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## Understanding the Political Crisis in Egypt

Mısır'daki Siyasi Krizi Anlamak

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### Özet

*Müdahaleler karmaşık bir konudur ve pek çok sebebe dayanmaktadır. Bu yüzden, tek bir sebeple açıklanamaz. Mısır'da yer alan askeri darbe bölgede ve dünyada herkesin dikkatini çekmektedir. Devletin demokratik olarak seçilmiş ama otoriter cumhurbaşkanı, ordu tarafından iktidardan düşürülmüştür. Bununla ilgili başka bir ciddi endişe de ordunun sivil siyasete doğrudan katılımı ve etkisidir. Bu makale, askeri müdahaleye yol açan temel ve kısa vadeli sosyo-ekonomik nedenlere açıklık getirmeye çalışmaktadır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Mısır, askeri müdahale, seçimler, anayasa*

The Moslem Brotherhood (MB) was established in 1928 as a Pan-Islamic religious and political movement by Hassan Al-Banna. As the Arab world's oldest Islamic movement it became highly influential and remained one of the largest political opposition organizations in the Middle East.

### **Abstract**

*Interventions are complex matters, consisting of multiple explanations. Thus, there is no single reason that suffices. The coup d'état which took place in Egypt has captured the attention of the region and the rest of the world. The coup was an important development as a democratically elected, yet authoritarian head of state was removed from power by the military. A related concern is the direct involvement of the military in civilian politics. This article attempts to provide clarity to the underlying and short-term socio-economic reasons that led to the military intervention.*

**Keywords:** *Egypt, military intervention, elections, constitution*

The Cold War was a period characterized by two superpowers effectively dividing the world. Whilst each had their respective allies, the majority of states professed to be non-aligned. The world experienced high tensions throughout the Cold War. Despite the fear that existed, there was also the knowledge that the two superpowers balanced each other; thus providing stability.

The key features of the post-cold war era are transition; globalization; and instability. Socialist and authoritarian states have engaged in transitions to democracy, with some succeeding in making progress in the right direction, with others falling by the wayside. Egypt is a good example of a previously authoritarian non-aligned state which joined the post-cold war transition wave very late, as part of the Arab Spring in 2011.<sup>1</sup>

### **Politics**

Having only three heads of state in more than half a century (Nasser 1956-1970, Sadat 1970-1981 and Mubarak 1981-2011) Egypt experienced a popular uprising as part of the Arab Spring whereby the military removed Mubarak from the presidency and established themselves as his replacement through creating the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (SCAF).<sup>2</sup>

The transition to a civilian government was effectively achieved within two years, with Egypt becoming the first state to have a democratically elected Islamist head of state.<sup>3</sup> Just after a year in office President Morsi was overthrown.

The military intervention that took place in Egypt on 3 July 2013 has created much interest in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond in terms of whether democracy can survive in the Arab world. In order to test such a hypothesis it is important to analyse the reasons for the coup in three dimensions: political developments; socio-economic circumstances; and the role of the military.

The Moslem Brotherhood (MB) was established in 1928 as a Pan-Islamic religious and political movement by Hassan Al-Banna. As the Arab world's oldest Islamic movement it became highly influential and remained one of the largest political opposition organizations in the Middle East.

Precisely due to these qualities the MB was well-prepared for the upcoming presidential elections that took place in 2012. Their candidate Moham-

ed Morsi won the election in a run-off because his rival in the second round Ahmed Shafik was someone who had little chance of being elected as head of state having served as President Mubarak's last premier.

Therefore, one can certainly assert that there was no effective alternative to President Morsi in the second round of the presidential election which he won with 51.7% of the vote.<sup>4</sup> This round of the presidential election whilst democratic in terms of the result, however, had an unexpected adverse affect on the majority of the electorate.

Many Egyptians considered the elections to certainly be a part of democracy; nevertheless, they questioned democracy as not representing the will of the people in terms of all the revolutionary candidates supporting the central ideas of the revolution being eliminated in the first round.<sup>5</sup> This was due to the fact that the system envisaged a French-style two-round collection.

### **Egyptian Society and the Economy**

The economic record of the Moslem Brotherhood in government has tended to be overlooked by observers who have focused very heavily on the military intervention that took place. In many respects, the coup has overshadowed the failure of the MB in power.

The underlying causes for the mass protests and the Armed Forces becoming involved and ultimately overthrowing President Morsi related to the Egyptian economy. More specifically, it concerned the subsidies given to fuel and wheat.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptian national budget spent and continues to spend a vast amount of its resources subsidizing these and related goods. The fact remains that the policy pursued which includes fuel subsidies accounting for almost 20% of the budget cannot continue indefinitely, as it is simply unsustainable.<sup>7</sup>

The Egyptian finances were and remain a serious problem.<sup>8</sup> The country's foreign reserves are falling, it has a negative balance of payments which is worsening and the aforementioned subsidies

are becoming more costly by the day. All of these naturally lead to bottlenecks and hardships for ordinary people who made this very clear by gathering in their tens of millions and protesting against the government of President Morsi.

The state of the Egyptian economy was captured accurately by the World Bank when it considered it to be "suffering from a severe downturn and the government faces numerous challenges as to how to restore growth, market and investor confidence. Political and institutional uncertainty, a perception of rising insecurity and sporadic unrest continue to negatively affect economic growth. Real GDP growth slowed to just 2.2 percent year on year in October-December 2012/13 and investments declined to 13 percent of GDP in July-December 2012. The economic slowdown contributed to a rise in unemployment, which stood at 13 percent at end-December 2012, with 3.5 million people out of work. Foreign exchange reserves have continued to decline and are now less than 3 months of imports."<sup>9</sup>

A deeper problem - which is a rather longer term one - concerns the demography of Egypt whose population is estimated to be 85 million presently and expected to reach 100 million within the next 15 years or so.<sup>10</sup> This becomes a major problem for any Egyptian policymaker given the fact that the next decade or two will mean a more populous new generation who will be looking for jobs and affordable staple goods.

This future scenario consists of many more angry young men asking tough questions and demanding simple answers. That would be a tough test for any policymaker whether it wears khaki uniforms, long white beards or professes to be a liberal open-market democrat. During those elections the participating political parties will have to inform the Egyptians of the very tough choices they face and accept the decision of the population of the electorate.

The economic model that was proposed by international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank resembled very much what neo-liberal advocates had been professing in the



West: reducing the size of the state - thereby limiting its competencies and responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> Privatisation, the de rigueur of such a policy, was high on the agenda as well as supporting big businesses with a greater role for charity being encouraged.

Certainly the notion of charity was very close to the hearts of the MB given its prominence within the Islamic religion. Such an economic reform agenda resulted in privatising both the causes and the solutions to poverty and inequality by reducing structural societal problems of redistribution and ownership to the level of individual morality. Therefore, a culture of charity was very much preferred to one of a welfare state. Rather than a collective institutional answer to the problem of inequality in poverty, the solution rested on the shoulders of individuals and their conscience.

The issue of public finances and subsidies remained pressing issues throughout 2012. The World Bank accepted that "The government also needs to reconcile the need for more public spending with the objective of reducing the deficit, which rose to 11 percent of the GDP in FY11/12. A major challenge the government faces is managing the state budget which includes salaries for public sector and subsidies, items that account for more than half of all public expenditures. Measures to further reduce fuel subsidies planned for April 2013 have now been postponed to later this year. Ongoing political tensions have prolonged Egypt's bid to secure a \$4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF has been discussing a program of support with the government and calling for stronger fiscal adjustment, full disclosure of underlying measures, and broader political support."<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the Moslem Brotherhood's failure to manage the economy was so dire that they felt forced to approach tarnished businessmen of the previous regime to offer them guidance and assistance.<sup>13</sup> Those businessmen who had worked closely and been associated with the NDP, were asked to return to the country to help assist with the economy.<sup>14</sup>

On 22 November 2012, the constitutional declaration gave the president authority which had not even been given to President Mubarak.<sup>15</sup> These unprecedented powers were a sign of the volatile political time to come, although President Morsi did rescind the declaration the very next month.<sup>16</sup>

The constitution was a very divisive document which whilst representing the whole gamut of views and wishes of the Islamist fraction in Egypt did not represent all those who opposed Islamism in the country. The result of adopting such a constitution was an extreme disconnect with much of the Egyptian nation. When one adds the constitution's silence with regard to the protection of women and the Christian minority in the country, it becomes clear how illiberal it was with very little protection of human rights.<sup>17</sup>

The constitution also had several quite controversial provisions, some of which put forward the case that the principles of Islamic law were the main sources of legislation. Other articles identified the principles of Sharia Law as having a primary role within law-making and national jurisprudence.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in the eyes of many, the Constitution came to be seen as an extension of the political arm of the MB, the Freedom and Justice Party and not as something representative of the nation writ large.

Bearing in mind that the whole idea of a constitution is to bring a nation together, this particular one actually drew the nation apart, further dividing the nation. Given the fact that it did not try to appear inclusive, appealing to a national consensus, the constitution never garnered legitimacy in the eyes of many, even more so in terms of the international community.

The Brotherhood's strategy in power can be plausibly classified as one of state capture. They wanted to possess the institutions and instruments of the state, considering political power to resemble a zero-sum game whereby state institutions in particular needed to be under their control, if not, it was seen as being under the influence of the opposition. Matthies-Boon and de Smet argue that there was a huge dissatisfac-

tion which “resulted from what many saw as the brotherhoodisation of the state, the increase of violence and torture, the deterioration of living standards and unjust social and political policies.”<sup>19</sup> The Moslem Brotherhood could not come to accept an in-between solution.

President Morsi adhered to the strategy of trying to infiltrate and Islamise Egypt’s main political institutions, primarily the judiciary and the executive through the control of Ministries. Whilst in power the President chose a Prosecutor-General whose purpose was to neutralise the judiciary.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, he pushed through a partisan constitution which did not reflect the views of the whole Egyptian nation. The November 2012 decree gave the president the power to unite all branches of government under his personal control, identifying his intentions.

The MB tried to completely weaken any and all opposition. There was no strategy of cooperation with the opposition as well as no idea to unify disparate sections of Egyptian society. The strategy was completely based upon dividing and increasing tensions within Egyptian society. There was no attempt to build any political short-term coalitions.

Therefore, the President and his government did not cater for the whole of the Egyptian nation, solely concentrating on the Moslem Brotherhood itself. This was aided and abetted by the controversial constitution written by an assembly completely dominated by Islamists.

### **Military**

So far there is conflicting evidence that the Armed Forces intervened on behalf of the people’s will on July 3, as opposed to merely attempting to legitimize its own actions by referring to the mass protests. The prevailing view considers the protests as a plausible reason for the action of the Armed Forces; it was a useful cover, a handy storyline for them to legitimise their military intervention.

Close observers such as El Baradei, however, disagree.<sup>21</sup> He has noted that there was a pos-

sibility of Egypt descending into a civil war, the army intervening to prevent such an outcome; to prevent further violence taking place. Since the military intervention, however, violence did not decrease, but actually increased.<sup>22</sup>

Certainly in the past, spiraling political violence has consistently been used to justify longer term military involvement in politics. Most military interventions use violence on the streets to legitimize their holding onto political power. Violence therefore, becomes the primary reason for the military to remain in power in order to consolidate their power, to actually remain in office for longer.

In a related matter, incidents of factionalism or sectarianism only makes the military appear even more important for the future of Egypt as well as in terms of as a stable anchor in the region. This was immediately attested to by U.S. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, a Virginia Republican, who released a statement confirming “the Egyptian military has long been a key partner of the United States and a stabilizing force in the region, and is perhaps the only trusted national institution in Egypt today.”<sup>23</sup>

In this respect one needs to remember that only a year ago the military was seen as the greatest threat to a democratic Egyptian future, whereas today there are millions who consider them to be the complete reverse of this: proposer and defender of an emergent democratic political system.

Given this perception, the Egyptian military is fully aware of the fact that interventions in the modern age have all been detrimental in terms of good governance, ultimately eroding the prestige of the military as a dependable institution. The Armed Forces therefore, is under no illusion that it must transfer power as soon as possible which is why they stated immediately after removing President Morsi that their political roadmap will not involve long-term military rule.<sup>24</sup> They seem to have learnt the lessons from the time when they held political power after President Mubarak in the guise of the SCAF.



***On July 3 when the military announced its roadmap what was immediately noticeable concerned the prospective talks including parties of very different political colours.***

So far the military has agreed to the demands of the Tamarod (Rebel) campaign in terms of having installed an interim president and insisted on an inclusive approach to the political roadmap which foresees early presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it seems that the army and the Tamarod campaign are in tandem for the time being.

It must not be forgotten that the Armed Forces and the Moslem Brotherhood were once partners, albeit rather uneasy bedfellows. After the original uprising against President Mubarak, the military reconstructed a new role for itself after the original revolution by establishing the SCAF. Through this they put forward a plan to remain in charge during a transitional period within which preparations were made to hold elections, which the latter welcomed, being the favourite to win due to their superior organisation.

The President dismissed the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces as well as Chief of Staff soon after taking office, hence creating an

image of himself as a revolutionary leader intent on cleaning up the establishment and creating a new, more democratic political and administrative system.<sup>26</sup> Certainly the changing of the Minister of Defence who had held office for 20 years was a notable success. One aspect, however, that has not received the attention it deserves concerns both the Defence Minister and the Chief of Staff not being at all liked in the army and both needing to be retired having passed the required retirement age.

In the aftermath, the selection and promotion of military officers seen as sympathetic to the Moslem Brotherhood was, at best an unethical policy. General Sisi was appointed as the new Defense Minister as he had been considered to be a sympathizer.<sup>27</sup> The choice of Sisi was due to his conservative credentials, especially the fact that in June 2011, he had publicly justified virginity tests on female demonstrators which, later on, he was forced to retract by the SCAF.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, less than a year after his appointment, it was this general who was to depose Morsi.

The economic record of the Moslem Brotherhood in government has tended to be overlooked by observers who have focused very heavily on the military intervention that took place. In many respects, the coup has overshadowed the failure of the MB in power.

The MB thought they were recruiting and promoting someone who was - if not one of them, at least - very close to them, who ultimately overthrew them. In this instance, by choosing to promote Sisi based on his potential compassion towards them, the Moslem Brotherhood fooled no one but themselves.

Alongside this episode, the MB increasingly came to accept as true, its own depiction of events and its strategy, by believing it was engaged in a vital battle to cleanse the establishment and promoting its revolutionary credentials - all in the pursuit of self legitimacy. All this took place with the opposition disputing and clearly not adhering to such an interpretation, considering it very much a delusional myth.

If the figures given by the Tamarod campaign are to be trusted, more than 22 million citizens signed a petition calling for the removal of the president.<sup>29</sup> Those who opposed the president came from wide-ranging sections of Egyptian society. Certainly these included secularists as well as socialists, though there were also liberals and Islamists amongst those opposing the Moslem Brotherhood and President Morsi.

This mass petition asked for four key demands. Firstly, the removal of the President. Secondly, the establishment of an interim government. Thirdly, a new constitution or the amendment of the current. Finally, early presidential elections.<sup>30</sup>

After the petition was collected, the military estimated on the day of demonstration (30 June) more than 30 million citizens took to the streets.<sup>31</sup> There is no authoritative source concerning the

quantity, in terms of how many protested against the president on Egyptian streets, with Tamarod asserting that up to half of the population were active (40 million people).<sup>32</sup> Whilst this is more than likely an exaggeration, the numbers nevertheless compared very favourably with the huge masses that demonstrated against President Mubarak in the January 2011 uprising. Certainly more people than who voted for the President demonstrated against him - as he had only received just more than 13 million votes in the second round.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, those who opposed the president claimed he no longer represented the people; that he had lost his legitimacy. Accepting such an analytical interpretation, however, is fraught with danger as one cannot equate the numbers protesting against the votes cast. Electors had voted for Morsi to remain in office for four years, whether in good times or bad. Protestors on the other hand need to be seen as representing a snapshot of a difficult time during the process of governing. Certainly elected officials do and will incur public wrath at times during their tenure, therefore, the numbers of protestors cannot usually be thought of in the same terms as of votes that have been cast in the past. Though when the numbers reach up to half of the nation, that takes on a rather different dimension.

Concerning this crucial subject of democracy and legitimacy Tadros provides a succinct summary by underlining the fact that "reducing democracy to a ballot box can only produce a majoritarian political order that is tyrannical and oppressive to difference. In order to produce an inclusive political order that is respectful of



women's full citizenship rights, the rights of religious minorities, and socially and politically marginal groups, there have to be a disentangling between representation, power and influence, and the electoral process".<sup>34</sup>

On July 3 when the military announced its road-map what was immediately noticeable concerned the prospective talks including parties of very different political colours. They involved religious authorities such as the Coptic Orthodox patriarch Tawadros II; the grand imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed El-Tayyeb; the Tamarod campaign group; Mohamed El Baradei, representing the opposition parties; as well as the secretary-general of the Al Nour Party representing the political wing of the ultra-conservative Islamists who themselves vehemently opposed the Moslem Brotherhood and President Morsi.

Moreover, at the moment of political crisis the President preferred to play the role of a 'divider' rather than a 'uniter', as he was not prepared to attempt to control the extremist elements within the Islamic fold. The president did not appear to show an interest in representing all Egyptians: those who voted for him, as well as those who voted against him.<sup>35</sup>

Having said this however, the president and the role of the presidency that he inherited contained many elements of state discrimination as well as sectarianism. One could therefore defend President Morsi by limiting accusations to acting in the same manner that his predecessor had; although at a much deeper level.

## **Conclusion**

The most noticeable revolutionary slogan of 2011 concerned "bread, freedom, justice".<sup>36</sup> Put simply, the masses demanded economic, political and legal reforms. Whilst the second part of this demand was met in terms of elections, a blind eye was very much turned to the first and third demands. Therefore, whilst political reforms were put in place, but the economic and legal reforms simply were not catered for. Of the three-legged chair, only one was challenged: the political dimension.

Thus, a systemic change did not take place despite the fact that this was what motivated most of the masses at the time. Concerning the proposed economic changes more of the same was practiced in terms of greater subsidies being channeled into bread and fuel to assuage the masses. In terms of legal matters, the constitution was changed, though it contained two major deficiencies. Firstly, there was a very low turnout in the referendum. Secondly, it was considered to be representing only the Islamist notion of a national constitution, thereby not catering for the rest of Egyptian society.

Looking at it from the perspective of the anti-Morsi protesters the intervention of the army has led to two important conclusions. Firstly, authoritarianism in the guise of Islamism was halted and secondly, the major mismanagement of the economy has been stopped.

Pursuing this trail of thought, the national as well as the international media portrayed those behind President Morsi's policies in government as simply MB supporters, whereas those who supported the removal of the president were portrayed as being the genuine representatives of the Egyptian revolution, expressing the national popular will. Therefore, the representations in media are another important aspect that needs to be borne in mind when evaluating and analysing the developments, as well as the future scenarios that will shape Egypt.

In this vein one needs to be aware that not all of those who support the Moslem Brotherhood are devils in disguise, neither is everyone opposing the president democrats with angelic faces. Both are far from perfect, possessing negative features as well as positive qualities. The challenge not only for Egypt but for the Arab world, therefore, is to be able to work out a balance within secular and Islamist groups and to try and form a constructive conversation between them. If this proves to be unsuccessful then the likelihood of 'rupture', or military interventions becomes more probable.



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7 Kızkardeşti; Büyük Biraderdi derken  
bu haylaz da Y Kuşağı oldu çıktı.  
- Familya bu ne yapacaksın!