The Arab Spring and Extremism:Case Study to the Evolution of Extreme-Islamism in Egypt

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Abstract—In conducting a case study to analyze the status-quo of the extremists' dominance in Egypt, the author of this paper uses qualitative research method to analyze the evolution of extreme Islamist groups in Egypt. In conducting this qualitative research, the author of this paper intends to use several lenses to understand the rise and the evolution of the hegemony of extremist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups in Egypt. Therefore, unless he intends to show an important nexus between the Egyptian groups and their sister-groups in other countries, he will intentionally exclude analyzing extreme Islamism of non-Egyptian origins. This case study relies on the moral disengagement theory to shed light on the ideological evolution of extremism in Egypt. The goal of this case study is to help in understanding extreme-Islamism adverse to the mainstream Islam; therefore, understanding the concept here should help in preventing similar groups from threatening the international community.

Keywords—Extremism, International Terrorism, Islamists, Middle East, Muslim Brotherhood.

I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURES REVIEW

THE new waves of Arab Spring swept the Arab World to tumble the long-lived dictators pursuing freedom and social equality; Egypt was among these countries. This qualitative study is focused on analyzing several Egyptian extreme groups. The reason this researcher may specifically focus on the brotherhood clerics because many of the ideologists and clerics of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood have been inspiring and inciting extreme Islamism [1], [3]. In conducting the case study, the author use qualitative research method by deploying comparative interdisciplinary-historical research approach to analyze the start and the evolution of extreme Islamist groups in Egypt.

Moral Disengagement theory explains how the leaders of extreme Islamic groups became the dominant political power in Egypt and how these groups impacted extremism growth in Egypt.

By studying the evolution of extreme Islamism to political power in Egypt one can understand the mechanism of extreme-Islamism; therefore prevent them from recruiting moderate Muslims. Indeed "the father of the contemporary Islamic extremism is one of the Brotherhood ideologists, Sayyed Qutb, who was not only one of the leaders of the

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Muslim Brotherhood, but also he became the Godfather of the Al-Qaeda and other similar extremists, even after his execution in 1966" [11], [12]. Qutb said that modern societies are moving towards pagan ignorance age (al-jahyliah). Qutb believed that real Muslim has to depart the society. Furthermore, he considered resisting secular rulers one of the Islamic pillars [15]. Therefore, the literature and the data show that extreme-Islamism falsify Islamic rules to dominate the socio-political domains.

The only way to confront Islamic extremism is to understand Sharia-law which denounces acts of terrorism. Extremists used the brutality in executing and assassinating the opponents publically to terrorize people [7]. However The Islamic Sharia doesn't tolerate act of violence and against extremism [4]. Most of the countries have new legal framework dealing with international terrorism.

The Italian Supreme Court, the Court of Cassation, stated that "purpose of international terrorism must be understood as 'violence aimed at undermining the principles of the Italian Constitution and establishing a system of terror against people, international states and (organizations)" [13].

A. Egypt and Extremism

After the Turkish parliament approved the move to secularism, the post of caliph was vacated for the first time in almost 1300 years. Therefore, in 1928, Hassan al-Bana established the Society of Muslim Brotherhood (in Arabic: *Jamaat al-Ikhwan al-Muslmeen*), to replace this vacuum (Table I). The society had conflicts between the Muslim Brotherhood and Egyptian rulers since 1920s. However, confrontation between Islamists and the regime escalated during Nasser and his predecessor. Nasser jailed the MBH leaders, and in 1966 executed Sayyed Qutb who was their ideologists.

Many organizations choose terroristic path such as al-*Takfeerwal-Hijra, Tanzeem al-Fania al-Askaria, Tanzeem al-Jihad*, and *al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya* [9]. During the former régimes from 1940s when radical Islamists became a paramilitary organization till the end of Mubarak's era, the radical Islamists were scrutinized and marginalized from political life. However, after the waves of the Arab Spring, extreme-Islamists took advantage of the security vacuum and came back to political life.

B. Moral Disengagement Theory

The extremists, who committed immoral behavior including terroristic acts, justify their behaviors under the name of religion. This cognitive process starts by vacating their self-

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:7, No:7, 2013

sanctioning [1], [3], which results in complete moral disengagement [3]. Clerics and ideologists of extremists use cognitive process in the misinterpretation of Islamic rules. The conceptual basis for this misinterpretation of sharia is to declare that the people live in the age of al-Jahyyliah.

Extremists or terrorists follow the moral standards established by the elite clerics of the extreme Islamists. Bandura, Barbaranellie, Caprara, and Pastorelli [2] suggested, "Moral standards are constructed from information conveyed by direct tuition, evaluative social reaction to one's conduct, and exposure to the self-evaluative standards modeled by others." The members of the extreme groups evaluate their action on the basis of the new guidelines. In the process of the moral disengagement the perpetrator shifts the blame to victims, by standers, or the society in general.

Extreme-Islamists use self-exonerative process to shift the blame on the victim or to blame other individuals and entities, such as the society, for their crimes [2]. Moreover, to complete the self-exoneration process, extreme-clerics invoke moral disengagement by dehumanizing their human target and also shift the blame on their victims. Therefore, supporters and sympathizers consider extremists or terrorists to be freedom fighters, instead of murderers or terrorists [12].

Although the supporters of extremists may not be liable, legally for sympathizers the extremists or the terrorists, the extremists rely on the emotional support of the sympathizers. Therefore, extremists invoke "moral disengagement process on their supporter through the same process that they use with their own members" [12]. Self-exoneration, according to taxonomy of Extremists' moral disengagement [12] is an important phase in normalizing extremism. Moreover, extremists not only exonerate themselves, but also shift the blame on others, including the victims. In the justification of departing the contemporary society and attacking it is allocated in Qutb's philosophy, which implied that democratic practice is non-Islamic, and that the sovereignty only to Allah [5], [15].

Qutb and other extremists imply that they have to work on re-Islamizing the Islamic societies, Egypt in this case.

II. THE CASE STUDY

Analyzing how extremists in Egypt gain control over political institution is not only a domestic concern, but also a regional and international concern. The Society of the Muslim brotherhood, also known as the Muslim Brotherhood or just the Brotherhood, since its existence in 1928 went through different phases; moreover, it worked with and against different political powers. For example, it built alliance with the Egyptian monarch before the Egyptian revolution of 1952; furthermore, the group allegedly worked with the Nazi, with Nasser, with Sadat, etc. However, they end up also working against all whomever they built alliance with at the end. The literature and the data collected shows that the extremism in Egypt increased after the Arab Spring; the literature also showed the geopolitical importance of Egypt, which made

extreme ideology of the Egyptian extreme clerics influential on other groups in the region.

There large number of data collected from multiple Arabic Language resources. Moreover, the literature reviewed on the extreme-Islamism, before and after the Arab spring, in both English and Arabic showed several controversial issues. One of the challenges that this researcher faced was spending too much time filtering this data to avoid unsubstantiated claims. Indeed, the literatures and the data collected showed strong nexus between and close ideological base.

III. METHODS

The research questions in this paper are: 1- What made outlawed extremists and former terrorists rise to power? 2- How extreme-Islamism evolved to become acceptable transformation? He conducted historical analysis to archived records which were examined on qualitative foundations. The use of archived data is important in explaining the present issues because of the links between different events that case study analyzes [18]. He relied on several achieved data in my research methodology to answer the research question [10]. Such archived data is an important resource for this qualitative research. The archived data here are made of different artifacts: photos, audio recording, video recording, treatises, personal communication posted on a public domain, and interviews.

A. Witnesses' Testimonies

Witnesses' Testimonies was the result of internet anthropological methodology [17]. Therefore, over fifty resources were scanned; however only fifteen participants were selected (N =15). [8], [10]. Intend of data collected were coded and triangulated to ensure reliability. Eyewitnesses were suspicious of the extreme Islamists (EI). The overall conclusion shows that extreme-Islamists in Egypt promoted and conducted violence against others.

B. Documentary Reviews

To complete the triangulation and the verification, this researcher examined and analyzed several documents and treatises. The main materials used are the shade of the Qur'an by Sayyed Qutb (Fi Zilal al-Qur'an) [14], [15], and the Milestone (Ma'alim Fi al-Taryyq) [16]. Additionally several documents said to be the product of the founder of the MBH, Hassan al-Bana.

C. Speeches of Extreme-Islamists

The Islamists participants (speeches) was from fifteen participants (N=15). The extreme-Islamic leaders' speeches were triangulated with different resources.

IV. RESULTS

Research showed that extreme-Islamism relied on invoking moral disengagement through dehumanizing adversaries. Moreover, it was clear from the speeches of the extreme-Islamists that they also shifted the blame on their victims [1]. The idea that extremists repeat is that the modern societies are

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:7, No:7, 2013

moving toward Jahiylyyah age. The new conceptual framework provided by the extremists is a new false interpretation of Islamic rules. Therefore, since the modern secular societies do not follow their interpretation, these secular societies are either Kufar (infidels), or kharijtes (heretics). Once this interpretation is accepted by the followers, they justified declaring Jihad on the societies.

This qualitative research is completed after data reached saturation level. Moreover, this researcher conducted full triangulation to all data collected. It was clear that the backbone of the new extreme-paradigm is based on the basis of *Takfee*r and *Hijra* (excommunication and exodus).

The excommunication and Exodus is the process which extreme clerics through filtering the main stream Islamic rules to generate new sharia rules distorting the correct interpretation of Islam [12].

V. DISCUSSIONS

The critical basis of this research is based on the moral disengagement [2], [3]. The data collected proved that extreme-Islamists appeal to their supporters and their followers by establishing a new conceptual framework on moral disengagement foundation [11], [12]. The Muslim brother since 1928 was established to be the replacement to the Islamic caliphate. Hassan al-Banaa, the founder of MBH, started as a religious group. However, quickly became started to complete for political power. The data collected shows that MBH had three wings: political, paramilitary, and religious. The radical paramilitary wings were responsible of the killing of Naqrashi pasha, and attempting to kill the former Egyptian president Nasser. Even the assassination of President Sadat in 1981 was committed by extremists who believed in Qutb ideology.

Extremists excessive use emotional statements to gain full control over their follower and supporters. Moreover, they dehumanize the victims and shift the blame on them [2]. Many extremists who were freed after the Arab spring admit that they are in agreement with al-Qaeda ideology. The data collected also showed several anti-minority and anti-women slogans.

According to Mottaleb [11], Fatwas of the extreme-clerics become the vehicles to deliver the message of establishing the new conceptual framework based on excommunication and exudes, which is the new extreme conceptual framework is the first stage of using moral disengagement approach to justify the new extreme concepts.

TABLE I
EVOLUTION OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ISLAM

year	
1928	– Creating the Society of Muslim Brother (MBH) *Jamaat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen* by Hassan al-Bana.
1936	– Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen started its political campaigns and became part of fighting militias in Palestine.
1939	– The Muslim Brotherhood Secret Apparatus
1948-49	Series of attacks on Egyptian Jews and prominent political figures. Hassan al-Bana finally was assassinated.
1950	The Egyptian Government Dissolve the Muslim Brotherhood
1952	– The Egyptian Revolution by Nasser and the Free Officers Group
1964	– The Government issued full amnesty to the Muslim Brotherhood and reconciled with them.
1966	– SayyedQutbwas executed after three failed attempts to assassinate Nasser and unleash violence as a result of Qutb call for Jihad in his publications.
1979	– Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists parties opposed the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Emergence of more terrorist cells on the basis of Qutb's ideology
1981	– Assassination of President Sadat and spread of violence in Egypt by the Egyptian Jihad and al-Jamaa al-Islamia.
1989-2000	– Series of terrorist attacks against prominent politicians, such as the assassination head of the Egyptian parliament, killing terrorists in Luxor, and other operations
2000-11	– Muslim Brotherhood entered into the political arena as opposition blocks under established parties.
2011	– A liberal-secular movement in Egypt started anti-government protests. The protesters became determined of ousting Mubarak regime. However, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists quickly jumped on the leadership of the revolution. Finally, Mubarak stepped-down under the international community's pressure and to avoid bloodsheds.
2012	– Mohammed Mursi of the MBH became the president of Egypt in June 2012.
2013	– The Egyptian people revolted to oust the Muslim Brotherhood regime, and the revolution succeeded to remove Mursi in June 2013 after the Egyptian Army and other prominent figures sided by the revolution.

A. Fatwas of New Social Orders

Extremists attempt to establish new social order that undermine the role of women and minorities in the society. The Islamic Legitimate Body of Rights and Reformation, ILBRR [12] ordered their followers to avoid celebrating or congratulating non- Muslims in their holidays. They distorted the prophet Mohammed Hadith that said "Every Nation – religious' adherent- has its own religious-festivity" (Mohammed PBUH).

However, the purpose of this Hadith was to respect other religions' holidays. Furthermore, extremists called for putting women in lower social cast.

B. Dehumanizing Opponents and Victims

Extremists and terrorists make their opponents appear to be non-human to make their followers feel no merci against their victims. For example, Hamas executed three of their own citizens publically without real trial and dragged their corps in the streets of Ghaza [7]. Moreover, Morsi [9], [12] called Jews "aps and pigs" according to Fahmi [6], the Muslim brotherhood always used the tactics to avoid distinguishing between Zionism and Judaism. From the data collected, the messages of hatred against Christians and Jews were overwhelming. This researcher reached data saturating level early in researching this issue.

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:7, No:7, 2013

C. The Process of Self-Exoneration

The data collected from participants showed that extremists claimed no guilt for their crimes and murders. For example, A. al-Zumur claimed that they assassinated Sadat in 1981 because of the lack of legitimate channels to seek changes. These claims were repeated by all Jihadi organizations.

D. Shift of the Blame on the Opponents and Victims

According to extremists, the society is to be blamed for the crimes they commit [14], [16].The reasons to call for the excommunication and exodus because the society moved to pagan-ignorance age (al-Jahilyya). The departure of the modern Islamic societies of Islamic rules makes it a duty to re-Islamize the society.

VI. Conclusion

Seeing the political dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood, and after conducting the qualitative content analysis and historical analysis, it was clear that the Muslim Brotherhood use Moral Disengagement process to keep their followers going in a specific path. Therefore, one may become skeptical how the situation may develop in Egypt. The main concern would be whether Egypt will become a second Iran. The Iranian revolution started as a liberal driven revolution seeking democracy and freedom; however, Iran during the revolution period, developed to become a lawless state; therefore, Khomeini and his radical group were able to hijack the revolution and claimed the power in Iran. As a result of that, Iran became one of the most oppressive regimes in the Middle East.

The current cooperation between the Brotherhood on the one hand, and Hamas and other radical organizations raises concerns on the real intention the Muslim Brotherhood. There is no new interpretation to negate the older radical interpretation of Sayyed Qutb and other ideologists. On the contrary, new versions of invoking violence openly surfaced in public domain.

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