The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Organizational Challenges and Ideology

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Abstract: The Muslim Brotherhood's loss of power on the one hand and the security campaign against it on the other have opened up debates as to whether these circumstances will push the movement to make significant changes to its ideology and organization, driving it either towards openly following peaceful strategies and tactics, or adopt an ideology of violence. The main questions of this report are what challenges the Muslim Brotherhood face in trying to overcome their internal divisions and whether the Muslim Brotherhood will maintain the peaceful stance it adopted during the coup, or whether it will be forced to adopt a policy of armed violence. The report will also discuss whether the Muslim Brotherhood will be able to find a way back into the political system.

Introduction

The particular historical circumstances experienced by the Muslim Brotherhood after the coup of July 3, 2013, especially the fierce security campaign to which the movement was exposed, no doubt put the Muslim Brotherhood, their organization and their ideology at stake. The Egyptian crackdown took a particularly significant toll on the Brotherhood's organization. Thousands of its members were imprisoned. The Brotherhood leadership has been unable to maintain effective control over the organization. After the coup, the Muslim Brotherhood lost the strong, overt presence in society that had evolved over decades through its elaborate network of social services. It has thus far proven unable to find a way back into the political system, or even to reach an internal agreement over discovering one. It has also been unable to build new political alliances. This report will discuss he challenges that face the Muslim Brotherhood in trying to overcome its internal divisions and if it will be able to maintain the peaceful stance it adopted during the coup era, or whether it could be forced to adopt a policy of armed violence.

Recent Internal Differences

The seventies generation played a major and important role in the Muslim Brotherhood. They were university activists during the seventies, and later they played an important role in many trade unions. Prominent among them were Abou Elela Mady, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, and Essam El-Erian. This generation differed from the Brotherhood's so-called old guard, most of the leaders of which were imprisoned by the Egyptian government under Gamal Abd El-Nasser.[1] The difference between generations led to a gap emerging in political policies between them. The middle generation accused the

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leaders of dominating the Guidance Office (Maktab al-Irshad), as well as accusing them of autocracy, autarchy, and anti-political trends resulting in less opportunities for potential alliances with groups from other political currents.[2] According to the middle generation, the Brotherhood's old guard did not make any concessions over these policies. Younger members expressed their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the Muslim Brotherhood's organizational shape and the dominance of the old points of view. Essam Sultan expressed his discontent, as he believed that "organized unemployment" was widespread in the Muslim Brotherhood. Many Muslim Brotherhood junior professionals found that their role in participating in the Muslim Brotherhood was marginalized.[3]

The peak of tensions between the Brotherhood's old guard and middle generation was in 1996, after the death of the fourth General Guide, Muhammad Hamid Abu al-Nasr, in January of the same year. Ma'mun al-Hudaybi, the Muslim Brotherhood's official spokesperson, announced that Mustafa Mashhur (a 76-year-old) would be the new General Guide. This infuriated the middle generation, who boycotted the elections through which Mashhur was appointed as a General Guide.[4] The disappointment among the Muslim Brotherhood's younger generation was led by Abou Elela Mady and his colleagues that announced the establishment of a new party, the Al-Wasat Party, in 1996, with this party being touted by the Egyptian government under Mubarak as the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing. The Brotherhood's old guard opposed the establishment of the Al-Wasat Party. Al-Hudaybi ordered the Muslim Brotherhood

members who joined the new party to pull out immediately or be subject to expulsion. Thus, Mady and another twelve of the leaders of the middle generation announced their resignation from the Muslim Brotherhood. The authorities rejected the new party, and its license was not granted.[5]

In June 2011, amid tensions between the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership and its younger generation, led for example Mohamed Kassas – the head of the Muslim Brotherhood's Youth Wing –to refuse joining the Muslim Brotherhood's official Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), announcing his intention to form the "Egyptian Current Party". Shortly after his announcement, the MB expelled him and other members who joined the Egyptian Current Party.[6] Mohammad Affan, one the Muslim Brotherhood active youth members that quit the movement, refused to join the FJP, as it did not bring into the post-Egyptian uprising a new set of ideas that suit the new revolutionary era, being simply a copy of the Muslim Brotherhood's concepts and ideologies.[7] He stated that the participation of non-Muslim Brotherhood members in the FJP was limited. Kassas added that the Muslim Brotherhood also refused to participate in many events and demonstrations after Mubarak's fall, leading to increased tensions between the movement and the newer generation.[8]

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and orientations. In the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, during Mubarak's rule there were shifts in their organizational structure that were centered on the growing influence of conservatives at the expense of reformers. Prior to 1996, the Muslim Brotherhood did not experience any notable rifts within its ranks. The middle-generation leaders or reformers played an integral role in building strategic alliances with liberals, secularists, and nationalists in order to avoid being denied participation by the regime.[9] This period therefore witnessed many successes in qualitative alliances with non-Islamist movements. These alliances aided the Muslim Brotherhood in winning some trade union and parliamentary seats during Mubarak's reign. Reformists paved the way for openness towards other parties and led political initiatives that reflected the Muslim Brotherhood's social and political views on various issues. At the forefront, initiatives called for political and constitutional reform, the political empowerment of women, and backed democratic systems and fair elections. For many Egyptian parties, reformists offered an acceptable ideological front (the reform initiative in 2004, the electoral program in 2005, and the draft party program in 2007).

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Insofar as the revolution of January 25 was a political opportunity for the Muslim Brotherhood organization to win power and carry out its social activities without the suppression it had experienced under previous ruling regimes, however, it constituted a threat to the movement as an organization. Suspending Aboul Fotouh's Muslim Brotherhood membership in May

Mubarak's fall and the political openness that followed encouraged members and leaders opposing the MB's policies to pull out and establish new parties that expressed their thoughts and aspirations. The establishment of new parties was not possible before the revolution of January 25, as the Al-Wasat Party's experiment – rejected by the Parties Affairs Committee – had clearly shown

2011 was a remarkable move. He announced his intention to run for the presidential elections;[10] however, the Muslim Brotherhood made a formal decision that he could not do so. Afterwards, Aboul Fotouh established the "Strong Egypt Party".[11] Mubarak's fall and the political openness that followed encouraged members and leaders opposing the MB's policies to pull out and establish new parties that expressed their thoughts and aspirations. The establishment of new parties was not possible before the revolution of January 25, as the Al-Wasat Party's experiment – rejected by the Parties Affairs Committee – had clearly shown.

From the above, it becomes clear that after the post-Jan 25 revolution the Muslim Brotherhood was unable to represent the full diversity within its ranks, which led to the domination of one specific faction which formulated its policies as well as its internal and external orientation. This form of organizational structure has overshadowed the Muslim Brotherhood's attempts at post-coup crisis management.

Key Post-Military Coup Disputes within the Muslim Brotherhood

Post-1996, conservatives began to slowly dominate decision-making within the Muslim Brotherhood. An organization dominated by conservatives (at the expense of reformists) led the Muslim Brotherhood after the revolution.[12] Conservatives did not grasp the diversity within the Muslim Brotherhood; instead they drove out reformists. The marginalization of reformists and youth within the party led to an imbalance in

its alliances with all concerned parties, particularly non-Islamists. Following the January 25 revolution, Muslim Brotherhood conservatives put alliances with Islamic movements at the top of their priorities.

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This conservative dominance and marginalization of reformists and youth within the Muslim Brotherhood created dissatisfaction inside the movement. Perhaps it was the experience of leaders who defected from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1996, forming the Wasat party (such as Abou el Ela Madi and Essam Sultan), that discouraged similar defections during the Mubarak regime on account of the prohibitions imposed by it on the Wasat Party and the successive arrests of its leaders. Conversely, after January 25, 2011, the chances of defection increased due to conservative dominance within the Muslim Brotherhood, the available political opportunity, and the elimination of the repression of the regime.

Disagreements within the Muslim Brotherhood stemmed from two main causes:

1) The mechanism with which the Muslim Brotherhood leadership dealt with the post-coup regime (from July 3, 2013).
2) The administrative dispute over decision-making and enforcement methods within the Muslim Brotherhood and its institutions.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Supreme Committee, dubbed the "Administrative Committee" by the media, represents the primary party to the dispute. The

Administrative Committee was founded in February 2014 under the chairmanship of Guidance Bureau member Muhammad Kamal, to run Muslim Brotherhood affairs in place of the Guidance Bureau, the majority of which has been detained since the military coup. This party also includes the Muslim Brotherhood Administrative Office outside of Egypt; formed in March 2015, under the chairmanship of a member of the Shura Council, Ahmed Abdel Rahman.[13]

The second party to the dispute included Guidance Bureau members, led by Mahmoud Ezzat, Deputy and Acting Minister for the Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide, Group General Secretary Mahmoud Hussein, and Secretary General of the International Organization Ibrahim Mounir.[14]

Following the July 3, 2013 military coup and the harsh blow suffered by the Muslim Brotherhood, misunderstandings developed between its members. Among the most prominent indications of this were internal disagreements within the Muslim Brotherhood. The first dispute took place in May 2015, when disagreements emerged within the group's leadership regarding the management of the post-coup organization, and as to who had the "legitimacy" to manage the organization. The dispute repeated itself in August of the same year, with several attempts to mend the gap failing to do so at the time.[15]

By the end of 2015, a dispute arose due to Mahmoud Ezzat's decisions, including relieving youth member Muhammad Montasir from his role as the Muslim Brotherhood's media spokesperson, and appointing Tal`at Fahmi the Brotherhood's Media Spokesman as his replacement. Also, Ezzat froze the membership of some other leading members, a step rejected by leaders supporting Montasir who formed a committee to manage the Muslim

Brotherhood in Egypt in a move that signaled their intent to overthrow Mahmoud Ezzat and his supporters.[16]

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Muslim Brotherhood Secretary General Mahmoud Hussein is one of the figures involved in guarding the group's organizational position. On December 12, 2015, he affirmed that he continues to hold his position as Secretary General, and will remain as such, until new elections are held via the Muslim Brotherhood's General Shura Office, rejecting Montasir's statement that he (Mahmoud Hussein) is no longer the Muslim Brotherhood Secretary General.[17]

In December of 2015, the Egyptian Association of Muslim Brotherhood Abroad (closely tied to Mahmoud Ezzat) issued the following statement: "It is commitment to the support of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in Egypt, represented by the Supreme Guide Mohammad Badie, his deputy and chargé d'affaires Mahmoud Ezzat as well as his deputies at home or abroad, the Guidance Bureau, and the General Shura Council elected in 2010".[18]

On 8 November 2015, several media outlets and Muslim Brotherhood groups circulated a document, said to be a letter from the "The High Administrative Committee", and was led by Mohamed Kamal, a former member of Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau who was assassinated by security forces, October 2016. The document affirming the subordination of the Muslim Brotherhood Office Abroad to the Committee and deeming it the sole authority that can halt all dealings with it or freeze it, unlike the Association.[19] The battle of the "Counter Statements" that took place between Muslim Brotherhood constituencies, at home and abroad, constituted a real crisis. The "Association" felt that electing an Muslim Brotherhood Office Abroad was contrary to the group's cohesive organizational structure and represented a dual role within a single entity. However, the Higher Committee felt that the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood Office Abroad was necessary to manage files related to the dispute in Egypt. A number of prominent figures intervened more than once in attempts to bridge the rift between the opponents, including Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi's initiative in February 2015.[20]

It is evident from the above that it can not be asserted that the recent disputes within the Muslim Brotherhood are generation-based. Both opposing sides have young and old members. Ibrahim Muneer and Mahmoud Ezzat, who lead the first party and have all the power in their hands argue that leaving the leadership to those who do not support the path of their reforms would open the way to changing the group's adopted ideologies and strategies as well as its stand towards violence. However, the group's leaders located in Egypt believe that the first party is responsible for the weakness that the Muslim Brotherhood has experienced after the Sisi-led military coup. They feel that the first party are also responsible for the mistakes committed before the military coup. Consequently, they claim that the first party are incompetent to navigate the next phase.

Many differences between the current stage and previous ones have emerged due to the the security campaigns targeting the members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Firstly, there is severe polarization inside the Muslim Brotherhood, that will have lasting

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repercussions, which cannot be ignored in the foreseeable future. Secondly, there is the absence of a leadership that has the ability to unify the Muslim Brotherhood and adopt a convincing strategy to maintain their base of support. These are two self-exclusion factors that have left the Muslim Brotherhood less able to attract more supporters in Egyptian society. Moreover, they do not help the organization to mobilize the public or promote its views and ideologies and therefore it now has little influence on Egyptian politics.

Ideological Challenges

In January 2016, the Egyptian regime announced that they had frozen the accounts of 1,370 Muslim Brotherhood members and 81 businesses including 19 money exchange companies, 1,125 institutions, 105 schools, 43 hospitals and thousands of detainees.[21] This indicates the loss of the networks which enabled the group to communicate with the community and ultimately the loss of its ability to mobilize and influence society as a whole.

The Muslim Brotherhood is a grassroots movement; it is only logical that it should encompass intellectual, ideological and inter-generational differences. Since the Muslim Brotherhood's inception, it has maintained a strategy of gradual and peaceful social change, and has rejected directly clashing with the state, especially after its painful "Nasserite" experiences during the time of former Egyptian president, Jamal Abdul Nasser.[22]

Following the July 3, 2013 military coup, the Muslim Brotherhood faced two challenges:
1. The regime's unprecedented security crackdown against its leaderships and members.

2. The insistence of young members within the Muslim Brotherhood on taking more "revolutionary" measures against the Sisi regime. The Muslim Brotherhood old guard has long adopted a policy of gradual peaceful change; however, the younger generation is calling for revolutionary change. The current Muslim Brotherhood leadership fears that the "revolutionary stance" might be misunderstood as the use of violence against the state, which will reflect negatively both on Egypt and the entire region. On the other hand, Muslim Brotherhood leaders are concerned about losing the loyalty of the youth, who have borne the brunt of repression and have become susceptible to radicalization by extremist groups.

The old guard refuses to give the "more revolutionary" Muslim Brotherhood much maneuvering power, deeming it a threat to the group's cohesive entity. Up to this point, the Muslim Brotherhood as a grassroots organization, have largely remained committed to its leadership's choices and denounced violence.

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In another context, the Muslim Brotherhood suffers from a weakened ability to adopt clear political choices, such as making political settlements with or building strong alliances to pressure the regime. While some new leaders are aware that, at some point, there will be a need for a political settlement, they have not been able to demand this from the lower ranking members of the Muslim Brotherhood.[23]

The main disputes within the Muslim Brotherhood continue to be about "Leadership Change", "Institutionalization", "Powers", and other fundamental themes. However, matters related to its political vision and revisions are still absent from the Muslim Brotherhood's internal debates

Among the challenges facing the Muslim Brotherhood is the expansion of radical jihadist movements in the Sinai. These movements are seeking a gradual expansion in Egypt, and are earnestly trying to persuade those who are angry with the Egyptian regime that "there is a war on Islam," that democracy will never tolerate the victory of Islamists, and that the Muslim Brotherhood's sure bets have failed.

Conclusion

The disagreements within the Muslim Brotherhood are broader than a simple divide over the commitment to peaceful measures, or the use of violence against the regime. They encompass rules for managing the Muslim Brotherhood, internal decision-making processes, and the relationship between the group's leadership and the grassroots.

The new leadership believes that events have gone beyond the old guard's vision, and the balance of power between the leadership and grassroots has changed. As a result, the new leaders believe in taking grassroots priorities into consideration, and that the objective should be to ensure the continuity of the revolutionary movement on the ground.

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For a long time, the Muslim Brotherhood's political perceptions have been unable to overcome the duality of the coup/legitimacy, or to develop an opposing political discourse that meets the requirements of the social strata that launched the January Revolution. The main restriction imposed on the expansion of the current opposition movement will continue to be one set by the Muslim Brotherhood itself! That is, it is hampering attempts to build broad political alliances between the forces opposed to the military coup.

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