The Dispute over the New Rules of the Game The State and the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan

Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman
September 2020

The Jordanian government had not taken drastic steps with regards to the Brotherhood, but the outcomes of the Arab spring, especially after 2013, provided it the opportunity to do so. The regime appeared to consider what happened during the Arab Spring to be treason or a Brotherhood 'conspiracy' to topple the government."

Behind these policies is a conviction that has taken root over time and even become a sort of 'official doctrine' that the previous relationship and alliance between the state and the Brotherhood has ended for good and that the two parties have reached a final stage of 'divorce.'

The group has taken unprecedented steps since 2016. This is evident by the development of the by-laws, the complete organizational separation from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the commitment to separate the group and the political party.

FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

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1

Introduction

The current crisis between the government in Jordan and the Muslim Brotherhood differs from past crises. The traditional ebb and flow that characterized relations between the state and the Muslim Brotherhood for the past seventy years no longer applies to the relations between the two parties today and the rules of this relationship no longer provide a basis for the future.

In this article, we will test the previous hypothesis, noting that both parties have not reached an agreement on the rules that will govern their relationship in the next phase. Nor have they entered into joint dialogue (as of the writing of this article), even following the major transformations since the Arab Spring in 2011 and the latest teachers' crisis.[1]

Ironically, whereas the state accused the Muslim Brotherhood of attempting to overthrow the rules of the traditional equation during the Arab Spring through its political demands, Brotherhood leaders today, consider state actions such as withdrawing their legal recognition, confiscating their property and finances, and refusing to engage in dialogue, to be a state-led coup against them. The writer ultimately have doubts about the thesis, as it is clear that the mutual trust gap seen during the Arab Spring still exists today. Will this "gap" remain the main variable that governs the "gray state" between the two parties, which former Islamist member and current leader of the Zamzam party, Dr. Nabil al-Kofahi calls "the state of no peace and no war?" Or, is there the potential to overcome doubts and create new foundations for the relationship in light of the collapse of the previous foundations? What lies beyond the current crossroads? In what direction are the foundations for the next relationship heading? Will the foundations be dictated by one party or will it be mutual? These are the questions I will address in this article.

1 If the constitution serves as the official contract determining the essence of the relationship between the state, citizens, institutions and political forces, and laws regulate these relationships, then the situation in the Arab world requires that political actors make clarifications and that agreements be added to the constitution and laws in order to bridge the trust gap in the relationship between these different actors. This is especially true when we discuss the relationship between the regime and Islamists because it is governed by concerns like establishing a religious state or "democracy for one time only" or the fear of Islamic fascism, which is employed as a boogeyman by the state to not proceed with the democratic process. Therefore, there is the need for internal dialogues and discussions to agree upon the rules of the political game under the umbrella of the constitution and the laws in order to avoid scenarios like military coups or domestic chaos.

2

Formations of the Crisis: Causes and Consequences

The current status quo of relations is not a sudden development. Rather, the crisis took shape gradually in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s after parliamentary elections revealed that the Muslim Brotherhood had become the largest opposition organization in the country, taking the place of the leftist and nationalist forces, which the state had originally allied with the Brotherhood to oppose. This provided the Brotherhood space to engage in social, charitable, cultural, and political causes during the 1950s-1990s. The Brotherhood formed a network of charitable institutions, universities, properties, and activities under the umbrella of the Islamic Centre Society which was established in 1991. In doing so, the Brotherhood was able to entrench itself in society and influence a broad segment of it. [2]

There was a brief honeymoon period between the state and the Brotherhood during the 1991 war in Iraq, when the Brotherhood participated in Mudar Badran's government with five ministerial portfolios. However, after Jordan's entry into peace negotiations with Israel and the signing of the Wadi Araba treaty in 1994, the state began to see the Brotherhood as a political opponent instead of a partner in confronting internal and regional forces. Meanwhile, the Brotherhood began to aspire to play a greater role in the political arena commensurate with its popular strength.

Differences grew between the state and the Brotherhood, and in 1997 the Brotherhood called for the boycott of parliamentary elections. However, the legacy of relations between the leaders of the moderate group in the Brotherhood and the late King Hussein bin Talal remained strong and prevented the relationship from reaching "the brink of the abyss." Instead, issues were resolved through personal meetings.

With King Abdullah's ascension to the throne, the relationship between the two sides entered a new phase. Hamas leaders were expelled from Jordan at the end of 1999 and the Brotherhood file was handed over to be dealt with in large part by the security institutions.

2 Muhammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Haniyeh, "The Islamic Solution in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security," Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, 2nd Ed., (2013): 63 - 72.

The Brotherhood then participated in the 2003 parliamentary elections based on an agreement with the regime. This was linked to international and regional trends after 911/ that promoted democracy in the Arab world and the rise of American and Western theories that linked the emergence of al-Qaeda to Arab despotism.[3]

The opening of relations between both parties, however, was temporary. Regional variables soon imposed themselves on the relationship, such as the emergence of the axis of resistance comprised of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, with the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan being associated with this axis, and the emergence of the moderate Arab camp made up of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The result of this regional and domestic polarization was the launch of a major government campaign against the Brotherhood, including the arrest of four deputies after they paid their condolences to the family of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq, in 2006. This was followed by tampering with the 2007 parliamentary elections to defeat Muslim Brotherhood candidates and other political forces. This was repeated in subsequent municipal elections, ultimately convincing the Brotherhood to abruptly withdraw from them.[4]

Meetings between the king and Brotherhood leadership became rare, and their relationship began to be framed by security matters. Relations saw a brief and unexpected thaw in 2008 at the hands of the former intelligence director, Mohammed al-Dhahabi, who oversaw a rapprochement with the Brotherhood and Hamas in the context of a struggle he had with his then rival, the Chief of the Royal Hashemite Court Bassem Awadallah. However, these changes were short lived and ended when the intelligence director changed that same year in 2008.[5]

The fundamental shift in relations occurred with the outbreak of the 2011 Arab Spring. The Muslim Brotherhood joined the popular movement, participated in demonstrations and marches, and refused to participate in the National Dialogue Committee, which the government formed in 2011 to foster dialogue about the demanded reforms. In response, the Brotherhood presented seven reforms which the regime considered to be a "soft coup" due to its attempt to change the rules of the game in Jordan and to limit the powers of the king constitutionally and politically.[6]

The Brotherhood did not participate in the parliamentary elections in 2012, reinforcing

3 Muhammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Haniyeh, "The Islamic Solution in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security," Friedrich-Elbert-Stiftung and the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, 2nd Edition, 2013, pp. 77 - 72.

4 About the 2007 elections, "Kalaldeh: A former intelligence director appointed 80 deputies," Sawalif News, 14 July 2020: https://bit.ly/2Fkejhe.

5 "Amer al- Sabayleh and Jordan WikiLeaks: Muhammad Al- Dhahabi," Amman News, 13 August 2011: https://www.ammonnews.net/article/97032.

6 Muhammad Abu Rumman, "Options for Political Participation" in "Restricted Democracy: The case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan," Association of Arab Universities Journal for Arts 12, no. 2 (2015): 476 - 481.

the confidence gap between them and the king, and intensifying tensions to an unprecedented degree. Furthermore, in line with regional changes, the Brotherhood's ambitions evolved from expanding its role to self-preservation. In July 2013, the Egyptian army overthrew the Brotherhood's rule in Egypt, followed by a strong regional stance against the group. Jordan's allies, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, all classified the Brotherhood as a "terrorist organization." Meanwhile, the course of the Syrian revolution changed drastically with Iran's intervention and Hamas' departure from Damascus, abandoning the axis of resistance. During this stage,[7] only Qatar retained regional support for the Islamists, followed by Turkey, which took in the Egyptian Brotherhood leaders and Islamists fleeing Egypt after General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi took power.

The previous US administration also backed away from its temporary rapprochement with the Islamists and the international and regional momentum for the group's endeavor to enhance its political role dissipated. The pendulum then swung in the other direction as Jordan's allies pushed the regime to take similar measures to criminalize the group, classify it as a terrorist organization, and expel it from the "political arena."

The Jordanian government had not taken drastic steps with regards to the Brotherhood, but the outcomes of the Arab spring, especially after 2013, provided it the opportunity to do so. The regime appeared to consider what happened during the Arab Spring to be treason or a Brotherhood "conspiracy" to topple the government. This is despite the fact that the Brotherhood did not raise slogans calling for the "fall of the regime," but instead put forth unprecedented demands.[8]

According to a government official, "What worried the state during the Arab Spring was the radical change in the Brotherhood's thinking. Some Brotherhood leaders began declaring that they were partners in government, calling for a full partnership as if they were a party and the state a different party." The official added that he "personally heard this suggestion expressed by Brotherhood leaders and then in Dr. Hammam Saeed's speech in January 2013, in which he claimed that the Islamic state is coming. This only reinforced the state of anger and suspicion among the state agencies towards the group's agenda." [9]

7 Muhammad Abu Rumman, "Or Release in Kindness" Al-Ghad, 31 January 2012.

8 Muhammad Abu Rumman, "Options for Political Participation" in "Restricted Democracy: The case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan," Association of Arab Universities Journal for Arts 12, no. 2 (2015): 476 - 481.

9 A meeting with this official at his home on 9 February 2020. Compare his remarks to what Dr. Hammam Saeed said in a Friday sermon during a sit-in with the Brotherhood and their supporters in what is known as Jumah al-Sharia at Firas roundabout in Jabal Al-Hussein. Saeed said: "The Levant is a land of jihad and preparation, a land of Islamic revival, and a rightly-guided state will soon be established on this land."
"Hammam Saeed preaches to the crowd: an Islamic state is coming. . . a state of alert for security," Al-Balad News, 19 January 2013: https://cutt.us/gp1wG.

The Muslim Brotherhood returned to participate in the 2016 parliamentary elections as well as municipal and local council elections. As a result, the Brotherhood was able to send 15 deputies from the National Coalition for Reform, which is led by Islamists from the party's candidates and independent personalities, to the House of Representatives to form the parliamentary reform bloc. Thus, after their four-year boycott, the Brotherhood returned to the political arena.[10]

Their return to politics had no impact on their relationship with the state. Instead, the crisis continued between the two parties and the state attempted to exploit fissures within the Brotherhood. The state supported a new offshoot founded by former General-Secretary Abdul Majid Thunaibat, giving it the name the "Muslim Brotherhood Association." The new association was made up of historical leaders in the Brotherhood, and the National Conference, which was founded by leaders splintering from the Brotherhood led by Dr. Raheel Gharaibeh and Nabil al-Kofahi and which received indirect support from official circles.

The Legislation Bureau issued a fatwa saying that the new association had the right to inherit and seize the Muslim Brotherhood's movable and immovable property. The Department of Lands and Survey, which is responsible for property ownership, began to implement this decision. However, the Muslim Brotherhood filed a case in court against the Department and thus the two sides (the state and the Brotherhood) entered a legal dispute related to its property and its legal status. For the first time, the legal status of the Brotherhood was raised as an issue in Jordan.[11]

Next came the 2018 protests which brought prime minister Omar al-Razzaz to power, and later the teachers strike in September 2019, which was the straw that broke the camel's back with regards to the state's relationship with the Brotherhood. After the head of the Teachers Syndicate died in a car accident, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Dr. Nasser al-Nawasrah, took on the role and oversaw the longest and perhaps largest teachers' strike in the kingdom's history, as teachers make up one of the largest government sectors. At the end of the day, the government was forced to sign an agreement with teachers that fulfills their financial and professional demands.[12]

It was clear that many parts of the country were not satisfied with this conclusion. The Muslim Brotherhood was linked to the teachers strike and was accused by state institutions of starting the matter and controlling the teachers union to serve the Brotherhood's

10 "The Islamist Coalition wins 15 seats," Jafra News, 20 July 2016: https://cutt.us/KixOZ.

11 "The problematic legal situation: Nassim Anizat transfers the Brotherhood's property to Brotherhood Association," Al-Dustour Daily, 12 June 2105.
"A legal battle awaits Jordan's Brotherhood with dissidents over property," Arabi 21 News, 18 June 2015.

12 "The agreement between the government and the teachers officially signed," Al-Ghad, 6 October 2019.

goals. This ultimately took the crisis to a new stage and greatly elevated tensions.

The crisis was renewed with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Jordan. The government announced the suspension of bonuses for employees in the public sector, which includes teachers after their agreement with the government in 2019. The teachers insisted on implementing the agreement, including the bonuses, but the government refused to discuss the issue entirely, so the crisis returned to square one. This time, however, the regime took early and critical steps by arresting the members of the Syndicate Council, at the decision of the public prosecutor, and directing charges against them. The regime also froze the teachers union for two years and appointed a committee from the Ministry of Education to supervise it during this period.[13]

State media drew a clear connection between the teachers union and the Muslim Brotherhood, claiming the Brotherhood was using the union to serve its own goals of confronting the regime, a claim the Brotherhood denied. The Brotherhood›s general-secretary insisted in an organizational letter that the issue was a professional and labor issue for the teachers union and that the Brotherhood was seeking to adopt a reform initiative to solve the problem, but it is not a party to the crisis.[14]

The teachers union council was released on bail on 23 August 2020, after a month of detention. However, the crisis between the union and the government is ongoing. Likewise, the situation between the regime and the Brotherhood remains unresolved, with regards to the question of the group's legal status, or future relations in light of domestic, regional, and international changes. For example, one question is whether the Democratic Party's return to power would influence the state's relationship with the group and its current policies? Another question pertains to how shifts in Jordan's relations with the Gulf states could be another variable, by either inspiring policies against the Brotherhood or in favor of it. Or is the domestic atmosphere the main determinant affecting official policies? I will address these questions in the next part of the article.

13 Dana Jibril, "Two weeks after the closing of the Teachers Syndicate: An ongoing crisis," 7iber, 9 August 2020: https://n9.cl/62u4.

14 The Comptroller-General's message on the Brotherhood's website, "Al- Thunaibat: We are keen on the stability of the nation... the Brotherhood has no relation to the teachers crisis," 17 August 2020: https://n9.cl/7kpvo.

3

What Does the Government Want from the Brotherhood?

This question is one of the most prominent questions revolving around the Muslim Brotherhood today. It has sparked an internal debate within the Brotherhood about whether the regime is moving in the direction of other Arab regimes. For example, will Jordan head in the direction of Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, and classify it as a terrorist organization, criminalize affiliation with it, and deem it to be an illegal entity? Or does the regime seek to create new rules for the relationship by weakening its traditional institutions, tools, and capacities of mobilization, and reducing its political weight and influence?

The Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, Musa Ma'ayta, maintains that the state does not have any intentions to criminalize the group and classify it as a terrorist organization and that there are Jordanian political and social determinants to prevent this. However, at the same time, Ma'ayta notes that there is a need to reformulate the rules of the relationship. According to Ma'ayta, one option that the state would allow is to get rid of the duplication between the group's social and civil society work and the political party. As a result; keep the party within a political legal framework that is engaged only in political work. There would then be no need for the Muslim Brotherhood.[15]

Another senior official supports the same option, asserting in a private meeting that a complete abolition of the Brotherhood is not necessary, instead calling for a redefinition of its legal and political status. One official does not deny that external factors, like the agendas of Jordan's traditional allies such as Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia towards political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood, influence Jordanian decision makers. When the Brotherhood is legally terminated and transformed into a political party, like the Islamic Action Front or any other party, Jordan will be relieved of this headache and restore its harmony with its Arab allies.[16]

However, has the state already finally and decisively opted to abolish the Muslim

15 A meeting with the Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs in his office at the Ministry on 26 August 2020.

16 A meeting with an official who requested not to be named on 24 August 2020.

Brotherhood, with its legacy, name and presence, and replace it with the umbrella of the Islamic Action Front, or could the tide turn back to the status quo ante, allowing the state restore its relationship with the Brotherhood as seen in previous decades? Or is the state too weak to abolish the Brotherhood, thus prompting it to seek a deal with them?

The answer to this question is important as it is also important to discuss the Brotherhood's options to deal with these different approaches.

We have seen how policies in place in the 1960s and 70s allowed the Brotherhood to grow in society and build a network of institutions, strengthen its economic capacity, and voluntary services, and gain influence in universities and student unions. However, with the 1992 election law, this amicable coexistence began to wane. The state began to turn against its former ally, causing the group to turn into an opposition party in the mid-1990s, eventually becoming the strongest opposition party.

Following the 1990s, the relationship between the state and the Brotherhood witnessed stages of push and pull, rise and fall, and what could be called a Tom and Jerry like relationship as described by American scholar, Nathan Brown. However, there was a clear state strategy throughout the past three decades. Regardless of the regional and international variables, the state strategy has been characterized by the following policies:

First:

The quest to reduce the group's representation in the political process. The regime has always been keen to ensure that the Brotherhood's representatives in the House of Representatives do not attain a high enough percentage so that they can actually influence decisions in the parliament. Especially after Hamas won the majority of the seats in the Palestinian Parliament in 2006 and Hezbollah had a significant bloc in the Lebanese parliament, Jordanian officials began to fear that the Brotherhood had a growing appetite for power, similar to these other Islamist groups who were their allies at the time.[17]

Although regional conditions have changed, the equation (less than one-third of the House of Representatives), remains the same. This limits any amendments to election laws since there are regulations in place to ensure that Islamists do not get a parliamentary bloc that influences the decisions of the House of Representatives.[18]

Second:

The state seeks to get rid of the Brotherhood's institutions, networks, and capabilities in the public domain, especially financial and economic. Accordingly, the state took the Islamic Centre Society from the Brotherhood

17 "Hamas's victory strengthens Jordanian Brotherhood's desire for power," Amman Net, 2 February 2006.

18 Raja Talab, "The Brotherhood's Spanner in the Works for Reform," Amman Net, 29 March 2011.

in 2006, which according to unofficial records, gave the group important influence in society through its volunteer, charitable, and community work.[19]

In the meantime, the state harbors a parallel concern about reducing the Brotherhood's size and influence in universities, unions, and institutions in the public sphere, which they believe the Brotherhood transformed into "enemy number one" of the state. The state supports candidates who compete with the Brotherhood, even leftist and nationalist candidates, who for the past decades were common opponents of both the state and the Brotherhood. Today, however, these candidates are a state ally against the Brotherhood.

Third:

The state makes efforts to withdraw any privileges that the Brotherhood obtained over the past decades through its volunteer work and work in mosques and charitable societies. As seen by its opponents, the Brotherhood's religious and social initiative provided a platform for recruiting new members and mobilizing ahead of elections. This is the rug that state policies tried to pull out from under the Brotherhood's feet, so to speak. Mosques, for example, were monitored and the role of Muslim Brotherhood preachers reduced, Muslim Brotherhood leaders prevented from speaking for a prolonged period, the group's charitable and volunteer work examined, and their license to carry out these activities withdrawn. Ultimately, the state tightly controlled Brotherhood activities and members in the public sphere.[20]

Fourth:

The state indirectly supported the formation of fissures within the group. The first fissure occurred in 2002, with the formation of the Islamic Centre Party followed by the splitting off of the Zamzam movement. Finally, the Muslim Brotherhood Association was established and the state gave it legal legitimacy. Since the elections in 2007, it has been clear that there is official support for any new Islamist representation against the Muslim Brotherhood.

Fifth:

Linked to the previous point, the state supported efforts to weaken the Brotherhood in East Jordanian and tribal circles. While it proved to be more difficult to weaken the group's influence in Palestinian-Jordanian circles, it was easier for official policies to forestall a "popular breakthrough" among East Jordanians. It became clear that the electoral weight of the group was concentrated in cities with large Palestinian-Jordanian populations such as Amman, Zarqa, and to a lesser degree

19 Muhammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Haniyeh, "The Islamic Solution in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security," Friedrich-Elbert-Stiftung and the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, 2nd Edition, (2013): 76 - 80.

20 Muhammad Abu Rumman, "The dynamics of the crisis between the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and the regime," Al-Jazeera, 7 July 2006.

Irbid, which has been influenced by the fissures within the Brotherhood.

Sixth:

The state wants to rescind the Brotherhood's legal status, the final step in the official policies whereby the state is trying to eliminate the part of the organization that exists under the surface. By transferring influence to the Islamic Action Front, the state manages to neutralize many members of the organization who would prefer to work in the shadows as part of the organization rather than in the political party. For such members, the organizational work is more compatible with the traditional ideology that combines emotional appeal, proselytization, and social and political aspects and is outside the gaze of authority. The state is trying to look at the organization as a whole by bringing it out into the open – and this is precisely what is achieved by restructuring its legal status.

To return to the key question: will outside factors or domestic factors play a more influential role in reconfiguring the relationship between the state and the Muslim Brotherhood? Will they restore relations to what they once were when they were characterized by alliance and coexistence? The official state policies of the past three decades indicate that despite some variation, the state has made a mounting effort to curtail, weaken and undermine the Brotherhood, and box it in within the "smallest possible sphere" of communal and political influence.

Behind these policies is a conviction that has taken root over time and even become a sort of "official doctrine" that the previous relationship and alliance between the state and the Brotherhood has ended for good and that the two parties have reached a final stage of "divorce."

Ironically, the Muslim Brotherhood's narrative is that it served the state in the previous decades and was a source of domestic stability in the face of internal and external threats and that its presence continues to serve as a key pillar of political stability. The state's current narrative, on the other hand, maintains that the Brotherhood benefited at the expense of the state and from the favorable policies towards it seen over the past decade. In turn, according to the state, the Brotherhood became a "state within a state" of unsure loyalties. During the post-2006 era of regional polarization, the Brotherhood fell within the camp hostile to the state's policies and regional interests, whether during the time of the "Axis of Resistance" as self-named (Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas), or during the Arab Spring and the period after within the Qatar-Turkey-Islamist axis.

The doctrine that currently governs the state is likely to continue and there will not be a return to the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, Muslim Brotherhood followers must adapt and change according to the new policies. This is something that the officials sought to establish by excluding the current General-

Secretary of the Brotherhood, Abdul Hamid Thunaibat, from informal meetings, especially during the teachers crisis – even though other leaders were invited. Excluding Thunaibat from these meetings is ultimately part of the state's attempt to deprive the Brotherhood of any legal legitimacy. A high-ranking official confirms this new rule, and considers that inviting the group's general-secretary to meet with the ministers of interior and political affairs to deliver a message about the teachers was an unintended mistake. The message behind the meeting was the need to affirm that the state does not recognize the Brotherhood and must correct its legal status.[21]

For that reason, official policies in the coming period will continue to attack the Brotherhood legally, confiscate its property as well as any offices and branches that still exist, remove any legal capacity or personality from the group, and deem its representation and bodies to be illegal and in violation of the law.

21 A meeting with an official who requested not to be named, op. cit.

4

Shifting Sands within the Brotherhood

It is difficult to understand the Brotherhood's policies towards these pivotal shifts without analyzing internal dynamics. These shifts played an important role in shaping the group's policies and vision of their relationship with the state, as well as its political and organizational future.

A history of polarization and fissure is rooted in the Brotherhood's history. The most prominent currents appeared at the end of the 1970s with the rise of the ideological current which was influenced by Sayyid Qutb's school and dominated power positions within the Brotherhood in the 1980s. Eventually, the pragmatic current, influenced by Hassan al-Turabi's school in Sudan and Rashid Ghannouchi's school in Tunisia, rose to prominence with its role expanding after the 1989 parliamentary elections and establishment of the Islamic Action Front in 1992.[22]

In the mid 1990s, a generational struggle broke out in the organization. A new current within the Brotherhood emerged, calling itself the "golden mean" and gained popularity among young members who had criticism for their elders, both the ideologues and the pragmatists. The "golden mean" split at the end of the 1990s over the crisis within the Brotherhood on Hamas, which was in Jordan at the time until the leadership was expelled in late 1999. The crisis with Hamas led to the formation of new identities. Those who retained their focus only on Jordanian national issues kept their affiliation with the "golden mean," while those who believed that priority should be given to supporting the Palestinian cause became known as the "fourth current."

In 2002, a realignment took place within the Brotherhood. An alliance formed between moderates-pragmatists (referred to as the "doves" in the media) and the "golden mean." A second alliance, was made up of hardliners-ideologues (referred to as the "hawks") and the fourth current, which was considered to be close to Hamas. Polarization remained strong between the two currents. The first current saw a need to reduce the severity of the crisis with the regime and focus on domestic issues,

22 Raheel Gharaibeh, "Internal dynamics evolve in Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood," Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan (2015): 6 - 12.

while the second considered the Palestinian crisis and regional issues to be a priority, along with the need to support Hamas because it represents the Palestinian struggle.[23]

The "moderate current" that managed to take control of the Brotherhood's leadership received a severe blow in 2006 with the rigging of the parliamentary elections and the state's takeover of the Islamic Centre Party. Afterwards, they signed an unprecedented paper affirming the group's commitment to loyalty to the king, the regime, and the renunciation of violence. The leadership from the moderate current was toppled in the early organizational elections that took place in 2008, and a hawk for the first time assumed the position as the group's General-Secretary. The new General-Secretary was of Palestinian origin, constituting the first time someone in this role was Palestinian, as the General-Secretary used to be strictly of East Jordanian origin in order to contain the crisis with the regime.[24]

The devastating blow to the moderate current led to surprising transformations in the Brotherhood's internal ranks and development of political thought. Some of the moderate leaders, like the former General-Secretary Salem Al-Falahat, Dr. Raheel al-Gharabeih, and Dr. Nabil al-Kofahi, among others, adopted an initiative called "Constitutional Monarchy," taking their criticism to levels that crossed the red line for the first time in the group's history. Ironically, the hawks disapproved of the initiative because they did not want to put the movement into a direct clash with the state on this sensitive issue.[25]

Internal shifts continued and the discourse of the centrist movement, allied with the doves, began to criticize the state at an unprecedented level. The group also strengthened its alliance with opposition currents, for example, with the National Reform Front headed by the former Prime Minister Ahmed Obeidat and other leftist and nationalist parties and personalities. However, the alliance did not last long due to internal disputes over events in Syria.[26]

The centrist leaders themselves announced the Zamzam initiative in 2013, which calls for transcending ideological concepts and terminology and launching a participatory effort focusing on national consensus in order to avoid the Egyptian scenario. However, eventually the leaders who started the initiative split from the Brotherhood and started a new

23 Muhammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Haniyeh, "The Islamic Solution in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security," Friedrich-Elbert-Stiftung and the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, 2nd Edition (2013): 82 - 92.

24 Salem al-Falahat, "The Islamic Movement in Jordan: A historical and analytical study and self-criticism," Dar Ammar, Amman 1st edition, v.1 (2017): 272 - 301.

25 Muhammad Abu Rumman and Neven Bondokji, "From the Islamic Caliphate to the Civil State: Young Islamists in Joran and the transformations of the Arab Spring," Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2018), Amman: 6568-.

26 Anis Khasawneh, "Reform of the National Front and the necessity for its president to step down," Zad Jordan News: http://www.jordanzad.com/print.php?id=115593.

party in 2015 called the National Congress Party or Zamzam.

Important Brotherhood leaders joined Zamzam, most prominently the former General-Secretary Abdul Majeed Thunaibat, who licensed a new association under the name of the Muslim Brotherhood Association in Jordan in 2015 and took legal personality from the original group. For the first time, a conflict broke out regarding the name of the Muslim Brotherhood. The state favored the new organization and hundreds of personalities, branches, and offices from the parent group joined the new association.

The next split was from the Committee of Wise Men which was led by the previous General-Secretary as well as Salem al-Falahat. The Rescue and Partnership Party was established, and new parties emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood, independent from the Islamic Action Front. By 2016, the majority of the members from the "golden mean" and dove currents left the group.[27]

Organizational elections for the selection of the Shura Council and Executive Office took place unconventionally and with a degree of discretion in order to avoid provoking the state, which had announced that the Brotherhood was not a legitimate and legal entity. One of the leaders of the doves, Abdul Hamid Thunaibat, was chosen to be the group's General-Secretary in 2016 and with him an executive office shared by what remained of the doves, moderates, and hawks.

The void left by departure of hundreds of leaders and youth from the Brotherhood to the new Brotherhood Association, Zamzam, and the Rescue and Partnership Party, was filled by Zaki Bani Irshaid, a past leader in the fourth current and hawks. Irshaid had been imprisoned and by the time he left prison after a year and a half between 201415-, his political perspectives had evolved. Irshaid discussed the shifts in his perception in the Kuala Lumpur Forum, which was headed by Mahathir Mohamad, who served twice as Malaysia's prime minister. In his discussions, Irshaid confirmed that his reconsiderations began even earlier, in 2012, and then further evolved with the Kuala Lumpur Forum and matured while he was in prison when he had ample time to think and reflect. After Irshaid left prison, he led a movement of young people to fill the vacuum, calling it the moderate movement in the group. In the last organizational elections, the moderate movement was able to return to leadership positions within the group. Meanwhile, Murad Adaileh, who today is one of the most prominent symbols for the hawks, led the Islamic Action Front.[28]

27 Details on these developments and fissures can be found here: Muhammad Abu Rumman and Neven Bondokji, "From the Islamic Caliphate to the Civil State: Young Islamists in Joran and the transformations of the Arab Spring," Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2018), Amman: 81 - 111.

28 An interview with Zaki Bani Irsheed, in my office at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan on 23 July 2020.

Thabet Assaf, one of the prominent young leaders today in the party and the official spokesperson, points out that the current division between the so-called centrists on the one hand and the so-called hawks on the other hand is imprecise and has no ideological or intellectual basis. Although he acknowledges the existence of the two currents, he insists that the differences are not ideological in the customary sense used historically within the group. The organizational situation is more like "shifting sands" and there is no stable and firm division. Instead, differences emerge on the basis of personal convictions and not within the amorphous frameworks of the currents both within the organization and the political party.[29]

Assaf added that the group's biggest concern today is the legal status and the relationship with the regime. For the first time, there is a joint group of leaders among the Brotherhood, the party, and Islamist MPs examining the political environment and presenting its vision and recommendations to both the group's leadership and the party.[30]

Furthermore, Assaf and Deputy General-Secretary of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Aql, confirmed that the group has taken unprecedented steps since 2016. This is evident by the development of the by-laws, the complete organizational separation from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the commitment to separate the group and the political party so that the party's secretary-general is chosen through the party's conference and not through the recommendation of the Muslim Brotherhood's Shura Council, as was previously the case.[31]

The group also issued a political-intellectual document in 2019. Through the document, it redefined itself in the Jordanian arena as a Jordanian national movement with an Islamic message and reaffirmed that it represents moderation in the face of extremism and violence, and that it seeks to spread the spirit of moderation in society. This was the first time that the group's official discourse appeared to be an attempt to play a moderate role in the face of radical currents like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, speak about citizenship and an inclusive national identity, and develop the use of political concepts (previous speeches were immersed in ideology and ideological language). This new document ultimately reveals that the group's language and discourse has become more politicized than before.[32]

29 A meeting with Thabet Assaf in my office at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan on 23 July 2020.

30 A meeting with Thabet Assaf in my office at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan on 23 July 2020.

31 A meeting with General Muhammad Aql of the Islamic Action Front on 26 July 2020, in Shafa Badran (where the group's offices were located before they moved).

32 The political document for the Islamic movement in Jordan issued by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front in 2019.

The Islamist movement presented a paper called "The National Political Initiative," produced by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Action Front, and the National Alliance for Reform. The paper included the group's vision to escape a complex political-economic crisis through constitutional amendments and moving towards parliamentary government.[33]

Despite the remarkable developments in the group's discourse and political thought, there are major concepts that remain subject to controversy among the group and party alike, such as the concept of the civil state and the separation between proselytization and politics.

33 The National Political Initiative by the Islamic Action Front, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the National Alliance for Reform, 1 April 2019.

5

Outlining the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party'soptions

What are the Brotherhood›s options and what is its vision for engaging with official state policies with regards to the legal situation as well as the different scenarios for their relationship with the state?

There is still open and ongoing discussion in Brotherhood circles to discuss these policies and the options available to them. Earlier, I addressed the various paths and scenarios available to the Brotherhood. However, until now no decision has been made, which raises the question: what are the main trends?

First:

"Taking shelter in the shadows." So far, this is the general trend led by the hawks as well as some doves. There is a preference for waiting it out and not taking steps to provoke the state, but also not moving to dissolve the Brotherhood. This trend wagers that circumstances can change. Consequently, the regime finds itself confronted with dialogue with the Brotherhood and the opportunity to reconfigure the relationship between the two parties.

Some leaders highlight the "Egyptian model" before the revolution in January 2011 as an example. Although the Brotherhood was illegal, it actively participated in elections, syndicates, politics, and in the public space. The Brotherhood entered alliances with existing parties like the new Wafd Party and the Labor Party. Thus, the Egyptian Brotherhood did not lose its organizational power due to the ban. When the revolution occurred, the Brotherhood quickly returned to public and legal work and reopened its headquarters before the army's intervention in 2013. [34]

Second:

Joining the new Muslim Brotherhood association. This scenario was proposed after the new association was established, which invited members of the parent group to register and benefit from its legal status. The current General-Secretary, however, discounts this scenario and considers it to be political suicide for the Islamist movement.[35]

34 An interview with the General-Secretary of the Muslim Brotherhood at the Islamic Action Front's headquarters in Shafa Badran on 26 July 2020.

35 An interview with the General of the Muslim Brotherhood at the Islamic Action Front's headquarters in Shafa Badran on 26 July 2020 and an interview with Muhammad Aql.

Third:

Renewing the Muslim Brotherhood's license. This became an illegitimate option considering that the new Muslim Brotherhood Association took its name. For that reason, the Brotherhood considers starting a new association bearing a different name to serve as an umbrella for Muslim Brotherhood followers. However, there are two obstacles pertaining to this option:[36]

The new association will not possess the same heritage and symbolism as the Brotherhood. This has posed concerns that the transition process to the new organization will be difficult and that members could be lost during the process, because many members were attached to the Brotherhood's name and the identity, legacy, and history it symbolized.

There are no guarantees that the state will allow the Brotherhood to register and license one or more new associations, making this option a gamble, unless the two sides agree in advance, which to date has not occurred.

Fourth:

Transforming into a political party. This constitutes one of the main choices today among the scenarios. A number of leaders both in the organization and the party are calling for it, similar to the Tunisian experience. Opponents, however, are apprehensive that it is rather the group and not the political party that possesses organizational power and capacity to recruit new members and engage in social work. There are still a large number of Brotherhood followers who prefer traditional organizational work to the political party due to a lack of confidence in party work and the extent of the state's belief in its usefulness and seriousness. Furthermore, the ideology exhibited by the group is based on a combination of proselytization, social, and political work, raising the concern that followers brought up on this combination may not be satisfied with party work alone.[37]

Proposals within the group are not limited to a shift towards the Islamic Action Front. There are also other proposals to register a new party that will inherit the full "human cargo" of the group and encompass all their members. This is rooted in the belief that the Islamic Action Front in its current capacity will not be able to accommodate all the Brotherhood's members. This matter is yet to be settled within the group andparty.[38]

36 An interview with the General of the Muslim Brotherhood at the Islamic Action Front's headquarters in Shafa Badran on 26 July 2020 and an interview with Muhammad Aql.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid and Interview with Zaki Bani Irsheed.

6

Future Prospects: Rewriting the Rules of the Game

Despite the trust gap that developed between the state and the Brotherhood during the past period, especially since the Arab Spring, which strengthened the regime's belief that the Brotherhood is "enemy number one of the state," and despite the official policies that move towards terminating the group's legal existence, there is still space for the two sides to reformulate the rules of the game.

To begin with, the state has a firm conviction against criminalizing the group and classifying it as a terrorist organization. Accordingly, the intention behind the state's policies is to remove its official legal status and limit it to a political party.

On the other hand, the idea of transforming the group into a political party does not appear to be rejected by a broad current in the Brotherhood today. However, there are concerns about the need for this step to be taken through dialogue and consensus between the state, the organization, and the party, since shifting towards party work is a complex and lengthy process. This is a process some leaders have called "the safe passage," meaning that it should be gradual, and the group should be given time to follow through with the transition. [39]

Why did the Brotherhood not prepare its members in advance for this process and begin the process after the establishment of the new association nearly four years ago? The reason lied in the Brotherhood's belief that the new association would not succeed and that the regime would at some point return to them. At the time, it ultimately was not as clear as it is today that the Brotherhood's previous form was no longer acceptable to the state.

Brotherhood leaders today discuss their willingness to distinguish between their proselytization and their political efforts and to follow the Moroccan experience of having associations concerned with preaching and social reform while leaving political work entirely to the party. This is of course new to the group's discourse. They believe it is necessary to engage in dialogue with the regime in order to agree on the new formula so that they can establish associations that

39 Interview with Muhammad Aql.

adopt religious discourse, even if they do not retain the name of the Muslim Brotherhood.[40]

Within the Brotherhood, there is still a split on the necessity of keeping the name. Many sees it's important because of its historical, symbolic, and emotional weight, and others who believe that the name is not sacred since the goal is for the intellectual and cultural school of the Brotherhood. In addition to being a reference for the party and its members, without adhering to the literal name and historical slogans. It is well known, for example, that the Islamic Action Front ran in the 2016 parliamentary elections without raising the slogan "Islam is the solution," a historical slogan used by the group since the return to elections in the 1989 parliamentary elections.

On the other hand, official policies may help the group move forward with a greater degree of pragmatism by ending the group's current status and freeing the party's political experience from the group's historical domination over it.

Such a "forced passage" will help the realist current in the Brotherhood end the decades-long stalemate between a conservative and traditional current that fears change on the one hand and a pragmatist and realist current on the other hand that sees the Tunisian, Moroccan, and Turkish experiences as examples of the possibility of developing a political discourse and practical conduct for the group and the party.

40 Ibid.

About the Friedrich Ebert Institute - Jordan & Iraq

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About the author

Muhammad Abu Rumman is a researcher at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan and the Ministry of Culture (2018 - 19). He has authored a number of publications, including "The "Islamic Solution" in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security," co-authored with Hassan Abu Haniyeh, "From the Islamic Caliphate to the Civil State: Young Islamists in Joran and the transformations of the Arab Spring" co-authored with Neven Bondokji, "Sociology of Extremism and Terrorism in Jordan co-authored with Musa Shteiwi, "The Salafis and the Arab Spring: The question of religion and democracy in Arab politics," and "I am a Salafi: A study of the actual and imagined identities of Salafis," among other books and studies.

This study analyzes the current relationship between the state and the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and the main reasons that the previous "rules of the game" between the two parties have ceased to apply. The study posits that the current crisis between the two sides that began in 2013 is unprecedented and that they are clashing as they formulate the new rules of their relationship. While the state is operating from a zero-sum mindset, the Muslim Brotherhood is touting its importance as a moderate political party willing to make a deal to help overcome the formidable challenges that Jordan faces, both domestically and internationally.

The study starts with a key question: What does the state want from the Muslim Brotherhood? Then it approaches internal discussions of how to engage with the main currents of these changes in the Muslim Brotherhood and how to interpret the government's new policies toward the group. The study provides a framework for the options proposed in Brotherhood circles for dealing with the new situation.

The study concludes with the outcomes sought by each side, both the state and the Muslim Brotherhood. It raises the question of whether there is an actual possibility for agreement between them on the new rules of the game, based on taking the new variables and changes into account and re-defining their mutual relationship.

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