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“LET OUR PEOPLE GO!”: EGYPTIANS RISE AGAINST NEW ISLAMIST PHARAOH

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EGYPT’S ANTI-ISLAMIST UPRISING: HOW DID IT COME TO THIS?

Evan Hill

[The Globe and Mail](#), July 1, 2013

Families had stockpiled food and water, drivers had slept nights in petrol lines that snaked for city block after city block, and half a dozen people had died in a days-long spasm of violence that exploded into a full-blown seizure on Sunday, when mass protests against President Mohamed Morsi broke out and brought out the largest crowds in Egypt’s modern history. The headquarters of the Mr. Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood were set on fire on Sunday night, after offices of the Brotherhood’s ruling Freedom and Justice Party were attacked and burned throughout the Nile Delta. Brotherhood toughs have banded together outside their offices wearing hard hats and makeshift shields and carrying homemade guns, ready to bludgeon or blow away what they fear is the very embodiment of the counter-revolution.

One online commentator described the mass movement to oust Mr. Morsi on the anniversary of his election – a movement known as Tamarod (“rebel”) – as the birth of a new political order that may kill its mother. A journalist said it was as if Egypt’s body politic were rejecting a transplant and killing the nation in the process, a fledgling democracy’s auto-immune system gone haywire.

How did the country get here? How did the January 2011 uprising and its young, made-for-TV activists spin out into another zero-sum game for control? The story is complicated, and the strategic and tactical failures by both the secularist opposition and the Muslim Brotherhood are so profoundly, majestically short-sighted and self-defeating that some have retreated into that most time-tested of rationales, the conspiracy, to explain how things could have gone so wrong, so fast. In their narrative, the crisis has been stage-managed by the military, Egypt's eminence grise and ultimate power-broker, beginning on the day in February 2011 when the generals opportunistically seized on the mass protests to quietly but forcefully escort President Hosni Mubarak, his family and his cronies from the stage.

Like most conspiracy theories, the story has a seed of truth. In the heady days before and after the fall of Mr. Mubarak, the generals were taking everyone's temperature. At one time or another, they chatted with many of the revolution's most prominent instigators. They met with Ahmed Maher of the April 6th Movement. They met with representatives of the Brotherhood. Mohamed Aboul Ghar, who would soon found one of the only serious non-Islamist political parties in the country, once told me how he, the editor of Al Ahram newspaper, and two other men were called before five generals that March. One kept notes as they spoke; he was Abdelfattah el-Sisi, later promoted to defence minister and military commander-in-chief under Mr. Morsi. As the meeting adjourned, one of the generals casually remarked that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces -- the military's governing body -- had in 2010 held a meeting without Mr. Mubarak, their commander, and decided not to allow the president's son, Gamal, to complete a widely telegraphed succession during rigged presidential elections then scheduled for 2011.

"The plan [was], when Gamal is going to take over, they are going make a coup," Aboul Ghar recalled. The military's disdain for Gamal and his generation of casually corrupt businessmen was well known, as was their desire not to see him crowned, and the January uprising provided a perfect opportunity to abort the Mubarak family dynasty. But after it became obvious that the masses would not accept a handover to Omar Suleiman, Mr. Mubarak's last-minute vice president and intelligence chief, the military needed a placeholder. Picking out a suitable figure from Mr. Mubarak's old National Democratic Party network would be impossible -- not in the aftermath of a rebellion that left their headquarters smoldering, their party dissolved, and their leaders facing prosecution. Egypt's political opposition, meanwhile, had been carefully neutered and co-opted for five decades; it had no base and its leaders no respect on the streets.

The only suitable dancing partner was the Muslim Brotherhood, an institution whose organizational, bureaucratic and service-providing experience was deeper than even that of the post-1956 militarized government itself. And so the transition proceeded under military rule, directed by old, conservative men who learned their craft in a much different Egypt, half of them hoping to protect the old order, the other half pushing their project to usher in a new one. A temporary constitution orchestrated by the military and backed by the Brotherhood and their ultraconservative allies passed easily. Calls from figures such as Mohamed ElBaradei to create a liberal, progressive and inclusive new constitution from scratch, written by an independent body chosen by consensus, were ignored. As the year dragged on, poor Egyptians remained poor, and Mr. Mubarak sat uncharged with any crime in a military hospital. Protests against the military's reluctance to hand over power grew. They were supported by the Brotherhood, which likely saw in the unrest a useful tactic to keep their prime opponent on the back foot. In November 2011, the protests threatened to get out of control.

Security forces stormed Tahrir Square and brutally dispersed a small sit-in of a few hundred people -- almost all of them relatives of the revolution's martyrs or those who had been wounded. They had been forgotten by the state, and they were angry. The revolutionaries were infuriated at the attack, and the result was the battle of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, a five-day brawl with the riot police near the Square that left more than 40 civilians dead. The end of the fighting was precipitated by army intervention, the construction of a large concrete wall, and the arrival of a human chain of Muslim Brothers who cajoled or forced the protesters off the street.

The revolutionaries and marginalized young men and women who had joined the fight were filled with righteous anger. They felt betrayed. They had shed blood, supposedly on principle: to force police reform, to snatch some justice for those who had lost sons or daughters or their own health during the revolution, to hold the army to account for abuses under its rule. To them, the Brothers had thrown it all away for political gain. The temporary constitution had paved the way for parliamentary elections, due that month, a critical step that would help decide who ruled post-revolution Egypt. The Brotherhood could not let them be delayed. They went on to dominate the vote. Mohamed Mahmoud cleaved a rift between the two sides that never healed.

Over the course of the following months, it became obvious: The Brotherhood was dutifully, purposefully playing for keeps. Under the temporary constitution they helped to pass, the new parliament would be tasked with choosing those who would write a permanent founding document for post-revolution Egypt -- the holy grail. The Brotherhood would go to almost any lengths to secure it. But what they saw as predictable hardball and democratic combat -- which they were almost guaranteed to win -- the opposition saw as a series of betrayals.

The Brotherhood ran for more seats in parliament than some of their prominent members had first promised, then dominated the ministries once elected. The opposition hardly contested the second legislative election, for the less-powerful upper house, which was similarly dominated by the Brotherhood and Salafi parties. When the time came to select the constituent assembly, the Brotherhood's parliamentary bloc helped gerrymander its 100-member makeup so that if push came to shove, the Brotherhood and its backers would not be outvoted. The Brotherhood pledged not to seek the presidency, then fielded a candidate, and fielded another -- Mohammed Morsi -- when the first was disqualified.

After Mr. Morsi took office, he failed to form -- or could not find those willing to join -- a cabinet that some had hoped would involve figures from across the political spectrum and prompt a national reconciliation. The Brotherhood, meanwhile, felt battered by the forces of the old regime. In the days before Mr. Morsi's victory, the Supreme Constitutional Court used an electoral technicality to annul the lower house of parliament, erasing the Brotherhood's gains and the country's most crucial elected body. The court docketed a case to rule on the legitimacy of the constituent assembly. Other courts planned to rule on the legality of the Muslim Brotherhood itself. Their entire project was now at risk.

The beginning of the end came in November, almost a year to the day after the Mohamed Mahmoud Street battle, when Mr. Morsi issued a package of sovereign decrees -- just four months into his term -- that essentially placed himself and the assembly above judicial review. He and his allies argued that to stand by and do nothing would leave courts packed with Mubarak appointees free to undermine every step of the transition. The opposition, which may have once been inclined to agree, did not take his side. There had been too many betrayals; trust had evaporated.

Protesters took to the streets, calling the president a "new pharaoh." The remaining liberals, progressives, leftists and Christians in the constituent assembly walked out. Mr. Morsi gave them two extra months to resolve their differences, but the assembly rushed the draft constitution through an overnight session and passed it. Opposition politicians increasingly believed that Mr. Morsi did not even call his own shots -- that decisions of national import were made in the Brotherhood's secretive Guidance Bureau. In Egypt's new constitution, human-rights groups and other critics saw gaping loopholes, lax protections for minorities, women and children, and troubling roles for religious oversight from conservative Sunni institutions.

The November crisis awakened the opposition to a harsh reality: they were going to keep losing this game, and the Brotherhood was not going to stop playing. The only solution was to change the rules. They united, for the first time, under the banner of the National Salvation Front. Their faltering effort to boycott and then vote down the new constitution failed, but the unexpectedly tight result convinced them that Mr. Morsi's base was shrinking. Soon after, the NSF declared that it would boycott upcoming parliamentary elections unless many of the rules -- written by the nearly wholly Islamist upper house -- were changed. Improbably, despite being filled with inflated egos and parties highly opposed to one another, the NSF held its front.

In December, after Morsi supporters ransacked a small sit-in outside the presidential palace and sparked deadly street battles, a more extreme wing of the opposition began to wield influence inside the coalition. They argued that Mr. Morsi had lost all legitimacy. He would have to go, voluntarily or by force. Violent anti-Brotherhood protests became the order of the day. Instability worked in the opposition's favour. The economy was nose-diving, and security forces -- becoming more openly vocal in their disdain for the Brotherhood government -- could not or would not do their jobs. Social media and independent television stations lit up with images of Brotherhood members beating away protesters. Newspapers openly mocked Mr. Morsi's government for its inability to right the ship. Rumours and anonymously sourced news reports spread about the Brotherhood's ambitions to Islamize the army and police and carve off critical swaths of sovereign assets, such as those along the Suez Canal, to sell to benefactors in Qatar. Mr. Morsi -- one of the more deeply uncharismatic leaders in modern Arab history -- proved incapable of rallying anyone outside his base.

The Brotherhood's majoritarian behavior had, by then, convinced many secular-minded Egyptians that Mr. Morsi and his administration would not engage in any meaningful negotiation. The goal for many in the opposition became the end of the Brotherhood's entire project itself. Ministries were in quiet bureaucratic rebellion. Lower-level employees stalled paperwork. Mr. Morsi and the Brotherhood had, by now, almost fully retreated to their core supporters. He held a sectarianism-fueled stadium rally where he severed relations with Syria's Bashar al-Assad -- after his administration had encouraged Egyptians to go fight in the war....

Egypt is more polarized than at any point since the revolution. Figures from the old regime -- Omar Suleiman's aide, the son of one of the Nile Delta's longtime Mubarak power brokers -- have re-emerged to rally supporters against the Brotherhood. The irony is not lost on many of the most dedicated revolutionaries, who wonder whether their causes have been hijacked and their voices marginalized once again. Others have set aside such concerns, saying the Brotherhood represents the more clear and present danger. The enduring legacy of Mr. Morsi's presidency, if he does not survive his four-year term, may be his inadvertent facilitation of the counter-revolution.

If Mohamed Morsi falls or steps down, millions of Egyptians will view it as a victory. Perhaps he could be succeeded by a salvation government, and some kind of stable progress will ensue, though the Brotherhood can hardly be expected to quietly allow their project to dissolve around them, and it would likely mean the return of the army to a guiding role. Revolutions come with chaos. History teaches us that many years may pass before a country comes out of such upheaval with a working government, satisfactory justice and reconciliation, and a consensus about national identity. But even in such a positive scenario, it is hard not to view the first two and a half years of Egypt's revolution as a series of squandered promises.

Evan Hill is a Cairo-based journalist.

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TWO FUTURES FOR EGYPT CLASH IN THE CONFLICT OF THE SQUARES

Nassif Hitti

[Al-Monitor](#), July 1, 2013

The Tamarod movement in Egypt came to fill a vacuum created by the absence of strong, well-entrenched, mass-based political parties. This is expected, since Egypt is emerging from six decades of authoritarianism that closed down the political space and confiscated political life. It also obstructed the creation and evolution of party politics.

Another factor for the emergence of Tamarod lies in the shaky legitimacy of the salvation front. It is a loose coalition of important personalities and of mostly small, newly created, elitist political parties. Beyond their common unified opposition to the newly established Muslim Brotherhood regime, they have different ideological sensibilities, political views and governing agendas ranging from liberal to nationalist to socialist to a combination of some of these ideologies. The asymmetry is due to the enormous resources and the iron discipline of the Muslim Brotherhood.

This is cemented by years of persecution and yearning for power and by the strong belief of being entrusted with the sacral mission to salvage the Umma. The Muslim Brotherhood is acting as if they earned via the ballots a piece of property called the state, which they could rebuild and redecorate the way they wanted. Tamarod, the youth movement, whereby youth represents a majority in Egypt, reflects the frustrated expectations of those who played a major role in bringing down the authoritarian regime of former President Hosni Mubarak. They wanted to establish an open, democratic, new regime, one that is established by all and for all. A regime that is based on political participation, accountability of the institutions, respect for rights and freedoms, separation of powers and drastic, concrete socioeconomic reforms introduced by the new state.

For them, a democratic regime is to be built by an inclusive equal-sharing societal process in which all the actors of the society are involved. For the Muslim Brotherhood, democracy was reduced to elections that gave the winner a free hand to enforce its ideological views and precepts, gradually if necessary, to reshape state and society. Thus, according to this view, democracy is no more than an electoral procedure, a parenthesis in the historical process to grab power. It bestows on the Muslim Brotherhood the right to build their own regime under a different name and a different legitimizing discourse. This is part of the well-known Islamist strategy of empowerment and redefining the sociocultural identity and remodeling the existent value system of the country, instead of redefining the role of the state to better face the socioeconomic challenges of an impoverished developing country.

The Muslim Brotherhood answer to the Tamarod movement call for change has been to depict the conflict as between Islam and secularism as the deputy supreme guide [Rashad al-Bayoumi] has been saying. Secularism is a word that represents an accusation in a religious conservative Egypt, being equated with atheism. They try also to define the conflict as being between the old regime people and the revolution.

If a win by knockout by either party is impossible, then to save Egypt from a deadly stalemate, with an unpredictable outcome, the regime must accept to change its policy entirely. The aim would be of building genuine bridges with the opposition. It must adopt an inclusive approach to national reconstruction that cuts entirely with the authoritarian mentality of the Muslim Brotherhood; the same mentality that governed Egypt under the old regime and that is changing its name this time. Otherwise the confrontation of the squares will continue to escalate and expand with the risk of becoming more violent. This will take Egypt to a dangerous, tortuous road leading to more economic impoverishment, a radicalization of the political discourse and more social violence in an atmosphere of tense escalated national tension, of state paralysis and of trading accusations.....

Ambassador Nassif Hitti is a senior Arab League official and the former head of the Arab League Mission in Paris. He is a former representative to UNESCO and a member of the Al-Monitor board of directors.

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FOR EGYPT'S MILITARY, THERE'S NO TURNING BACK

Avi Issacharoff

Times of Israel, July 2, 2013

Just hours after publishing an unequivocal statement that put it firmly on the opposition's side, Egypt's military, late Monday night, issued a second announcement in which its leaders attempted to regain a more neutral position. "Military coups are not part of our ideology," the later message said. "The published statement was meant to push the sides towards an agreement... We have no plan of taking power into our own hands."

The military's late attempt to paint itself as an impartial broker between the secular and Islamist camps failed to sound convincing... Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more dire threat to a democratically elected president. The military, in its initial statement, decided to grant President Mohammed Morsi (and the rest of the political system) a 48-hour ultimatum to reach understandings with the opposition, "as a last chance to shoulder the burden of the historic moment." If the demands are not realized in that time, the military said it would be

obliged to “announce a road-map for the future and the steps for overseeing its implementation, with participation of all patriotic and sincere parties and movements ... excluding no one.”

While the wording of the statement was vague, it was not vague enough. The opposition’s demands are clear—the removal of Morsi. The only compromise that may be in the cards is the cancellation of the pro-Islamist constitution and, perhaps, the dismissal of Prime Minister Hesham Kandil. However, the millions who swarmed Tahrir Square and those who amassed opposite Ittihadiya palace will not accept anything less than Morsi’s resignation, especially in the face of such a clear threat from the military.

In the meantime, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood are digging their heels in and don’t show any willingness to compromise. They may still meet with opposition representatives in the day and a half before the ultimatum expires, but the gaps between the sides seem too deep to overcome. Still, in this era of Egyptian revolutions, a last-minute compromise is not an impossibility. Morsi, who just a few days ago seemed to convey confidence in a public address, found himself on Monday night weaker than ever. Eleven Cabinet ministers as well as members of Parliament and regional governors have submitted their resignations. Belief that Morsi will survive is dwindling, especially in light of the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are still swarming to Tahrir Square.

He has two guns to his head now: one held by the opposition, whose ultimatum will end at 5 pm Tuesday, and one held by the army, whose ultimatum expires Wednesday afternoon. Protest groups have already announced that if the president isn’t out by 5 pm, they will announce a general strike that will bring the country to a standstill.

What will the military actually do when it’s 48-hour ultimatum to Morsi expires? Not much it seems. The chances of a military coup seem slim at the moment. It may be that as part of their promised “Road map” the army will demand Morsi take steps for appeasement or even leave office. If he doesn’t comply, the army may simply carry on its current policy of letting the protesters do as they like, including attacking regime institutions.

In such a scenario, Morsi may even turn to the army himself, requesting to be saved.

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[Who Will Save Egypt? Cairo's Economic Disaster:](#) [Marina Ottaway, *Foreign Affairs*, June 30, 2013](#)—Egyptians have a lot to be upset about these days, and they are showing it. The one-year anniversary of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi’s inauguration has brought with it major protests and counter protests, raising fears of renewed political violence. Underneath all the anger lies a basic fact: The Egyptian economy is in deep trouble.

[Pressure Builds on Morsi as His Allies Quit and Protests Mount:](#) [Ben Hubbard, David D. Kirkpatrick And Kareem Fahim, *New York Times*, July 2, 2013](#)—President Mohamed Morsi faced deepening political isolation on Tuesday as protesters massed to call for his ouster, the clock ticked on a two-day military ultimatum, high-ranking officials quit his cabinet and his own press office, and ultraconservative Islamists joined the opposition’s call for early presidential elections.

[Volcano on the Nile:](#) [Editorial, *The Daily Star \(Lebanon\)*, July 2, 2013](#)—For Egyptian President Mohammad Mursi, perhaps it requires repeating: In early 2011, Egyptians mounted a massive popular uprising in order to remove an authoritarian regime, not to install the Muslim Brotherhood.

[The Egyptian State Unravels:](#) [Mara Revkin, *Foreign Affairs*, June 27, 2013](#) — Meet the gangs and vigilantes who thrive under Morsi... “Everybody needs a weapon,” said Mahmoud, a 23-year-old Egyptian arms dealer, as he displayed his inventory of pistols, machetes, and switchblades on the living room floor of his family’s apartment in the crime-ridden Cairo neighborhood of Ain Shams.

['Rebel' Egyptian Movement Defies Morsi Through Petitions:](#) [Ahmed Ateyya, *Al-Monitor*, May 17, 2013](#)—“The Rebel Movement announces that it is collecting signed petitions calling for confidence withdrawal from the illegitimate President Mohammed Morsi.” In the middle of the infamously noisy and overcrowded Giza Square, a group of 15 activists started to repeat their announcement through a megaphone, carrying thousands of copies of the petition and a stock of extra pens Monday.

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