Roots of Religious Extremism:
The Muslim Brotherhood and the Four Faces of Tyranny

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One way of getting to the "root causes" of terrorism and religious extremism in the Middle East is to examine the thinking of the mother organization of all groups and movements espousing violence and terrorism. Fortunately, the history of the Muslim Brothers is well researched. The revelations of the organization reflect a great deal of inconsistencies between the general and the specific: public pronouncements and specific documents, theory and practice, English and Arabic. However, serious scrutiny of their media, documents and public standing—particularly during their participation in the Egyptian parliament and the presidency of Egypt (2005-2013)—reflects a project of religious and tyrannical orientation.

The cornerstone of the Muslim Brothers' strategy for changing Egypt, and indeed the rest of the Islamic world, is to create a "new man" who is devoid of sinful intention, has a "good" consciousness, and is ready to serve the words of God. In order to achieve such an end the Brothers' project calls for a near monopoly over the means of socialization in Egypt, which includes schools, media, and of course mosques. The Brothers do not intend to change the status and role of government in national broadcasting, television, and press. Instead, they will consolidate and expand its reach by adding new channels in different languages like English, French, German, and Spanish to spread the word of God and respond to the false allegations against Islam.

The goal of creating and molding the "faithful man" leads the Brothers to systematically discriminate against minorities, particularly women and Copts. Not only they are excluded from the "Wilaiat Al Auzma," namely the high positions of the President and the Prime Minister, minorities are also subjected to social separation. For example, some Brothers require different laws for churches and mosques because they are different buildings of worship. The Brothers insist that female circumcision is a "blessing for women," and furthermore demand that women receive community approval for employment in positions of power, particularly as judges.

The Muslim Brothers have rejected allegations that they aim to establish a "theocratic" religious state. They argue that "theocratic politics" denotes the rule of religious figures—preachers, popes and the like— who have no official place in Islam. However, in practice, the Muslim Brothers tend to approach a theocratic state in a variety of ways. First, the Brothers aim to transform the development of legislation in the country so that it abides by the process of "fatwa," religious interpretation of the holy books. By depending on verses of the Quran and statements of the Hadith, politics becomes exclusive to the Muslim

domain and loses its essence as a purely human activity. Second, the Muslim Brothers insist on religious slogans and political symbols. By saying "Islam is the Solution," they actually negate the civic process of social and political bargaining because it cannot be restricted to a specific interpretation of the sacred books. Third, the party platform of the Muslim Brothers in 2007 put the notion of implementing a theocratic state much more bluntly than any time before. The program states that, "the Islamic State is by necessity a civic state." However, this definition of the civic state should be understood within the framework of the Brothers' other declarations: the Shari'a, not the constitution, should be the binding legislative source for all elected citizens. The 2007 platform also states:

> "The Legislative power should ask for the opinion of a commission of great religious authorities in the nation. This commission should be elected freely and directly from religious Ulama (Religious Scientists) and really and totally independent from the executive power technically, financially, and administratively."

Fourth, in case any doubt remains about the theocratic nature of the state, the Brothers platform of 2007 stipulates that "the state has essential religious functions", and

> "These religious functions are embodied in the head of the state or the prime minister according to the existing political system; therefore the head of state or the prime minister have duties that are in contradiction with the beliefs of the non Muslims. This does not allow for asking non Muslims to take such a mission according to the Islamic Shari'a which does not commit non Muslims of duties that may contradict their creed".

In practical terms this means the conscription of non-Muslims is unacceptable, which opens the door for implementing a "Gezia," or protection tax, on non-Muslims. Mustafa Mashhour, the ex-supreme guide of the Brothers, has called for such a tax in an interview.

If one complains about the heavy-handed Egyptian state and its notorious bureaucracy of 7 million employees, they should look at the proposed state of the Muslim Brothers. The Brothers first intend to develop the economy towards achieving "self-sufficiency" in vital sectors like food, medicine, armament, and general needs of citizens—including clothing, housing, and transportation. Second, they intend to increase governmental investment in the service sectors of health and education in order to raise the quality of service and increase employment. Third, the Brothers will begin "gigantic national projects" to develop Sinai, the New Valley (Western Desert), the Western Coast, and the Eastern Desert. They will make similarly significant endeavors to develop nuclear, space, aviation, and bio-engineering programs. Fourth, the Brothers will make an "integrated industrial base for 'strategic industries' (military industries)."

In foreign policy, the Muslim Brothers' statements separate domestic and external challenges to national security. The former concerns the backwardness of the country, as well as general social and economic weakness. None of the Brothers' official documents even mention terrorism. External challenges include the "Zionist entity" (Israel), American projects and plans for the Middle East, and deployment of foreign forces in the Gulf, the Red Sea, Iraq and Lebanon. All of these represent direct national security threats to Egypt and neighboring Islamic states (mainly Iran), as well as violations of Arab security.

Such an approach to national security is not new in the Middle East. In general, it aligns with the main traits of nationalist and radical regimes across the region in the past few decades; countries like Iran also continue to take a similar approach. However the Brothers are unique in how their religious characterization mixes with their national security goals, a posture that allows for high mobilization, incitement, terrorism, and definitely tyranny.

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