

## *COMMENTARY*

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### **The Brothers and the Muslims**

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In 1928, a group of Islamist zealots established the Muslim Brotherhood movement in response to the challenges that were presented by new trends that rocked the cultural life in post-Second World War Egypt. In those days Egypt was under the British occupation and Britain pulled on the strings of power as it pleased, in an effort to influence the society in a secular, Western direction. As a result, new socio-political trends emerged in the Egyptian society: there were those that saw the Egyptian character as based on the Pharaonic heritage (a symbol of heresy in Islam) as the source of inspiration of modern Egypt; others saw the Arab nation (of Muslims, Christians, Jews and others, all of who speak Arabic) as the province of affiliation; and there were also those who saw the Greek (Alexander, Ptolemy) and the Roman (Cleopatra) past as the source of European identity of the Egyptian people. All of these trends were anti-Islamic, and the Brotherhood – headed by the founder of the movement, Hassan Al-Banna – saw the occupation by the Christian, wine-drinking and pork-eating British, as the source of all the cultural problems of the Land of the Nile, so they placed the struggle against the foreign occupation at the top of their priorities.

However, physical occupation is only part of the problem, because the culture of the foreign occupiers, principally the innovations that they brought into the Egyptian society regarding the status of women, their manner of dress and the question of their integration in the public arena, was perceived as a threat to the stability of the global moral values of Islam. Therefore, the Brotherhood saw the purification of Egyptian society from the influence of Western culture as a secondary task, which in their opinion is rotten corrupt, permissive and not suitable to Islamic society. The struggle over the culture placed the Brotherhood in conflict with the new socio-

political theories regarding the source of collective inspiration of the Egyptian people, which has been noted above. In answer to all of these trends, the Brotherhood claimed that "Islam is the Solution"; it is forbidden for a Muslim society to search among other cultures for solutions and arrangements that are the mere works of man.

The third task that the Brotherhood took upon themselves is to prove that indeed "Islam is the solution", by imposing Islamic Sharia in all areas of life, private, family, political, economic and diplomatic. This task, which aspires to impose the rules of Islam on the politics and the state, has created the concept of "political Islam" in contrast to other religions, which separate between religion and state. The slogan of the Brotherhood is "God is our objective, the Qur'an is our law, the prophet is our leader, jihad is our way and death in the name of Allah is our supreme aspiration". The symbol of the organization expresses this ideology well: the colour of green represents Paradise, two swords in the centre express the two basic avowals of Islam - there is no god but Allah, and Mohammad is his messenger and one word, which appears in the Qur'an just once, written above: *Wa-aidu*— "and prepare". This word is the beginning of the passage from the Qur'an (chapter 8, verse 59) which states that "and prepare" whatever you can of your strength and your harnessed horses in order to impose fear (=terror) in the hearts of Allah's enemy and your enemies". Zealots of Islam implement these ideological and practical components and of the Muslim Brotherhood movement at all times and in all places, according to prevailing conditions. This is why there are "daughter movements" of the Brotherhood almost in all places of the world, for example in Syria, in Jordan, in the Palestinian Authority (Hamas), in Tunisia (al-Nahda), in Israel (the two branches of the Islamic Movement), in Europe and in every other continent. States which are not Islamic and are ruled by a non-democratic regime (China and Russia) do not allow activity of political Islam at all. In the states where these organizations are active, there is usually a covert struggle at the red lines that the state delineates for their activities, because they see them as organizations whose goal is to undermine the stability of the regime and the ideological womb from which they were spawned are terrorist jihad organizations.

When the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt, King Fuad the First ruled, and in 1936 his son Farouk succeeded him, and ruled until the Officers' Revolution in July 1952. During the monarchy, the Brotherhood acted very freely, because the regime was incredibly ineffective. In December 1948 an activist from the movement assassinated the Prime Minister, Nukrashi, and two months later the movement's founder and leader—Hassan al-Banna— was murdered, apparently by agents of the regime.

The regime of the Officers was much more determined and decisive, and in general, conducted a stubborn battle against the Brotherhood because it saw them and their activities as an attempt to undermine its legitimacy and stability. In the year 1966 President Gamal Abdul Nasser sentenced the ideology of the movement, Sayyid Qutb, to be hung because in his writings, he claimed that

any regime that does not implement Sharia is like the heresy that preceded Islam, or idol worship, and therefore it is justified to conduct a jihad against it. The Egyptian constitution that was in force until it was suspended in February 2011 forbade the establishment of parties on a religious basis, which meant that the Muslim Brotherhood movement was blocked from participating in the official political process of the state as a legitimate member.

Because the Brotherhood was marginalized politically during the years of the Officers' Regime, they found their fertile field of activity within the economically and politically marginalized people, and turned their energies to charitable activities within the society of the tens of millions of Egyptians living in the poor, unplanned neighbourhoods at the margins of the cities, without running water, without sewage, without electricity, without telephone lines, without medical services or educational services, without work and without hope. It was the Brotherhood who supported these miserable people for years, out of a feeling of commitment, responsibility and mutual trust rooted in Islamic values, which does not differentiate between religion, society, politics, economics and culture. The regime allowed them to operate among the weak neighbourhoods, since it did not see acts of charity and kindness as a danger to the stability of the regime, and because the burden on the state of caring for the poor population was eased because of the Brotherhood's activities. The people held the Brotherhood in high regard, because for many years, the Brotherhood supported the poor among the people wholeheartedly; and because they are not corrupt and greedy like the "fat cats" who ruled the state and because they relate to the people with respect, unlike the regime, which humiliated them and oppressed them cruelly.

In the last years of the Mubarak regime, the state, meaning the president, allowed the Brotherhood to run for seats in parliament as independents, but not as representatives of a party that was forbidden by the constitution. The number of seats that they won never reflected the high regard with which the public regarded them, but it did reflect the amount of power that Mubarak agreed to allow them. In the elections for parliament in the year 2005, as a result of the pressure of Condoleezza Rice and President George W. Bush, Mubarak permitted the Brotherhood to "win" 88 seats, about one fifth of the seats in the "Peoples' Council", apparently in order to fend off the pressures of the western world to implement a democratic regime in Egypt, because Mubarak feared that a democratic regime would certainly result in a takeover of the state by the Brotherhood. The threat worked, and in the elections of 2010 the Brotherhood "won" only one seat, without the White house uttering a peep. At that time President Obama still preferred secular democracy over Islamic democracy.

Those who initiated the street riots that broke out in Egypt on the 25 January 2011, which some call the "Arab Spring", were throngs of Egyptian secular youth, some of whom were educated and were sick of the corrupt and cruel regime, which had become hereditary in nature. "The Muslim Brotherhood" did not take a meaningful part in the demonstrations, but rather sat on the

sidelines waiting to see which side would win. After the military forced Mubarak to resign on the 11th of February, the Brotherhood went out to al-Tahrir Square in order to take advantage of the opportunities that it had waited patiently for many years. The Qur'an (Chapter 2, Verse 152) states that "Allah is with the patient", and indeed Allah is with them: in the period that preceded the November 2011 elections to parliament, the Brotherhood activated *Operation Da'wah* (Islamic outreach), in order to translate their investment of years of community efforts into political support by the public. Spokesmen of political Islam, headed by Yosef al-Qaradawi, mobilized themselves in support the Brotherhood, and the result was that almost half of the seats of parliament were won by the "Party of Freedom and Justice", the representative of the Brotherhood, and a quarter more of the seats were won by the "Party of Light", the representative of the more conservative Salafi groups. This is how the decisive majority of the Egyptian parliament was suffused with the colour green, the colour of Islamic Paradise, in a truly democratic way.

It is important to note here that one of the most eloquent spokesmen of the Brotherhood, Sheikh Safwat Hijazi, appeared on the 1st of May this year, and gave a speech that was broadcasted live for thousands of people to see, as part of the Brotherhood's preparations for the elections. In his fiery discourse, Hijazi announced that the goal of the Brotherhood is the unity of all the Arab states into one giant Islamic Caliphate, under Mursi's flag, whose capital will be "not Mecca and not Medina but al-Quds [Jerusalem]". His words reflect very well the goal of the movement - to erase the heritage of colonialism, principally the borders marked by colonialist interests, which damaged both the Arab world and Islam; the elimination of Israel; and imposition of Islam on Judaism. It might be that this referred to a far-off hope and not immediate plans, but the cheers of support from the throats of the masses that thronged into the streets expressed the collective energy behind the idea, waiting for the suitable moment to turn it into reality. Besides this, it must be taken very seriously the hopes of others, because the state of Israel is exactly the realization of hopes ("If you will it, it is not a legend"), and enemies of Israel learn from Israel how to realize hopes as well.

With the winning of the presidency of Egypt last week, they have conquered another position on their way to the realization of their Islamic program, and the question of how they will continue from here disturbs the sleep of many in Israel and in the world.

### **The Challenges Confronting the Brotherhood**

**P**art of the problem is the fact that the organization is not monolithic; rather there are various differing trends because of cultural or personal factors. There are many among them whose culture is similar to that of the Salafi movement, while others have more modern members seeking partnership especially among the secular, modern groups. Most of the adults in the movement see the situation with the moderate eyes of an adult who have

accumulated experience and know that life is complex, while young people see the world in black and white. The raison d'être of the Muslim Brotherhood was to challenge the state's authority, and this has shaped its character accordingly. Thus, it is not spared of the crisis of leadership and the crisis between the generations that exists in most of the Arab societies.

Therefore, the main challenge that confronts the Brotherhood is to translate their political-religious hopes into a practical program, both in the internal Egyptian arena, as well as in the foreign arena: the Arab, Islamic and global.

### **The Internal Arena**

**T**he principal controversy that occupied the organization during the past year, especially in the period after the parliamentary elections, was whether to field a candidate for the presidency or not. During 2011, those who opposed fielding their own candidate overcame their opposition, and they even eliminated Dr. Abdul-Manam abu al-Fatouh, who dared to defy the decision and fielded himself as a candidate for the presidency as an independent. After the victory in the parliamentary elections, the voices of those in favour of fielding a candidate increased because they were encouraged by the results, but the movement lost most of its following because of their inconsistency on this issue. The movement fielded two people, Khairat al-Shater and his substitute, Muhammad Mursi, in case the first was disqualified, which was what indeed happened. Those who objected to running a candidate for presidency based their stand on a fear —that is fairly well based — that the president will not be able to solve the complex problems of Egypt, and that his failure will be interpreted, both in Egypt and outside it, as a failure of Islam. Seculars and liberals also feared being marginalized, which might exacerbate the internal split between modern sectors and traditional ones, between secular and religious groups. They also know that as the ruling party with a president from among its ranks, the movement will be accused of the expected failures, and thus will lose its support.

Another disagreement among the Brotherhood is the fate of the relation with the military, if it continues to hold onto power and imposes its agenda on the elected civil authorities (the parliament and the president), and on the legal system. Egypt does not have a valid constitution at present, so there is no clear division between the authorities of the various powers, and therefore differences of opinions between the military and the Brotherhood might deteriorate to a situation of open conflict, which the military would win in a bloodbath. Must the Brotherhood demand from the military to pass the baton of state administration to parliament, so that they can choose a permanent government, write a constitution and legislate laws that reflect their way, or must it accept the military as "a state above the state" as it was during Mubarak's time, just to avoid a frontal conflict from which there will only be losers?

Among the members of the Brotherhood there are disagreements regarding how much they should influence the culture in Egypt through legislation in the parliament: will they force the

high school girls, especially if they are not religious, to cover their heads? Will they permit the Salafi girls to come to school with their faces covered with a *niqab*, a practice from which the girls of the Brotherhood are exempted? Must the Brotherhood try to encourage the rehabilitation of tourism for the livelihood that it provides for millions of Egyptians, or must they limit it because of the negative influence of tourists upon the morals of youth of Egypt (both male and female)?

A question related to this is the question of whether to impose Egyptian law on the Sinai Peninsula, which has become a sanctuary for homeless jihadis from the world over. Only for the sake of comparison: Egypt does not impose Egyptian law and order upon the 350,000 Bedouins who live in Sinai, just as Israel does not impose the laws of planning and building on the Bedouin residents who live in the area between Beersheba, Arad and Dimona.

But the most severe questions are in the arena of security and internal governance: What would a regime ruled by the Brotherhood do about demonstrations against it when people will crowd into al-Tahrir Square? Will it allow demonstrations for democracy and the right of expression to be held, or will it scatter them with the claim that the parliament (with an Islamist majority) is the only legitimate arena for the clarification of political questions? Will the Brotherhood try to establish a coalition of powers with the liberal groups and with the remnants of the Mubarak regime, as an expression of the nationalist idea that all the Egyptians are brothers in the homeland, or perhaps they will prefer the Islamist view that sees secular people as the ideological enemy? Another important issue is that of the Copts: will the Brotherhood see the Christian Copts as brothers in the homeland in the civil and nationalist way or perhaps they will see them rather as those who have "strayed from the straight path" (Qur'an, Chapter 1, Verse 7), who eat pork and drink wine. The Copts have already reached this conclusion: ever since the Brotherhood won the elections to parliament a half year ago, tens of thousands of Copts have emigrated from Egypt.

The artists of Egypt - writers, poets, playwrights, film makers, photographers, graphic artists, and sculptors - and many intellectuals as well, fear mightily for their freedom of creativity and expression in Egypt under the rule of the Brotherhood. There are those among them who have already found themselves safer places than Egypt, where their creation will not be limited by the red lines of Islam.

### **The Foreign Arena**

**T**he peace agreement with Israel is a point of contention among the Brotherhood, because— on one hand— everyone sees Israel as an illegitimate entity and all agree that the peace treaty with Israel gives it a "life insurance policy", which is not acceptable. But on the other hand, everyone understands that it would not be acceptable to the international community to cancel a political agreement that was signed more than a generation ago and has

international backing, and this might show Egypt to be an outlaw state, and the Brotherhood as political novices.

Strangely, Egypt, under the leadership of the Brotherhood, might actually become involved in a severe conflict with Saudi Arabia. For the past fifteen years, Saudi Arabia has been exporting its Hanibali-Wahhabi messages to Egypt. And it is this ideology which represents the main ideological threat to the Brotherhood, especially if they will not succeed in extracting the millions of unemployed Egyptians from the despair into which they have recently sunk. The black money that the Salafis smuggled out from Saudi Arabia to Egypt was put to good use in funding their efforts to present themselves as an alternative to the Brotherhood in the unplanned neighbourhoods. The Saudi satellite channels served many Egyptian viewers as a source of influence as to their world view, which is totally different from the way of the Brotherhood. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is an important source of loans and grants to the Egyptian government, which makes it possible for Egypt to continue to operate without going bankrupt. But Saudi money doesn't come without strings attached, and the Brotherhood will need to weigh well how it will relate to the Wahhabi kingdom.

Another important subject that will compel the Brotherhood to take a stand against another Arab state is the ideological question, because there is some doubt whether it is possible to hope for good relations with its Iranian regime, or perhaps Egypt must distance itself from this Shia state, which might take advantage of the connection with Egypt in order to penetrate into Egyptian society, as it did in Lebanon and Syria. Will Egypt allow Iranian battle ships to pass through the Suez Canal? Will it allow Iran to stream weapons from Egypt into the Gaza Strip? Will Egypt participate in the Arab effort that Saudi Arabia is leading, the goal of which is to bring an end to the Iranian nuclear project? Only the Brotherhood knows the answers.

In the background is the question of whether Egypt, under the rule of the Brotherhood, will cooperate with regimes, for example the Jordanian, which sees their peers, the local Muslim Brotherhood movement, as an enemy of the regime?

What must be Egypt's position regarding the states of East Africa, mainly those which have a Muslim majority or a large Muslim community, and also, as of today, develop agricultural initiatives within their territory, decreasing the water that flows into the Nile? What should be the connection with the state of Hamas in Gaza, which, on one hand, proves that a political Islamic fighting organization can establish and conduct a state, however —on the other hand — has also divided the Palestinian Authority and eliminated the hope for one Palestinian state?

However, the most important question specifically relates to the United States, because Egypt receives significant quantities of food and monetary support from the US, and therefore it must take into account the interests of the same, who they also see as the source of Western evil. The peace agreement with Israel and the Iranian issue are also connected with the American interests.

These questions, which are connected with internal and foreign policy may cause divisions within the Muslim Brotherhood organization because they will force it to take difficult decisions about questions that they never had to address previously, and most of its decision makers haven't studied Political Science in a university. Decisions that lean too much in the "religious" direction will be subject to criticism by secular groups and the military, while decisions that lean too much in the "secular" direction will necessarily invite penetrating criticism from the Salafis, and thus the Brotherhood might find itself between the secular hammer and the Salafi anvil.

The Brotherhood's economic decisions as well in the macro-economic arena might be misguided, and the results might be fatal to the sputtering Egyptian economy.

### **Strong and Weak Points**

**T**he strength of the Brotherhood is mainly due to the fact that they are guided by the Islamic viewpoint, and that they have a guide in the person of "The Economic Guide" Dr. Mahmoud Badia', who has already announced that Muhammad Mursi is the president of all Egyptians including himself, and that he —the economic guide —subordinates himself to the decisions of the “president of everyone”. However, beyond the rhetorical value of such an announcement, Dr. Badia' knows well that there are many among the Brotherhood who do not take the decisions for granted, as has happened many times in the past. The sociology of religion affords a few explanations for the fact that a religious framework can suffer from ideological and personal divisions, and that religion, which is supposed to serve as a bond among the people, actually works sometimes more as a flame accelerator, igniting the disagreements between them into conflagrations. One of the reasons for this situation is the tendency of people who are guided by religious principles to become too meticulous, sometimes even exaggerated to the point of being overly concerned with minute details in the application of their principles, and when one person's meticulousness is different from that of another person's, a conflict arises which is sometimes irreparable, between them as well as their supporters. This phenomenon exists also among the Muslim Brotherhood, and their present situation, in which they must make decisions that involve compromising on ideological points; it will necessarily throw them into disagreements about much greater and more fateful matters than the minute details of religious practice.

From this honourable stage, I wish the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement success in bringing out the dilapidated Egyptian cart from the mire of problems in which it has sunk till the shaft of its wheels, despite that its four horses (the Islamists, the liberals, the military and the remnants of the Mubarak regime) are all pulling it in different directions. Fate has placed Egypt, with its tens of millions of citizens living under the poverty line, in the hands of people who have proven during decades of beneficial social activity that their intentions towards their people are good. The world waits to see if indeed "Islam is the solution" and what kind of future the



Brotherhood will provide to their brothers, the sons of Egypt: Will they look for an external enemy such as Israel in order to distract the attention of the unemployed and neglected and blame it for the problems, or perhaps they will really cope with Egypt's problems and utilize the peace agreement with Israel as a lever with which to develop Egypt, and to bring hope to its citizens.

Islamic tradition (according to the books of Sahih Muslim and Al-Bukhari) say that Mohammad, the prophet of Islam, told his community: "Each one of you is a shepherd, and each shepherd is responsible for his flock". The question that confronts the Muslim Brotherhood today is whether and how much they will act according to this guidance of their prophet.

### **Who are you, Muhammad Mursi?**

**M**uhammad Mursi was born in 1951 in the village of al-Adwa which is in the district of al-Sharqiyya to a hard-working rural family. He was the first of six children. He served as a soldier in the chemical warfare unit in the second Army in the years 1975-6. He is married to Naglah Mahmoud, and they have a daughter, four sons, and three grandsons. He excelled in his studies from a young age and earned a Master's degree in engineering from the University of Cairo and a doctorate in California in the United States, where he also taught. (This is another proof that western studies do not turn a Muslim to an adherent of Western culture.) Mursi joined the Muslim Brotherhood movement in 1979, and served as a member of its "board of instruction" and endured persecution and harassment by the Mubarak regime. Like many other leaders of the movement, he was tried and imprisoned a number of times, but nevertheless was a member of a small coalition, which led the movement. Between the years 2000 and 2005 he was the head of a group of independent members of parliament who were also members of the Brotherhood, despite the prohibition of their organization into one undivided party. In the year 2006 he was imprisoned and when he was subsequently freed, he was put under house arrest. In January 2011, immediately after the demonstrations broke out, he was sent again to prison, and when the prisons were broken into, and thousands of prisoners and detainees fled, he refused to leave solitary confinement and demanded from the Mubarak regime explanations for his imprisonment. In the year 2011, he became the head of the Party of Freedom and Justice that won the parliamentary elections. Before the elections for the presidency, he resigned his position in parliament, and Later when he won 51.7 per cent (compared to 48.3 per cent for Shafiq), he left the Muslim Brotherhood in order to be the "president of everyone".

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