

Egypt at a Crossroads: The Presidential Elections and Their Aftermath

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ABSTRACT

On June 17, Egypt ended the second and final round of the first presidential election since the removal of Mubarak and his regime in February 2011. This was a long-awaited appointment on the revolutionary calendar, as many Egyptians hoped that the election of a new president would conclude the long and drawn-out transitional period. Since the fall of Mubarak, Egypt has been ruled by the 19 generals of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, who were expected to hand over power to the new president. But the new president, Dr Muhammad Mursi, was the Muslim Brothers candidate. Against all odds, Mursi came first in the first round of elections, and went on to triumph against a powerful opponent in the second. To contain Mursi's rise to the presidency and secure their share of power and influence, the military took a number of preemptive measures aimed at limiting the president's power and authority. This is an examination into the presidential elections and their aftermath.

Egypt is the central country of the Arab world. The political and cultural influence that Egypt has exercised on its Arab neighborhood in modern times has been immense. Although the current movement of Arab revolutions broke out first in Tunisia, it was the Egyptian revolution which captured the world's imagination and gave "the Arab spring" its name. But Egypt's transition to democracy has been slow and tortuous, complicated by a conflict over the country's soul between the forces of change and the military-judiciary bureaucracy complex. The election of a new president, the first to be chosen in a relatively free election since the founding of the republic, is no doubt a major step forward in the process of democratization.

The second and final round of the election was conducted on June 16 and 17 between the two front runners in the first round: Dr. Muhammad Mursi

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of the Freedom and Justice Party (the political arm of the Muslim Brothers), and former Air Force general Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister of the deposed Mubarak's regime. At dawn on Monday, June 18, Mursi's campaign headquarters announced his victory, relying on results from local voting centers. However, Shafiq's spokespersons refused to admit defeat. Although official results were not declared until June 24, they were to confirm the results that had been announced previously, showing that Mursi was able to beat his rival by 880,000 votes.

More than 50 percent of eligible voters (about 26 out of 51 million) voted in the second round, far exceeding the 40 percent in the first round. While the considerable rise in the turn out indicates that Egyptians had yet to show signs of electoral exhaustion, it also

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shows the intensity of the competition. Yet even before the president was to assume his responsibilities, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) had taken several measures to insure they keep their heavy-handed role in shaping the country's future, diminishing Egyptians' hopes that the presidential elections would finally conclude the long process of transforming authority.

This is an examination into the presidential election and its results, the challenges that continue to face the process of democratization in Egypt, and the ongoing confrontation between the SCAF and the political forces expected to back the new president, especially the Muslim Brothers.

The First Round

The first round of the presidential election was conducted on May 23 and 24, following electoral campaigns that lasted for a full year in the case of candidates Amr Musa and Abdel Mun'im Abul-Futuh, and a mere month in the case of Muhammad Mursi. While only five of the nine candidates, Abdel Mun'im Abul-Futuh, Muhammad Mursi, Amr Musa, Hamdayn Sabbahi and Ahmad Shafiq, were considered serious and competitive, the large number of candidates precluded any one of them from crossing the 50 percent threshold required to win. Surprisingly, Ahmad Shafiq (who was widely described as a candidate of the old regime) and

Muhammad Mursi (the Muslim Brothers candidate) were the two frontrunners and made it to the final round, thus turning the election into another episode in the historical war between the old regime and the Muslim Brothers.

Mursi had the highest number of votes in the first round, with slightly less than a quarter of votes and about 200,000 votes more than Shafiq's. The

Nasserite candidate Hamdayn Sabbahi came in third place with a fifth of the votes, while the independent Islamist Abul-Futuh came fourth, followed by Amr Musa, a former foreign minister and the former secretary-general of the Arab League. Of the six major governorates, Mursi won in Giza and Buhayra; Shafiq in Sharqia and Daqahlia; while Sabbahi achieved a great victory in both of Cairo and Alexandria. Generally, Mursi was strongest in Upper Egypt, while Shafiq and Sabbahi were the favorites in Cairo and the Delta governorates. Ultimately, what contributed to Mursi's victory was the substantial share of votes he received in most of Egypt's 27 governorates, including those where he did not win outright.

What affected Mursi's fortunes in the first round was the extremely short duration of his campaign as he was the last to enter the fray, which limited his ability to reach large and vital segments of the Egyptian people. Mursi was also the Freedom and Justice Party's reserve candidate, not its first choice, which subsequently raised questions about whether he was able, or even ready, to be president of the republic.

Shafiq received vote from various quarters of Egyptian society. In Egypt, like after almost all other popular revolutions, there are strong segments of society that do not support the revolution and feel nostalgic for the old order. This was Shafiq's first constituency. His other source of support was a network of some of the most prominent businessmen in the country, some of whom took

advantage of the destitution of many Egyptians and used money on a large scale for the sake of their candidate. It is also believed that among the five million votes that went to Shafiq, about two millions were cast by Coptic Christian voters. In addition, Shafiq benefitted from the powerful support of the dissolved National Party network, and the sympathy of officers in the national security apparatus (previously known as the state security), as well as members of the local state administration, which have not been reformed since the fall of Mubarak.

Shafiq's sharp rise in support in the last few weeks of campaigning was detrimental to Amr Musa, whose campaign targeted the same voting blocs that Shafiq was finally able to attract. Even though Musa too used money extensively, Shafiq's financial resources surpassed that of all other candidates combined. In addition, Shafiq's campaign was more professional and dynamic, and he proved to be more convincing to anti-revolutionary forces, whether in business, the state administration, or media.

For Sabbahi, his voters came mostly from the quarters of society that supported or sympathized with the revolution and were not prepared to vote for the Islamists, fearing their monopoly on the reins of power. A small proportion of Sabbahi's vote is also believed to have come from the Coptic community, especially Coptic youth and liberals, who refused to comply with the church's instructions.

Another surprise was Abul-Futuh's fourth place result as many observers expected him to be one of the two making it to the second round. In an atmosphere of high political polarization, Abul-Futuh failed to win any of the segments of voters that did not go

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with the Islamist parties in the People's Assembly elections. Furthermore, the Salafi forces that decided to support him in the last few weeks of the campaign did not work vigorously enough to rally their sympathizers behind his cause, and some of their members did not even go to the polls. Given that the Salafi forces were divided between Abul-Futuh and Mursi, it did not seem that the Salafi vote added much for either one of them, perhaps due to the negative impact of the open split among Salafi religious and political leaders over the candidacies of Abul-Futuh and Mursi, and the absence of a clear Salafi candidate in the competition. Moreover, there was a substantial decline in the Islamist vote in the first round, in comparison to the legislative elections, which clearly affected the number of votes that both Abul-Futuh and Mursi received. This decline in pro-Islamic vote cannot be attributed only to the Salafis' failure to fulfill their electoral duties, but also to the immense

media attack against the Islamist parties since they won the parliamentary majority.

The campaigns of Amr Musa and Abul-Futuh made a terrible mistake by organizing a televised debate only between their two candidates, portraying a flagrant sense of confidence. In the debate, the two candidates attacked each other in front of millions of viewers. Mursi's campaign was not free of mistakes either, especially in adopting a religiously-loaded discourse. Shafiq and Sabbahi, however, realized from an early stage of the campaign what they wanted, and proceeded towards their goals with great discipline and consistency.

In the end, the outcome of the first round was in many respects what the Freedom and Justice Party candidate had hoped for since his opponent in the second round was to be Shafiq, a figure distinctly identified with the old regime. If Mursi would have had to fight the second round against Sabbahi or Abul-Futuh it would have been easier for either one of them to rally all the other political forces behind a "Stop the Muslim Brothers" banner, which would have made it difficult for Mursi to have won the presidency.

The Politics of the Second Round

The second round of voting took place in a highly tense political environment that was fraught with the results of the



Photo: REUTERS, Handout

Egypt's Islamist President-elect Mursi looks at the crowd that had gathered for his speech in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

first round. Great effort was exerted by Mursi's campaign, after the announcement of the first round results, to mobilize revolutionary forces and democratic parties. However, the polarization and fragmentation of the Egyptian political arena, which have been ongoing since the People's Assembly elections, made the outcome of this effort limited. Abul-Futuh reluctantly announced his reserved support for Mursi, while Sabhahi completely refused to back either of the final candidates. Mursi made serious offers to Abul-Futuh and Sabhahi to be his vice presidents, but both declined the offer. As for Amr Musa, who came fifth in the first round, it was not likely that he would back Mursi, and appeared even convinced that the

state's machine would eventually secure victory for Shafiq. He, therefore, pragmatically made some conciliatory gestures to Shafiq, although it was clearly obvious that his overwhelming defeat was brought about by Shafiq and not any other candidate.

A number of liberal political leaders and intellectuals, such as Usama al-Ghazali Harb and Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, the liberal Free Egyptians Party, a number of leaders of the Wafd party, and the leftist Tagamu' Party, did not hesitate to declare their support for Shafiq. Almost all state media outlets and privately owned television stations took Shafiq's side. However, his greatest support came from those circles of wealth and power that propelled his

candidacy in the first round: influential members of the dissolved National Party, businessmen known for their close relations with the old regime, members or ex-members of the security institutions with expertise in tampering with elections, and local elements of the state administration with direct links to voters and knowledge of the traditional social map in rural areas.

On the other hand, the Islamist forces, whether the new Salafi parties and organizations, such as *al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya*, or the traditional Islamist groups, such as *al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya* and *Ansar al-Sunna*, sided with Mursi. His campaign also received support from a wide range of youth activists that had worked for Abul-Futuh's campaign as well as a relatively smaller number of those who had worked for Sabbahi's campaign. Significantly, he gained the full support of the April 6 Movement, the Egyptian Trend Party (which consists of Islamist revolutionary youth), and a number of smaller revolutionary parties and groupings. The formidable machine of the Muslim Brothers added unprecedented dynamism to ensure his victory.

Mursi's political language in the rather short campaign in the second round became more nationalist and conciliatory than it was in the first round. The Islamic-advocacy figures that accompanied Mursi in the first-round campaign were completely absent in the second round. Politically speaking, however, Shafiq's campaign was certainly the most cunning. Known for his

political ineptness, Shafiq was assisted by a number of professional political operators who knew how to reach average Egyptians. At certain moments of his campaign, Mursi seemed hard pressed to catch up with Shafiq's bundle of promises to poorer voters and those drowning in debt, like small-scale farmers and peasants, laborers, and poverty-stricken city dwellers.

What put Mursi at a disadvantage was the inability of his electoral machine to confront the frenzied media attack against him and the Islamists' performance in the People's Assembly, despite the assembly's great legislative achievements in the short period of its existence. What put him at an advantage was the increasing sympathy he gained after the issuing of the Constitutional Court's ruling that declared the electoral law of the People's Assembly unconstitutional and called for its dissolution. The decision precipitated a strong feeling that Mursi (and the whole political process) was being blatantly attacked by circles of the old regime and the SCAF. The combative speech that Mursi made in the late evening of June 14 had significant impact on public opinion and reinforced his position as the candidate of the revolution and its only remaining hope against those scheming to resurrect the old regime.

Mursi's campaign also demonstrated excellent organization, especially in selecting and prioritizing public meetings, media interviews, and meetings with specialized groups. It also dealt with the electoral results with compe-

tence, reaching a fairly accurate sum of each candidate's votes within a few hours of the closing of ballot boxes. Furthermore, it took a number of ingenious tactical steps such as announcing Mursi's victory on 4 a.m. of June 18, and providing a copy of the local voting centers' results to journalists.

The electoral process was certainly not devoid of direct and indirect fraud. Indirect fraud involved a widespread and intensive use of political money by Shafiq's campaign, while direct fraud included the employment of not easily detectable means of manipulation, such as repeat voting, rotating voting cards, and even shoving ready-marked ballots into boxes in large numbers. However, the electoral law issued by the People's Assembly (which required all voting centers to count the votes locally, in the presence of representatives of the two candidates, and to provide these representatives with a copy of the results) made organized and widespread manipulation a hard and unpredictable exercise.

The Results of the Second Round

Egypt's 27 governorates can be divided into five voting groups: the first consists of the six largest governorates (Cairo, Giza, Daqahlia, Sharqia, Alexandria, and Buhayra) that have between 3.2 million (Buhayra) and 6.5 million (Cairo) voters each. Together, these six governorates comprise almost half of

the total eligible voters in the country. The second consists of another six governorates (Gharbia, Minya, Qalyubia, Sohag, Munufia, and Asyut) that have between 2 and 2.9 million voters each. The third consists of four governorates (Kafr al-Shaykh, Qina, Faiyum, and Bani Swayf) that have between 1.4 and 1.9 million voters each. The fourth also consists of four governorates (Aswan, Dimiyatta, Isma'ilia, and Luxor) that have between over half a million and less than a million voters each. Finally, the fifth and smallest group consists of

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seven governorates (Port Said, Suez, the Red Sea, South Sinai, Marsa Matruh, the New Valley, and North Sinai), which have less than half a million voters each.

The two candidates fought vigorously over the first and second group without either accomplishing any significant breakthrough. Shafiq won three of the six largest governorates, the same governorates where he came ahead of Mursi in the first round, including Cairo (which has the largest number of voters). Mursi triumphed in the other three governorates, which in the first round he had won outright in two of them and was comfortably ahead of Shafiq in the third (Alexandria). In fact, Mursi's decisive victory in Alexandria was an expected

but still a big achievement, helped by the re-energized Muslim Brothers' electoral machine and the massive Salafi bloc in the city. One of the surprises of the second round was in Shafiq's failure to achieve the kind of victory he had hoped for in Cairo, where his campaign managers believed that he would be

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able to beat Mursi by at least one million votes. In the end, Mursi was able to compensate for Shafiq's lead of half a million votes in Cairo with an equivalent half a million vote difference in the relatively smaller Giza governorate, the inhabitants of which voted for Mursi in droves. Still, Cairo, with its large Christian population of almost a million voters and colorful political map, remains a hard nut to break for Islamist political forces. This is also true of the Cairene part of Giza.

In the second group of governorates, Shafiq achieved his greatest victory in Gharbia, where he received 600,000 more votes than Mursi. He also substantially won in Munufia, a governorate closely linked to the state for decades, and which produced two previous presidents, Sadat and Mubarak. However, Shafiq won with a smaller lead in Qalyubia, a governorate adjacent to Cairo. Although Mursi won the other three governorates of this second group, his

greatest success was in Minya, where he received 400,000 votes more than Shafiq. Yet, what put Mursi's electoral balance over Shafiq's in the end was his victory in most of the governorates of the third, fourth, and fifth groups.

Geographically, and no less significantly, Mursi took 17 out of the 27 governorates, defeating Shafiq in almost the entire river's length of Upper Egypt, from Giza to Aswan, and across the entire Mediterranean coast, from Marsa Matruh to North Sinai.

Shafiq won in only one governorate of Upper Egypt, Luxor, and only one along the Mediterranean coast, Port Said. It does seem that geographic distribution of votes argues against the belief that Mursi's victory was due to the support of the marginalized and less developed governorates. The truth is that the coastal governorates that voted for Mursi are not considered marginalized in any way. Also, the agricultural Delta governorates and Cairo's poor and lower middle-class quarters, as well as Christian voters, provided the bulk of Shafiq's vote.

By and large, the results do not reflect the existence of a coherent electoral strategy on the part of any of the two candidates. In the end, neither candidate was able to achieve a considerable victory in the governorates that were won by, or were inclined to, the other candidate in the first round. This may explain the not very large lead by which Mursi realized his final triumph.

The Persistence of the Military

Prior, during, and just after the holding of the second round, several major decisions were made by the Constitutional Court and the SCAF.

The first was a ruling by the Constitutional Court two days before the election that legitimized Shafiq's disputed candidacy, despite an earlier law issued by the People's Assembly that deprived prominent figures from the deposed regime of their political rights, and despite the fact that the dispatch of the law to the Constitutional Court by the Supreme Electoral Commission was even a procedure marred by legal doubts. The second ruling by the Constitutional Court, declaring the electoral process of the People's Assembly unconstitutional, and thus declaring that the assembly itself was illegitimate, was more controversial. Although the court does not have the authority to dissolve the parliament, its ruling went on to call for the immediate dissolution of the first post-revolution assembly, which was elected by 28 million Egyptians.

Within hours of the publication of the court's decision, army and police units blockaded entrances to the People's Assembly in order to prevent the deputies from returning to their offices. Two days later, Field Marshal Tantawi, the chairman of the SCAF, notified Dr. Muhammad Sa'ad al-Katatni, speaker of the People's Assembly, of the Constitutional Court's decision, clearly indicating that the SCAF considered the People's Assembly dissolved. However,

al-Katatni, supported by the majority of deputies, prominent retired judges, and an array of constitutional lawyers, believed that the transitional period's temporary constitution did not assign the right to dissolve parliament to any of the state's branches, let alone to a judicial body that is not supposed to have executive authority over the legislative body. In an attempt to reach a satisfactory solution to both parties, a meeting was held on June 17 between al-Katatni and the SCAF but it was unsuccessful.

The third decision was made by the SCAF on the evening of June 17, just a few hours after the counting of votes had begun, which took the form of a new constitutional declaration, supplemental to the declaration approved by the nation in March 2011. The new declaration, based on the assumption that the People's Assembly was dissolved, granted legislative and regulatory powers to SCAF. The declaration stipulated that the SCAF would retain these powers until a new People's Assembly is elected. Accordingly, the president and his government would not be able to issue any laws-in-decree, including the national budget, without the SCAF's approval. Moreover, in a highly puzzling text, the new constitutional declaration divested the president of his powers as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, at least until a new and permanent constitution is drafted and ratified.

The new declaration further granted the SCAF the right to form a new constitutional assembly for the drafting of a constitution within a week of the emer-

gence of any obstacle that might thwart the workings of the current constitutional assembly, which was elected by the People's Assembly before its supposed dissolution. It also gave the president, the chairman of SCAF, the prime minister, the head of the judiciary council,

the military, including the minister of defense. The National Defense Council would be concerned with affairs related to issues of national security and make its decisions by absolute majority. The truth is that the forming of a National Defense Council was an idea agreed upon by almost all political forces, and decided in the constitutional declaration of March 2001. Many Egyptians, in fact, perceive the new council as an institution that would help in organizing civilian-military roles in determining is-

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or one-fifth of the constitutional assembly members, the right to object to any text in the draft constitution and to refer the issue to the Constitutional Court. The court's decision would be final and binding.

What these two articles of the SCAF's declaration mean is that the elected constitutional assembly is now at the mercy of the SCAF, and that any disputes, or objection to its legality, would automatically lead to the assembly's immediate dissolution. In addition, the rules of voting approved by the People's Assembly for the constitutional assembly are now effectively null and void.

Earlier, on June 14, but a fact which did not become known until it was published in the official gazette a few days later, the SCAF issued a decree establishing a National Defense Council that would consist of the president, the speaker of the parliament, and 16 other members, 11 of whom would be from

issues exclusive to the country's security and defense. However, the decision to form the defense council with a military majority indicates the SCAF's desire to maintain control over the country's strategic affairs.

Finally, since the SCAF now retains legislative powers, and that neither the president nor his prime minister would be able to issue any laws-in-decree without the SCAF, all measure that were taken by the SCAF, including the establishment of the National Defense Council, cannot theoretically be changed by the president until the SCAF loses these powers.

Prospects and Issues of Conflict

One of the most important results of the presidential election and Muhammad Mursi's victory is that it puts an end to the policy of exclusion towards the Muslim Brothers, which had been

state policy for eight decades. This policy, which deformed and greatly undermined politics in Egypt, led to repeated eruptions of political violence in the country. The largest political force in the country is now a genuine partner in the building of the new republic. Mursi's victory, moreover, spared the country from any dangers emanating from what appeared to be an attempt to resurrect the old regime, and the prolonged instability that Shafiq's presidency could have engendered.

Simultaneously, however, the election demonstrated that the country and its various political forces, especially the Freedom and Justice Party, lack the infrastructure necessary for practicing politics in a free, democratic, and pluralistic environment. The new Egypt lacks professional and independent polling organizations, genuine plurality in the media (which is currently divided between the state-owned media and those owned by businessmen with close ties to the old regime), and a broad base of capital that can support a diverse political life.

For the post-revolution political arena suffers from the collapse of a political consensus, vital for securing a smooth and speedy transition to democracy. As a result, the SCAF was given an opportunity to assert its position and role. A popular movement had succeeded in breaking the SCAF's will during the great week of protest (November 18-15, 2011), when a wave of protests forced

the overthrow of Sharaf's government and the 'Ali al-Silmi's document on the so-called extra-constitutional principles.

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Nevertheless, the victory of the Muslim Brothers and the Salafi political parties in the People's Assembly elections in January 2012 provoked fear within liberal and secular forces, and led many to seek support from the military. At the same time, the Brothers made a series of mistakes that alienated a wide section of the revolutionary youth groups and widened the rift in the political arena.

Two objectives were behind the measures taken by the SCAF: the first was to contain the rise of Mursi, the Muslim Brother outsider, to the presidency; and the second was to contain the gains that the popular movement had achieved since November 2011 and thus maintain the SCAF's control over the state and government for the longest time possible, or at least until the constitutional position and privileges of the military can be guaranteed. Hence, the date set for the handover of power, June 30, should be deemed as the beginning, not the end, of Egypt's march towards building a free and democratic republic. It is clear, in any case, that the following three issues are now open:

1. The supplementary constitutional declaration, rejected by the Islamists and revolutionary forces in the million-man march on Tuesday, June 19, and in every subsequent Tahrir square gathering.
2. The fate of the People's Assembly, which most deputies believe cannot be legally dissolved by any organization during the transitional period.
3. The powers and authorities of the president of the republic that were usurped by the SCAF on June 30.

To be confronted with all of these issues simultaneously, only days after the end of the presidential election, would mean that Egypt would be about to

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face a bitter confrontation between the SCAF, the judiciary and the state administration, on the one side, and the Muslim Brothers, revolutionary youth groups, the Salafi forces, and some liberal parties and figures on the other. In the short term, the SCAF will have to make some substantial concessions to the forces of change and democracy in order to allow for the emergence of a new republic, although the struggle for freeing the state entirely from the vestiges of military control will continue at a slower pace, and for many years to come. The other option is for the SCAF

to carry out a blatant military coup and impose an unequivocal military regime. Although it cannot be completely ruled out, this option seems improbable at this stage for the generals understand quite well that a military coup would put them in conflict with the majority of Egyptians and perhaps lead to a civil war.

For Egypt to transition into a free and democratic country, the following conditions will have to be taken into consideration:

1. Muhammad Mursi will have to assume his responsibilities as president of the republic, fight for his powers, and be supported in this fight by the widest sections possible of the people and political forces. Notwithstanding the military pressure and plans to limit his powers, the presence of an elected president will be a very important factor in determining the balance of power between the forces of democracy and the military.
2. After months of debates about the policies adopted by the Muslim Brothers, it has become apparent that only they have the political resources necessary to stand up to the military and the remnants of the old regime. Had it not been for the Muslim Brothers, the SCAF would have managed to hold all the strings of power without any major opposition from other political forces. The Muslim Brothers should lead the struggle, and other political forces

- should accept their leadership. This, nonetheless, should also involve sustained efforts by the Muslim Brothers to form a coalition of forces in the struggle against military tutelage. No single political force can bring about real change, or rule the country, on its own.
3. It is necessary for the Muslim Brothers to define specific strategic goals that are comprehensible and achievable, and that guarantee the country's democratic transformation. It must also avoid back-room negotiations on major issues. Not differentiating between the major and minor, the tactical and strategic, would have heavy consequences for the future of the country, perhaps delaying the process of democratization for a long period of time putting Egypt on a course similar to the post-1980 Turkish situation or the post-1991 Algerian one.
 4. Given its sensitive geostrategic position, Egypt is, of course, in dire need of a cohesive army. It is essential, therefore, that the conflict with the SCAF does not turn into a conflict with the army as a whole, or into an uncontrollable campaign to humiliate the armed forces. The struggle against the SCAF in Egypt has not reached the level of the struggle against forces loyal to the regime in Syria. The ultimate goal of the revolution in Egypt is to turn the SCAF from a tyrannical guardian of the status quo that it is now into a partner in the building of a democratic and free political system and reforming the state institutions.
 5. Overall, both the Muslim Brothers and the military leaders must realize that Egypt has changed and that the process of change will continue regardless of the costs. In this, it is thus crucial for the Muslim Brothers to shoulder their responsibilities in the struggle for freedom and democracy, and for the SCAF not to lead the country into further instability and bloody conflict.
- The crisis that developed after the presidential election is the most complicated in the country since Mubarak was ousted from power in February 2011. Most probably it will end with a negotiated deal between the Muslim Brothers and the SCAF. These two are the most powerful forces in the country, and any talk of "a third force" is presently a waste of time. Only these two centers of power can mobilize support, have the ability to organize, and can act, regardless of the disparity in resources and means that each possess.

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If the SCAF represents the well-entrenched Egyptian state, Ahmad Shafiq, the state's candidate, received enough votes to show that Egyptians are torn between the Muslim Brothers and the state-military. The Muslim Brothers and the military should, therefore, negotiate a deal that satisfies the majority of Egyptians, safeguards the gains of the revolution, allows for the maximization of these gains in the next few years, and assures the SCAF and its supporters that the Muslim Brothers do not seek to undermine the state or are plotting to use state power to settle historical accounts.

However, reaching such a deal will require breaking the SCAF's will and insistence on determining the country's future on its own. When the time for negotiating this deal arrives, the Muslim Brothers should act in an unambiguous manner in order to maintain unity of purpose with a broad array of revolutionary forces, democratic parties, and public figures. If the Muslim Brothers lose the support of those who stood by them during and after the presidential election, they will delay the process of change and become an easy prey for the SCAF's counterattack that is waiting in the wings.