

## **UNPRECEDENTED PRESSURES, UNCHARTED COURSE FOR EGYPT'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD**

**NATHAN J. BROWN AND MICHELE DUNNE**

The Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest opposition movement and one of its oldest, is squeezed between an unprecedented crackdown from the security state and a young generation pushing for more assertive action against the regime of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. As a movement that has long espoused evolutionary change morphs into one that advocates revolutionary change—and struggles with whether that means adopting a strategy of violence against the state—the implications for Egypt and the entire region are massive.

### **Diverging Views Amid an Unprecedented Crackdown**

- While the Brotherhood has faced several crackdowns, notably a lengthy one under late president Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, it has never experienced as intense a period of killing, imprisonment, torture, and other forms of repression as the one since the July 2013 coup against former president Mohamed Morsi, a senior Brotherhood figure.
- The Brotherhood's internal review of Morsi's disastrous year in power concluded that the organization failed to be revolutionary enough, and that the political deals it tried to cut with the military and other parts of the state backfired.
- Brotherhood leaders worry about losing the allegiance of youth, who are taking the brunt of repression and are susceptible to radicalization by extremist groups.
- Leaders have become more deferential to younger members, who are driving the organization to an extent not seen before.

### **A More Revolutionary Direction**

- The Brotherhood as an organization inside and outside Egypt is back on its feet and held elections for underground leadership positions, including the general guide and members of the Guidance Bureau, as well as for a new external affairs bureau in Istanbul.
- Brotherhood leaders and activists are still in an early stage of defining what it will mean for the organization to become revolutionary. The only certainty is that it means opposing an Egyptian state they have concluded is irredeemable.
- While the Brotherhood's official position remains largely one of nonviolent resistance, what members and leaders say in public and private is more ambivalent, and several Brotherhood statements have endorsed retribution. Some members express concern about abandoning decades of nonviolence and fear being drawn into an unwinnable and extremely destructive armed struggle with security forces. Others say that in the context of unprecedented state violence against the Brotherhood and all other opposition, continuing to call for peaceful resistance is nonsensical.
- The regime has increased its crackdown on the Brotherhood, including threatening to execute senior leaders, after violence against state targets by Sinai-based extremists escalated in summer 2015, even though the state has not established Brotherhood responsibility for that violence. This has raised the stakes higher than ever.

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