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The Brotherhood and terrorism

Some say that allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to have continued in power would have spared Egypt terrorism. In reality, the Brotherhood had planned for Egypt bigger disasters.

Ali Hassan

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The Muslim Brotherhood had three choices on 3 July. They could revise their outlook and behaviour, and apologise for their disastrous year in power. That would have been the most sensible choice, the best for the country and ultimately better for them. But their calculations were awry as always. The second option was to engage in a head-on collision with the state and society and attempt to bring down the new authority by means of a new mass uprising. This is obviously the course they initially opted for and in which they have failed. Although they are still playing the game of trying to wreak attrition on the state they will fail in this as well.

The third option was to attempt to win over revolutionary and other political forces by assigning a portion of Muslim Brotherhood members the task of connecting with such forces with a peaceful and conciliatory rhetoric. Simultaneously, the organisation would continue in its drive, in alliance with terrorist and takfiri groups, to undermine the state, wreak economic havoc and otherwise create conditions that would force the government to enter into negotiations that would result in their social and political revival and the restitution of some of the gains they had won by virtue of the 25 January Revolution and that they could never have dreamed of in the Mubarak era.

This is the course that the Muslim Brotherhood is currently pursuing with total single-

mindedness. It has led some to wonder whether if the Egyptian people had left them in power they would have spared Egypt the miseries of the terrorism that the Brotherhood has unleashed against Egyptians today and that looks like it will persist for some time to come, especially given the way it is being fed by various regional and international powers.

I am not making this up. I have actually heard people say that if we had left Morsi on his seat, swallowed our tongues and did not revolt against Brotherhood rule, we would have averted the evils of terrorism that have been inflicted on our country today. However, as we shall see, the argument is simplistic and fallacious.

Firstly, the overthrow of any despotic, corrupt or failed regime comes at a price. Affiliates of that regime will do all in their power to obstruct the process of change or to turn the clock back to the point that it was their interests — and perhaps their attitudes and beliefs — that were served. This applies as much to the Muslim Brotherhood and its circles as it does to the Mubarak regime and that client class of officials, senior bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, chief security officials, some army commanders, large land-owners, prominent families, some tribal leaders and an assortment of middlemen that benefited from the patronage of Mubarak and his son. In like manner, both former regimes schemed to return to power and/or defend their special interests. Though whereas the Brotherhood has opted for violence and terror, the remnants of the Mubarak regime tended towards subtler methods.

Second, most everyone had anticipated that the cost of toppling the Brotherhood regime would be considerable. In fact, the ordinary people that I had interviewed before 30 June had expected that the price would be huge and, indeed, much harsher than we are paying now.

Thirdly, the price Egypt is paying now is far less than what we would have had to pay if the Brotherhood had remained in power much longer than they did. It is important to bear in mind how they hijacked and betrayed the revolution and its principles, how they conspired against the nation and society, and the dangers to which they exposed our national security in their pursuit of their particular vision of “global mastership” in alliance with jihadist and takfiri groups and foreign powers and intelligence agencies.

Fourthly, there is no doubt that if Morsi had remained in power he would have used terrorism and the Brotherhood’s connections with terrorist groups as a means to protect and perpetuate Brotherhood rule. Egyptians saw this in practice when the Hazemone besieged the Supreme Constitutional Court and Media Production City, set fire to the Wafd Party headquarters and Al-Watan newspaper premises, and stood alongside Morsi in Cairo Stadium to threaten all Egyptians who opposed him. In the weeks following 30 June, one speaker after another ascended to the podium in front of Rabaa Al-Adawiya Mosque to issue such proclamations as, “we will crush them,” “I see their heads and they are ripe for plucking,” “one hundred thousand armed men are ready to march on Cairo if the people call for the fall of the government,” and “bombs will be planted among the crowds of peaceful demonstrators and these bombs will reap what they wish.”

If we had given the Muslim Brotherhood another year in power, they would have formed their own militias to perpetuate their rule, whether as an organ of state muscle in the manner of the Iranian “basij” or in a less formal form. The Muslim Brotherhood was a state within a state and even after it came to power it refused to legitimise itself as an organisation.

In short, Muslim Brotherhood terrorism was coming one way or another. Moreover, it may have been stronger and deadlier if they had remained in power than it currently is now that they have lost power and are fighting to return or at least to wreak their vengeance on the Egyptian people. While in power, they would have availed themselves of all the material and symbolic resources of the state to build and fund their militias, weaken the defences of the state, and supply intelligence to terrorists.

To make matters worse, the Brotherhood were as corrupt and tyrannical as the Mubarak regime. In a study I wrote in 2003 on the Muslim Brotherhood’s stance towards political reform I observed, “the Muslim Brothers have no interest in comprehensive reform or radical change of the Mubarak regime. They want to inherit it as it is so that they can manage its corruption and despotism towards their own benefit.” The Mubarak regime and Muslim Brotherhood cooperated and benefited from one another. They feigned animosity in the open and scratched each other’s backs in private. If the government occasionally clamped down on the Muslim Brotherhood it did so selectively because it still needed them to use as a bogeyman at home and abroad. Prior to Mubarak, Sadat used the Muslim Brotherhood to crush the Egyptian left and bury all the gains in social justice that had come with Abdel-Nasser.

It is useful to recall that, while its parliament was sitting, the Muslim Brotherhood regime refused to pass a “political isolation” law, which would have banned former Mubarak regime affiliates from political activity; that is until Omar Suleiman announced that he would run for president. They also concealed from the public the results of the fact-finding report on rights violations from January 2011 to June 2012 and instead used it to barter with affiliates of the old Mubarak regime. Brotherhood business magnate Hassan Malek was quick to haggle with his Mubarak era counterparts over ways to divvy up the national wealth at the expense of the Egyptian people. Saad Al-Katatni, head of the Brotherhood’s political wing (the Freedom and Justice Party), huddled up with leaders of the former state party (the National Democratic Party) in the governorates to work out how they could stage manage the next parliamentary elections, which never took place. In fact, Morsi personally paid courtesy calls on some former NDP luminaries during his campaign tours between the first and second rounds of the 2012 presidential elections.

It was not just that the Muslim Brotherhood shared the Mubarak regime’s neoliberal — which is to say unrestrained monopoly capitalist — outlook and its penchant for self-perpetuation in power. The two were much cosier than that. Let us not forget that in an interview with Akher Sa’a before the January 2011 Revolution, the then Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide said that he would have no problem with Gamal Mubarak running for president. He went on to praise President Mubarak in glowing terms. Echoing his sentiments, Morsi said: “We have kept electoral constituencies open for patriotic figures such as Zakariya Azmi and Ahmed Ezz.” Such were the Mubarak era faces that would have found their way back to power with the benevolent aid of the Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide.

Finally, I should add that the road taken by the Muslim Brotherhood leadership has forced some other Muslim Brotherhood members to pay a price. I refer to those who opposed to the decision to nominate a candidate for the presidency, the sacrifice of religious and moral principles for the sake of the thirst for power, and the pursuit of violence. These were left to dangle in the wind by a hardline Qotbist leadership that had aligned itself with the schemes and projects of regional and international powers. In all events, the folly, arrogance or vindictiveness of the Muslim Brotherhood has blinded it to this truth that is as glaring as the scorching sun on a summer day.