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## Abusive opposition

**It is unsurprising that the Muslim Brotherhood reverted to arms, having at its core — as with all fundamentalist Islamists — the outlook that it alone knows the will of God**

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In spite of countless declarations that they had renounced violence and support for violence forever, the Muslim Brotherhood reverted to violence, intermittently under the Morsi government and permanently since its fall.

Why would the Muslim Brotherhood sink so low, some might ask? The answer: What would keep an organisation that had no compunction about killing off its political adversaries before the 1952 Revolution from reverting to form? This is, after all, a group whose founder and first supreme guide, Hassan Al-Banna, created a “secret apparatus” precisely to carry out acts of violence against property as a means of intimidation. Only when the members of that apparatus spun out of control did Al-Banna famously say, “Those are not brothers and they are not Muslims.” This is also a group that is now dominated by leaders who subscribe to the radical thinking of Sayed Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue who was quick to condemn all who disagreed with him as heretic and whose thinking is referred to as “Qutbist”. Over the course of many years, the Muslim Brotherhood’s current leadership had systematically campaigned to sideline and eliminate among their ranks all reformists, advocates of a reconciliation with

modernist democratic thought, and critics who held that the Muslim Brotherhood had been diverted from the original spirit and calling of its founder (perhaps unaware of the fact that Al-Banna, himself, had planted some of the seeds of the organisation's tendency to violence).

The Muslim Brotherhood has never strayed from its symbolic espousal of violence, as epitomised by the Muslim Brotherhood's emblem: two crossed swords beneath a Quran. It has never strayed from verbal violence, a phenomenon that has become increasingly virulent now that it has mobilised its electronic armies to wage hate and slur campaigns against its perceived enemies, indeed against any and all who oppose the group's opinions and policies. But evidently this was not enough. Now they indulge, again, in material violence against state and society. They obstruct roads and metros, they intimidate peaceful pedestrians, they vandalise and destroy, and they maim, torture and kill.

And no, this did not suddenly start after 30 June when the Egyptian people toppled Muslim Brotherhood rule. The Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated just how committed it was to peaceful means during the protests against Mohamed Morsi's authoritarian constitutional declaration in November 2012. That was when the organisation sounded its call to arms and dispatched its squads to tear down the protesters' tents, to "detain" dozens of protesters by dragging them into makeshift barricaded "security" offices, and to interrogate and torture them until dawn. It was as though they were applying the handbook of some fascist state security apparatus. When reports and video footage of those horrors went viral, the Muslim Brotherhood government came under intense pressure at home and abroad. But it did not change its general philosophy regarding violence; just its tactics. This was when the Muslim Brotherhood leadership cast around for proxies to carry out its violence for it and began to court jihadist and takfiri groups of the sort that have become very active today. The extent to which the Muslim Brotherhood had tightened the bonds of friendship and cooperation with those groups became visible during that famous gathering in the covered reception hall at Cairo Stadium in which Morsi smiled on as jihadist and Salafi leaders threatened seas of blood and a rampage of fire and destruction if the Egyptian people pressed ahead with the plans for the mass 30 June demonstrations to bring down Morsi and Muslim Brotherhood rule.

Proof of the Muslim Brotherhood's return to violence — large scale — is to be found in statements by one of the jihadist leaders allied with the Muslim Brotherhood and who recently revealed that Khairat Al-Shater, the number two man in the Muslim Brotherhood, had given him \$15 million to purchase arms to equip terrorist groups operating in the Sinai. Jihadist Salafi leader Mohamed Al-Zawahri, brother of Al-Qaeda's current chief, Ayman Al-Zawahri, also said: "We can resort to jihad and violence in society if the ruler deviates from Islamic Sharia, as did Hosni Mubarak and Bashar Al-Assad. We are slaves of God and we do as He commands us... Our vision of Islamic rule was not realised when the Muslim Brotherhood came to power."

The Muslim Brotherhood, itself, was not the only source of violence under their regime. Other Islamist organisations and pundits allied or in collusion with the Muslim Brotherhood believed that defending this organisation and attacking persons and properties of their political and ideological opponents were religious duties in defence of the so-called "Islamist project". Examples of the religious fatwas and pronouncements issued by such groups and individuals to incite hatred, violence and strife are endless, as are examples of the actual acts of violence they

perpetrated.

Some had imagined that with the Arab Spring the blight of pseudo-religious ideological madness that had afflicted our society since from the 1940s, at the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood, through the turn of the millennium at the hands of Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya and other jihadist organisations, would be gone forever. Surely the democratic grass revolutions against despotic regimes would silence those groups that espoused violence on the grounds of an Islamist ideology inspired by that still living 13th century theologian Ibn Taymiya who ordained that any faction that refrained from applying a single one of the “fixed and manifest” laws of Islam should be put to the sword (and who saw this as a kind of pre-emptive jihad). Now that Islamist groups and organisations can engage in politics in legitimate ways this will roll back the chances of violence, the argument went.

But much to our surprise, not long after they came to power, the Muslim Brothers who had long proclaimed their divorce from violence wed themselves to it again. Not only did they threaten violence against their political foes, they carried out such threats through beatings, torture, abductions and murder. Some people suspected that the Muslim Brotherhood gangs, who would roar their mantra “Power! Determination! Faith!” organised and carried out the systematic sexual harassment of women in Tahrir Square and elsewhere in order to frighten them away from participating in protests against Muslim Brotherhood rule.

Alongside the Muslim Brothers were members of other groups that we thought had renounced violence forever. As the days passed, it could be seen that they had called a halt to violence against the ruling authority, but that was when they were in power. Their hostility to the rest of society remained unshaken. Eventually, they reverted to violence against all: the government, the state, and society at large. They did not even spare their Salafi allies when the Salafis chose to side with the people on 30 June and became part of the post-30 June roadmap.

After security agencies apprehended the Nasr City terrorist cell in September 2012 they discovered a document that revealed a design to unleash a massive wave of violence against Egyptian society. The “conquest of Egypt”, as the document was called, held that war against the army and police was a duty, killing anti-Islamist media figures was a good thing, and murdering Sufis was also a duty because Sufis were “idol worshippers”. The document enjoined followers of this jihadist sect to obey six decrees, substantiated by excerpts of Quranic verses, Prophetic Sayings and theological rulings all lifted out of context and moulded to suit the purpose:

- Idol worshippers are heretics. Regard them as your enemies whom you must hate, just as you must hate those who love them, or defend them, or do not condemn them as infidels. For idolatry is a falsehood and a calumny against God and it is a Divine duty to condemn idolaters as infidels and to sever all ties with them even if they are your brothers or children.

- Kill any Muslim who aids a heretic, even if he prays and fasts and regardless of whom he may be, ruler or ruled.

- Anyone who indicates to idolaters approval of their religion, even if only to dissemble or flatter them in order to avert their evil, is an infidel like them, regardless of whether he hates their religion and despises them, and loves Islam and Muslims.

- Infidels in power is a greater sin. There are four sorts: those who love the heretics who advocate democracy and modernism; those who aid Muslim heretics as they do Christians and Jews; those who ally with heretics and conclude pacts with them to help them to victory even if they are not victorious; and those who engage in the practices of heretics in politics, such as creating parliaments, bodies and committees of the sort prevalent in countries of the West.

- Infidels and Christians must not be allowed to occupy important positions, especially now that the times are upside down and People of the Book (ie Christians) are made ministers.

- All theologians, writers, thinkers and journalists who aid the rulers are infidels because they perpetually call for reconciliation with governments that violate Sharia law.

The foregoing ideas are taken straight from the Al-Qaeda textbook. Did Al-Qaeda infiltrate Egypt following the January revolution, seizing the opportunity of the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power?

At the very least, we must acknowledge the emergence of an environment suited to takfiri organisations of Al-Qaeda's stripe. A considerable amount of clear and undeniable evidence supports this:

- Emblems and slogans of jihadist Salafis indicating an association or affiliation with Al-Qaeda were heard and seen loud and clear in the heart of Cairo during the ascent of the Muslim Brotherhood and afterwards. Their pundits appeared on television shows, sermonised to worshippers in mosques, fulminated in pro-Muslim Brotherhood demonstrations, held press conferences in which they railed against the opposition and variously championed authorities or criticised the same authorities depending on actions or positions related to democracy that they regard as a heresy and a violation of Islamic law.

- Mohamed Morsi issued a blanket amnesty for the jihadist Salafis in prison. Some of these hastened to join ranks with the terrorists in Sinai. Others, one day, decided to storm the Ministry of Defence building, although they were given a harsh lesson by the army.

- During their time in power, the Muslim Brotherhood issued veiled threats on numerous occasions to the effect it would turn jihadist extremists against its political rivals. It simultaneously demonstrated its strategy to use them as a bogeyman to lure Western powers into supporting the Muslim Brotherhood as a bulwark against — or a force that could contain — extremists and thereby help safeguard Western interests. On the occasions when terrorist violence erupted in Sinai during Muslim Brotherhood rule, there were indications that the Muslim Brotherhood would be glad if the army became embroiled in a confrontation against jihadist Salafis there. The battle would divert the attention of the Egyptian army and give the Muslim Brotherhood a freer hand to secure control over all agencies of government, consolidate its hegemony, and engineer a political transformation tailored to promote its perpetuation in

power. This, after all, was the Muslim Brotherhood's long dreamed of design and the aim they pursued since leaping aboard the revolution and even more doggedly after they came to power, regardless of the deterioration in the economy and the state of security. Eventually, when the army was weakened sufficiently in Sinai and neutralised, they intended to convert it to a whip to tame the people and to defend their wealth and power. When that design failed to pan out, and the Muslim Brotherhood was ousted from power by popular demand, they unleashed the terrorist weapon not just against the army but also against the whole of Egyptian society.

It is equally impossible to deny that all politicised groups, associations and organisations with an Islamist frame of reference, whether violent in orientation or advocates of peaceful change, emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood umbrella. Some of these may have wanted to rival or oppose the Muslim Brotherhood. Others may have been put off by what they regarded as its obsequiousness towards the ruling authorities during the successive eras of Egypt's modern history. Of particular interest, here, are those that favoured the shorter route — violence — in the pursuit of the fulfilment of the Islamist project; namely, the acquisition of power.

As indicated above, there is considerable overlap between the extremist thought of jihadist groups and the Muslim Brotherhood's current leaders — Qutbists who assail all who differ with them as heretics and infidels, who reject political plurality, and who claim to represent God's view on how we should live our lives. The Muslim Brotherhood's gambit of relying on some jihadist Salafist factions is a dangerous gamble that threatens to jeopardise Egypt's security and future. Above all, it could pave the way to foreign intervention, at levels that would be more extensive and intense than at present, and in a manner that would be unpredictable as well as harsh.

Religious violence and terrorism is a chronic disease in our history. It has been regenerated and bred without interruption throughout the ages with tendentious and erroneous interpretations of Quranic verses, false attributions of words and deeds to the Prophet, the sanctification of the ideas of theologians who lived centuries later, and the lack of a jurisprudential social science that analyses ancient theological notions, pronouncements and fatwas in terms of the times and conditions in which those theologians lived. This intractable disease is what has long bred armies of kharijites bent on killing Muslims who differ with their extremist ideas, ideas that stem from their self-serving reading of the Quranic verse: "If an idolater appeals for your protection, offer him refuge until he hears the words of God, then guide him to safety, for they are a people who do not know." (9:6)

Throughout Islamic history there has never been a period free of those takfiris who dig through yellowed tomes without knowledge and erudition, who distort our great magnanimous faith and try to void it of its lofty spirit and aims without compunction, and who find in times of strife and upheaval opportunities to rear their heads and attack others out of their delusion that they and they alone possess the true word of God.

In modern times, these kharijites condemned Gamal Abdel-Nasser, Anwar Al-Sadat and Mubarak. At one point, they even branded Morsi as a heretic, even though he sports the beard of the faithful, prays on Fridays, preaches to people from pulpits, sprinkling his speeches with citations from the Quran and hadith, and belongs to a group that professes to be made up of true

Muslims and that for many years had campaigned under the slogan “Islam is the solution” before adjusting its tone to “Al-Nahda (the “renaissance project”) is the will of the people”.

This is not to suggest that Morsi’s predecessors in the president’s office were not Muslim, but only that the takfiris did not see them that way. Morsi, of course, knew this, just as he knew that his fellow “brothers” in the Muslim Brotherhood leadership were inclined to a mode of thought that converged in part with the ideas of the Tawhid and Jihad group.

That mode of thought formed the basis of the Muslim Brotherhood’s reversion to violence during the period of their rule, and with venom after their fall from power. It explains why they turned so readily for help to allies and proxies in Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya and some factions of the jihadist Salafist trend. It also accounts for why they worked to prepare an environment for violence and other pernicious phenomena in order to close political horizons, alter the rules of the political game to forestall political and ideological plurality and, subsequently, in order to wreak attrition on the state and terrorise society as punishment for the people’s revolution against the disaster of Muslim Brotherhood rule.