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The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Headed for Internal Collapse?

by [Mohammed Soliman](#)

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Articles & Testimony

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt can be characterized as an intellectual and political movement distinguished by its relationship with the ruling regimes. After Gamal Abdel Nasser and his comrades swept away the Egyptian constitutional monarchy in 1952, the Brotherhood cemented its place in Egypt's political arena, regarded as the most pragmatic of the Islamist organizations. But the Muslim Brotherhood would face intermittent bouts of suppression for 30 years. It was during Hosni Mubarak's era when the Brotherhood achieved its major breakthrough. Escalating violence from Islamist groups in the 1980s and 1990s paved the way for the Brotherhood to take part in elections for professional guilds, local councils, and parliament. The Brotherhood preserved the group's organizational momentum over and above its ideological output, never delving into details regarding such issues as the place of women in society, political and foreign policy, or the status of Egypt's Copts. In this way the Brotherhood emerged as a veritable political melting pot for Islamists in all their forms, including Salafis, Azharis, and the Wasat Party.

This opacity of goals followed the organization into its momentary political ascent when the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in 2011. The old-guard leadership continued to dominate the Brotherhood's highest ranks – Khairat al-Shater, Mahdi Akef, Mahmoud Ezzat, Ibrahim Mounir, Mahmoud Hussein, Mahmoud Ghazlan, and Mohamed Morsi. Consequently, the leadership failed to understand its new position as a ruling power in need of ideological reassessment in order to bring it closer to Egypt's middle-class public. The leadership rejected younger members' internal calls for reform and hastened to separate reformist youth from the organizing influence of Abdel Moneim Aboul Futouh – the former Islamist presidential candidate who received four million votes. A Salafi jurisprudential umbrella group called the Islamic Commission for Rights and Reform brought the Muslim Brotherhood together with more extremist Salafi groups, a move supported by the Brotherhood's powerful deputy leader, the businessman Khairat al-Shater.

The military intervention into political life, on the heels of popular demonstrations against the Morsi government, resulted in many Brotherhood leaders' arrests and jailings. The most important Brotherhood leadership ideologically, including the current Brotherhood leader Mohamed Badie, the former leader Mahdi Akef, deputy leader Khairat al-Shater, President of the Republic Mohamed Morsi, former Speaker of Parliament Saad al-Katatni, Mohamed al-Beltagi, Essam al-Erian, and Helmy al-Gazzar all suddenly found their control of the group restricted by their incarceration. Those leaders who escaped arrest fled to Qatar and Turkey, notably: the Brotherhood's first deputy Mahmoud Ezzat, General Secretary Mahmoud Hussein, former official spokesman Mahmoud Ghazlan (recently arrested), and London office head Ibrahim Mounir. Those scattered abroad continue to manage the foreign affairs portfolio and the Brotherhood's sources of funding, giving the group control over the organizational leadership.

Nevertheless, the jailings and relocations have displaced the historic leadership. Its popularity has receded and has been effectively challenged by a revolutionary leadership bringing together the Brotherhood's Youth, Students, Media, and Popular Mobilization Committees, groups at the forefront in leading the Brotherhood protests against the Egyptian regime. Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have pressured the British government to issue a statement declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization. This would mean a ban on its activities in London where the International Confederation is located under the direction of the well-known leader Ibrahim Mounir.

In the face of this external siege, internal disagreement has escalated over the vision of the historic leadership represented by acting Supreme Guide Mahmoud Ezzat, General Secretary Mahmoud Hussein, and President of the Brotherhood's Higher Administrative Committee in Egypt Mohamed Abdel Rahman. On the other side is the leadership of the revolutionary movement within the organization, consisting of Chief of Education and Guidance Bureau member Mohamed Taha Wahdan, official spokesman Mohamed Montaser, and the head of the Office of the Egyptian Brotherhood Abroad Ahmed Abdel Rahman. With the restructuring of the organization through new leadership elections for the Brotherhood's seven geographical departments (Cairo, the middle Delta, Alexandria, al-Daqhaliya, al-Sharqiya, and northern and southern Upper Egypt), neither of the two factions has been able to settle the organizational conflict within the Brotherhood. The continuance of Mahmoud Ezzat as acting Supreme Guide and Mohamed Abdel Rahman as President of the Brotherhood's Higher Administrative Committee has meant their hegemony at the top of the organizational pyramid, with the officers of the al-Daqhalia and likewise the al-Sharqiya sections supporting them and the rest of the historic leadership against the new revolutionary leadership in the Brotherhood.

The organizational and ideological position of the Brotherhood seems similarly factional. Led by acting Supreme Guide Mahmoud Ezzat, the historic leadership is caught up in a war to reclaim the Muslim Brotherhood from the rogue "revolutionaries" who have adopted violence as their central tactic in facing the current Egyptian regime. This group receives support from Qatar and Turkey, seeking the reincorporation of the Brotherhood into the public sphere in Egypt. This effort has gained strength from the latest position taken by Britain, which has demanded that the Brotherhood undertake an ideological reassessment in order to avoid being placed on the list of terrorist organizations.

The opposing group and its leadership – the Brotherhood's official spokesman Mohamed Montaser and head of the Office of the Egyptian Brotherhood Abroad Ahmed Abdel Rahman – rely on the Youth, Students' and Popular Mobilization Committees that directed the Brotherhood's movement against the Egyptian regime in the aftermath of July 3, 2013. There are affirmations that this group endorses the use of violence against the ruling regime and its institutions in revenge for the arrests and killing suffered by the Brotherhood. The traditional leadership has subjected it to external pressure by cutting off financial support and internal pressure through the Brotherhood leaders in al-Daqhaliya and al-Sharqiya provinces choice to side with the Brotherhood's historic leadership. The

announcement by Mahmoud Hussein and Ibrahim Mounir about the need to follow peaceful means of change was considered the beginning of an effort to undermine the legitimacy of any mobilization within the Brotherhood inside Egypt against the political regime, placing them between the hammer and the anvil.

With this the Muslim Brotherhood is cleaving into two organizations with two opposing visions, each battling the other. Meanwhile, external circumstances have become linked with the closing of ranks between Sunni states Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey behind Saudi Arabia's leadership against Iran. The siege on the Brotherhood is tightening in order to deter it from violently confronting the state. It is most realistic that the Brotherhood will remain under the historic leadership and the direction of acting Supreme Guide Mahmoud Ezzat. This expected result would inevitably lead to the departure of groups of Brotherhood youths who adopt violence and their re-dedication to groups whose culture revolves around armed violence against the regime. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Brotherhood will be able to pose a popular threat to the Egyptian regime in the near future, given its loss of centrality as the most important Islamist organization in the Middle East and Egypt, the disappearance of its organizational base, and its internal struggle over leadership. This retreat by the Brotherhood does not mean that another Islamist organization will become its heir, rather this represents the general falling fortunes of the Islamist current and its losing battle with the Egyptian military.

Mohamed Soliman is an Egyptian engineer and political analyst. This article was originally published on the [Fikra Forum website](#). ❖

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