



Egypt: Back to Square One?

Silvia Colombo and Azzurra Meringolo

Abstract

The events of 3 July 2013 have cast a troubling shadow over Egypt's future and have opened a new phase in the country's transition. While opinions in Egypt are deeply divided over whether the new situation is the result of a military-dictated "soft coup" or the outburst of a reinvigorated, grassroots revolutionary momentum, or both, the challenges to a veritable democratic and pluralistic transition process are manifold. Stopping the bloodshed and easing the tensions and polarization are only the first steps. A process of national reconciliation accompanied by an inclusive revision of the constitution need to be pursued by the new interim government. The new leadership should also find ways to engage the excluded Muslim Brotherhood facilitating its inclusion in Egypt's political institutions. Only at the end of this long journey we will know whether Egypt has embarked on an Algerian-style civil war-type path, or a Turkish-like experience marked, at least until recently, by successful government with the Islamists at the forefront.

Keywords: *Egypt / Domestic policy / Armed forces / Muslim Brotherhood / Civic opposition / Political transition*

Egypt: Back to Square One?

by Silvia Colombo and Azzurra Meringolo*

Introduction

Egyptian state television screens daily events in Cairo. On one half of the screen, thousands of people in Tahrir Square celebrate the end of Morsi's rule; on the other, crowds in Rabaa El-Adaweya mourn the President's ousting. On 30 June, millions of Egyptians mobilized for the *Tamarrod* campaign; the day after, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) imposed a 48-hour ultimatum on Hosni Mubarak's successor, inducing him to find an agreement with the opposition.¹ When President Mohamed Morsi refused to take part in genuine negotiations, the army summoned the most important representatives of the opposition and the leaders of the main religious institutions - the Copt church and *Al-Azhar*, the most influential authority of Sunni Islam - to define a "road map" and to take over the reins of Egypt's government.

According to the plans, Adly Mansour, Chief Justice of Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court, should substitute Morsi until new presidential elections are held. A technical government would thus lead the process of constitutional amendment, which would then need to be approved by national referendum. A commission for national reconciliation would be established, aimed at mitigating the deep political polarization that the country witnessed over the last months, particularly after the massacre that took place on 8 July, when more than 50 Morsi supporters were killed. The transition process, which started with a decree issued on 7 July, will last for at least six months. Parliamentary elections should take place during this period. Many commentators see this last move as both an assertion of military might and evidence of the inherent weakness in the opposition's capacity to build a democracy. The situation is, however, much more complex.

What anti-Morsi demonstrators were calling for was real democracy: social justice, dignity and a responsive government that would create a genuine democracy and not simply one that would heed to the will of an electoral majority. The political settlement between the Muslim Brotherhood and the army excluded youth revolutionary forces who had instigated the revolution, opposition parties and movements, women, civil society, Christians and just about everyone who was not from the Islamist camp. From the outset, the democratic experiment was doomed to fail because the expectations and aspirations of these groups were thwarted.

Paper prepared for the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), July 2013.

* Silvia Colombo and Azzurra Meringolo are researchers in the Mediterranean and Middle East programme of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

¹ At the beginning of May, the *Tamarrod* campaign (*Tamarrod* means "rebellion") launched a petition in order to remove the Islamist President Mohamed Morsi. According to the campaign's leaders, 22 million signatures were collected. In June 2012, Morsi was elected with less than 14 million votes.

An analysis that accounts both for Morsi's democratic election (in June 2012) and his overthrow one year later as two single and separate events would be flawed. In the middle there is an entire year of events that demonstrates that ballotocracy² is not democracy. This is the reason why the civic opposition, joined by some remnants of the old regime, decided to keep pushing for change, using all means necessary to achieve their aims.

1. The break in the Islamist-military pact

For Morsi's supporters, recent events represent a veritable military coup. According to his opponents, the military intervention saved the Egyptian revolution from being high-jacked by the Islamist camp. Supreme Commander of the Egyptian Armed Forces Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's televised speech, the tanks on the streets and the shutting down of pro-Islamist TV channels revealed how the army made a decisive come back to the frontline of Egypt's political scene. It opted for a soft coup, according to Amr Shobaky³. In 2011, after the fall of Mubarak, a military representative took over the country's leadership. Unlike then, today the army intervened with a view to popular mobilization, but decided to take a step back, involving in this new stage of transition civilians who had not been protagonists in Morsi's government.⁴

Putting forward a comprehensive explanation of the military's behaviour is far from easy. Many explanations have been offered of the military's intervention. On the one hand, the sense of anger and disillusionment among large sectors of the Egyptian population fuelled by the exclusionary practices of the first democratically-elected president explains the re-politicization and mobilization of large swathes of society.⁵ In this reading, the military was forced to intervene because of the risk of instability stemming from a likely second mass uprising. In this light, stability is highly prized by the military establishment, which thrives on it to preserve its institutional position and to safeguard its interests. On the other hand, opposite views tend to underscore the extent to which the army's leadership has an interest in jeopardizing Egypt's stability for exactly the same reasons of the preservation of their interests.⁶ Heightened factionalism and the perils associated with the current phase of the transition - these views contend - have made the armed forces appear once again as indispensable, thus re-legitimizing the military in the eyes of the disaffected public.

Both explanations offer valid insights to help to interpret the current crisis. What emerges clearly from the decades during which the military was one of the most important actors of the Egyptian political system is that the higher echelons of its

² This is the term used by Amr Ezzat's editorials in *Al-Masry Al-Youm*.

³ This is the term used by Amr Shobaky's editorials in *Al-Masry Al-Youm*.

⁴ Although the appointment of Al-Sisi as deputy prime minister suggests that the military has not taken a step back at all.

⁵ See Vivienne Mathies-Boon and Brecht de Smet, "Egypt: From Rebel to Revolution?", in *openDemocracy*, 8 July 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/vivienne-mathies-boon-brecht-de-smet/egypt-from-rebel-to-revolution>.

⁶ See Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio, "The Army's coup in Egypt: for the people or against the people?", in *openDemocracy*, 10 July 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/andrea-teti-gennaro-gervasio/army%E2%80%99s-coup-in-egypt-for-people-or-against-people>.

establishment - not necessarily the army's rank-and-file - have an interest in guiding the transition so as to safeguard their economic interests. The sooner the Egyptian people, who turned against Morsi in the name of the 2011 revolution and true democracy, realize that the military's intervention was not carried out to uphold their claims to "bread, freedom and social justice", the smaller the risk of a new cold shower when the revolutionary flames blow out and politics moves away from the squares and back to the palaces.

What is already clear, however, is that this "anomalous" coup broke the pact between the army and the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷ The unspoken agreement between the two, which had emerged in 2012, foresaw that the Brotherhood would ensure the military's safe exit from the frontlines of government, while leaving untouched their behind the scenes influence and financial autonomy. In return, SCAF would create the environment for the Muslim Brotherhood to seize power.

Morsi's first 100 days in office passed without significant progress towards the fulfillment of his electoral pledges, apart from his success in ousting SCAF from government against the backdrop of the attack against Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai in August 2012.⁸ This "soft coup" against military rule replaced Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi with Al-Sisi, and gave Morsi a burst of self-confidence and impetus.⁹ But instead of using such events to advance the goals of the revolution, Morsi capitalized on them to promote the political aims and ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.

A major turning-point came in November 2012, when Morsi's constitutional declaration, which accorded the president unprecedented executive and legislative powers, ignited new rounds of protest. Then there were the repeated clashes with Egypt's judiciary, which tried to defend its independence in the face of Morsi's attacks.¹⁰ Instead of seeking conciliation, during the rise of the *Tamarrod* campaign Morsi carried out a government reshuffle and nominated 17 new governors on 16 June 2013 in a move that increased the presence of Islamist figures.

Alongside this, and notwithstanding Morsi's electoral pledges, the economy continued to spiral downwards. The government failed to pass new laws on subsidies, foreign investments, or the fiscal system, exacerbating economic stagnation and leading to the protraction of negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a 4.8 million dollars soft loan.¹¹ Other revolutionary demands went unheard: bread and social justice

⁷ For an account of the history of relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military, see Wael Eskandar, "Brothers and Officers: A History of Pacts", in *Jadaliyya*, 25 January 2013, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9765/brothers-and-officers_a-history-of-pacts.

⁸ According to other interpretations, the "coup" that saw the promotion of a relatively younger generation of military figures was masterminded within the army apparatus itself with a view to protecting the military from the excessive intervention in politics that had proven to be detrimental to their image, prestige and record.

⁹ Azmi Ashour, "The inexorable revolution", in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 2 July 2013, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/3195/21/The-inexorable-revolution.aspx>.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Field Marshal Tantawi interrupted the negotiations, asserting that the IMF's offer represented an unacceptable interference in Egypt's national sovereignty. See Ugo Tramballi, "La vera sfida rimane

remained scarce currency. As a result, expectations were shattered, and disillusionment ran high. The Brotherhood's year in office was marked by a steady decay in urban life: rising prices of basic commodities and fuel, anarchy and unbearable traffic on the roads, rising crime, and rampant growth of the informal sector, all of which fuelled the people's revolutionary mood.

These conditions may be explained by the fact that the Brotherhood followed the economic policies they inherited from Mubarak's neoliberal cabinets. For example, the rapacious capitalist practices of business people close to the Muslim Brotherhood, also defined as the "pious business bourgeoisie",¹² were very similar to those that had been the hallmark of the last seven years of Mubarak's rule, which had been characterized by the rising star of Gamal Mubarak and Ahmed Nazif, Prime Minister from 2004 to 2011. Some of Morsi's policies continued those of Mubarak, such as the "Cairo 2050" plan that, among other things, aimed to expel poor residents from prime real estate in the capital in order to make room for five-star hotels. Such policies were met with vocal opposition. To some extent, these aggressive capitalist policies were also perceived as potentially threatening the economic privileges enjoyed by the military, which is at the core of a business empire built around crony-capitalist practices and public-private enterprises. This helps to explain the superficial coincidence of interests between the military and the disaffected public.

The increasing economic deterioration and the polarization probably helped to change the army's behaviour. The Egyptian military has a well-defined role: to protect the sovereignty, security and stability of the country. Its role is not to promote democracy. The Egyptian military also has economic interests, special privileges for its top brass, and a very powerful role to protect in any future political configuration of the country. All this may explain why, despite the introduction of the constitution drafted by the Muslim Brotherhood which protected the military's privileges, the military ultimately turned against the Islamist administration. The military view political and economic problems through the security prism, and may have wanted to sideline the Brotherhood before the next parliamentary elections.¹³ It remains to be seen whether all this is happening by design or by default, but it is likely that the military has simply ridden the wave of discontent, merging with the *Tamarrod* campaign to achieve their aims and those of other remnants of the former regime that also wanted to see their interests protected.¹⁴

2. Two losers, one winner

Even if in Tahrir Square the civic opposition celebrated the Al-Sisi's statement as its own victory, this was far from reality. Mubarak's dictatorship lasted for decades, and the legacies of this past are still visible in today's Egypt. During Mubarak's rule, it was impossible for the secular opposition to create a united and effective political front. With

l'economia", in *ISPI Commentary*, 4 July 2013, <http://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/la-vera-sfida-rimane-leconomia>.

¹² Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio, "The Army's coup in Egypt: for the people or against the people?", *cit.*

¹³ Marwan Bishara, "Three questions: Egypt's 'Zero-sum' politics", in *Al-Jazeera*, 6 July 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/07/20137515562854215.html>.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

the ousting of the regime, when the time had come for this opposition to emerge in full force, it failed to provide a real alternative to the Islamist front. Now it plays an important role in the political scene thanks to the army, which it had criticized and rejected for a long time. As a consequence, its success cannot be seen as a real victory.

After two and a half years since the ousting of President Mubarak, it is difficult not to blame the revolutionary and civic forces for the dismal state of the opposition to Morsi's increasingly autocratic rule. This blame has certainly to be shared with the Muslim Brotherhood leadership, which closed all space for participation and inclusive dialogue with these forces, and which should be seen as primarily responsible for the lack of opposition to Morsi. The public mobilization and the *Tamarrod* petition can in fact be viewed both as an outcry against the Muslim Brotherhood's majoritarian understanding of political power and legitimacy, and as a sign of the sheer inability of the secular opposition to understand and play according to the institutional rules of the game. The threat made by Mohammed El-Baradei's National Salvation Front (NSF) in February 2013 to boycott the next parliamentary elections, originally scheduled to begin in April 2013, is a clear indication of the abysmal performance of these political actors.¹⁵ It is also worth recalling that the *Tamarrod* campaign that resulted in Morsi's ousting was not initiated by the NSF, but that El-Baradei rather jumped on what looked like the winners' bandwagon and that his party endorsed *ex-post* the goals of the *Tamarrod* campaign, rather than leading the process. The result is that the NSF and other civic forces have become part of a mixed group that also comprises sympathizers of the former regime. The very strength of the spontaneous social movement that ousted Mubarak and resurfaced against Morsi may also make the task of "playing politics" as difficult as in the past. Today's so-called opposition to Morsi is divided, and represents an even more heterogeneous group compared to the anti-Mubarak opposition two years ago. Following three decades of authoritarian rule, political organizations, especially credible opposition parties, remain fragmented and weak.

This said, it is the Muslim Brotherhood that has suffered the greatest defeat. Its members were not the first to take to the streets to remove Mubarak. They ultimately took advantage of the confused political situation and won the elections. The Brotherhood is still an organization based on secrecy. Continuing to act as members of an illegal movement, the Brotherhood was not able to become a responsible political force that cares for its country and not only for its own interests. The Islamists made the mistakes of the previous regime in that they failed to listen to young Egyptians and were not willing to cooperate with the opposition, which was asking for a role in the political process. Morsi overestimated his electoral success. Among the 51% of voters who voted for him, there were many young revolutionaries who chose him because they did not find in Ahmed Shafiq (Prime Minister under Mubarak's last government) a plausible option. The day after the elections, many young Egyptians declared that they would have stayed on the opposition's side.

¹⁵ "ElBaradei Calls for Boycott of Parliamentary Elections", in *Ahram Online*, 23 February 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/65398/Egypt/Politics-/ElBaradei-calls-for-boycott-of-parliamentary-elect.aspx>.

Beyond Egypt, the conservative wing of political Islam has been dealt a hard blow by the army's intervention. It considered Cairo as its capital and the Brotherhood as its main representative. The other countries of the region are following carefully what is going on in Egypt because they know that it could have consequences for their internal political balance. In view of this, the first to congratulate the Egyptian army was King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah had supported the Mubarak regime, had never supported the Arab Spring, and is deeply suspicious of the Brotherhood. It is no coincidence that it is precisely in Saudi Arabia that former Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali took refuge. Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad also applauded Morsi's removal, defining it as the end of political Islam¹⁶.

The only winner in Egypt for now seems to be the army. It is the only institution that presents itself as striving to pull Egypt out of chaos. Thanks to this last intervention, it has regained the credibility it lost during the first transition period as a result of the violent episodes with the revolutionaries who were calling on it to step aside¹⁷. This is one of the reasons why the army is not taking the lead now, even if it is the real master of events.

3. Future challenges

The challenges that Egypt faces at the moment are numerous, but the most pressing is the need to achieve broad national reconciliation to rebuild the nation's sense of collective self and avoid bloodshed, in order to initiate a democratic and pluralistic transition that will not exclude any group. The 8 July massacre of 51 Muslim Brotherhood supporters (some estimate as many as 84) in front of the Republican Guards headquarters, where the former President is said to be held in *incommunicado* detention, shows that the country is not going in this direction. The interim authorities, in particular the newly-nominated President, have launched an initiative for national reconciliation. The initiative, called "One Nation", involves all components of Egyptian society.¹⁸ In this framework, the new President should continue in his attempts to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood, even if this is likely to be a long journey of confidence-building punctuated by many conflicts.

The fact that the recent "soft coup" represents a dangerous precedent in Egyptian political life cannot be discounted. Apart for the moral implications of this act, the political repercussions are likely to be felt for some time to come. The alliance between the civic/revolutionary pole and the military establishment, brought together by the shared desire to oust Morsi, is likely to lead to the consolidation and entrenchment of the role of the army as the ultimate arbiter of political life. In this regard, the civil strife and political impasse experienced by Algeria in the aftermath of the military's intervention in December 1991 against what was anticipated as the remarkable victory

¹⁶ Anne Barand, "Syrian Leader Is Jubilant at Morsi's Fall", in *The New York Times*, 5 July 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/05/world/middleeast/morsis-fall-in-egypt-lauded-by-syrias-assad.html>.

¹⁷ The most violent clashes were those of Mohammed Mahmoud and Qasr El-Aini in winter 2011.

¹⁸ "Egypt Presidency to Unveil National Reconciliation Initiative", in *Ahram Online*, 9 July 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/76134/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-presidency-to-unveil-national-reconciliation.aspx>.

of the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) opened the way to a revival of the primacy of the military over the civilian sphere.¹⁹

In addition, creating a precedent means that future presidents, no matter how resounding their victories are and how legitimate their rule is according to a purely procedural notion of democratic legitimacy, will govern with a sword of Damocles hanging above their heads. It is not the people that hold this sword, but rather the military, which acts as an unaccountable institution largely motivated by its own interests. The interim President and government in particular are likely to be subject to a considerable amount of pressure from different interest groups. The election timetable laid out by the interim authorities is a clear sign of time pressure. Leaving aside the problems of the sources of legitimacy and authority of the interim government, the compressed schedule clearly leaves far too little time for negotiations and consensus-building among Egypt's deeply polarized political factions. This seems to be in strong continuity with the problems that have plagued Egypt's botched first attempt to build a democracy.²⁰

This brings us to the issue of legitimacy, which appears to be the key point of contention between the two opposed groups. As is evident from the discussion above, the issue of legitimacy is likely to plague the future of Egypt for some time to come. Even if the military-civilian duo that is now governing Egypt manages to initiate a veritable process of democratic transition, including the drafting of a constitution that is more inclusive and the creation of accountable institutions, the initial legitimacy of this whole process is likely to be continuously questioned by large swathes of the population. What appears more troubling today is the fact that - besides the fierce battle that is taking place in the streets between two types of (democratic) legitimacy with the associated risk of spiraling violence - the Egyptian state as a whole is going through a legitimacy crisis, as the rules of the game have been suspended. The institutional and procedural legitimacy claimed by Morsi's supporters, who would want to see him back in power, and the other form of legitimacy held by the mobilization of the people must be reconciled through new rules that allow for the broadest possible participation.

Having experienced the pitfalls of a purely majoritarian understanding of democracy that is not accompanied by respect for basic rights, restoring legitimacy and stability in Egypt will ultimately depend on the ability to craft a pluralistic and inclusive political system and a democratically-elected government that is capable of imposing its will on the military and other components of Egypt's omnipresent "deep state". Each actor is called upon to do its job in this daunting task and go beyond the winner-takes-all game in which the prize is total control of the state. As Egypt's recent past vividly illustrates, elections alone will not bring about change without other crucial factors being put in place.

¹⁹ See Hicham Yezza, "What Algeria 1992 Can, and Cannot, Teach Us About Egypt 2013", in *openDemocracy*, 9 July 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/hicham-yezza/what-algeria-1992-can-and-cannot-teach-us-about-egypt-2013>.

²⁰ David D. Kirkpatrick, "New Egyptian Government's Transitional Plan Meets With Swift Criticism", in *The New York Times*, 10 July 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/10/world/middleeast/egypt-elections.html>.

The greatest challenge the army faces is that of playing a constructive role in the country's political dynamics. It will have to carry out a balancing act, since Egypt is still not a democracy and could go through other difficult moments in its transformation. Egypt's population is largely young and politically motivated; the army could lead a guided transition, helping transform the street demonstrations into organized political movements. However, even if the Egyptian army considers itself as the only guarantor of order in the country, in the future it could simply meddle in politics every time it feels that a civilian government is interfering with its interests.

Divided and poorly organized as they are, the secular and civic forces that were at the helm of the revolution could be weakened by the better-organized military. They must stop any further incitement against, or demonization of, the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, they ought to extend a hand to the Muslim Brotherhood - especially its individual supporters - and be sincere about reconciliation without gloating. The first days in this phase of the transition suggest this is unlikely to happen. Their relationship with the military will also prove tricky. The staged scene of unity between the military and various political groups on the day of Morsi's overthrow masked a divergent vision for the future of Egypt and an imbalance of power between the divided opposition and the formidable military.²¹

Leading the new government, the civic opposition has now an important chance to play an active role in Egypt's political life. But the civic forces should attempt to overcome the strained polarity between Islam and secularism, broaden their base, and reach out to different segments of society. In addition, they will have to decide how to finance themselves. To prevent internal tensions, the civic parties have refused generous donations from single individuals,²² yet they have not been able to establish any fundraising strategies for their activities. Another challenge concerns youth participation.²³ Although the civic opposition was the main driver of the revolution, young people continue to be excluded from the decision-making process, in which an older elite still dominates.²⁴

In the short run, there are two major problematic areas that could lead to the reproduction of another authoritarian order. The first is the constitution, and the second is the electoral law. The distribution of power within the committee responsible for amending the current constitution will be key to safeguarding a new social contract that ensures social justice, full and equal citizenship rights for all, and the complete separation of powers.²⁵ Crucial issues like the role of religion in the state and the political inclusion of minorities remain at stake, and will have to be clearly defined in the revised constitution. As regards the electoral law, after decades of authoritarian rule,

²¹ Marwan Bishara, "Three questions: Egypt's 'Zero-sum' politics", *cit.*

²² The Egypt Freedom Party, for example, has set a ceiling of 200,000 Egyptian pounds for any single donation (about 22,000 euros, or 28,000 dollars).

²³ Azzurra Meringolo, "Stop-and-go: Egyptian Civic Opposition Moves Slowly Forward", in *Insight Egypt*, No. 1 (May 2013), <http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=945>.

²⁴ Hamdeen Sabbahi's party has set up an executive council that includes 17 young members, while the older generations have been grouped into an advisory committee. El-Baradei's party instead continues to be shaken by deep internal turmoil, and so far has failed to find a suitable way to involve young people in the decision-making process.

²⁵ Mariz Tadros, "Opportunities and pitfalls of Egypt's roadmap", in *openDemocracy*, 5 July 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/mariz-tadros/opportunities-and-pitfalls-in-egypt%E2%80%99s-roadmap>.

fostering the development of political parties will also be the means of ensuring the representation of the whole spectrum of political views and voices in state institutions and society.

The events of late June and early July 2013 are evidence of both the persistence of attempts at radical democratization, and the failure of state institutions to address popular demands. Part of the reason stems from the fact that institutional continuity has been a defining feature of the Egyptian transition so far. Despite all the attempts made by Morsi to penetrate and control state institutions, large parts of the old authoritarian institutions remain intact and impenetrable. The existence of reactionary forces, which resist change, is sometimes dubbed Egypt's "deep state". The resilience of core state institutions and their practices can be seen in the army itself, the police and the security forces, the judiciary and the bureaucracy. Without any profound transformation of these old structures of power, the transition towards a more inclusive, accountable and transparent polity will be much longer and more painful. In another country in the North African region, Morocco, the "deep state" is synonymous with the *Makhzen* - officially the network of actors, both public and private, that is controlled by the monarchy. Some authors talk about the *Makhzenification* of the Egyptian military, meaning the vast network of interests and alliances controlled by the military that has substantially grown beyond the formal political space and today has come to the surface as one of the main actors in the Egyptian transition.²⁶ It is absolutely necessary to break this political and economic status quo-oriented elite that protects and ensures the control of the military over large sectors of Egypt's productive activities. This is the only possible way both to set the country on the path towards a truly democratic destiny in the hands of civilian forces, and to encourage the confidence of external investors, which is necessary to solve the major socio-economic problems facing the Egyptian transition today, the pledge of 12 billion dollars made by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait notwithstanding.²⁷

A final point concerns the future of Islamist movements and parties in Egypt, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. Assessing the implications of the current situation for political Islam in the region goes beyond the scope of this paper, and would be a futile and purely speculative endeavour. Talk about the demise of political Islam is nonsensical and contradicts the reality of other experiences of power held by Islamist groups in a number of countries in the region.²⁸ Nonetheless, a few points about the current situation of the Muslim Brotherhood and the short-term impact of recent events on its ability to influence politics can be put forward.

²⁶ See Mark LeVine, "L'Etat, C'est Nous: Who will Control the Egyptian State?", in *Al-Jazeera*, 6 July 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/07/201374131418638208.html>.

²⁷ Aya Batrawi, "\$12 billion in aid for Egypt only temporary boost", in *Associated Press*, 11 July 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/12-billion-aid-egypt-only-temporary-boost-061426913.html>.

²⁸ Despite the marked differences, it is worth recalling that Islamist parties gained power in Tunisia and Morocco in 2011 and seem to be holding it firmly despite the socio-economic challenges and the divisions over the results of the constitution-drafting process, particularly in the Tunisian case. The Egyptian events have prompted a number of statements by the Al-Nahda leadership in Tunisia distancing itself from them and may arguably contribute to speeding up the transitions process. See Syed C., "Al Nahda warns rivals not to allow the derailment of the political process", in *Middle East Monitor*, 16 July 2013, <http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/africa/6578-al-nahda-warns-rivals-not-to-allow-the-derailment-of-the-political-process>.

First, the Algerian experience clearly shows that it is not possible to uproot authoritarian tendencies by making use of authoritarian tools. The Muslim Brotherhood will continue to feel that they have been robbed of their legitimate power. Incidents of violence against them, as well as a dangerous rhetoric that pitches religious and civic forces one against the other, risk augmenting the feeling of alienation and exclusion. Interestingly, rumours of a conspiracy against the Brotherhood during the period of Morsi's rule have already emerged.²⁹ Signs of "persecution" include the military's decisions to close down TV stations that are sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood and to issue arrest warrants for hundreds of its leaders and militants. There is a risk of a radicalization of these forces or other Islamist groups, such as the Salafists, in the name of the rejection of democracy. In the past, Egypt's Islamists have proven most dangerous and violent when they have felt excluded from the system, which entails the risk of further violence and instability in the current delicate phase of the transition.

If the crackdown against the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood persists, the Islamists have three options: to resist the recent military measures by all means at their disposal; to reach a compromise that would bring the Brotherhood back into the political process; or to capitulate and retreat from the political scene.³⁰ Whatever happens, Islam constitutes the roots and the identity of large sectors of the Egyptian people; a political representation of Islam, though different from the Muslim Brotherhood, will therefore be an important factor for the political future of the country.³¹ The Brotherhood itself will continue to be a major political force in the country's political scene.

A second point concerns the possibility to see the current phase as one providing opportunities for the Muslim Brotherhood to rethink its political engagement and to be saved from having to deal with a complex political, social and economic domestic situation. Coupled to this is the regional situation, and notably the simmering conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia over the control of the Nile waters.³² Seeing the glass as half-full points us in the direction of a new form of the "Turkish model" that could be applied to the interpretation of current events in Egypt. Both the role of the Egyptian army and the new position of the Muslim Brotherhood bear some resemblance to the Turkish case in the 1990s-2000s. In 1997, the Turkish Armed Forces removed the first Islamist Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan, through a soft coup, and then proceeded to purge Islamists from government, the bureaucracy and the military. Nevertheless, in 2002 the Justice and Development Party (AKP by its Turkish acronym) participated in national elections and won a resounding victory, thus initiating the consolidation of moderate Islamist politics in Turkey and its role in the promotion of economic development.

²⁹ Ben Hubbard and David D. Kirkpatrick, "Sudden Improvements in Egypt Suggest a Campaign to Undermine Morsi", in *The New York Times*, 11 July 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/11/world/middleeast/improvements-in-egypt-suggest-a-campaign-that-undermined-morsi.html>.

³⁰ Marwan Bishara, "Three questions: Egypt's 'Zero-sum' politics", *cit.*

³¹ Massimo Campanini, "La fratellanza ha perduto la sua occasione", in *ISPI Commentary*, 4 July 2013, <http://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/e-cosi-legitto-ha-perduto-unoccasione>.

³² "Egypt, Ethiopia and the Diplomatic Dam Busters", in *The Africa Report*, 11 July 2013, <http://www.theafricareport.com/North-Africa/egypt-ethiopia-and-the-diplomatic-dam-busters.html>.

In conclusion, a new phase has opened for Egypt with the events of summer 2013. Transition processes are rarely conflict-free and these changes, abrupt and contested as they may be, represent a moment in a long process of social and political transformation that will continue for years to come. The country is not back to square one. It is not the same country today as it was under Mubarak or even two years ago. What will happen next, and if the country will follow the Algerian or the Turkish path, is still anyone's guess.

Updated: 19 July 2013



Latest IAI Working Papers

Series editor: Nathalie Tocci

- 13 | 22 N. Mikheilidze, Juggling Security, Democracy and Development in the Caucasus: What Role for the EU?
- 13 | 21 C. Bianco, The Syrian File. The Role of the Opposition in a Multi-Layered Conflict
- 13 | 20 P. Ish-Shalom, Where is Israel Heading?
- 13 | 19 S. Colombo, The Future of Syria and the Regional Arms Race
- 13 | 18 E. Pergolizzi, An Uncertain Road to Peace: Domestic and Regional Challenges in the Turkish-Kurdish Process
- 13 | 17 M. Martín de Almagro Iniesta, EU Engagement with Local Civil Society in the Great Lakes Region
- 13 | 16 G. Fagotto, The State-Migration Nexus in the Gulf in Light of the Arab Uprisings
- 13 | 15 D. Huber and N. Tocci, Behind the Scenes of the Turkish-Israeli Breakthrough
- 13 | 14 M. Lorusso, Presidential Elections in Armenia and the Opposition's Long March
- 13 | 13 C. Heffler and W. Wessels, The Democratic Legitimacy of the EU's Economic Governance and National Parliaments
- 13 | 12 E. Fuller, Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict
- 13 | 11 A. Maurer, From EMU to DEMU: The Democratic Legitimacy of the EU and the European Parliament

The Institute

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (The International Spectator), an online webzine (AffariInternazionali), two series of research papers (Quaderni IAI and IAI Research Papers) and an Italian foreign policy yearbook (La politica estera dell'Italia).

Istituto Affari Internazionali

Via Angelo Brunetti, 9 00186 Roma
Tel.: +39/06/3224360 Fax: + 39/06/3224363
E-mail: iai@iai.it - website: <http://www.iai.it>
Send orders to: iai_library@iai.it