary resources to sustain this conflict.

On the other hand, much of the Group, which would turn on the decisions and legitimacy of Dr. Mahmoud Ezzat, felt that the results of development and change brought unsafe consequences, and overshadowed the patriarchal feeling that the historical leadership tried to invoke control of the operational tempo, bringing it back to inherent caution, centralization and the old leadership style which had prevailed prior to January 2011.

After the killing of Dr. Mohamed Kamal in October 2016, the dispute continued in the form of a group calling itself the General Office, which considered itself the legitimate and elected extension of Dr. Mohamed Kamal's administration. It inherited a heavy legacy of conflict, internal struggle and severe political hemorrhage amid a complex security and political landscape in Egypt. The fragmentation of its figureheads abroad increased after the resignation of the Office of the MB Abroad, which was followed by the dispersal of some of its members. Some disagreed with the new administration at home and returned to communicating with the traditional leaders, others decided to work independently.

This internal crisis has left a deep wound for many members of the MB, both in Egypt and abroad, young or old, regardless of their stance or side in the crisis, and added salt to the

wounds of those despairing in prisons. The Group took the hopes of its members for the development of its capacity and effectiveness, and tossed them into the wind. According to a survey conducted by the researcher in June 2017, 38% of the MB youth sample believes that the MB cannot regain its vitality and ability to influence soon, 36% are reluctant to define it, and only 25% believe that the Group can return as a more vital and influential actor.[80] These polling results reflect disappointments created through internal organizational conflict, with 33% feeling that Egypt could change back to democracy, 39% believing it could not, and 26% saying they were unable to decide.[81]

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ABOUT ALSHARQ FORUM

The Sharq Forum is an independent international network whose mission is to undertake impartial research and develop long-term strategies to ensure the political development, social justice and economic prosperity of the people of Al-Sharq. The Forum does this through promoting the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue, social justice, and public-spirited research.

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