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The unintended consequences of the banning of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood

by Carolin Goerzig

An Egyptian court has banned the Muslim Brotherhood and seized its funds in an attempt to dismantle the Islamist movement. Instead of seeking an all-inclusive dialogue, the Court has excluded a conflict actor from the political process. This decision may backfire for several reasons.

The most apparent unintended consequence of the decision is a possible radicalization of the Muslim Brotherhood. The inability to operate by legal means will strengthen the hardliners within the movement. This is especially the case because recent developments will confirm the members of the group who belief that democracy and Islam are irreconcilable. The Muslim Brotherhood has been known for following a rather moderate course. Now that this course has not yielded positive results the militants within the movement will be reaffirmed. Driving the movement underground might possible also imply criminalization. Albeit this might be a rather unlikely move do to the aspirations of the Muslim Brotherhood to be an official player, seizing their funds will inevitably raise the question for alternative sources of funding. The Muslim Brotherhood has been known for its provision of social services. They will not halt this important part of their course to win the hearts and minds of the Egyptians. In fact, seizing the Muslim Brotherhood's associations' funds can create an opposition front of the poor people who were financially supported by these associations on a monthly basis.

A further problem concerns the lack of clarity of the decision. Banning movements and policies of terrorist proscription are usually designed to motivate a change of action of the targeted group. If it remains unclear what the Muslim Brotherhood needs to do in order to become unbanned, the policy will not produce any effects. In fact, a lack of transparency will only add fuel to the fire and cause further radicalization, especially if the requirements for moderation are not specified. Without a carrot the stick won't work.

Moreover, the decision to ban the Muslim Brotherhood will only undermine any future attempts to establish a democratic regime in Egypt further. The arbitrary banning of political activists will weaken the belief of the population in the political system. The move to ban the Muslim Brotherhood will be perceived by many as an instrumentalization of the war on terror. The

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broadening of terrorist listings since the 9/11has blurred the boundaries between legal and proscribed activities and raises questions about the infringement on civil rights. Banning a mainly non-violent movement undermines the credibility of the rulers.

While radicalization may be a short-term consequence of the banning decision, the long-term consequences for the democratic development of Egypt may be even more harmful. Sooner or later, Egypt will be affected by the imprudent decision to drive the Muslim Brotherhood underground.

Carolin Goerzig ist Assistant Professor an der Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. Ihre aktuelle Forschung fokussiert sich auf die Radikalisierung von Moslems in Europa und den USA, Cyberterrorismus sowie Kooperation im Kontext von Terrorismus.

Tags: Ägypten, ban, Egypt, Militär, military, muslim brotherhood, Muslimbrüder, Verbot

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