



The Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring:

Tactics, Challenges and Future Scenarios

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Policy Brief

Abstract

The brief analyses the situation of Muslim Brotherhood (MB)-inspired entities throughout the Arab world two years after the beginning of the Arab Spring. In keeping with the flexibility and political opportunism that has characterised the group since its early days, MB-inspired entities have adopted different positions according to the circumstances. In Tunisia and Egypt, where for the first time in history they have gained power through elections, MB entities are trying to gradually solidify their positions and advance their agendas while avoiding dramatic moves that could undermine their still weak hold on power. In Arab countries where authoritarian regimes still rule, MB entities are adopting positions ranging from participation in government to military confrontation. The brief concludes by analysing potential concerns for Western policymakers and future scenarios.

Keywords Muslim Brotherhood – Gradualism – Authoritarianism – Opposition – Western concerns

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Introduction

The Muslim Brotherhood

Founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is the oldest and most influential modern Islamist movement. As per its motto 'Islam is the solution', the MB sees Islam as an all-embracing system governing all aspects of private and public life that, once implemented, constitutes the antidote to all the social, moral, economic and political ills plaguing Muslim societies.¹ Even though it does not completely eschew the use of violence for political goals, the MB aims to achieve its goal of establishing a purely Islamic system of government as a natural consequence of the peaceful, bottom-up Islamisation of the majority of the population.

In order to accomplish this goal, it has long established a capillary structure of mosques, professional organisations, charities, social services and publications. Politics is just one part of what the MB does, and the group sees it as a way to reach its greater goal of changing society rather than as an end in itself. The MB is, in essence, much more than a political force. It is a movement that seeks to shape all aspects of an individual's and society's life according to its interpretation of Islam.

The global Muslim Brotherhood

From Egypt, the ideas and methods of the MB soon spread to other countries in the Arab and Muslim world. Today, organisations that, albeit in very different ways and with varying degrees of intensity, trace their origins to the MB exist in almost all Muslim-majority countries and in most countries where a Muslim community exists. In each country the movement has taken different forms, adapting its tactics to local political conditions.

Attempts to form a structured organisation overseeing these MB entities worldwide have repeatedly failed.² Entities belonging to the 'global Muslim Brotherhood' work according to a common vision but with complete operational independence. There are consultations and constant communication and extensive personal and financial ties among their leaders, but each is free to pursue its goals as it deems appropriate.



¹ R. P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 209–83.

² For more on the international structure of the Brotherhood, see A. Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition* (London, Saqi, 2010), 96–132; and L. Vidino, 'The Global Muslim Brotherhood: Myth or Reality?', Homeland Security Policy Institute, Issue Brief 10, 11 March (2011).

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Therefore, the global Muslim Brotherhood is most properly identified not as a group or even a loose federation but simply as an ideological movement, in which different branches choose their own tactics to achieve their short-term goals in complete independence. What binds them together is a deep belief in Islam as a comprehensive way of life that, in the long term, they hope to turn into a political system using different methods in different times and places.

This brief will at times refer to them generically as “MB entities,” but it cannot be overstated that they constitute neither a centrally controlled nor a monolithic bloc. Their views on issues such as democracy, the use of violence and religious rights differ significantly, not only from one MB entity to another, but also among the various wings of each MB entity.

The Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring

The turmoil of the Arab Spring took the MB, like all other political forces, by surprise. Yet, in every Arab country, the local MB entity has been able to quickly adapt to the circumstances, tailoring its moves to the fast-paced developments on the ground. This report aims to analyse how MB organisations in various Arab countries have done so, to separately analyse cases in which the MB 1) is in power, 2) is participating in government from a minority position and 3) is in opposition. It also outlines various issues of concern to Western policymakers and potential future scenarios.

The Muslim Brotherhood in power

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, MB entities have achieved power by entering into coalition governments as senior partners in Egypt and Tunisia. In Egypt the MB has participated in the country’s first truly free elections through the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which the MB established in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. While officially independent, the FJP is a direct emanation of the Egyptian MB. In Tunisia it did so as al Nahda, the political formation that has represented the MB philosophy in the country since the 1980s.



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In both countries the strategy has been twofold:

1. avoiding confrontation with the military: Finding a *modus vivendi* with the army has been particularly challenging in Egypt, where the military has enormous power. However the MB seems to have established a relatively effective power-sharing mechanism with it, partially enshrined in the new constitution. In a nutshell, the MB does not encroach on the army's huge financial interests, and the army lets the MB govern. However there are also indications that the MB is seeking to slowly replace the old military leadership with elements that, for personal or ideological reasons, are more sympathetic to the movement;³
2. obtaining power through the ballot: In Tunisia, the al Nahda Party won 37% of the votes in the October 2011 Constituent Assembly elections, making it the largest party by a wide margin. Al Nahda led a coalition government until February 2013, when the turmoil following the assassination of opposition leader Chokri Belaid caused its collapse.⁴ In Egypt, the FJP, decided to run for a number of seats that progressively grew as the group reassessed its popularity and its leeway with the military.⁵ The group has since achieved three straight electoral victories: a majority, together with allies in the Democratic Alliance for Egypt and the Salafists, in the November 2011–January 2012 parliamentary elections; the victory of its candidate, Mohammed Mursi, in the May 2012 presidential elections; and the approval of the document it had drafted in the December 2012 constitutional referendum. There is little question that one of the main reasons, aside from its professed genuine belief in democracy, why the MB has embraced elections is that it has realised it wins them.⁶ As one Egyptian liberal activist has argued, 'the MB loves the ballot because the ballot loves the MB'.⁷

Despite these successes, it would be incorrect to characterise the Brothers as the unchallenged rulers of Tunisia and Egypt, as several factors and entities have posed significant obstacles to the movement's aims and activities. Largely because of these challenges, both al Nahda and the FJP have so far been unable to enact major reforms or legislation.

³ In August 2012, for example, newly elected President Mursi sent Field Marshal Mohamad Hussein Tantawi and a handful of senior army leaders into early retirement. Other senior military leaders have since been replaced.

⁴ At the time of writing, consultations over the formation of a new government are taking place.

⁵ The MB first officially announced that it was running for only 30% of the parliamentary seats. It later changed that number to 40% and finally decided to run for an absolute majority.

⁶ R. Meijer, 'The Majority Strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood', *Orient* 1 (2013).

⁷ Telephone interview with an Egyptian liberal activist, January 2013.

Gradualism

This relatively limited footprint of MB entities since coming to power in both Egypt and Tunisia can be explained not just by the obstacles it has found on its way but also by the MB's twofold strategy, often outlined by MB leaders, of gradualism. Gradualism means that the MB sees the establishment of an Islamic state only as the zenith of a slow process of the Islamisation of society. MB leaders believe that a society which is not properly Islamised would reject a full implementation of the sharia, and therefore they should take small steps towards their goal.

However, from a more tactical perspective, gradualism also means that the MB understands that too sudden an implementation of an Islamic agenda would have pushed several forces (the military, various domestic interest groups, the Tunisian/Egyptian population at large, foreign governments and investors) to challenge its still weak grip on power.⁸ For the time being, it might make sense for a calculating and politically savvy force like the Brotherhood to bide its time, slowly reinforcing its power and ability to Islamise society while avoiding the negative attention that could be potentially triggered by the adoption of dramatic decisions.

The following moves can be seen in light of this strategy:

- replacing editors at state media with sympathetic elements;
- slowly replacing heads of the military with sympathetic elements;
- obtaining control of religious institutions, from the Ministry of Waqf (which oversees funds going to Islamic foundations and appoints imams in public mosques) to al Azhar University.

Even in the few circumstances in which it has made decisions that seem to enact an Islamist agenda, the MB has done so gradually and without dramatic moves. In February 2013, for example, Mursi's government decided not to issue new licences for the sale of alcohol in the new residential suburbs of the country's largest cities or to renew old ones once they expired. The move, argue critics, epitomises the MB's gradualism. Instead of banning the sale of alcohol *tout court*, as most Salafists advocate, the MB have decided to slowly but surely make the sale of alcohol more difficult—with the aim of eventually banning it throughout the country.⁹



⁸ This attitude has been outlined, for example, by Mohammed Akef, the former Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood, who has stated that 'our preliminary platform will be shown through the Freedom and Justice Party, but our full platform will not be disclosed until we are in complete control and take the presidency as well', in D. D. Kirkpatrick, 'Egypt Elections Expose Divisions in Muslim Brotherhood', *New York Times*, 19 June 2011.

⁹ *Reuters*, 'Alcohol Sale to Be Banned in Egypt's New Suburbs', 17 February 2013.

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Shater's Renaissance project

The MB's gradualist approach is perfectly outlined in a public lecture entitled 'Features of Nahda: Gains of the Revolution and the Horizons for Developing' that Khairat al Shater delivered in Alexandria in April 2011.¹⁰ Al Shater is an enormously powerful member of the Egyptian MB, the first candidate the group presented for the presidency (he was disqualified by the Egyptian judiciary, leading Mursi to run in his place) and, according to many, the real leader of the movement. His speech outlines the Nahda (Islamic Renaissance) project that has been the backbone of the FJP's electoral platform and provides unparalleled first-hand insight into the group's aims.

In the speech, which should be read in its entirety to understand the MB's senior leadership's vision and strategy, al Shater reminded the audience that the Brothers 'have spent a long time working on the individual . . . working on the household, working on society,' carrying on the bottom-up Islamisation that characterises the group. Addressing the situation after the fall of Mubarak, al Shater stated that 'things have changed, so we must re-examine my programmes for interaction with society'. He then argued, outlining the gradualist approach, that 'we are preparing this society for the stage of Islamic government' and that 'every aspect of life is to be Islamised'.¹¹

Evidence of the gradualist approach has also surfaced in Tunisia, where al Nahda's leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, was taped giving a speech to a group of Tunisian Salafists in January 2012.¹² Ghannouchi urged Salafists to be patient, because Islamists have made major steps, but 'the secularists are still controlling the media, economy and administration'. He similarly argued that 'the police and the army's support for Islamists is not guaranteed, and controlling them would also require more time'. 'I tell our young Salafists to be patient', added Ghannouchi, 'Why hurry? Take your time to consolidate what you have gained . . . create television channels, radio stations, schools and universities. The government is now at the hands of the Islamists', he optimistically concluded; 'the mosques are ours now, and we've become the most important entity in the country.'

¹⁰ The original speech can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnSshs2qzrM> accessed on 8 February 2013. An English language translation can be found in 'Khairat al-Shater on 'The Nahda Project', *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 13 (2012), 127–57.

¹¹ Throughout the speech, al Shater spelled out the greater mission of the Brotherhood, for which success in the elections is only a means to an end: 'Thus the mission is clear: restoring Islam in its all-encompassing conception; subjugating people to God; instituting the religion of God; the Islamisation of life, empowering of God's religion; establishing the Nahda [renaissance] of the Ummah on the basis of Islam.'

¹² B. Roggio, "'Moderate' Islamist Leader in Tunisia Strategizes with al Qaeda-linked Salafists', *The Long War Journal*, 16 October 2012, accessed at http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/moderate_islamist_le.php on 22 March 2013.



Authoritarianism

The actions of al Nahda and the Egyptian MB since gaining power have so far not confirmed the worst fears of its critics, as the movement, possibly aware of its own limitations and the scrutiny it is subjected to, seems to have adopted a gradualist approach. There have, however, been a few events that have been troubling:

- Mursi's declaration, on 22 November 2012, that presidential decrees 'are final and binding and cannot be appealed', a power not even Mubarak had. He was forced to rescind the decree a few weeks later. Although the move unquestionably smells of authoritarianism and has been universally criticised, it can be argued that, to some degree, Mursi's seemingly undemocratic move was triggered by a series of actions by the courts that undermined his legitimate powers. Among them, in particular, the Supreme Constitutional Court's decision to annul the parliamentary elections, which had almost universally been judged as legitimate, and dissolve the MB-dominated parliament;
- the use of violence and even torture against protestors by MB supporters during riots in front of Mursi's palace on December 2012 and, in Tunisia, the use of violence by the al Nahda-affiliated League for the Protection of the Revolution;¹³
- massive media censorship;
- investigation for high treason by Mursi-appointed public prosecutors of several leaders of the opposition. MB media have also spread accusations that opposition leaders like Amr Moussa spy for Israel and are part of a US-orchestrated plot to overthrow the government.

Hammas

Since taking power in Gaza in 2006, the Palestinian branch of the MB has faced many challenges similar to those faced by the Islamists in power after the Arab Spring. In a 2012 speech, Hamas leader Khaled Meshal tellingly acknowledged the 'difference between opposition and governance, between imagination and reality, and between being a critic and a practitioner'.¹⁴ Other Hamas leaders have similarly admitted their shortcomings in satisfying their populace's daily needs and in transitioning from a

¹³ Allegations of the abuse of protestors, including the creation of makeshift detention centres by MB activists with the connivance of the police, have been raised, both by a range of Egyptian opposition members and media and by Human Rights Watch, 'Egypt: Investigate Brotherhood's Abuse of Protesters', Report (New York, 12 December 2012), accessed at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/12/12/egypt-investigate-brotherhood-s-abuse-protesters> on 15 March 2013; and N. Okail, 'Two Years after Mubarak's Fall, Torture and Denial Continue Unabated in Morsi's Egypt', Freedom House (Egypt, 11 February 2013), accessed at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/blog/two-years-after-mubarak%E2%80%99s-fall-torture-and-denial-continue-unabated-morsi%E2%80%99s-egypt> on 15 March 2013.

¹⁴ O. Mirghani, 'The Confessions of Hamas are a Message to the Islamists', *Asharq Alawsat*, 9 January 2013.



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'resistance' movement to a governing body. Islamists blame Hamas's shortcomings on the peculiarities of the situation in Gaza, which are undeniably a major factor to consider, but there is no question that Gaza represents an example of the challenges Islamists will face once in power.

Challenges

Internal. Some commentators have seen as being a major challenge to the Egyptian MB the fact that, after the revolution, a handful of senior leaders and several young members of the MB criticised the group's leadership. This analysis is misguided because 1) for the most part, at the heart of the dissent was internal management conflict over a lack of transparency and not deep ideological divides; 2) those who dissented were expelled, and such a harsh measure substantially stopped internal dissent;¹⁵ and 3) with the exception of former senior MB leader Abdel Moneim Abul Futuh, who performed well as a candidate in the presidential elections, the breakaway MB members have gained no traction on the political scene as independents. Like any large political movement, the MB has various wings and currents. But the group maintains a strong internal discipline and does not tolerate dissent. The MB is unlikely to crumble from within.

Salafists. The sudden growth of Salafists concerns the Egyptian MB mainly for political reasons. Whereas the Brothers are forced to weigh every word they utter, in order not to upset the military, centrist voters and international observers, Salafists have no such concerns. Brotherhood strategists fear the group is being 'out-Islammed' by the Salafists, whose outward piety and simple messages might chip away at important cross-sections of what the Brotherhood considers its natural electorate.¹⁶ Tensions between the two blocs do exist and are likely to increase as elections approach.¹⁷ At the same time, the two blocs see eye-to-eye on many issues, and the Salafists' political amateurism and internal fragmentation has largely prevented them from imposing their views in parliament.

In Tunisia, the Salafists have not been politically integrated, and the challenge they pose to al Nahda is mostly security-related. Yet, al Nahda's inability or unwillingness to crack down on the violent actions of certain Salafist networks have cost the group significant political capital with large cross-sections of the Tunisian public, particularly after the assassination of Chokri Belaid, allegedly at the hands of a group of Salafists.



¹⁵ R. Meijer, 'The Majority Strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood', 23.

¹⁶ Personal interview with Kamal el Helbawy, former official representative of the Brotherhood in the West, Cairo, August 2011.

¹⁷ O. Fahmy, 'As Vote Nears, Tensions Flare among Egypt Islamists', *Reuters*, 18 February 2013.

Liberals and the deep state. Two of the main reasons for the MB's electoral success have been the group's remarkable organisation and, reversely, its opposition's fragmentation and poor mobilisation skills. Although these dynamics still hold true, there are signs that, in both Egypt and Tunisia, liberal forces are overcoming their differences and forming more structured and organised coalitions. It remains to be seen how big a challenge they will pose for the MB.

Another challenge to the MB's power comes from the 'deep state', large and powerful administrative and judicial bodies with strong ties to the former regimes and little sympathy for the MB. Particularly in Egypt, courts have repeatedly attempted to stall several MB actions—most notably by declaring the parliamentary elections won by the MB invalid. Various influential professional orders and labour unions have also voiced their strong opposition to MB entities (in Tunisia, the powerful Tunisian General Labour Union, UGTT, has been at the forefront of the anti-al Nahda protests).

MB governing in cooperation

In a handful of Arab countries, MB entities have participated in elections and consequently entered coalition governments, although in positions that are not as strong as those of their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt. In Morocco, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) won a plurality of seats in the October 2011 parliamentary elections, and its secretary general, Abdelilah Benkirane, subsequently became prime minister. King Mohammed VI's decision to include an Islamist force in such a prominent role is unprecedented and partially determined by the fact that the PJD had decided not to join the protests of the Arab Spring-influenced 20 February movement. The PJD has touted this response to the Arab Spring as a Moroccan 'Third Way': not revolution and the disruption that comes with it, as in other countries, and not limited top-down reform but genuine partnership between the king and the opposition, leading to shared reforms.¹⁸ Yet the PJD's initial enthusiasm has been cooled by the slow process of reform and the realisation of its limited powers. The party's agenda has been stifled by dissent within the coalition government and recognition of the fact that the new constitution still reserves exclusive control of all strategic matters for the king.¹⁹



¹⁸ M. Ottaway, 'Morocco: Can the Third Way Succeed?' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 31 July 2012.

¹⁹ M. Sehim, 'La Guerre des Populos', *Maroc Hebdo* 1007 (2013), 10–13.

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Islamists are also part of a coalition government in Algeria, albeit as junior partners. Algeria has been a puzzling exception to the trend that has seen MB forces succeed in elections, as its largest Islamist formation (the Green Coalition) obtained a meagre 6.2% in the May 2012 elections.²⁰ Three concurring factors might explain this anomaly. First, since the mid-1990s, various Islamist formations have been integrated into coalition governments, proving largely ineffective and therefore cooling voters' enthusiasm for an Islamist alternative. Second, the Algerian Islamist scene is plagued by leadership squabbles that have deeply fragmented it. Finally, some have argued that the deep scars of the Algerian civil war of the 1990s have rendered the Algerian public distrustful of Islamists.²¹

The MB in opposition

In a handful of Arab countries, local MB entities are currently engaged in one form or another of confrontation with the government. In Jordan, the confrontation is kept on political terms, as the Islamic Action Front, which has a long history of cooperation with the monarchy, has recently adopted a more aggressive position and boycotted the January 2013 elections.²² The movement seems to be split between those who want to continue cooperation with the king, asking for 'evolution and not revolution' and advocating a national unity government with a role for the MB, and those who, riding the wave of discontent fuelled by the Arab Spring and the country's deep economic crisis, seek more drastic solutions.

The MB in Iraq is similarly taking advantage of popular discontent to advance its agenda. The MB-dominated Iraqi Islamic Party, in fact, has been the main force behind the protests against the Shia-dominated government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki which have raged throughout the Sunni areas of Iraq over the last few months.²³ The Iraqi MB has long participated in the post-Saddam democratic life of the country, running in elections and holding cabinet ministry posts—a position that has been harshly criticised by other MB entities throughout the Arab world, which have accused their Iraqi counterparts of indirectly supporting American efforts in Iraq. But the Iraqi MB has now chosen a strategy of confrontation, even advocating the formation of an autonomous area in the Sunni majority areas of Western Iraq.



²⁰ R. Lefèvre, 'Current Events in North Africa', *Journal of North African Studies* 17/4 (2012), 717–20.

²¹ *Al Jazeera*, 'Is Algeria Immune to the Arab Spring?', 14 May 2012.

²² T. Luck, 'Amid Regional Change, Jordanians Reluctantly Vote for More of the Same', *Washington Post*, 23 January 2013.

²³ H. Knablat, 'Muslim Brotherhood Back in Iraq', *Zaman*, 11 February 2013.

The situation in the Persian Gulf is complex, and there are significant differences from country to country. Qatar has been arguably the most enthusiastic political and financial sponsor of MB entities throughout the Arab world since the beginning of the Arab Spring—a position motivated both by ideological affinities and by pragmatic strategic calculations on the part of Doha.²⁴ However, in the United Arab Emirates, authorities have severely clamped down on MB-related networks, arresting dozens of suspected MB activists and accusing them of subversive activities and plotting to overthrow the government.²⁵ Senior figures in the UAE government have openly and repeatedly accused the MB of seeking to ‘export the revolution’ to the Gulf, and this dynamic has created diplomatic tensions with the MB-led Egyptian government.²⁶

Yet, without doubt, the most virulent confrontation between the MB and a regime is taking place in Syria, where the MB plays a crucial role in the military and political efforts against the regime of Bashar al Assad. The MB has gained very influential positions in the Syrian National Coalition and its military council, an achievement obtained thanks to 1) its militias’ reportedly widespread and effective efforts on the battlefield, 2) the fragmentation and poor political skills of other rebel forces and 3) the financial and political backing of Qatar and Turkey.²⁷

Western concerns

The rise of Islamists to power has raised concerns in Western capitals in relation to a variety of potentially critical issues.

Foreign policy

Breaking with the policies of the Mubarak regime, Mursi’s government has opened a dialogue with Hezbollah²⁸ and has shown signs of a rapprochement with Iran. Yet, since coming to power, the MB-led governments in both Tunis and Cairo have not taken major foreign policy decisions. There is little doubt that, at least when it comes to rhetoric, Islamist movements are less accommodating—if not outright confrontational—towards most Western policies and regimes. Blaming the West for most of the

²⁴ See G. Steinberg, ‘Qatar and the Arab Spring’, *SWP Comments C/2012 7*, February 2012.

²⁵ *Al Arabiya*, ‘UAE Charges 94 for Attempts to Overthrow Government’, 27 January 2013; *Asharq Alawsat*, ‘Kuwaitis Financed Brotherhood Members held in UAE: Kuwaiti Media’, 11 January 2013.

²⁶ M. Habboush, ‘UAE Militants had Links to al Qaeda: Dubai Police Chief’, *Reuters*, 9 January 2013.

²⁷ *Reuters*, ‘Syrian Rebels Elect Islamist/Dominated Unified Command’, 8 December 2012.

²⁸ *Jerusalem Post*, ‘Egypt to Pursue Relationship with Hezbollah’, 29 December 2012.



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ills of the Muslim world and accusing it of imperialism, often with virulent and conspiratorial tones, has long been one of the cornerstones of their messages, and this dynamic has not changed since the Arab Spring.

Whether or how much this rhetoric will translate into actual anti-Western policies remains to be seen, as there are several factors that might push a pragmatic force like the MB in the opposite direction (e.g. fear of losing much-needed Western aid and investments, or pressure from the military). In November 2012, Israel's launch of Operation Pillar of Defense against Hamas and other groups in the Gaza Strip provided a test of whether pragmatism or ideology would prevail in foreign policy. Despite the fears of many, Mursi's government played a crucial and universally praised role in negotiating a ceasefire between the two sides.

This position was surprising to some, given the well-documented virulently anti-Israel and anti-Semitic views of the MB. In July 2012, Mohammed Badie, the MB's Supreme Guide, stated that saving Jerusalem from the hand of 'rapists' is 'an individual duty for all Muslims'.²⁹ Anti-Semitic rants and calls for jihad against Israel were common on the MB's official Arabic language website during Operation Pillar of Defense.³⁰ And in January 2013, tapes surfaced showing Mursi a few years prior, urging Egyptians to 'nurse our children and our grandchildren on hatred' for Jews and Zionists, which he described as 'bloodsuckers', 'warmongers', and 'descendants of apes and pigs'.³¹

In light of these positions there are two alternative explanations for Mursi's behaviour during Operation Pillar of Defense. It can be argued that Mursi and the MB, despite their deep hatred of Israel, fully understand the importance of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty with the Jewish state and, while maintaining their anti-Israel rhetoric for their supporters, have pragmatically opted to maintain good relations with it and peace in the region. Similarly, Tariq Ramadan has argued that Mursi 'will not make a single decision against Israel' because it would alienate American support, something the new president understands he cannot afford to do.³²

But others argue that this position is only temporary and just another manifestation of the MB's gradualism. The MB, it is claimed, will never accept a normalisation of relations with Israel. However, at this time, it is aware of the many and arguably



²⁹ M. Fayed, 'Leader calls for the Liberation of Jerusalem', *al Wafd*, 5 July 2012.

³⁰ MEMRI, 'Muslim Brotherhood on Operation Pillar of Defense: Antisemitic Statements, Calls for Jihad against Israel', Special Dispatch 5069, 28 November 2012.

³¹ D. D. Kirkpatrick, 'Morsi's Slurs against Jews Stir Concern', *New York Times*, 15 January 2013.

³² G. Saura, 'Los Árabes Han Dicho No, ahora Deben Decir qué Quieren' (Interview with Tariq Ramadan), *La Vanguardia*, 19 December 2012.

unbearable consequences of a sudden reversal of policy such as a unilateral pullout from the Peace Treaty or a military confrontation with Israel. Critics argue that it is therefore simply seeking to progressively let relations with Tel Aviv deteriorate. Tellingly, argue supporters of this thesis, in recent months the FJP has reportedly drafted legislation to unilaterally amend the Peace Treaty, and an MB foreign policy official told a private gathering that Mursi was working to 'gradually' end normalisation with Israel.³³

Terrorism and security

Although circumstances vary from case to case, the rise of jihadist and militant Salafist groups in various Arab countries after the Arab Spring is the consequence of two concurring phenomena: the collapse or significantly diminished capabilities of the security apparatuses that kept them in check under the previous regimes, and the tolerance for these groups by MB forces in power. The MB's reluctance to crack down on jihadist and militant Salafist groups is due to the ideological proximity that, despite significant differences, exists between the MB and these groups and, particularly in Egypt, the fear that being perceived as too harsh on these groups would sway some of the most conservative votes to the Salafists.

The MB is beginning to understand that this position is untenable. In Tunisia, large swaths of the population blamed al Nahda's soft approach towards militant groups for the assassination of Chokri Belaid and other violent actions by Salafists, making a serious dent in the group's popularity. In Egypt, the MB government quickly realised that it had to act against jihadist groups in Sinai, also due to pressure from the army and the US.

MB entities in power will likely develop a framework to deal with jihadist groups, understanding that they pose a threat to their own power. In some cases, MB governments will cooperate with Western counterterrorism officials. This counterterrorism cooperation is nevertheless highly unlikely to be as close as the relationship between Western countries and the pre-Arab Spring regimes.

Rights and freedoms

Fears over the implementation of strict interpretations of the sharia or norms severely hampering the rights of women and religious minorities have so far been largely unfounded. In that regard, the new Tunisian and Egyptian constitutions are not



³³ E. Trager, 'Think Again: The Muslim Brotherhood', *Foreign Policy*, 28 January 2013.

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substantially different from the documents that they have replaced. Critics nonetheless allege that the two documents use deliberately vague language designed to allow Islamists enough interpretative room to eventually restrict rights. There has also arguably been a deterioration in the day-to-day condition of women and religious minorities, but it is difficult to say whether this is attributable to the role of the MB-led governments or, rather, to the inevitable post-revolution chaos.

Conclusion and future scenarios

Outlining future scenarios for the MB is a daunting task. The movement, like the whole region, is venturing into uncharted waters, and it seems almost futile to attempt to predict even short-term developments. Moreover, as seen, MB entities in various countries operate independently, and therefore each is likely to pursue goals and adopt tactics tailored to its specific circumstances. At the same time, it is undeniable that the rise to power of Islamists in Egypt and, to a lesser degree, Tunisia, is being observed with unparalleled attention by MB forces throughout the region, and the outcome of these experiences will have repercussions well beyond those two countries.

Delivering economic growth

MB entities in both Egypt and Tunisia are well aware of both the unprecedented opportunity they have been given and, at the same time, the monumental challenge they face. Their leaders know that this is where ideology meets reality. They also know that the group has to deliver to its electorate, most of which are not staunch MB members but rather ordinary citizens who have decided to give the group a chance, hoping that it will improve their daily lives.

And yet, solving Egypt's and Tunisia's current woes is a monumental task, and not just for a political force in power for the first time. Unquestionably, the direst challenge is represented by the economy, where chronic problems have been exacerbated by the turmoil of the Arab Spring. Although the MB likes to project an image of a free market force with an eye for social justice, and many of its senior members are themselves quite successful entrepreneurs, it is arguable that the group lacks solid macroeconomic foundations. Since coming to power, it has not produced any broad and consistent programme for how to improve the fledgling economies of the two countries, and it has largely relied on technical experts from the previous regimes to deal with economic matters.



Maintaining public order

Partially interconnected and similarly problematic is the challenge of maintaining public order. Although the methods Ben Ali and Mubarak used to do so might have been abhorrent, their regimes provided a high degree of security for their countries. Over the last two years, the security situation has significantly deteriorated in both Tunisia and Egypt. Crime has surged dramatically. Extremists carry out frequent attacks against liberals (particularly in Tunisia) and religious minorities (particularly in Egypt, where Copts have seen their security situation deteriorate). Protests and strikes regularly degenerate into violent clashes. The MB-led governments have struggled to manage these developments.

Accountability and respect for democracy

Neither the economic malaise nor the deterioration of security has been caused by the MB-led governments, and it is arguable that any force in power would have identical problems in dealing with them. Yet it will be the MB, given its position of power, that will have to deal with the demands and often unrealistic expectations of its citizens. For the first time in its history (if one excludes the arguably atypical cases of Gaza and the Sudan), the MB will not have the luxury of criticising those in power while providing only lofty slogans, but, rather, it will be forced to deal with society's very practical problems. It will be held accountable for its decisions and, assuming an authentic democratic system is kept in place, it will be voted out if it does not perform.

Critics of the MB are fearful about this last point. Some of the more pessimistic observers argue that the MB's love for the ballot might end once the ballot stops loving them. Indeed, over the last 30 years, there have been a handful of cases in which Islamists have gained power through elections, but it has never been the case, despite differing dynamics on each occasion, that Islamists have stepped down from their position of power. In other words, it will be crucially important to see how the MB will act once it loses elections, an event that at some point is bound to happen. Will the MB step down, like any force accepting the rules of democracy would? Or will it find ways to hold on to power? A former leader of the Egyptian Brotherhood, Abdel Moneim Abul Futuh, has expressed doubts over the matter, arguing that the MB 'needs to understand that democracy is not just a way to gain power but an end in itself'.³⁴



³⁴ B. Daragahi, 'In Power, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Remains Secretive, Defensive, Critics Say', *Financial Times*, 10 December 2012.

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More optimistic voices argue that full inclusion in an authentically democratic system and facing the challenges of governance will constitute the final steps of a process of political maturation that Islamist forces started some 30 years ago. Participation in the system will inevitably change them, forcing them to review and soften some of their most confrontational positions.³⁵ It is of course too early to judge which of the two positions is correct, and it is likely that the behaviour of MB entities will differ markedly from country to country. The political crisis that has followed the assassination of Chokri Belaid in Tunisia, and the next parliamentary elections in Egypt, might provide some indications of these developments.



³⁵ See, for example, N. J. Brown, *When Victory is not an Option: Islamist Movements in Arab Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

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