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EGYPT AFTER MORSI

JOINT GOVERNING OR DIVISION OF SOCIETY?

Many “knew it”, of course. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, or “the Islamists” in general, didn’t have a political plan and their downfall was only a matter of time. The Tamarod (“Rebel”) campaign called for protests against President Muhammad Morsi on 30 June. Millions answered and demonstrated for days. On 1 July the military set a 48-hour ultimatum for resolving the crisis. This didn’t happen. On 3 July the army took over, again, and deposed Morsi who was elected into power only one year earlier.

Tamarod has been a success that surely surprised everyone. The grassroots campaign was founded in the end of April by people related to the Kefaya (“Enough”) movement that already challenged the rule of former President Mubarak. It grew quickly, in a decentralised manner, with volunteers unified by their opposition to President Morsi collecting signatures throughout the country. As the campaign built up people in Egypt were asking: “What will happen on 30 June?” The question was a mix of fear, anticipation, and hope for change after political deadlock that was imposed by the Muslim Brotherhood. The country was gripped by food and fuel shortages as well as frequent electricity and water cuts. Political frustration by the Brotherhood’s politics of favouritism and sectarianism has built up to staggering heights. By late June, Tamarod claimed to have collected 22 million signatures (almost a quarter of Egypt’s population) for a petition demanding Morsi to resign and allow for early presidential elections.

Following the massive mobilization of the past months that resulted in the biggest demonstration Egypt has witnessed in rural and urban parts of the country (it is estimated that up to 17 million citizens took to the streets that day). Tamarod demanded the resignation of Morsi or threatened that the people will start a civil disobedience campaign all over Egypt. After seeing this massive turnout and the demands made, the military gave a 48 hours ultimatum to political actors – but mainly to President Morsi – for settling their differences, otherwise it would implement its own “roadmap”. The presidency did not meet the ultimatum, the people kept pushing in the streets and the army deposed Morsi. The step was greeted with massive applause by the “protesters” and rejected by a huge number of “Morsi supporters”, as the simplifying labeling goes.

Now, as street fights and shootings between the different camps are dominating the scene, and a new transitional leadership has to be chosen, the joy has made room for fears of a civil war, although most commentators are excluding an “Algerian scenario”¹. There is not yet well formulated programmatic talk about a political way forward and ways to end the political, societal, and economic crises. The challenges are enormous: unemployment is at 12.7 percent (official figure), a sharp rise from 2010. Since 2011, 4,500 factories had to close and the Egyptian Pound has devalued by 22 percent. Foreign reserves have dropped from 36 billion USD to 16 billion.²

EXPIRED MEDICINE: CAPITALISM

For some, the solution to this is simple. “It is capitalism, not democracy, that the Arab world needs most”, they say³. One must argue, though, that since President Anwar Sadat’s introduction of the “infatih” or (market) opening policy in the 1970ies, capitalism already came to stay in Egypt. It accelerated during President Hosni Mubarak’s era with huge waves of privatization of different industries, with subsequent increases of unemployment and poverty. The strong strike movement that subsequently developed was a convincing force. It joined the anti-Mubarak protests in early 2011 and the tens of thousands of striking workers were a convincing reason for the military to depose President Mubarak on 11 February. The economy as the elites knew it was in danger.

There is a point, though, regarding the democracy-is-not-needed part, at least if democracy is understood as constituting of transparent elections, strong parliaments and legal, institutional possibilities for deposing

¹ “Why Egypt is not Algeria”, (July 2nd 2013) Khaled Fahmy, <http://www.madamasr.com/content/why-egypt-not-algeria>.

“Will Egypt become another Algeria?” (Arabic), Ghada Tantawi, (6 July 2013), <http://on.fb.me/12oRVHs>.

² All figures according to “Egypt’s next government faces major economic challenges”, Ahram Online, 4 July 2013, <http://english.ahram.org/News/75742.aspx>.

³ It is capitalism, not democracy, that the Arab world needs most, The Telegraph, online, 4 July 2013, <http://bit.ly/1320qla>.

the government. The elections of 2011/2012 were organised under the rule of the military leadership. They have proven that they are able to organise such a poll according to internationally approved rules and they can do it again. But what could be the incentive for the Muslim Brotherhood to take part in new elections? And if they would be able to freely participate, would other political forces and the military accept another Brotherhood victory or even it forming a strong opposition? One thing is for sure: for now, the old suspicions against elections as a superficial tool of a Westernized political system gain new grounds within the Islamist camps of the region.

Furthermore, what sense would new elections as soon as possible make when no political force is able to provide a realistic and strategic way out of the crisis? It is easy to call for social justice when you don't have to provide concrete information and calculations with regarding to its implementation.

For the political left, or any other force that thinks about deviating from the capitalist track, these questions are as important as for the Muslim Brotherhood. How would a military leadership that exercises vast control over the Egyptian economy and the country's budget respond to that? The answer is rather obvious and the debate about whether what happened in Egypt was a military coup or not, is therefore futile. The issue at this point seems rather: finding a way to implement social justice while, at the same time, accommodating the military. A more revolutionary way to look at it would be – as was made by some leftists' groups – seizing the moment and starting to make social justice happen now. For this, though, the popular movement needs to crystallise its demands and use it to pressure the alliance of the right wing politicians and the military, and to organize itself as an independent actor in the political process⁴.

LEFTIST VIEWS

So, how did the Left in Egypt formulate its position regarding the events? What solution did it propose? What is its vision for the role of the army? Does it have its own roadmap, which is different than that of the army?

The National Salvation Front (NSF) is a coalition of 20 political parties from the left and the right that was formed opposing the constitutional declaration made by President Morsi last November. Its key figures are Mohammed Baradei, Hamdeen Sabbahi, and Amr Moussa. The NSF, mainly controlled by liberals, is considered to be the strongest secular opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood and, at times, doesn't seem to have any other common project. It has joined the Tamarod campaign in early May. The Front has had a very defeatist attitude towards the involvement of the army. It did not question the military's roadmap and does not put any pressure on the military; which might put it in weak position in relation to the military in future negotiations. It does however give the political cover needed at this point for the military to go through this transition phase.

The Socialist Alliance Party is considered to be one of the leftist parties that paved the way for the Revolution of 25 January 2011 when its members were active in different parties and movements and decided to unite under a wide merge of leftist currents. It has joined "Tamarod" campaign in late May, and in a statement issued 22 June, the party presented its vision for the period following the removal of Morsi from the Presidency. It demanded the transmission of authority to the President of the Constitutional Court for a period not exceeding 6 months; it suggested forming a transitional government of technocrats headed by a political figure which would be responsible for forming a constitutional assembly for writing a new constitution, and calling for new parliamentary and presidential elections. The party also suggested forming a transitional representative council overseeing this transitional phase. It encouraged popular bottom-up organization for participation and oversight of the management of the transitional phase through popular committees. But above all else the party had a strong position against calling for the military to end Morsi's ruling and against the return of the military to manage the state's affairs and interference in political life.

The Revolutionary Socialists, a smaller, but very active group, has made three demands before 30 June: 1. to immediately start a process of achieving social justice for the benefit of millions of poor and low-income people who paid more than anyone the bill for the failure of Morsi and before him the Supreme Council for Armed Forces (SCAF). 2. election of a representative constituent assembly to develop a democratic civilian constitution. 3. drafting a law for the transitional justice system which ensures accountability for the crimes of the Muslim Brotherhood, the military leadership, and the remnants of the Mubarak regime.

Sameh Naguib, a Revolutionary Socialist from Egypt, argues⁵ for the need of a unifying revolutionary political alternative that is able to expose the NSF that, in his views, betrays the objectives of the Egyptian

⁴ Statement: the end and the beginning ... Revolution continues in spite of all its enemies!, Khamassin, (4 July 2013), (Arabic) <http://on.fb.me/18bmWmP>.

⁵ Sameh Naguib, (4 July 2013), "The Four days that rocked the world", (Arabic), <http://revsoc.me/politics/rb-ym-hzt-llm>.

revolution and the “blood of the martyrs” for a shortcut to power. He adds that this revolutionary program and project will win over the masses, will surpass both the Islamic and liberal elites and move forward in rooting the Egyptian revolution and in purifying all the old regime’s institutions, including the military and security institutions, which are at the heart of the counter-revolution. Naguib also argues that all progressive actors must be consistent in the face of all forms of torture and repression (the arrests and closure of satellite channels and newspapers after 3 July) the Islamists are subjected to, because pretty soon it will be directed towards the labor movement and mass protests, under the pretext of stability in “this critical stage”.

INVOLVEMENT OF ALL MAJOR POLITICAL FORCES NEEDED

While different parties from the left and the right called for a new constitution, the military decided to ignore those demands and decided for modifications to the current one. All actors are in a weak bargaining position with regards to the current strong position of the military. During 2011 and 2012, the military accumulated a record of human rights violation that leaves left-wing politicians and activists with serious worries as to how this transitional period will turn out. No matter if Egyptians will be going to cast their votes soon again or not, the future of their system will rest on the ability of politicians to cooperate and to agree on a joint “roadmap”.

In this regards, the ouster of Morsi on 3 July neither marks the end of political Islam nor the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, as it will continue to be a societal, political, and cultural force. But it seems clear now that authoritarian ruling styles don’t work as strategic options, no matter who is at the helm. In order to appropriately respond to the Arab Spring’s demand for bread, freedom, and dignity, the Egyptian society has to first find a way to provide social justice for everyone and accept that no political force will be able to solve problems to everyone’s satisfaction very soon.

And Egyptians generally have taken a decision. Although the majority is deemed traditional and with religion being of strong importance for most, the simple slogan “Islam is the solution” won’t work anymore. People expect concrete solutions for concrete problems. Food on the table is more important than cultural warfare. The Muslim Brotherhood already starts talking about past mistakes and will adapt, although now is the time to keep heads high and to defend its leadership and position. The Brotherhood is a heterogeneous movement and will have to undergo soul searching. It is not clear, in the current circumstances, if they won’t refocus their efforts from parliamentary participation and do again what they know best: concretely aiding people in need⁶, thus securing their base and using the time for being better prepared for the political stage.

But only through joint efforts of all major political forces will there be a possibility to build strong, trustworthy institutions. Decades of NDP (National Democratic Party – the now illegal “Mubarak Party”) rule has made big parts of the administration uncontrollable by other political parties, especially ones that have alternative views to that of the old establishment.

In the first half of 2011, when hopes were still very high in Egypt, people answered the question regarding to what would happen if the future political leadership wouldn’t fulfill the demands of the revolution by: “We would take to the streets again and remove them.” Whoever thought of this attitude, then, of being naïve, was surely proven wrong on 30 June. If they don’t like it, they will do it again.

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⁶ Although the funding situation might be more difficult, given the animosity towards the Brotherhood by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Relevant impact of the changes in the Qatari leadership is too early to predict.