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Brotherhood: Challenges of Reality & Options of Confrontation

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With the outbreak of Covid-19 in Egypt and amid escalating calls for the release of detainees in Egyptian prisons, the crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) with the current Egyptian regime has re-emerged, given that among detainees there are a large number of distinguished doctors in various specialties who are basically leading MB figures. Even one of them had previously reached a treatment for one of the Corona viruses.

All these calls have always tended to frame the idea of releasing detainees within a humanitarian context, away from its political form that is the core of the crisis.

This paper focuses on how the Muslim Brotherhood can regain its cohesion on the basis of principles that ensure that the group shall resume its national role, as one of the components of Egyptian society and one of its living and active forces for decades.

From the writer's point of view, the Muslim Brotherhood is currently suffering from an ideological crisis, which is a major part of its current internal crisis, that has led to a significant decline in its role. It is important to note that this paper will focus on the MB's internal factors, not on the external factors, despite their significance - such as the successive security pressures to which the group has been exposed to.

However, given the fact that when the security pressures on the group was absent abroad, the MB crisis continued; therefore, the external pressure alone cannot be considered the main reason behind the group's suffering. The MB has not been able to achieve remarkable practical achievements in the diverse Egyptian issue despite the availability of elements of action and influence overseas.

Certainly, many other problems surfaced with Egypt's military coup in 2013, but the ideological problem of the MB remains the central problem. This paper will attempt to dismantle this dilemma to allow a sound diagnosis, to a large extent, which may contribute to the search for likely solution frameworks.

An important final point is that although this paper focuses on the Muslim Brotherhood, due to its weight and influence, this model can be applied to all other Islamist movements, or any movement that may engage in political action from a holistic perspective.

Dilemma of the MB's foundational ideas

In order to fully understand the significance of this great crisis intellectually, it is necessary to understand its background in the Arab and regional environment. In fact, there are two approaches to access to power in the Arab world through opposing the [ruling regimes](#): either by the use of weapons and violent confrontations, or via traditional political opposition through forming parties and running for elections.

The strategy adopted by the West in general, the United States in particular, in the Arab region is based on ensuring that power, rule, and sovereignty be restricted to persons that are directly related to them to ensure their interests and the security of Israel. Therefore, there is no access to power allowed to independent personalities, even if they are not ideological. The independence of decision-making in any Arab country means the likeliness, even the inevitability, of a conflict of interests with Washington and its allies, or at least this is how the West thinks.

Because the MB in its collective thinking or intellectual methodology is independent, rather than dependent, opponents of the group in the Western camp consider it a threat to their interests. Add to this the fact that the Brotherhood has an Islamic cultural project, which makes many Western decision-making circles consider it a threat to their culture.

Therefore, the West is keen to prevent them from reaching power in its true sense, that is sovereignty, control, and domination. However, this approach means closing the peaceful political track and leaving the doors wide open for the armed track that may lead to uncontrollable dire consequences against the regimes loyal to the West in the Arab world.

The illusion of power

To solve this American-Western dilemma, their third alternative, which I call "the illusion of power," was to allow Islamic movements to practice political activity, enter parliament, participate in the government and have some state positions; where all Muslim youth who want to change power are

drawn and completely exhausted and consumed in these activities, away from the option of changing government by force. However, there are red lines that the Islamists cannot cross, as they cannot in any way approach the real tools of governance, such as the army, the presidency, the media, the security and non-security information services, or financial institutions.

It is worth noting that since the early eighties, during the Mubarak era, the regime allowed the Brotherhood to practice politics and [enter parliament](#), although the regime had not officially recognized the group, in the hope that the Brotherhood's activity and movement would pull the rug from under the feet of armed jihadist groups.

The Egyptian regime was also keen on making political practice within its own rules and controls difficult, to exhaust players. But at the same time, the regime controls all the tools of the political game, including the parliament, the judiciary, the media, and political parties; thus, it could regain control at any moment if the Brotherhood or others tried to violate the established rules of the game.

MB and political practice

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has accepted to engage in the political game in the hope that they would gradually achieve their goals. The MB strategically adopted the "legal constitutional struggle" in their pursuit of political reform or access to power, as a prerequisite for the Egyptian regime's acceptance of them. Meanwhile, the regime allowed them to spread horizontally and vertically within the different segments of society, so that they could feel they are progressing on their way to power, by obtaining seats in parliament or some government senior positions.

On the other hand, the ruling functional regime in Egypt, as well as in the Arab world, benefits from this in conferring legitimacy on this or that regime. The acceptance of the Brotherhood - that enjoys great popularity - to share power with the ruling regime in Egypt or elsewhere in the region, is an instrument of legitimacy and acceptance, even despite the fact that the MB opposes many of the regime's policies.

Therefore, after the July 3 coup, Sisi was keen to try to include ministers from the Muslim Brotherhood in his government to obtain legitimacy; but they [refused](#), which led to suppressing and punishing them for that.

Manifestations of power

In addition, the global system led by the United States considers authority, weapons, money, energy, and information to be forbidden zones that anyone else cannot approach, except for those who owe allegiance to it. Consequently, the world order is impossible to allow the Brotherhood or others to possess one of these manifestations of power, except to the extent that it does not pose a threat to it; be under its auspices, or serve its interests. There are many examples as evidence: Take for example the events that occurred in Algeria when the Islamists won the elections there. Also, think of what happened to Hamas, when the resistance movement succeeded in in elections and reached power. Most recently, when Dr. Mohamed Morsi won elections and reached power, a bloody military coup was made against him, not to mention the horrible killings that followed, most notably the massacre of the Rabaa sit-in dispersal.

Either the group adheres to the constitutional and legal struggle that will not bring it to real power, in addition to the fact that it legitimizes dictatorial regimes in most of our Arab countries, or to face suppression and abuse. If the only strategy of the Mb for reaching its goals remains the constitutional and legal struggle amid satisfaction of the world order, it will be almost impossible to achieve the great goals that are being instilled in MB members.

Threats to designate MB as a terrorist organization

When US President Trump said that he would [designate](#) the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, I believed that it was only a threat for blackmail, as he would never do that. This is because such a classification does not have any legal basis in the first place; and even if it is done, it may push the Muslim Brotherhood towards the armed option after closing all areas of peaceful political action to them. Although the MB rejects the use of force in the face of the state and considers it contrary to its peaceful approach, that mainly relies on the constitutional and legal struggle, as shown above, yet the group cannot control all its members or the rest of the youth in the Arab world. This is what made the US [State Department](#), Defense Department and intelligence services oppose the American administration with respect to the idea of classifying the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.

The calls to classify the group as a terrorist organization which are raised from time to time and then retract them, is a clear evidence of the MB intellectual dilemma we are talking about and its effects on the group in particular and the Islamic movements and the Egyptian revolution in general.

This dilemma is that the Brotherhood seeks power without owning its real tools, and at the same time, the West allows them to seek after the illusion of power and not the real power.

In order for the group to solve this dilemma, it has several options, one of which is to give up its goals with respect to the competition for power, so that the constitutional and legal struggle strategy adopted by the group could become compatible with achievement of some goals below the level of power, and thus protect itself from many pressures in the long run.

However, this strategy has its own risks, because it necessarily means reviewing and modifying the ideas of the MB founder. Also, it will clash with the "emotional state" on which the Brotherhood members are raised, that they seek to establish the good Muslim government and eventually restore the caliphate. Accordingly, the organic structure of the group will be exposed to threats of many schisms, especially in the absence of heavy-weight thinkers, as the case was in the days of the MB first crisis in the era of [Gamal Abdel Nasser](#). During the Nasser era, the Muslim Brotherhood had got several great thinkers that were able to reproduce the group's intellectual and cultural project to varying degrees, whether by re-establishing the ideas of Imam Hassan al-Banna, the group founder, or by presenting new ideas for its intellectual project.

However, the Brotherhood is currently experiencing more difficult and harsh conditions than during the days of Abdel Nasser, but unfortunately they lack such heavy-weight thinkers, amid a state of desertification in the currently influential leaders of thought and opinion, whether within the group or even outside it.

The impact of this central intellectual crisis that the group suffers from is not limited to the MB internal affairs only, but it went beyond that to directly affect the Egyptian revolution. With the intensification of the MB internal disagreement between some that adhere to the "reformist" approach sought through constitutional and legal struggle, despite repression and failure to achieve the group's goals as explained above, and others that seek use of other alternatives, regardless of the maturity or validity of those alternatives. As a result of this dispute, the revolutionary movement was completely

suspended in Egypt, and largely stumbled overseas, with efforts drained and wasted in the MB internal crisis.

The Muslim Brotherhood need to seek a real central idea within the group's convictions, that they can actually implement after harnessing the organization's energies and capabilities for it.

Available options

The options available to the Brotherhood to get out of its current ideological impasse are narrowing; however, they all need creative figures and leading ideas that can push forward the process of transformation and change within the MB:

First, the group should relinquish its political and [popular role](#) in order to ease the pressure of regimes on it. However, in this way it will lose much of its popularity, in addition to the disintegration of a large part of its grassroots.

Second, to engage in a legal fight with the regimes, and thus the group consumes its institutions and cadres in windmills battles with legal and constitutional articles and provisions that are closer to a labyrinth, which would lead to the depletion of its financial and human resources, which has already happened in Egypt and other countries.

Third, the group should take a leap forward, not backward, in the sense that it should rethink its comprehensive movement approach, a central approach in the group's thought. Here, I distinguish between the comprehensiveness of movement and the comprehensiveness of the idea, as I believe that Islam is a comprehensive idea that pervades all aspects of life. However, my talk here is focused on the kinetic side of the group's thought, not on the idea and methodology.

Specialization of movement

In my view, jumping forward means abandoning the comprehensiveness of the methodology in favor of the specialization of the movement, so that the group turns into several completely separate entities, not tactical, that perform specific societal roles, turning into groups for Islamic advocacy, academic universities for legal and civic education, political parties, union roles, jihadist movements, transnational enterprises, media stations, charities, and so on.

This specialization will distribute the pressure of the regional war on the group, not leaving all the group's activities in one basket, as it would be easy to hit all of them.

This specialization would allow the emergence of competencies, and would make the group open to all segments of society, without organizational sensitivities. At the same time, the MB can keep its literature and thought, and even its organization, active within countries where it does not suffer severe pressures.

The central option presented by the paper here suggests that the group divide in favor of itself, not against itself, and aims to spreading, not to rivalry and fight.

