

## 5. EGYPT: THE SEARCH FOR STABILITY

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When Cairo's Islamic Art Museum was devastated by a car bomb in January 2014, the attack represented a new face of an old problem in Egypt. The country's rulers—whether European colonial powers, Ottoman khedival administrations, or Egyptians themselves—have struggled against what they perceived to be religiously inspired radicalism for more than two centuries. The museum is located across the street from a security complex that was the real target of the attack. Amidst the rubble, shattered medieval mosque lamps and splintered millennium-old prayer niches were potent symbols of how little is protected in the confusing and often violent struggle. The government swiftly blamed its nemesis, the Muslim Brotherhood, for the attack, while a Sinai-based militant salafi group, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, claimed responsibility. Each side took the attack and the reaction to it as proof of the underlying radicalism of its opponents. Each resolved to fight even harder for its survival.

The endurance of radicalism in Egypt is a puzzle, since the downfall of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 was broadly interpreted as a possible end to the region's violent struggles. The Egyptian government had fought a jihadi uprising for much of the 1990s, and Egyptians always constituted much of the muscle behind al Qaeda. Jihadists had justified their violence by calling it the only pathway to change, as Arab governments would brook no compromise with their opponents. The diverse coalition that helped displace Mubarak—secular

liberals, Muslim Brothers, the youth, and parts of the business community—held out the prospect of a new model of governance. When ultraconservative salafi candidates took more than a quarter of the seats in Egypt's first postrevolutionary parliament, their success provided evidence to all sides: to liberals, it demonstrated that salafists were willing to share power, and to salafists it demonstrated that they could gain power by participating in elections. Most of the fundamental premises of the jihadi argument were eviscerated.

Yet prospects for a new model of governance have faded, and violence in Egypt appears to be on the upswing. The newly elected government of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi seeks to reimpose order in Egypt. Former militants and other Islamist-leaning groups are deciding how to position themselves vis-à-vis the new government. While Egypt's government hopes to pacify the country as the Mubarak government did in the 1990s, many skeptics warn that traditional coercive methods are unlikely to prove as effective in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings as they did two decades ago, and in the current regional environment could even make matters worse.

### **ISLAMISM AND RADICALISM IN EGYPT**

There is no consensus in Egypt on what constitutes a radical group in the current environment. Egypt's jails bulge with the secular and religious alike, and the relationship of religious groups to those who carry out acts of violence is contested. In many ways, Egypt is facing two different radicalism problems, though some see these as just two sides of the same coin. The threat that seems most imminent to the government is the one that it sees emanating from the Muslim Brotherhood, a nationwide movement with deep roots in Egypt's cities throughout the country. The second is the threat from violent groups such as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis. Though now mostly based in the Sinai Peninsula, these groups have not only attacked government targets in Sinai, they have also moved against targets in the Nile valley itself.

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Ismailiya in 1928 as a nationalist youth group and blended social services, religious self-improvement, and attacks on occupying British soldiers. Repression of the organization preceded—and followed—the Brotherhood's 1948 assassination of Prime Minister Mahmoud Nuqrashi Pasha, who feared the organization was seeking power in tumultuous postwar Egypt. Many of the military officers who seized power in 1952 (including future presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat) had Brotherhood affiliations, and the Free Officers reportedly offered to include the group in the post-monarchical government. The Brotherhood's leader, Hassan al-Hudaybi, refused the offer, arguing that the Brothers should not be in power until society was completely Islamized.<sup>1</sup> Nasser and Hudaybi repeatedly clashed and reconciled until a member of the Brotherhood's armed wing tried to assassinate Nasser in October 1954. In the aftermath, the government arrested thousands of Brotherhood members and executed several of them.<sup>2</sup> In Nasser's jails, Brotherhood members such as Sayyid Qutb became further radicalized and developed the doctrinal underpinnings of jihadi-salafism.

The rise of salafism in Egypt dates back to the 1920s and occurred alongside the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. Dedicated to stripping Islam of its cultural accretions and rediscovering the path of the Prophet Muhammad, salafists as a group were political quietists for much of their history. They believed party politics divided the Muslim community, and they viewed parliaments as illegitimate bodies that usurped God's role as legislator. Quietist salafi groups have been allowed to operate and organize over the decades—in part as an Islamist counter to the avowedly political Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 96–104.

2. *Ibid.*, 148–62.

3. Stéphane Lacroix, "Sheikhs and Politicians: Inside the New Egyptian Salafism," Brookings Doha Center Policy Briefing, June 2012, 2, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/6/07%20egyptian%20salafism%20lacroix/stephane%20lacroix%20policy%20briefing%20english.pdf>.

After Nasser's death in 1970, President Anwar Sadat sought to rehabilitate the Brotherhood and use it as a tool to counter other political opponents. Facing opposition to his efforts to dismantle Arab socialism and empower a new capitalist class, Sadat freed many Brotherhood members from jail and allowed the broader Islamist community to organize openly.<sup>4</sup> But the Islamists and Sadat soured on each other after Sadat began overt diplomatic overtures to Israel. Despite its disappointment in Sadat and harassment from his government, the Brotherhood kept its pledge of nonviolence. Some of Egypt's salafists, however, began organizing themselves to overthrow the regime in the mid- to late-1970s, and one of the resulting groups, Egyptian Islamic Jihad (or al-Jihad), was responsible for Sadat's assassination.<sup>5</sup>

This turn to violence by some salafi groups continued through the 1980s. The violence—much of which started among those imprisoned under Nasser and Sadat—both fed into and drew power from the involvement of Egyptians in the Afghan jihad and in the formation of what would become al Qaeda. Al Qaeda's global jihadi doctrine integrates elements of Egyptian and Saudi salafism, taking from the former Sayyid Qutb's emphasis on overthrowing renegade Muslim rulers and from the latter a more ultraconservative religious outlook. Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was Osama bin Laden's close associate and took over leadership of the global organization after bin Laden's death, was an admirer of Qutb's. Under Zawahiri's leadership in the late 1980s, the return of veterans from the Afghan jihad provided the justification as well as the muscle for a violent puritanical movement targeting the Egyptian government. Partly through coercion and partly through co-optation, the Egyptian government successfully contained the violent jihadi threat.

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4. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 83–87. For more detailed analyses of the period, see Omar Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2009) and Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (London: Saqi Books, 1985).

5. Ashour, *De-Radicalization*; Kepel, *Pharaoh*.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, waged a brutal campaign against the Gama'a Islamiyya, a group that embraced the militancy advocated by Sayyid Qutb, built an armed wing, attacked Christians, and even seized a Cairo neighborhood.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptian security services rounded up tens of thousands of militants and suspected militants and deployed extensive firepower in Upper Egypt, where the group had its strongest base of support. Yet the government's response was not all at the end of a gun. In an effort to provide jobs and infrastructure to a population that felt starved of both, Mubarak directed that millions of pounds of resources be poured into Upper Egypt. The third leg of the government's strategy was ideological, as it sought to persuade militants of the theological errors in their thinking. In the 1990s, the government elicited from group members public recantations of their theology, in part through an extensive effort by orthodox theologians, and perhaps enabled by the personal animus felt by some Gama'a leaders toward al Qaeda deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>7</sup> As the dust settled, most members of the Gama'a renounced violence and recognized the state's authority. The government's uncompromising attitude also led a major faction of al-Jihad, the group that assassinated Sadat, to renounce its campaign against the government.<sup>8</sup> Throughout this period, salafi groups that accepted the state's authority and renounced violence (such as the Salafi Call in Alexandria) were allowed to carry on with their missionary activism, though they suffered occasional low-level harassment by the authorities.

Mubarak alternately tolerated and repressed the Brotherhood. In return for releasing its members from jail, the organization endorsed Mubarak for president in 1988,<sup>9</sup> and he allowed the Brothers to establish hospitals and schools and to dominate many of the professional syndicates in the country. The Broth-

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6. Ashour, *De-Radicalization*, 45–50.

7. Lawrence Wright, "The Rebellion Within," *New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, 36–53, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/06/02/the-rebellion-within>.

8. Ashour, *De-Radicalization*, 90–109.

9. John Walsh, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood: Understanding Centrist Islam," *Harvard International Review* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 32–33.

erhood also had a small but vocal minority in parliament; these men had run not as members of the Brotherhood (which was neither a recognized organization nor a legal political party), but in alliance with established parties or as independents.<sup>10</sup> The Brotherhood's persistent inability to gain legal status allowed the government to modulate its approach to the Brotherhood, and when desired, to arrest Brotherhood members and seize assets at will.<sup>11</sup> In practice, the government managed the organization through alternating co-optation and coercion. For many in Egypt, and for many at senior levels of the U.S. government and the intelligence community, it appeared not only that the strategy was working adequately, but also that it consolidated the Brotherhood's decisions to give up its violent past.<sup>12</sup>

#### **AFTER THE UPRISING**

After Mubarak's fall, his successors, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), calculated that their survival depended on placating the most organized element of the opposition—the Islamists. Following Sadat's and Mubarak's playbook, the SCAF ordered the release of several prominent Islamist political prisoners (such as Muslim Brotherhood leaders Khairat al-Shater

10. Nancy J. Davis and Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 32–61.

11. The Brotherhood was not officially recognized until it registered as a nongovernmental organization in 2013 in response to a lawsuit brought by its opponents in Parliament. By then, of course, the Brotherhood had already come to power through the Freedom and Justice political party it established in 2012. See “No Decision’ in Egypt on Dissolving Muslim Brotherhood,” BBC, September 6, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23985622>. The fact that Nasser had given verbal rather than written orders to dissolve the Brotherhood led to some controversy in 2012 when a non-Brotherhood member of parliament asserted that the group still operated illegally. See Noha El-Hennawy, “Muslim Brotherhood: Operating Outside the Law?” *Egypt Independent*, February 16, 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/muslim-brotherhood-operating-outside-law>; “Brotherhood Mulls Legal Status, Name Change,” *Egypt Independent*, February 26, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/brotherhood-mulls-legal-status-name-change>.

12. Bruce Reidel, “Don’t Fear Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood,” Brookings Institution, January 28, 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/01/28-egypt-reidel>.

and Hassan Malek) as well as some jihadi-salafists.<sup>13</sup> The SCAF also allowed many Islamists to return from exile<sup>14</sup> and permitted the Brotherhood and other Islamist groups to form political parties. Following the SCAF's lead, the Ministry of the Interior cooperated with the Brotherhood as well.<sup>15</sup>

While some salafists had begun to consider political activity in the 2000s, the real pivot in salafi thinking about politics did not come until after the fall of Mubarak.<sup>16</sup> Prior to 2011, the salafists often styled themselves as the “pure” Islamic alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood, which they characterized as hopelessly compromised by their participation in rigged elections and a powerless parliament.<sup>17</sup> But when they faced an opportunity to run in free elections and perceived that their competitors would reap the rewards of power while compromising on the establishment of an Islamic state, the salafists began founding political parties. The Salafi Call established the Nour Party; the reformed jihadi Gama'a Islamiyya established the Construction and Development Party; and two Cairo salafi personalities established their own small parties. The parties formed a coalition—dominated by Nour—to compete against

13. “Two Senior Brotherhood Members Released Today,” *Ahram Online*, March 3, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org/NewsContent/1/64/6898/Egypt/Politics-/Two-senior-Brotherhood-members-released-today.aspx>; “Egyptian Court Acquits Mohamed Zawahiri and Brother of Sadat’s Assassin,” *Al-Arabiya*, March 19, 2012, <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/19/201778.html>.

14. “Convicted Militant Islamists Return to Egypt Seeking Rehabilitation,” *Ahram Online*, September 4, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org/News/20240.aspx>.

15. Karim Medhat Ennarah, “The End of Reciprocity: The Muslim Brotherhood and the Security Sector,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 2 (2014): 410–13.

16. William McCants, “Lesser of Two Evils: The Salafi Turn to Party Politics in Egypt,” Brookings Middle East Memo, May 2012, 2–3, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2012/5/01%20salafi%20egypt%20mccants/0501\\_salafi\\_egypt\\_mccants.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2012/5/01%20salafi%20egypt%20mccants/0501_salafi_egypt_mccants.pdf); Hussam al-Wakil, “Anba’ ‘an khawd al-salafiyyin intikhabat majlis al-sha’b ba’d mubadarat rafid al-dimuqratiyya” [News about the salafists’ participation in elections after an initiative refusing to espouse democracy], *Al-Dustur*, February 16, 2010, <http://www.dostor.org/politics/alexandria/10/february/15/6578>.

17. Muhammad Isma‘il al-Muqaddam, “Silsila hawl dukhul al-barlaman tariq al-barlaman al-ra’y wa-l-ra’y al-akhar” [A series about entering parliament by means of parliament, point and counterpoint]. Transcript of lecture, undated, available at <http://audio.islamweb.net/audio/index.php?page=FullContent&audioid=163387>. Based on excerpts posted on salafi forums, the lecture dates from no later than 2009. See <http://alsalfy.com/vb/showthread.php?t=812>.

the Brotherhood, and went on to capture nearly 24 percent of the seats in parliament.

When Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Morsi was elected president in May 2012, the military and security services appeared cooperative at first. But after Morsi's constitutional declaration on November 21, 2012, which was widely interpreted as a power grab, the situation changed. Morsi fired his minister of the interior for not cracking down hard enough on demonstrators protesting the declaration, and when the replacement minister brutally repressed demonstrations in the relatively quiet Port Said, the army had to intervene to calm the situation. Protests spiraled out of Morsi's control, and the rationale for further military intervention grew stronger. Morsi was already at odds with private media and the judiciary—powerful supporters of the old regime. And although Nour had cooperated with Morsi on drafting the constitution, its relationship with him and the Muslim Brotherhood was in general acrimonious. Many Nour members felt the Muslim Brotherhood shut them out, and the party forced out its principal founder in January 2013 for being too close to the Brotherhood.<sup>18</sup> The loss of the military's confidence in Morsi's ability to govern, combined with his failure to establish a broad-based ruling coalition, proved fatal.<sup>19</sup>

Following large public protests, the military stepped in on July 3, 2013, and put Morsi and many of his top advisers under house arrest. On July 24, then-General Sisi (still head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) sharpened his rhetoric against the Brotherhood. In a speech delivered at a military parade, Sisi accused the Brotherhood of arming itself against

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18. Zeinab El Gundy, "Salafist Splits Bring New Choices, Complications for Voters," *Ahram Online*, January 23, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/62908/Egypt/Politics-/Salafist-splits-bring-new-choices-complications-f.aspx>; Michael Collins Dunn, "The Salafi Nour Party Split," Middle East Institute, January 3, 2013, <http://mideasti.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-salafi-nour-party-split.html>; Sarah El Deeb, "Egypt's Largest Ultraconservative Party Splits," Associated Press, January 1, 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/egypts-largest-ultraconservative-party-splits>.

19. Ennarah, "End of Reciprocity," 413–16.



the regime and asked the public for a “mandate” to allow him “to confront terrorism and violence.”<sup>20</sup> After millions heeded his call to demonstrate on his behalf on July 26, in August Sisi ordered the military and the national police to demolish two of the most popular pro-Morsi camps in Cairo. The police and military killed somewhere between 600 and 2,600 civilians.<sup>21</sup> A September 2013 court ruling banned the Muslim Brotherhood, which had the effect of freezing the group’s assets<sup>22</sup> and crushing its economic infrastructure.<sup>23</sup> A December 2013 proclamation branding the organization a terrorist group (in response to a bombing in the Nile delta for which Ansar Beit al-Maqdis claimed responsibility) tightened the noose further. Since then, Egyptian courts have sentenced over 1,000 Muslim Brotherhood supporters to death; over 200 of those sentences have been upheld, including that of Brotherhood leader Muhammad Badie, who also faces several sentences to life in prison.<sup>24</sup>

Following Morsi’s fall, the salafi movement split even more deeply. While the clear end of Islamist rule in Egypt has alarmed many salafists, the Nour Party leadership has preached patience and circumspection. As one leader explained, “It is a matter of managing losses and choosing the least bad option. The reality is that people support this new government—or are at least giving

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20. “Excerpts from General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s Speech,” *Egypt Independent*, July 24, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/excerpts-general-abdel-fattah-al-sisi-s-speech>.

21. Manar Mohsen, “Health Ministry Raises Death Toll of Wednesday’s Clashes to 638,” *Egypt Daily News*, August 16, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/08/16/health-ministry-raises-death-toll-of-wednesdays-clashes-to-638/>; “Egypt’s Brotherhood to Hold ‘March of Anger,’” *Al Jazeera*, August 16, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/08/201381522364486906.html>.

22. Patrick Kingsley, “Muslim Brotherhood Banned by Egyptian Court,” *Guardian*, September 23, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/23/muslim-brotherhood-egyptian-court>.

23. Interview with Issandr El Amrani, May 4, 2014, Cairo.

24. “Badie and 14 MB Leaders Sentenced to Life for Giza Clashes,” *MadaMasr*, September 15, 2014, <http://www.madamasr.com/content/badie-and-14-mb-leaders-sentenced-life-giza-clashes>; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Egypt: UN Experts ‘Outraged’ at Confirmation of 183 Death Sentences,” June 30, 2014, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14801&LangID=E>.

Sisi enough legitimacy to maneuver. It is the will of the people and the will of the military.” He added, “You only make gains if you stay in the struggle.”<sup>25</sup> Nour’s salafi opponents make precisely the opposite arguments. One prominent salafi leader has argued that by supporting the overthrow of a democratically elected Islamist president, Nour irrevocably damaged its long-term credibility as a serious opposition party.<sup>26</sup>

In 2014, Sisi made elimination of the Brotherhood a key plank in his successful bid for president. In an interview on Egyptian TV in May, Sisi vowed to finish off the Brotherhood.<sup>27</sup> Once elected—with 97 percent of the vote—Sisi continued his hard-line policy, refusing to reconcile with those who “committed crimes” or “adopted violence as a methodology.” He emphasized that there would be “no cooperation or appeasement for those who resort to violence and those who want to disrupt our movement to the future.”<sup>28</sup> Even if Sisi wanted to reconcile with the Brotherhood, his supporters would find such a move difficult to accept, given this rhetoric.<sup>29</sup> Some of those supporters include conservative governments in the Gulf, which are providing billions of dollars to keep Egypt’s economy afloat. These governments see the Brotherhood as a mortal threat to their own rule, and they are increasingly active in regional efforts to undermine the organization.

In response to the crackdown against it, the Brotherhood has repeatedly rejected, officially, any endorsement of violence. Its members assert that the organization has no paramilitary wing and that its leaders do not sanction the violent overthrow of the Egyptian government. A prominent youth secretary in the Freedom and Justice Party stated in March 2014 that “the Brotherhood’s youths are committed to creative peacefulness

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25. Interview with Nour Party leader, May 5, 2014, Cairo.

26. Interview with prominent salafi political leader, May 6, 2014, Cairo.

27. “Egypt’s Sisi Vows Muslim Brotherhood ‘Will Not Exist,’” BBC, May 5, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27285846>.

28. “At Swearing-In, Ex-General Vows ‘Inclusive’ Egypt,” *New York Times*, June 8, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/09/world/middleeast/sisi-sworn-in-as-egypts-president.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/09/world/middleeast/sisi-sworn-in-as-egypts-president.html?_r=0).

29. Interview with Ibrahim al-Houdaiby, May 4, 2014, Cairo.

in their anti-coup defiance. They will never attack any Egyptian in any way whatsoever.”<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Ali Bisher, a member of the Brotherhood’s Shura Council, released a statement in May in which he denounced violence against soldiers.<sup>31</sup> “The Muslim Brotherhood does not know violence,” asserted the group’s Supreme Guide Muhammad Badie in a June court appearance.<sup>32</sup> When the Cairo subway was bombed, the Brotherhood denied the government’s charge that it was responsible and asserted that it would “not be dragged into violence and destruction, notwithstanding the systematic violence used by coup authorities since the beginning of the coup to the present day.”<sup>33</sup> The true perpetrator, the Brotherhood argued, was likely the regime, which seeks to discredit the Brotherhood by falsely accusing it of violent acts.

Despite these assertions by Brotherhood representatives, it appears that individual members do not always follow suit. Fury at the regime for its massacre of Brotherhood members has increased the rank and file’s appetite for violence.<sup>34</sup> The arrest of the regime’s leadership has also left the Brothers—members of a very hierarchical organization who are used to guidance from the top—to their own devices.<sup>35</sup> The unprecedented regime violence and mass arrests have led members to engage in what analysts have called “micro”<sup>36</sup> or “lower-profile”<sup>37</sup> violence against

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30. “Youth Leader: Muslim Brotherhood Committed to Non-Violence Notwithstanding Coup Atrocities,” *Ikhwanweb*, March 17, 2014, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31601>.

31. “Muslim Brotherhood’s Bishr Reiterates Commitment to Non-Violence,” *Ikhwanweb*, May 2, 2014, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31648>.

32. “Egypt’s Brotherhood Leader Says Committed to Nonviolence,” *Middle East Eye*, June 5, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypts-brotherhood-leader-says-committed-nonviolence>.

33. “Muslim Brotherhood Denounces Dubious Subway Bombings in Cairo June 25,” *Ikhwanweb*, June 26, 2014, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31690>.

34. Interview with Ibrahim al-Houdaiby, May 4, 2014, Cairo.

35. Ibrahim al-Houdaiby, “A Nonviolent Muslim Brotherhood?” Middle East Institute, October 4, 2013, [http://www.mei.edu/content/nonviolent-muslim-brotherhood#\\_ftn1](http://www.mei.edu/content/nonviolent-muslim-brotherhood#_ftn1).

36. *Ibid.*

37. Eric Trager, “Egypt’s Invisible Insurgency,” *New Republic*, March 19, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117072/egypts-young-islamists-use-facebook-organize-violence>.

government installations and nonhuman civilian targets. The violence still falls within parameters prescribed by the Brotherhood's jailed leadership, its proponents claim, because it does not target humans. In a post circulated on a Brotherhood Facebook page popular among the protestors ahead of the July 3 anniversary of the coup, the author called on the "supporters of legitimacy to carry anything that will be useful for self-defense and not for killing," suggesting that fires be lit to disrupt metro travel in order to spark widespread clashes with the police.<sup>38</sup>

Worried it will lose control, the Brotherhood leadership tolerates this type of action to give breathing room to angry members and prevent splintering.<sup>39</sup> But not all Brotherhood members have limited themselves to this kind of "micro" violence. Some have threatened to assassinate government officials. Others—members of the so-called "Molotov Movement"—issued a statement on March 9 threatening to kill policemen in Luxor.<sup>40</sup> There are also rumors of Brotherhood members setting up military training camps in Sudan and Libya.<sup>41</sup> The government, for its own part, sees a Brotherhood hand in virtually all of the violence going on in the country, ascribing Brotherhood inspiration and support to actions claimed by jihadi-salafi groups in the Sinai and elsewhere.<sup>42</sup>

### MILITANCY IN THE SINAI

In reality, the security problem in the Sinai is its own beast, and it is in the Sinai that the government's second radicalism problem is starkest. Underdeveloped, isolated, militarily occupied, and home to antigovernment militants, the Sinai resembles ungoverned spaces in other parts of the world more than it resembles

38. Hani al-Arjundi, "Al-Tariq ila 3 Yulyu" [The path to July 3], Facebook, July 1, 2014.

39. Interview with Ibrahim al-Houdaiby, May 4, 2014, Cairo.

40. See Trager, "Egypt's Invisible Insurgency"; "Harakat 'Mulutuf' tuhaddid bi-ighthiyal 40 shakhsiyya" [The Molotov Movement threatens to assassinate 40 individuals], *al-Mesryoon*, March 9, 2014.

41. Interview with Issandr El Amrani, May 4, 2014, Cairo.

42. Louisa Loveluck, "Sisi Says Muslim Brotherhood Will Not Exist under His Reign," *Guardian*, May 5, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/06/abd-el-fatah-al-sisi-muslim-brotherhood-egypt>.

other parts of Egypt. Political and economic grievances against the government in Cairo—including the overthrow of Morsi—have driven some militancy in the Sinai, but other factors are at play as well. Northern Sinai has long been home to a range of militant groups, and these movements have proliferated and grown bolder in the past few years. The political uncertainty, constrained and distracted government in Cairo, and steady supply of weapons from Libya that are a legacy of the uprisings created ideal conditions for jihadi-salafi expansion in the Sinai.

For the marginalized Bedouin in the Sinai, long-standing grievances against the Egyptian government, military, and security services contribute to militancy. Sinai's Bedouin populations felt general contempt toward the Mubarak government for its neglect of development in the Sinai apart from a few tourism-oriented areas. Persistently, local inhabitants also perceived that emigrants from the Nile valley were advantaged over them in an array of economic and legal matters. Making matters worse, the Ministry of the Interior consistently exercised a heavy hand in Sinai, while Egypt's General Intelligence Service was focused on gathering informants at any cost.<sup>43</sup> The result was endemic violence, corruption, and a perception that many of the area's most malign actors operated with impunity. The Mubarak government also conducted harsh and sometimes indiscriminate crackdowns on Bedouin populations following the terrorist attacks in Dahab, Taba, and Sharm al-Sheikh in the mid-2000s. These experiences left a legacy of hostility toward Egypt's central government that post-Mubarak governments have not overcome.

Grievances against Cairo alone do not explain the proliferation of militants in Sinai since 2011, however. The most lethal jihadi-salafi group operating in Sinai is Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, made up largely of Egyptians and Palestinians.<sup>44</sup> Created in

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43. Steven A. Cook, "Al Qaeda's Expansion in Egypt," statement before the Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, U.S. House of Representatives, February 14, 2014, 3.

44. "Profile: Egypt's Militant Ansar Beit al-Maqdis Group," BBC, January 24, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25882504>.

the wake of the 2011 uprisings,<sup>45</sup> it has since claimed responsibility for a wave of high-profile violent attacks, most of them in the wake of the overthrow of Morsi.<sup>46</sup> In addition to Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, known or suspected groups in the Sinai include the Muhammad Jamal Network, al Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula, the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem, and al Tawhid wal Jihad, the group blamed for the 2004–2006 bombings in Taba, Sharm al-Sheikh, and Dahab. Analysts have variously argued that the latter attacks were linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict<sup>47</sup> or that they were the work of al Qaeda-linked jihadists who had originally come from Upper Egypt,<sup>48</sup> where the Mubarak government had fought jihadi-salafi violence throughout the 1990s.

It remains difficult to determine the exact nature of these groups' affiliation (or lack thereof) with al Qaeda. Some groups, such as al Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula, have openly aligned themselves with al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, and he in turn has praised the activities of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis.<sup>49</sup> Zawahiri opposed the Muslim Brotherhood, and the endorsement suggests that attacks by Ansar Beit al-Maqdis—while they have increased since July 2013—have not been driven solely by Muslim Brotherhood–military dynamics. A powerful Sinai tribal leader claimed in September 2013 that around 1,000 al Qaeda fighters, composed of Libyans, Palestinians, and Ye-

45. "Terrorist Designation of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis," U.S. Department of State, April 9, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/04/224566.htm>.

46. In January 2014 alone, it was responsible for the Cairo bombings (January 24), the downing of a military helicopter in Sinai with a man-portable air defense system (MANPAD) (January 27), and the assassination of an aide to the Egyptian interior minister (January 28).

47. International Crisis Group, *Egypt's Sinai Question*, January 30, 2007, 3, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/-/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Egypt/61\\_egypts\\_sinai\\_question.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/-/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Egypt/61_egypts_sinai_question.pdf).

48. Lucas Winter, "The Abdullah Azzam Brigades," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34, no. 11 (November 1, 2011), 883–95.

49. Zawahiri also called on Egyptians to oppose Sisi. See "Update: Zawahiri Praises Chechen Fighters as Models for Jihad, Reflects on Egyptian Revolution," SITE Intelligence, January 26, 2014, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/zawahiri-praises-chechen-fighters-as-models-for-jihad.html>.

menis, were operating in the Sinai.<sup>50</sup> In late 2014, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis reportedly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and changed its name to Wilayat Sinai, although actual linkages between the two groups remain unclear.<sup>51</sup>

The situation in the Sinai is further complicated by the amorphous and poorly understood links between local jihadi-salafi groups and the Islamists and jihadists in neighboring Gaza. Gaza's population shares many ties with the Bedouin of northern Sinai.<sup>52</sup> The bombings at Sinai resorts in the mid-2000s were blamed on militants with ties to Palestinian organizations. Sinai has at times served as a safe haven for Gazan militants, and the smuggling tunnels between Egypt and Gaza have been an economic boon to residents on both sides of the border. The Mubarak regime's cooperation with the Israeli government in maintaining the blockade of Gaza contributed to anti-Mubarak sentiment in the Sinai,<sup>53</sup> and the Sisi government's aggressive effort to close down the tunnels has had a similar effect. At least one Gaza-based group, the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem, which primarily attacks Israeli targets, has also attacked Egyptian security forces in relation to their cooperation with Israel.<sup>54</sup>

The current Egyptian government has generally attributed violent acts in Egypt to the Brotherhood, rather than to jihadi-salafi groups operating in the country. While some caution is warranted in evaluating the charge, there seems to be little doubt that the jihadi-salafi forces fighting from Sinai have been strengthened both by an unknown number of prisoners

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50. Mohannad Sabry, "Al Qaeda Emerges amid Egypt's Turmoil," *Al Monitor*, December 4, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/al-qaeda-egypt-sinai-insurgency-growing-influence.html>.

51. An *Al Monitor* Correspondent in Sinai, "After joining IS, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis expands in Egypt," *Al Monitor*, December 1, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/12/egypt-ansar-maqdis-sinai-spread.html>.

52. Nicolas Pelham, "Sinai: The Buffer Erodes," Chatham House, London, September 2012, 1.

53. *Ibid.*, 10.

54. Seth G. Jones, *A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of Al-Qaida and Other Salafi Jihadists* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 28, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR637.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR637.html).

escaping from jail in Mubarak's final days and by subsequent governments' decisions to release hundreds of prisoners who had spent decades in Egyptian jails for violent crimes under Mubarak. In June 2011, one report suggested that the SCAF had released more than 400 political detainees in the four months it had been in office.<sup>55</sup> Upon taking office, President Morsi continued to free dozens of prisoners, including several who had been condemned to death for violent acts in the past.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, jihadi-salafists also launched devastating attacks against Egyptian security forces even during Morsi's tenure. Morsi had a complicated relationship with the jihadi-salafists revolting in the Sinai. The revolt began under the SCAF when some militants there took advantage of the chaos surrounding Mubarak's fall to try to push the Egyptian military out of the peninsula and to assist militants in Gaza. Morsi first attempted to dissuade the jihadists from their campaign, appealing to their shared Islamist ideals and working through salafi intermediaries to establish a rapport.<sup>57</sup> When those talks failed, he ordered the military to crack down.<sup>58</sup> In August 2012, Morsi launched Operation Eagle II to secure the Sinai,<sup>59</sup> and he increased the government's efforts to destroy the tunnels to

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55. Heba Afify, "Victims of Mubarak's War on Islamists Still Serving Jail Time," *Egypt Independent*, June 1, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/victims-mubaraks-war-islamists-still-serving-jail-time>.

56. See Tom Perry, "Egypt's Mursi Frees Islamists Jailed by Mubarak," Reuters, July 31, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/31/us-egypt-mursi-pardon-idUSBRE86U13K20120731> and "Morsy's Pardon Decree 'Includes 25 Jamaa al-Islamiya, Islamic Jihad leaders,'" *Egypt Independent*, July 21, 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-s-pardon-decree-includes-25-jamaa-al-islamiya-islamic-jihad-leaders>.

57. Avi Issacharoff, "Egypt's Morsi Using Former Islamists as Intermediaries in Negotiations with Sinai Militants," *Haaretz*, August 29, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/egypt-s-morsi-using-former-islamists-as-intermediaries-in-negotiations-with-sinai-militants-1.461453>.

58. Nancy Youssef, "Egypt's Morsi Dispatches Army to Sinai after Suspected Islamists Snatch Soldiers," *McClatchy*, May 20, 2013, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2013/05/20/191735/egypt-s-morsi-dispatches-army-to.html>.

59. Ahmad Eleibah, "Egypt's 'Operation Eagle': Army Boasts 'Successes' as Criticisms Mount," *Ahram Online*, September 2, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/51761/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-Operation-Eagle-Army-boasts-successes-as-cr.aspx>.



Gaza in February 2013.<sup>60</sup> Morsi's willingness to use force against the jihadists contradicts Sisi's claim that Morsi kept the military sidelined in Sinai during his entire presidency; indeed, Sisi privately counseled Morsi in 2012 to avoid a crackdown in the Sinai on the grounds that it would stir further violence against the government.<sup>61</sup>

Since Morsi was ousted, jihadi-salafi attacks against Egyptian security forces have increased in scale and frequency and spread beyond the Sinai. The seeming return of the status quo ante in July 2013 has not only reinvigorated long-standing complaints against Cairo; it has also led to grassroots criticism that the peninsula's tribal leaders were both unprincipled (in shifting allegiances toward whoever was in power in Cairo) and ineffective (in failing to derive tangible benefits for their communities in exchange for their support).<sup>62</sup> Periodic security operations—targeted at extremists, but reportedly also hitting civilians—have added to anger. Anti-state sentiment has grown so strong that there has been a sharp rise in the northern Sinai in the use of locally run shari'a courts, which circumvent state laws as well as formal legal authority. In addition, government buildings in the area have come under repeated attack.<sup>63</sup> For local Bedouin, many of whom are inclined not to be religious, jihadi-salafi groups not only help frame a broader indictment of Egypt's central government, but also provide a means to strike that government in anger.

60. Fares Akram and David Kirkpatrick, "To Block Gaza Tunnels, Egypt Lets Sewage Flow," *New York Times*, February 20, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/21/world/middleeast/egypts-floods-smuggling-tunnels-to-gaza-with-sewage.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/21/world/middleeast/egypts-floods-smuggling-tunnels-to-gaza-with-sewage.html?_r=0).

61. David Kirkpatrick, "Egypt's New Strongman, Sisi Knows Best," *New York Times*, May 24, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/25/world/middleeast/egypts-new-autocrat-sisi-knows-best.html>.

62. Rani Geha, "Sinai Tribal Elders Lose Local Support," *Al Monitor*, April 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/egypt-sinai-tribal-leaders-lose-local-support.html>.

63. See for example "Egypt pleas for help after deadly Sinai attacks," *Al Arabiya*, October 26, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/10/26/Palestinians-say-Gaza-truce-talks-in-Cairo-postponed.html>.

## CONCLUSION

The Arab uprisings temporarily reduced the power of the old elite in Egypt and prompted the Brotherhood and its Islamist supporters to create a new one. Traditional elites took umbrage at the Brotherhood's power grab and want to ensure it does not happen again. The Brotherhood miscalculated its level of popular support and its ability to withstand the old elite stepping back in. Other salafi and jihadi actors in Egypt have reacted to the Brotherhood's fall by variously abjuring politics, lining up with the Sisi government, joining the Brotherhood's rejection of the Sisi government, or launching violent attacks against the state.

Now that Sisi is in control, he has to weigh the risks of keeping Morsi's supporters outside of the political tent. So far, the Sisi regime has calculated that it can deal with its nonviolent Islamist opponents in the way Mubarak dealt with his violent Islamist opponents in the 1990s—through mass arrests and violence. This marks a shift in the state's definition of Islamist radicalism. Sisi's predecessors had made violence the touchstone for determining who was an extremist and which of them merited absolute repression. Now, Sisi has changed the definition to hinge on political ambitions rather than ideological or violent commitments. Taking such a position against a group like the Brotherhood, which professes nonviolence and which many observers feel is not committed to violence, risks pushing it or factions of it into a long and bloody revolt against the state. Such a scenario played out in Algeria, after the government nullified the Islamists' gains in parliamentary voting in the early 1990s.<sup>64</sup> Sisi faces the additional challenge of a failed state—Libya—in his backyard, which can provide a safe haven to his enemies.

When talking to visitors, Sisi's administration frequently characterizes his counterterrorism policy as a continuation of his predecessors' policies toward violent Islamist groups. That would be right if the Brotherhood were a violent Islamist group.

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64. See Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003) for an explanation of what triggers revolution in Muslim-majority countries.

But compared to the groups that launched terrorist attacks in Egypt in the 1990s or 2000s, it is not. Prior to the Arab uprisings, the military leaders who ran Egypt tolerated Islamist organizations as long as they did not use violence against the state. Today, in order to perpetuate the justification for a crackdown on the Brotherhood, the government suggests whenever possible that the Brotherhood bears responsibility for violence in Egypt. In July, for example, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis killed 22 soldiers and border guards near Libya.<sup>65</sup> True to form, the Egyptian military insinuated that Qatar was behind the attack, presumably because Qatar supports the Brotherhood and the Brotherhood allegedly controls the salafi militants in Egypt.<sup>66</sup>

For the moment, nonviolent salafi political activists are allowed a seat at the table as long as they do not threaten the power of the old guard. Sisi has allowed the Nour Party to continue engaging in politics, which blunts charges that the regime is anti-Islamic and weakens the Brotherhood's hold over the Islamist vote. The Nour Party has endorsed the new political reality because it anticipates outsized influence over Islamist politics if it is the only official and well-organized Islamist party. But if Nour cannot run in future elections, which is a real possibility,<sup>67</sup> the party's strategy of accommodation will have completely backfired. Further, it is difficult to imagine the current government passing laws of which Nour's base would approve, so the party will likely have to justify its continued participation in a government unresponsive to a salafi political agenda.

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65. "Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis Claims Responsibility for New Valley Attack," *Egypt Independent*, July 22, 2014, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/ansar-bayt-al-maqdis-claims-responsibility-new-valley-attack>.

66. The military spokesman said an "international intelligence service" used mercenaries to carry out the attack. See "Al-Dakhiliyya al-Misriyya tattahim mukhabarat duwaliyya bi-l-wuquf wara' majzarat al-Farafra" [The Egyptian Interior Ministry accuses an international intelligence service of standing behind the al-Farafra massacre], *al-Arab Online*, July 25, 2014, <http://www.alarabonline.org/?id=28836>.

67. "News Analysis: Islamic Parties at Stake as Egypt Dismantles Brotherhood's Political Wing," Xinhua, August 10, 2014, <http://www.philstar.com/world/2014/08/10/1356011/news-analysis-islamic-parties-stake-egypt-dismantles-brotherhoods-political>.

The more distant future is even more unfathomable. Islamist opponents might be permitted to reenter Egyptian politics in a weakened state. Returning to procedures from the Mubarak era, the government might allow the Muslim Brothers to field candidates as independents in rigged elections, a move that might mollify some of the opposition. The government could also prohibit the Brothers' political participation altogether but tolerate their continued existence as long as they remained nonviolent and stayed out of politics, a policy that served Sisi's predecessors well. Given the heterogeneous nature of the Islamist coalition against Sisi and the generational divides within it, the responses will vary. Some leaders of the Brotherhood may want to reconcile, but many younger members are in no mood to bargain.

The Brotherhood's nonviolent salafi allies are also conflicted, as demonstrated by a rift in the Gama'a leadership over the question of negotiations with the regime. Although the Gama'a leaders sided with Morsi and against the coup, they have remained committed to nonviolence<sup>68</sup> and have denounced attacks on Christians and churches.<sup>69</sup> In June, one of the group's most important figures, Aboud al-Zomor, urged the Gama'a and the Brotherhood to accept Sisi's presidency, arguing that the jailed Morsi could not provide leadership to the nation. He also called on them to sponsor candidates in upcoming parliamentary elections. The Gama'a and its political party rejected al-Zomor's initiative, although they admitted that the Brotherhood has been deaf to criticism of its maneuverings since the crackdown.<sup>70</sup>

68. "Egypt Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya Says Group Won't Return to Violence," *Ahram Online*, October 23, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/84599/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-AlGamaa-Allslamiya-says-group-wont-return-to.aspx>.

69. "Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya Denies Role in Church Attacks," *Ahram Online*, August 15, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/79134/Egypt/AlGamaa-Allslamiya-denies-role-in-church-attacks.aspx>; "Egyptian Political and Religious Figures Condemn Warraq Church Attack," *Ahram Online*, October 21, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/84375/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-political-and-religious-figures-condemn-W.aspx>.

70. "Inqisam 'ala 'walayat Mursi' yufarriq Al al-Zumur' wa yashuqq 'al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya' bi-Misr" [Division over the "governance of Morsi" splits the Zumur family and divides the Jama'a Islamiyya in Egypt], CNN Arabic, June 24, 2014, <http://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/06/24/egypt-brotherhood-zomor>;

Meanwhile, Egypt's violent jihadi-salafists are unlikely to abate their activities. They will continue to network with other jihadi-salafists across the region, destabilize the Sinai Peninsula, threaten the Sisi government with large-scale attacks, and regularly target policemen and soldiers in the Sinai, the Delta, and Cairo. The genuine security challenge posed by these groups—and by the ideological alternative they present to young Egyptians frustrated with Morsi's overthrow, governance under Sisi, or various economic and social ills—will remain a threat to Egyptian peace and stability.

Sisi's current policy of denying many of his Islamist opponents any access to the political system after they have been mobilized politically is likely, intentionally or not, to push some into violent opposition. Sisi is unlikely to change his calculation about the Brotherhood in the short term. His policy is supported by two of his most generous patrons, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both of which urge the destruction of the Brotherhood. The two states have risked billions of dollars and the ire of their own Islamists to ensure Sisi succeeds in his campaign. Sisi also has the support of a large part of the Egyptian public and the old guard, which does not want the Brotherhood to return to power. Sisi could change his strategy in the long term if his opponents continue to destabilize the country and scare away Western investment. But Gulf money and the state of emergency have tempered public anger toward the president, which means he does not have much incentive to change course.

The problem of religiously inspired radicals who urge violence against the Egyptian state and its supporters is unlikely to disappear soon. Sorting out the religious and political roots of violence, and understanding which of those roots to address through persuasion and inclusion in lieu of brute coercion, will take time. If this effort is successful, it might allow the Egyptian state to avoid creating new grievances and inspiring new

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"Islamist Hardliner El-Zomor Backs Transition of Power Following Morsi's Ouster," *Ahram Online*, June 24, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/104667/Egypt/Politics-/Islamist-hardliner-ElZomor-backs-transition-of-pow.aspx>.

ideologues. If unsuccessful, it could sow the seeds of the current government's downfall. Whatever the political future of Egypt looks like, its leaders will need to have a strategy to confront this problem.