Victory or Death: The Brotherhood in the Trenches

By Samuel Tadros

MORE THAN TWO YEARS AGO THE WORLD WATCHED IN AWE AS young Egyptians took to the streets of their capital and brought down their dictator. Taken completely by surprise by the unfolding events, the Obama administration sought an explanation in historical precedents. According to the *New York Times*, President Obama asked his staff to study transitions in more than 50 countries around the world in order to understand and predict where Egypt and other countries in the Middle East might be heading. After extensive study, his staffers predicted "that Egypt is analogous to South Korea, the Philippines and Chile."[1] Months later, the administration was still confident in its assessment. While aware of the obstacles that were on the way during the desired transition to democracy, Benjamin Rhodes, a deputy national security advisor was adamant that, "The trajectory of change is in the right direction."[2]

A lot of water has since flowed under the bridges over the Nile and Potomac Rivers and the wave of optimism and escape from history soon met the test of reality and crumbled underneath. The promises and dreams of a revolution that would usher in a new era, when Islamism would no longer be the dominating phenomenon of the region and when fears of Islamists were merely irrational,[3] soon gave way to an Islamist tsunami that prevailed at every electoral contest held in the past two and a half years. Those confident in the Brotherhood's disinterest in government power[4] were soon mugged by the reality of their power grab. Those certain of the Brotherhood's

moderation and commitment to "standard reform stuff"[5] watched in bewilderment as the Brotherhood abandoned any perceived moderation and moved in a clearly authoritarian direction. Those hopeful that anti-Americanism would not continue being the rallying cry of the country's politicians were shocked to discover not only the endurance of that mode of politics, but more importantly its broadening appeal even to those considered natural allies of the United States.

Today, hardly anyone commenting on Egypt would claim that it is heading in the right direction. Instead of imagining a Chile or South Korea on the Nile, observers are throwing in the names of failed or failing states from Pakistan to Somalia. After what has been described as the worst transition in world history, the political crisis in Cairo is moving from bad to worse. Zero-sum politics as practiced by the ruling Muslim Brotherhood have left the non-Islamist opposition with little else but to call for the fall of the regime and ally themselves with a military institution that never felt comfortable with the idea of civilian control. A complete lack of trust of the other side is perhaps the only remaining glue that ties Egypt's political class together, Islamist and non-Islamist alike, besides their ever-more imaginative conspiracy theories. Dreams of democracy have turned into Islamist domination, which in turn has led to a military coup. Hopes of institutional reforms of the police have become Islamist attempts at controlling those institutions and subsequently the full return of the unreformed police, only this time with the acclaim of the masses. Brotherhood leaders have moved quickly from prisons to the Egyptian presidency and are now heading back to those same prisons. A cynical observer may rightly wonder whether anything has actually happened in Egypt in the past two and a half years.

At the center of Egypt's turmoil stands the Muslim Brotherhood. Its behavior in the past two and a half years has left some of its closest observers baffled. Enthusiasts of the Brotherhood expected it to approach the experience of governance well-prepared. As the largest opposition movement in the country, with an impressive organizational structure and hundreds of thousands of cadres from all walks of life, the organization was surely the best equipped to deal with the enormous challenges Egypt was facing, from a failing economy, to a deteriorating security situation, to the political crisis. Instead the Muslim Brotherhood showed complete incompetence and failed miserably in actual governance.

Furthermore, experts on the Muslim Brotherhood, who for years had put their trust in its promises of being an inclusive organization, had expected the Brotherhood to reach out to its opponents and attempt to build a national consensus to sail the turbulent waters into which Egypt was heading. Given that the Muslim Brotherhood did not win an outright majority in parliamentary elections and that its presidential candidate won a very tight victory, and given the historical fears that many in Egypt

and the West have held over Islamism and the Brotherhood specifically, it was natural to expect the Brotherhood to attempt to be as conciliatory as possible. If the Muslim Brotherhood was not already a moderate organization, as some argued, its very participation in the democratic process would moderate it or, in the worst circumstances, it would be forced to moderate due to the burdens of governance and a failing economy. Instead, observers have been taken aback by the Muslim Brotherhood's increasingly dictatorial manner, ignoring its critics and failing to reach out to other Egyptians, even alienating its traditional allies. Observers were treated to an unabashed power grab that left no room for the very pragmatism the Brotherhood was famous for.

Lastly, the Brotherhood's loss of popular support took many by surprise. While the hatreds and fears that opponents of the Islamist project held were hardly surprising, massive demonstrations in traditional strongholds of the Brotherhood in the Delta that turned violent and seemed driven by complete hatred of the Gama'a were another matter. While no elections have been held to determine the extent of the Brotherhood's loss of support, no observer could deny that the movement had lost its glamour in the eyes of many Egyptians who were not initially predisposed against it.

Those three questions—why the Brotherhood was completely incompetent at governance, why it abandoned its famed pragmatism and step-by-step approach and sought to take the reins of the state as fast as possible, and how and why it lost a significant part of its popular support—continue to be debated. To understand the Muslim Brotherhood's behavior in power, it is necessary to journey to the trenches in which it stationed itself.

Where is the Nahda?

BROTHERHOOD LEADERS ARE QUICK TO COMPLAIN THAT THEY WERE GIVEN A VERY bad hand upon assuming power. Their complaints are fair. The Egyptian economy's state of free fall can be traced to the January revolution. Egypt's foreign currency reserves had already plummeted and revenue from tourism had declined together with investor confidence in the country's economy and hence foreign investments. The Egyptian police had taken a heavy blow on the 28th of January 2011 and never recovered. Egypt's streets were in a state of lawlessness with citizens taking the law into their own hands. But if a bad hand was conferred upon the Brotherhood, the Gama'a did its best to make matters worse.

Even before its assumption of the presidency, the Brotherhood proclaimed to both

foreign observers and the Egyptian population that it had elaborate plans for governing Egypt. The word on everyone's lips was the Nahda Project and the man at the center of the spotlight was the Brotherhood's Deputy General Guide and strongman, Khairat al-Shater. The Muslim Brotherhood confirmed that, "this project and program is the result of a tremendous effort and hard work that lasted well over fifteen years"[6] and that it was supported by the "talents and experience of more than 80 years."[7] If implemented, the project would uplift Egypt in four years.[8]

Both the project and the man were raised to mythical status. In late 2011, a foreign observer sympathetic to the Brotherhood was shown what he described as "comprehensive, detailed plans for economic development and institutional reform."[9] The admiration was shared by the *New York Times*, which in a laudatory profile of Khairat al-Shater reported that, "he was grooming 500 future officials to form a government in waiting," as well as "overseeing the blueprint for the new Egypt," and "devising the economic policies the Brotherhood hopes will revive Egypt's moribund economy."[10] Even seasoned American politicians such as Senator Lindsey Graham were very impressed by the man.

But What Exactly Was
That Nahda Project?

WELL, NO ONE REALLY KNEW. SHATER PROCLAIMED IT STARTED WITH BUILDING A democratic system and strong political institutions. The Freedom and Justice Party's Women's Committee claimed women had a role in it. Ali Fateh al-Bab declared it aimed primarily at the elimination of poverty and unemployment and at a press conference said there was a "Nahda-based education campaign." Presidential candidate Morsi promised Sinai was the priority of the Nahda project and one week later, declared tourism as the priority of the project. Finally, Morsi said the project was based on empowering the people and placing their destinies in their own hands."[17]

In reality of course, there was nothing resembling a detailed plan. For all the hype that surrounded the Nahda project, it was, as a reporter commented early on, "more rhetoric than substance."[18] A very early indication of the complete absence of any coherent plan came from the mouth of the man most associated with it, Khairat al-Shater. Less than two months after his release from prison, Shater gave a speech to the Brotherhood's cadres in Alexandria. For the careful observer the speech contains an apparent contradiction. While arguably the most important articulation by a

Brotherhood leader as to what the Gama'a is and is not and its own understanding of itself and its history, the speech falls short in its main target, to which the last third of it is devoted: to explain what the Nahda project is. After going in circles about the importance of the Nahda, the greatness of the Nahda and the complexity of the Nahda, Shater admits that, "the project does not exist on the level of planning or formulation." He then adds, "this means that efforts are demanded of us to organize and think about what developing the Ummah's Nahda on the basis of Islam means."[19]

The contradiction is striking. Shater has obviously not only memorized the vision that Banna outlined but absorbed it as well. If the vision could be transformed into an actual plan, he was certainly the most suited to do so with his long organizational history as well as business experience. His failure and the larger Brotherhood failure lead one to question the possibility of such a transformation from vision to reality in the first place. For many years, observers of the Brotherhood assumed that, "the existence of ambiguities in the MB's positions on key issues was intentional and reflected a strategy of confusing the message."[20] Such observations were quite true in regards to those controversial issues on which the Brotherhood was careful to assuage Western fears, but behind that curtain of lies lay the bare truth of the emptiness of the vision itself.

Partly, that emptiness was the natural result of the lack of any actual conception of government. For all its claims to be the only political representation of Islam, the Brotherhood was in reality a quite modern phenomenon with very thin connections, if any, to Islamic history and system of government. Moreover, the historical experiences the Brotherhood insisted on proclaiming as its natural heritage, from the early Caliphs to Salah al-Din, shared a common thread that exposed the Brotherhood's deficiency in political thinking: they were all pre-modern. Whatever political tracts the Brotherhood produced, and these became scarcer to find as time passed, seemed unaware that a key break in human history had occurred and that pre-modern notions of governance had little relevance to how the modern state operated.

But the problem was not only a theoretical one. For all its long history, the Muslim Brotherhood lacked any experience in actual governance. They were, as Edmund Burke had described those similar to them 200 years earlier, "men who never have seen the state as much as in a picture."[21] True, its members had run and won seats in parliament and for a while controlled professional syndicates; they had run charity campaigns and built an impressive electoral machine. But that hardly offered any preparation for running a massive state apparatus such as Egypt. In fact, the Brotherhood's long history in opposition seems to have had a reverse effect on its understanding of governance. Being accustomed to opposing the state, the Brotherhood fell victim to its own rhetoric and accusations against the Egyptian regime. It reduced the question of governance to that of corruption, with good governance becoming

little more than lack of corruption. Such notions were hardly helpful when it suddenly became responsible for solving tremendous economic problems. As Burke once reflected, "the science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*."[22]

To make matters worse, the Brotherhood's rise to power came all of a sudden, shocking not only outside observers but the Brotherhood itself. While the Brotherhood had maintained its commitment to a revolutionary vision and a goal of a complete transformation of society, Banna's six-stage process which the Gama'a followed had made the movement extremely conservative in approach. Revolutionary goals combined with conservative means had turned the movement itself into a contradiction. The Gama'a dreamed and truly believed it would transform not only Egypt, but the whole Muslim world and achieve Banna's eminence among nations, yet its very approach to politics under Mubarak's regime was a cautious one, working within the framework of what was allowed. At no point prior to the 25th of January, 2011 did the Brotherhood believe that the Egyptian regime was about to fall, and hence at no point did it actually explore what a post-Mubarak Egypt would look like. It is no surprise then that the Brotherhood would describe the revolution as the work of God[23]—who else could be responsible for taking them from prison cells to presidential palaces?

A State of Mediocrity

THE BROTHERHOOD'S PROBLEMS HOWEVER WERE NOT LIMITED TO THEORETICAL OR practical experiences. More profound was the quality of its cadres or more precisely the lack thereof. At the center of that problem was the Brotherhood's greatest asset, its membership structure.

The membership structure of the Muslim Brotherhood is not a new invention. Richard Mitchell, in his detailed account of the movement's founding,[24] writes that the movement's 3rd General Conference in 1935 divided membership into four levels: assistant, related, active and finally a select category of struggler. He gives the year 1943 for the founding of the *usra* (family) structure. Clearly visible by that time were the geographical divisions of families, branches, districts, and administrative offices. Also stressed from the founding moment of the Gama'a was the member's expected commitment to obedience, confidence in leadership, and after a period of testing giving the *baya* (oath of allegiance).[25] The testing process, the atmosphere of secrecy, and the oath-giving ceremony were all intended to ensure full membership

loyalty and absolute commitment not only to the cause, but perhaps more importantly to the leadership.

The basic structure of the Muslim Brotherhood underwent little change throughout its eighty-year history. If anything, the structure grew more complex. Eric Trager in a detailed look at the movement's organizational structure identifies five stages of membership: lover, supporter, affiliate, organizer, and finally working brother. He writes, "becoming a full-fledged Muslim Brother is a five- to eight-year process, during which aspiring members are closely watched for their loyalty to the cause and are indoctrinated in the Brotherhood's curriculum."[26]

As Khairat al-Shater explains, the structure of the Gama'a is no coincidence. He attributes Banna's methodology and the structure he invented to the Prophet himself. He quotes the Caliph Omar as saying, "there is no religion without a Gama'a and no Gama'a without an Imam, and no Imam without obedience," and then explains, "this means officials, structure and groups; a particular structure, not just a matter of circumstances. This structure also needs to be obeyed and committed to." He stresses the point further by arguing that, "not any gathering is a Gama'a, even if it was a group of good people who are committed to Islam; they are not a Gama'a as such without their structures and officials, no system, commitment, and obedience."

Why this stress on a structure and obedience? Shater quotes Banna's warning "of the pious unorganized man or he who always breaks ranks." He then adds, "one of the fundamental prerequisites to develop the Brother within the Gama'a is to realize that you are on the right path and that you must not be on a path other than this one." Banna's warning and Shater's addition shed light on the rationale behind the complex structure, the extensive examination and the emphasis on obedience. The Brotherhood is continuously challenged and has been since its inception not only by alternative ideologies but more profoundly by alternative currents within Islamism. At certain moments the challenge was in the form of Jihadi organizations luring young members; recently Salafism has become the major competitor. In order to keep the organization intact throughout the years and maintain membership cohesion, uniformity was enforced.

Any collective uniformity enforced on a body of people does not come however without a major flaw. Stressing uniformity limits innovation, enforcing obedience diminishes free thinking, and upholding discipline and rigid structures destroys the possibility of self-reflection, criticism and reform. When Abdel Moneim Aboul Fetouh decided to run for President, disobeying the Brotherhood's Guidance Council, his decision was not merely described as a betrayal. As Mohamed Badei, the current General Guide, put it, he "violated his covenant with God."[27]

The Brotherhood's former Deputy General Guide, Mohamed Habib, explained to

Eric Trager the advancement criteria: "it is about your knowledge, thinking, commitment to duties, and how much ability you have to execute the orders given to you, like participating in demonstrations or conferences." Nowhere is it stressed that a member can challenge his superiors, reflect on the movement's weaknesses and innovate according to circumstances. A movement started by a young revolutionary does not produce today anything resembling its founder. It produces mediocre cadres of the Erian and Katatny mold, not towering figures of the Banna or Qutb variant.

The Brotherhood's organizational structure and rigid obedience served it well as an opposition organization often attacked by the regime's security forces. It made it, as Eric Trager stated, unbreakable. Other opposition parties were infiltrated and weakened by Mubarak's state security; the Brotherhood on the other hand not only survived but grew stronger. What proved a strong point in opposition was the reverse in governance. The Brotherhood lacked innovate members capable of learning from their mistakes and correcting them. It lacked a young pool of recruits that could challenge their elders and push them to adapt to changing circumstances. It lacked a leadership that could be held accountable by a vibrant base.

Lastly, the Brotherhood's brief experience in government and in the spotlight showed another serious flaw in the group's competence. Given the chance to finally reach power after many years in opposition and lacking qualified cadres, the Brotherhood's top leaders often depended on young assistants whose only qualifications seemed to be their ability to speak English and their family connections. Given the organizational structure of the movement, an intentional and unbreakable sense of brotherhood is created amongst its members. Those bonds are not merely organizational but often grow into both social bonds via marriage and finances as well. Sons and daughters of top leaders are often married to each other, creating a new ruling class within the movement who is often educated abroad or in foreign language schools, detached from the movement's base and lacking any qualifications besides a powerful last name.

The Conspiracy

"IT WAS NATURAL THAT THE CALL OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, THE CALL TO WHAT is right, strength and freedom, would be faced with all the evil powers, domestic and foreign."[28] Thus wrote the Muslim Brotherhood General Guide, Mohamed Badei, in his weekly letter last March. Those domestic evil powers were identified a couple of

lines later as "those who changed their lives, traditions, and ideas in order to be in line with those of rapist colonialists." "The West is playing in the region," Khairat al-Shater had warned two years earlier.[29] Such conspiratorial language is a constant feature of the Brotherhood's Arabic website, its official statements and its messages to members. Sometimes the conspiracy is directed against Egypt or its glorious revolution, at other times it is against Islam. The parties behind such conspiracies range from the counter-revolution, to a corrupt media, remnants of the old regime, the country's elite, foreign agents and enemies of the revolution and gangs.[30]

The Muslim Brotherhood's insistence on blaming all of its failures in governance and its opponents' criticisms on a grand conspiracy against the Brotherhood, the Islamic project in general or both seems confusing to scholars. For a while those enchanted with Turkey were willing to follow the Brotherhood's lead in attributing actions to a deep state in Egypt. The Supreme Court's decision to dissolve parliament due to the unconstitutionality of the election law—which every political actor in Egypt knew was legally sound, based on precedent, and expected—continues to provide Islamists and those echoing their arguments the necessary ammunition.[31] Nevertheless with the mounting failures of the Brotherhood, their blaming everything on a grand conspiracy has become less convincing.

The belief in the existence of a grand conspiracy against the Brotherhood is hardly a new phenomenon amongst its members. Those who have delved into the Brotherhood's history can easily recognize the victimization narrative that the autobiographies and testimonies of the early generations of Brotherhood members and leaders have presented. The *mihna* (ordeal) is the word often used to describe the Brotherhood's suffering at the hands of Nasser after 1954, thought it can also be understood more broadly as describing the various crackdowns the Brotherhood has endured from the time of Nukrashi Pasha until Mubarak. 1954 certainly looms large in the minds of the Brotherhood, as does the Algeria scenario.

The narrative has had devastating effects on the Brotherhood's behavior. While, as Khalil al-Anani argues, this narrative "helped the MB to accommodate regimes' repression and avoid any internal substantive fissures or schism over the past decades,"[32] it has also had its downside. The need to protect the organization and its members from imagined conspiracies and the necessity of working under the threat of real repression by the regime has meant an emphasis on secrecy. Such secrecy was helpful as an opposition group but hurt the Brotherhood in power, as it allowed its adversaries to rightly portray it as a secret organization with clandestine operations. It also limited the Brotherhood's ability to open up to the rest of society and incorporate some of the traditional elements of Egyptian politics into its governing structure. Fearing infiltration and not trusting anyone but its members, the Brotherhood was forced to rely

only on its cadres, limiting its recruitment options and any possible broader appeal.

Some attribute the continuation and domination of the conspiracy discourse to the benefits it provides to the Brotherhood leadership. Khalil al-Anani states that it "significantly benefits the MB and plays in favor of its conservative leadership." The Brotherhood leadership has certainly benefited from it as it has proven effective in maintaining group loyalty and cohesion in the face of brutal assaults, as well as limiting any questioning of the leadership's behavior. However, the relationship between Islamism as an ideology and the conspiracy theory is not a matter of coincidence or of convenience. While blaming a grand conspiracy for their failures might be helpful for the leadership of the Brotherhood in maintaining the base's support and averting criticism, the conspiracy theory is at the heart of the Islamists' worldview and inseparable from the very premises and foundations of Islamism as an ideology.

Islamism was born as an attempt to resolve the crisis that the Muslim world faced in the decline of Islam both in the form of the decay of Islamic rituals, symbols and practices in the daily lives of Muslims, and in the worldly fortunes of Islamic states. The Muslim world is viewed as subject to two forms of assault: one in the form of European colonialism and the direct occupation of Muslim land, and the other in the form of an invasion of Western practices, ideologies and life styles. This dual invasion creates the crisis that Islamism aims to resolve with the simple solution being a return to an earlier period of time when the Islamic world was not in decline but in ascendance by returning Islam to its all-encompassing meaning. Khairat al-Shater defines the Brotherhood's mission as "to empower God's religion on earth, to organize our life and the lives of people on the basis of Islam, to establish the Nahda of the Umma on the basis of Islam."[33]

The most important question of course is how the state of Islam reached such a miserable condition as to allow the occupation of Muslim lands and their infiltration by what are inferior Western practices. While some mistakes are acknowledged at the hands of Muslims, even those mistakes are often tied to a conspiracy against Islam. The existence of a conspiracy that aims to subvert Islam and deny it its rightful place in the world is the only way to explain such conditions. Those familiar with Islamic history can find earlier versions of such arguments in attempts by later generations of Muslims to deal with the traumatizing episode of *Al Fitna Al Kubra* and the fights among the companions and family of Prophet Mohamed in the form of the invented character of Abdullah Ibn Saba and his role as a Jew in dividing Islam and creating Shiism.

Banna's warnings of the animosity the Brotherhood would face and its future plight ring true today to its members and leadership just as they did to generations before them. As Shater explains, the media misrepresentation of the Brotherhood is merely

a continuation of the assault on the Brotherhood, only this time not in the form of security attacks and oppressive procedures, but in the form of media distortion.[34]

Now is the Time

CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND THEIR AFFECT ON BEHAVIOR, NO MATTER HOW PREVALENT and deeply rooted in the mindset of the Brotherhood, are not enough to explain the movement's behavior. In fact, such belief and obsession in the amalgam of many forces against the movement and its project should have driven the movement in the exact opposite direction. Under threat of a grand coalition against it by a combination of internal and external enemies, the Brotherhood should have followed a policy of reaching out to some of its adversaries and accommodating their concerns in order to divide its enemies. No rational entity which truly believes, and there is no doubt that the Brotherhood believes, in the existence of a conspiracy against it, would seek to take all those enemies at once. The Brotherhood's famed pragmatism, which some misunderstood as moderation, was born of such need. In fact, the Brotherhood's behavior in the first year after the 25th of January was driven by precisely such a policy of never being alone and making sure that a union between its historical enemies did not take place.[35]

The effect of the belief in conspiracy theories is mitigated and balanced by another consideration that has driven the Brotherhood to abandon all caution and push for a quick power grab. That consideration is the Brotherhood's reading of the historical moment that the 25th of January revolution has created. When Mohamed Morsi won Egypt's presidency, the feeling of euphoria and vindication was best exemplified by Khaled Abdel Kader Ouda, who after 58 years finally accepted condolences for the death of his father, Abdel Kader Ouda, whom Nasser killed.[36] In his above-mentioned speech, Khairat al-Shater repeats this notion no less than seven times and emphasizes its importance. He calls it a "major transformation," "historical moment," "new stage of freedom," "major historical stage," and "major fundamental transformative stage." This moment provides the Brotherhood with a golden opportunity and "it is imperative that we, take advantage of this revolution which took place in Egypt and continues in the countries surrounding us" and "we must take advantage of this opportunity to develop our Gama'a and push it to the furthest level possible to contribute to Egypt's salvation." The repeated stress deserves some explanation.

Khalil al-Anani is on the mark when he notes that, "a quick comparison between

Brotherhood rhetoric and conduct before and after the revolution reveals that oppression, not inclusion, was the motivation for developing the group's intellectual discourse and maturity and rationality of its political conduct."[37] The Brotherhood's behavior under the Mubarak regime and its surrender of power after losing professional syndicates elections occurred because it could not do otherwise, and not because it had embraced democracy, as some have argued.[38] Shater himself singled out that very oppression and its demise when he explained what the historical stage was: "Mubarak and a large part of his regime are gone, and we hope that what remains of the regime is removed and God willing never returns. The Ummah has embarked on a new stage of freedom unknown for long times, having tied the hands of the security institution to a great extent up until now." He adds, "The obstacle has now been removed."

According to Shater, the Muslim Brotherhood was preparing for that stage in the early 90s and some ideas were being formulated before they were abruptly stopped by the beginning of an extensive crackdown that Mubarak unleashed. Shater attributes Mubarak's change of policy towards the Brotherhood, from toleration to crackdown, to the effect of events in Algeria on him. Those initial plans are of course what became known as the Salsabil case, which exposed Brotherhood plans to take control of Egypt. Israel Elad Altman examined those documents and explained[39] that they identified "influential institutions" such as the military and the police that should be neutralized as well as used once in power as they "would constitute an important reinforcement of its effectiveness in bringing about change." He stresses that "The international threat, emanating from the hostile forces—the U.S. and the West—should according to the document be confronted in the first stage by a policy of coexistence, achieved by persuading those forces that it is in their interest to work with the forces that really represent the peoples of the region, and that the MB is a stable and disciplined force."

The Salsabil case with its initial plans and ideas formed the blueprint of a Brotherhood ready to embark on a new stage. For Shater and his colleagues, that stage was delayed for 20 years, but it had finally arrived, and that stage was Islamic government. Banna, according to Shater, "went back to the method of the Prophet and studied his jurisprudence or his way of instituting religion, and thus extracted his way, explained it and outlined it to us in what is known as the method of the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood's method is that of the Prophet." Banna outlined six stages in order to achieve the movement's overall mission: the Muslim individual, the Muslim family, the Muslim society, the Islamic government, the global Islamic state and reaching the status of Ustathiya (eminence among nations).

Shater rhetorically asks at which stage the Brotherhood is along and answers, "we

are preparing for the stage of Islamic government after this because it is what follows the stage of society." "Now, the obstacles have been removed, and so we return to the origin; to our natural objective; to our main mission," he emphasizes. This means that the Brotherhood's prior caution and pragmatism is abandoned and a drive for complete domination is sought, as a new stage means a new strategy. The reasons are many; historical moments do not come that often, after all, and once missed the Brotherhood may not get such an opportunity again. There is also a human element at play. For the Brotherhood's rank and file, not only has the movement been denied the possibility of achieving its objectives, but they themselves have been denied many worldly successes. Members were often detained and sometimes imprisoned for long sentences. They were often denied promotions due to security concerns and sometimes had their money and businesses confiscated. Finally the oppressor had fallen, and it was only human that they would be extremely hungry for power after generations of drought.

More important was the human factor affecting the top echelons. For people like Khairat al-Shater and Mahmoud Ezzat, who had devoted more than 30 years of their lives to the movement, paid a heavy price for that commitment, and became old men along the road, the dream was finally within reach. They, and not their sons or grandsons would be the ones who transformed the Brotherhood and put it on the road to Ustathiya. They would be the ones who would make the dreams of Banna and hundreds of thousands after him into a reality. Who could ever resist such a temptation?

A Gama'a is Not a Party

"We are not a political party although politics in accordance with Islam is deeply rooted in our ideas; and we are not a welfare organization nor a sports team, although welfare and sports are part of our method; we are not any of these because these are all forms, techniques or means designed for specific objectives and for a limited period of time. We are, however, an idea and a creed, a system and a syllabus, which is why we are not bounded by a place or a group of people and can never be until the Day of Judgment, because we are the system of Allah and the way of His Prophet ..., which is why we are a mercy for mankind."[40]

THOSE EXPECTING THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD TO GOVERN IN AN INCLUSIVE MANNER and to be affected by public opinion were basing their expectations on the notion that the very inclusion of the Brotherhood was supposed to make its rhetoric and

action more rational and moderate.[41] Behind such notions was a dangerous premise: that the Muslim Brotherhood was a political party and hence that it would react to questions of governance and declining popularity as any rational politician would, by attempting to move to the center.[42] As some reasoned, the problems of governance would eclipse ideology and force moderation.

What is most striking of such a premise is its adoption and perseverance despite the Brotherhood's tireless attempts to proclaim that it was not a political party and would not act as such. Khairat al-Shater states quite explicitly, "The primary instrument for implementing this project is the Gama'a, not the Party or any other means."[43] Why, might one ask? Because, "the party, as an instrument, means, or vessel, is not born of the Islamic idea, rather, it is one of the various products of Western civilization." And why should that matter? Because, "It is an instrument or a vessel for the deliberation of power in the political space, an instrument for engaging in the conflict for the sake of obtaining power. The Gama'a, on the other hand, is not an instrument of conflict or competition. The Gama'a is an instrument of integration and rallying of the entire Ummah in order to build its Nahda on the basis of Islam." Could the Brotherhood at a certain moment become a party not a Gama'a? No, Shater insists: "it would not be possible if someone says 'the Gama'a should become a party,' or 'forget about the society and let's establish a party or two or three,' because the party is a vessel born of the Western idea which has a particular nature within particular limitations; it is designed and conceived, as manifested by everything from its philosophy to its methods, for the political process which is only one part of the greater Nahda project in politics, economy, society, education, morals, values, behavior, children, women, the elderly, the young. Every aspect of life is to be Islamized and the primary instrument for this is the Gama'a." But why then did the Muslim Brotherhood establish a political party? Does this not show a sign of a change in thought? No, "The Gama'a may establish a party, an association, schools, and many other means for some of the secondary tasks; but the Gama'a is to remain the instrument which establishes an entire life for the Ummah on the basis of Islamic reference or the basis of the Islamic method."

Shater's articulation leaves little doubt as to what the Brotherhood is and what it is not. Shater's rejection of political parties is not merely because they are Western, but more importantly because they are limited to politics and competition. The Brotherhood however is much wider; its scope is not merely politics, but life itself, which it seeks to Islamize. As Shater states, "everywhere, the Ikhwan are working to restore Islam in its all-encompassing conception to the lives of people, and they believe that this will only come about through the strong Gama'a." The strong conviction that it is only through a Gama'a that the mission could be achieved is also not accidental.

"The primary instrument for implementing this project is the Gama'a, because who-ever studies the jurisprudence of instituting religion as established by our master the prophet will find that the instrument which he used was the Gama'a." The attribu-tion of not only the overall mission, but the very means to achieve it to the Prophet is of vital importance to the Brotherhood. It links it not only to Islam's history and political experience but to the very founding of that religion by the Prophet and God's guidance, making it not a mere political organization within the world of Islam, but the only political manifestation of that religion. It immunizes the Brotherhood's method from criticism by other Islamists and convinces its members that no matter what obstacles they face, they are on the right path. As Shater emphasizes, "One of the fundamental prerequisites to develop the Brother within the Gama'a is to realize that you are on the right path and that you must not be on a path other than this one." It is hence no surprise that the Brotherhood's methods and not only its mis-sion would be declared as constants that are not up to discussion or change.

But as Shater explains, "not any existing gathering is a Gama'a , even if it were a group of good people who are committed to Islam." "The Gama'a has two primary prerequisites that must be on hand." The first prerequisite pertains to the quality of its members; "every individual in the Gama'a should be an Islam, a walking Quran." The second prerequisite is a strong organizational structure: "this means officials, structures and groups; a particular structure, not just a matter of circumstance. This structure also needs to be obeyed and committed to." Those two prerequisites are what distinguish the Brotherhood from any gathering of people. That is what gives it its "Shar'i definition."

Hence lay the core problem in the Brotherhood's governance. The Brotherhood could not make the transformation from an opposition movement into a governing party. The Brotherhood closed its doors to hundreds of thousands of Egyptians who would have been willing to serve the new regime and join its ranks. It could not open its ranks to new members without passing them through its complex and long mem-bership process in order to test their loyalty and commitment to the ideology. It alien-ated the traditional family networks that had shaped local politics in Egypt for generations and which had served every Egyptian regime, and excluded them from governance, turning them into sworn enemies of the Brotherhood dedicated to its de-mise. If many Egyptians grew to view the Brotherhood as a cult, the Brotherhood cer-tainly did its best to strengthen that sentiment.

Two Future Paths

THE BROTHERHOOD'S TRIUMPHANT MOMENT LASTED MUCH SHORTER THAN IT envisioned. One year after its victorious entry into Egypt's presidential palace and its assumption of the commanding heights of the state, it finds itself back in prison cells, and in public squares demonstrating the injustice that has befallen it, with the further threat of even the latter being denied to it. A new government has been formed and not a single Islamist serves among its ministers. To make matters worse, while Egypt's generals were ultimately responsible for ending the Brotherhood's dream, the moment did not arrive without a significant portion of the population cheering along. As Brotherhood members get rounded up, leaders thrown into prisons without charges, Islamist channels closed and Brotherhood demonstrations attacked, the majority of the population is quite indifferent with many gloating and asking for more. The Brotherhood's future participation in politics remains an open question with calls for banning Brotherhood members from running being floated.

Today the Brotherhood is still dealing with daily developments and attempting to outline a strategy to deal with the assault. In the face of unfolding events, it proclaims its confidence that President Morsi will soon be reinstated by the power of the people as Chavez had been in 2002. Such bravado should not blind one however to the reality of the situation and the actual balance of forces on the ground. No matter how good a fight the Brotherhood puts, it has lost this battle to its enemy, the military. In due time, the occupation with daily developments will give way to long-term considerations and the Brotherhood will look back at its one year in power, start the process of self-reflection, and attempt to find answers for essential questions. What did we do wrong? Could we have avoided this scenario? How can we reach power once again and maintain it?

Occupying the horizon ahead of the Brotherhood will lay two paths. The first is that of Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party. Learning from their mistake, the Brotherhood as a whole or some significant portion of it may realize that they need to change their ways, give up their organizational structure, open up to society, moderate their discourse and develop actual governance plans. An Erdogan may rise from the ranks of the second-tier leadership of the Gama'a or in the person of a previous leader of the Brotherhood who was kicked out of its ranks, such as Abdel Moneim Aboul Fetouh, with the ability to capture the Brotherhood's constituency and expand it.

But another path also dominates the horizon: that of Said Qutb. The characterization

of the events that led to Morsi's ouster as part of a conspiracy against Islam or the Islamist project, and which involves the military, seculars and the West, may lead to positions hardening instead of softening. It can also lead to a questioning of the whole methodology of the Gama'a. The ballot box will be questioned as the preferable route and the bullet will provide a tempting alternative. "We told you so," is the message Jihadis are already screaming at the Brotherhood and it is sounding more persuasive than ever. Abandon the roads of democracy and of man and return to the road of Jihad and of God.

Which path will the Brotherhood take? Erdogan or Qutb? The question remains unanswered, but the Brotherhood will not approach it in a vacuum. Two issues will shape how the Brotherhood answers the questions of today as it aims to come up with the answers of tomorrow: what room its enemies will allow it to play in the country's political sphere and how its own historical experience will shape how it views things. Rationality, after all, is not value free.

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