

2 Egyptian Revolutionaries' Unrealistic Expectations

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AFTER EIGHTEEN DAYS of protests, Hosni Mubarak resigned as president of Egypt. Less than three years later, the Egyptian security state apparatus appeared to have reestablished political control of the country. Why did the democratic transition fail? Answers range widely. Some blame the poorly designed transition process, which made trust among different political groups unachievable. Others point to a lack of leadership within Egypt's political organizations, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. Still others focus on a devastating economic crisis that post-Mubarak governments could never address given the political divisions within the country.

These explanations are plausible and not mutually exclusive. But they all miss something important: the January 25 revolution was also a striking failure of political theory. More precisely, it was a failure of the theories embraced by the most idealistic revolutionaries. Their demands were too pure; they refused to accord any legitimacy to a flawed transition (and what transition is not flawed?), which could only yield a flawed democracy. They made strategic mistakes because they did not pay enough attention to Egypt's institutional, economic, political, and social circumstances. These idealists, generally, were politically liberal. But the problem does not lie in liberalism itself. The problem lies in a faulty understanding of the implications of political liberalism in the Egyptian context—an insufficient appreciation of factors that limited what could reasonably be achieved in the short term. This chapter argues that a more sophisticated liberalism would have accounted for these realities.

Three Revolutionary Forces

Although the masses in Tahrir Square appeared unified on the day Mubarak was ousted, in actuality there were three broad groups vying for power. The first, associated with the military, took a minimalist view: the revolution was simply about removing Mubarak and his cronies from power and ensuring that his son Gamal Mubarak did not succeed him to the presidency. Given this group's desire

to preserve as much as possible of Mubarak's order (without Mubarak), it was able to reconcile with old-regime elements. Moreover, although this first group originally lacked a distinctive ideology, it eventually adopted a nationalist, sometimes even xenophobic, posture that distinguished it from the cosmopolitanism of Islamist, liberal, and socialist revolutionaries.

According to the second group, the revolution aimed at broad reforms of the Egyptian state without uprooting it entirely. For this reformist group, the crisis stemmed from corruption. Mubarak, they argued, had undermined the state's integrity by usurping its institutions to fulfill his and his allies' personal and political ends. The revolution needed to reform the state's institutions so that they would meet the formal requirements of a legal order and be accountable to the public will. Formal democracy was a crucial demand of this group because it was seen as the only way to ensure that the state would not again be hijacked in order to further the interests of a narrow group of Egyptian elites. The Muslim Brotherhood and its allies belonged to this second group.

The third group, composed largely of young Egyptians, understood the revolution as an attempt to fundamentally restructure state and society. The revolution provided an opportunity to create a virtuous state. Doing so would, however, require a complete rupture with the *ancien régime*. This radical group had an ambivalent relationship with formal democracy. Thus, although elections were desirable, the most important goal was the substantive transformation of the state and society: "revolutionary legitimacy" trumped whatever legitimacy formal representative democracy could provide.

The degree of public support enjoyed by each of these three groups remains uncertain. No one disputes that the youth, the third group, served as the revolutionary vanguard, having planned and executed the antiregime demonstrations on January 25. The Muslim Brotherhood joined later, and the military, for obvious reasons, was the last to take up the banner.

Egypt's most idealistic revolutionaries did not understand the implications of political liberalism. Still, one should not exclude the military from the revolutionary coalition. The protesters at Tahrir welcomed the military, which they believed to be more sympathetic to their cause than the detested police. Demonstrators treated the military as a legitimate authority.¹ For example, when protesters caught agent provocateurs working for the regime, the latter were turned over to the military.

Other actions also underscored the willingness of Tahrir revolutionaries to recognize the continued legitimacy of at least some parts of the old order. For example, prominent liberal lawyers within the revolutionary camp continued to abide by the constitution that Mubarak had put in place in the waning years of his presidency. This constitution included a series of amendments, adopted in

spite of gross procedural irregularities that were intended to ensure his son's succession. During the revolution, one liberal lawyer even published an appeal to Mubarak in the *Washington Post* demanding that he perform the formal steps required for a legal transition.²

More restrained interpretations of the revolution continue to have strong support among Egyptians even after Mubarak's resignation. Subsequent elections have confirmed this. In the March 19 referendum, voters favored a quick transition and rejected radicals' appeals to complete a draft constitution before selecting a new government. In the subsequent parliamentary elections, Islamist-affiliated parties won almost 70 percent of the seats, while postrevolutionary liberal parties took only 10 percent. And in the presidential elections of 2012, with Mohamed ElBaradei withdrawn from the race, the liberals could not even field a candidate. The top two vote-getters in the first round, Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak's last prime minister, and Mohammed Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood, were affiliated, respectively, with the minimalist and reformist camps.

Whatever else can be said about the political preferences of Egyptians as revealed by their postrevolutionary voting patterns, elections demonstrated that a successful and peaceful democratic transition would require a coalition of minimalists, reformists, and radicals. In other words, each of the three groups would have to accommodate the other two.

The Challenge of Pluralism

Accommodations are hardly unusual in societies emerging from a long period of authoritarian rule. Consider Chile, where General Augusto Pinochet was granted immunity in the aftermath of his bloody regime. All over Latin America, citizens accepted a substantial continuing role for free market economics, even though it had been a commonplace feature of dictatorships in the region.³ Successful democratic transition inevitably requires some degree of compromise with old ways.

The challenge Egyptians faced throughout the transition was to build an inclusive polity in the face of their deep divisions. They could resolve these divisions either by suppressing disagreements through a forceful exercise of state power, or by competing at the ballot box. The first strategy requires massive state violence in the short term and almost always leads to suspension of formal democracy, without any guarantee of a return to democracy in the medium or long term.⁴ The second strategy involves less force, establishes at least the formal elements of democratic rule, and preserves the possibility of additional democratic gains in the future, even if it requires concessions to undemocratic or illiberal political groups in the present and is marked occasionally by episodes of political violence.⁵

Both liberal and Islamic political theories endorse the second option. Traditional Islamic political theory prioritizes social peace in circumstances where achieving a more ideal polity would require widespread violence. Preserving social peace is also a crucial moral value of such political thinkers as Thomas Hobbes and John Rawls.⁶ These theories applied in Egypt: a formally democratic regime that allowed for fair and nonviolent competition over political office was the only means of including all three of Egypt's political forces, and thus the most likely way to preserve social peace. Any attempt to suppress one of the three groups, on the other hand, would contradict this fundamental moral precept and would launch the country into civil war, or else result in the imposition of emergency law. Both outcomes would preclude meaningful politics.

From a Rawlsian perspective, Egypt's divisions meant that social peace could only be achieved through a constitution that established a temporary agreement among the parties. Such a constitution could do no more than guarantee formally democratic procedures of governance. It could not satisfy the requirements of justice, since it would be grounded in a particular balance of social power rather than an overlapping consensus on a shared conception of justice. Nevertheless, such a constitution, in Rawls's view, is usually a necessary step toward the establishment of a just, well-ordered society.⁷

The fourteenth-century Arab Muslim political thinker Ibn Khaldun's tripartite typology of regimes—natural, rational, and Islamic—is consistent, in broad terms, with Rawls's analysis.⁸ Natural states are based on relations of domination between the ruler and the ruled, restrained only by the limitations of the ruler's actual power. Rational and Islamic states, by contrast, impose moral restraints on the exercise of political power. According to Ibn Khaldun, rational and Islamic regimes transcend the relations of the domination characteristic of natural regimes and establish overlapping conceptions of the common secular good. Ibn Khaldun's rational and Islamic regimes can both foster the convergence in political morality that, like Rawls's overlapping consensus, characterizes a just constitution. Critically, this convergence or consensus must occur organically. Ibn Khaldun argued that coerced adherence to Islamic law fails to produce virtuous subjects. Likewise, coerced imposition of even a just constitution cannot produce an effective system of justice if large numbers of citizens are incapable of freely adhering to its terms.⁹

Although procedural democracy by itself did not promise the Egyptian radicals the substantive changes they hoped for in the short term, it did offer the possibility of social peace and an opportunity to generate, over time, a broader consensus on the fundamental questions of how to establish a just and effective state worthy of citizens' voluntary allegiance. It also offered the foundation of a more liberal political order.

Morsi's Constitutional Declaration

The most powerful postrevolutionary political actors in Egypt accepted a pragmatic option: they rejected radicalism and endorsed procedural democracy. In November 2012, when Morsi moved to insulate his decisions and the content of the 2012 constitution from judicial review, he was following the pragmatic course. Proponents of a liberal constitution objected, but their aims were not achievable without further political strife.

Most commentary points to Morsi's November 2012 declaration as the final blow to the Muslim Brotherhood's relationship with the liberal and radical revolutionaries, effectively setting in motion the events that led to the July 2013 coup. Morsi was hardly the first Egyptian politician to issue such a decree. The military had used constitutional declarations regularly throughout the transition process in order to ensure that a formal legal order would remain in place. Morsi's goal was not outlandish either. He intended to prevent the judiciary from interfering with the constitutional drafting process so that a text could be completed in accordance with the provisions of the transitional road map, which had been approved by the March 2011 referendum. The radicals, however, interpreted Morsi's decree as an intolerable assault on democracy, which confirmed their suspicions that Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were attempting to create a new kind of authoritarian state.¹⁰

Yet, the real issue was the makeup of the constituent assembly and the substance of the constitution it would draft. The parties eventually arrived at a deal, including the semi-presidential structure of the state (with executive power shared by a prime minister and a popularly elected president), but the role of religion remained a point of contention. Because parliament had selected the members of the constituent assembly, and because Islamists had won the majority of seats in parliament, Islamists dominated the constituent assembly. Liberals argued, not unreasonably, that those parliamentary elections exaggerated Islamists' long-term political strength. Liberals also thought that the draft sacrificed or limited too many personal rights and freedoms in the name of religion, morality, and family values. They argued that the constitution would not be legitimate unless it was a consensual document capable of gaining acceptance by all significant social groups in Egypt.¹¹

The individual-rights provisions of the constitution were clearly deficient from the perspective of international human rights law. In particular, the attempt to limit personal rights in the name of respect for traditional religious values does not comport with wider commitments to liberty. Liberal dissidents, however, never faced up to the reality that Egypt is divided on these personal rights. Should the state underwrite freedom of expression even if that enables blasphemy and apostasy? Should gender equality override religious rules, Christian or Muslim,

particularly in the context of family law? Given that so many Egyptians disagree with the liberal position on these matters, it is difficult to understand what the demand for a consensual constitution recognizing personal rights could have meant in practical terms. The argument that the constituent assembly unreasonably exaggerated the strength of Islamist parties was plausible, but even granting this point, any democratic process would have placed a significant block of Islamists in the constituent assembly. As a result, there was no democratic path for liberals to establish a constitution that secured the personal rights and freedoms they sought.

By the time Morsi issued his November 2012 declaration, constitutional deliberations had effectively ground to a halt. From Morsi's perspective, the declaration was the only means available to prevent the Supreme Constitutional Court from dissolving the constituent assembly. He had reasonable grounds to worry that the court was prepared to intervene. A case demanding dissolution was pending, and the court had already issued two rulings that interfered in the democratic transition: the first disbanding Egypt's first freely elected parliament since 1952, the second overturning a law that attempted to bar old-regime elements, such as Shafiq, from running for the presidency. The dissidents' boycott of the constituent assembly's deliberations was a not-so-subtle sign to the court that, as far as they were concerned, its intervention would be welcome. In light of the court's opposition and the fast-approaching deadline for completion of the draft constitution, Morsi felt he had no choice but to cut the court out.

There is little doubt that Morsi, as the democratically elected president, was the more legitimate arbiter of this dispute. The court is not democratically accountable, and the draft constitution could not come into effect unless it won approval in a popular referendum. While one might disagree with Morsi's methods, it is reasonable to conclude that he acted in accordance with his responsibilities as the only democratically accountable official in the country. To describe his actions as a "naked power grab," as ElBaradei suggested at the time,¹² requires a presumption of bad faith inconsistent with democratic commitments. The radicals' violent opposition to the November declaration would only have been justified if the constitution Morsi acted to protect failed to promote a pluralistic and inclusive political system. This was not the case: the 2012 constitution provided a more open political system than had prevailed prior to the revolution. It increased formal political rights, reduced the power of the president, and increased the power of the prime minister and parliament.¹³

These were meaningful changes. For the first time, anyone could form a political party or publish in print without the prospect of government censorship. By contrast, during the Mubarak era, the formation of political parties required the state's approval, thereby ensuring that no party capable of challenging the ruling National Democratic Party could develop. Under the new constitution, the

president would also be limited to serving two terms, would face stricter rules on declaring states of emergency, and would no longer be able to dismiss the prime minister. Parliament was newly empowered to withdraw confidence from the government, and the president would be required to select the prime minister from the largest party in parliament.

The new constitution also boosted the capacity of the political branches by leaving open the content of many rights. Limitations on personal rights could only become operational upon the passage of positive law. The same was true of the provision contemplating military trials for civilians: Egypt's future governments had the power to reduce the jurisdiction of military courts or to eliminate it through legislation. And though the constitution did not recognize a universal right to religious exercise—protection is limited to followers of the three Abrahamic religions—it did not prevent the state from doing so in the future by statute.

This structure reduced the influence of the courts—in particular the Supreme Constitutional Court—by vesting the power to define rights in the political branches. This was a reasonable constitutional strategy in a society characterized by sharp division on fundamental personal rights. Indeed, from a Rawlsian perspective, we would expect such a society to adopt a constitution that guarantees only those political rights necessary for democratic participation in lawmaking. The 2012 constitution appeared to accomplish that, leaving the more contentious issues of individual rights to future deliberation. Unlike constitutions of nearby states, such as Morocco, the 2012 constitution did not entrench any provisions, including those on the role of Islam, as supra-constitutional norms impervious to amendment.¹⁴ Nor did it place any substantive, ideological limitations on the formation of secular political parties, provided that they were not organized on a discriminatory basis. It did not impose religious piety or a theological test as condition for public office. This ensured that the constitution would not privilege the Muslim Brotherhood, other Islamist parties, or even the role of Islam itself above other provisions of the constitution.

Democratic Faith

Even in a well-ordered, just society, Rawls argued, a polity may in some cases legitimately restrict the liberty of conscience of the intolerant, but only when there is a “reasonable expectation that not doing so will damage the public order which the government should maintain.”¹⁵ While Egypt is not a well-ordered society in Rawls's sense, his principle casts light on how liberals should have reacted to the prospect of a military-led coup against an illiberal elected president and his illiberal political party. Extrapolating from Rawls's treatment of restrictions on liberty of conscience, we might say that preservation of the constitutional order is the only justification for such an intervention. Furthermore, we could con-

clude that this claim is only legitimate when it is based on objective evidence, widely accessible, demonstrating that the threat to the lawful public order is not “merely possible or in certain cases even probable, but reasonably certain or imminent.”¹⁶

It is hard to conclude that Morsi’s conduct as president, however disappointing, crossed this threshold. Many radical revolutionaries justified their support for Morsi’s removal not on the grounds that his actions represented an imminent threat to the political order, but rather on the grounds that Morsi did not confront the military and the police with sufficient vigor.¹⁷ In their eyes he thus betrayed the revolution.

It is not clear, however, that Morsi had the power to transform these instruments of oppression in the year he was in office. The security forces were largely immune to Morsi’s influence. They refused to protect the offices of the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party, the Freedom and Justice Party. Even businesses affiliated, or thought to be affiliated, with the Muslim Brotherhood could not rely on police or military protection. When the presidential palace was attacked during demonstrations in the wake of Morsi’s constitutional decree, the security services were nowhere to be found. For Morsi’s opponents, however, his failure to reform the security services was taken not as a sign of his weakness, but as evidence that he and the Muslim Brotherhood were conspiring with the military and police to destroy the liberal and radical opposition.¹⁸

Even less plausible than fears of a secret alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and the security services was Egyptian liberals’ belief that, in acting against Morsi, the military would promote democracy rather than restore the security state.¹⁹ Even if liberals were right about Morsi’s and the Muslim Brotherhood’s intentions, the only rational democratic strategy would have been to insist on parliamentary elections. There were at least three routes to such an outcome. If the opposition were able to win a two-thirds majority in upcoming parliamentary elections—which should have been easy if its claims about the universal unpopularity of the Muslim Brotherhood were true—it could have impeached Morsi. If Morsi were found guilty at trial, he would have been removed from office. Even if unsuccessful in removing Morsi, such a strategy would have strengthened the cause of Egyptian democracy. A less dramatic step would have been to use parliament’s powers to withdraw confidence and appoint a new government. The final lawful option would have been to defeat Morsi or another Muslim Brotherhood candidate in the 2016 presidential elections.

Instead, the opposition, including radical revolutionaries, demanded early presidential elections. But there were no legal grounds for hastening the election schedule. Military intervention, a strategy that discredited political parties as the representatives of the Egyptian people in favor of the military, police, and other state institutions, was left as the only means to oust Morsi. Thus, Egypt’s most

ardent democrats, under the banner of “The Revolution Continues,” passed on constitutional options in favor of methods that would only advance authoritarianism.

The idealists who halted the democratic experiment failed to understand what democratic theorists have long recognized: that the very conditions that produce democracy—namely, liberty and equality—also produce factionalism, instability, and violence. If clashes are not mediated through some acceptable institutional arrangement, they are likely to be resolved through despotism. This risk was especially palpable in Egypt, given the dominant role that the military and security services have played since 1952.

Citizens in a democracy must accept compromise with political adversaries, meaning that ideologues of every stripe will be disappointed (indeed, strident Islamists criticized Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood for making too many compromises with secular democrats). The failure to achieve all of one’s political goals is the price of democratic politics. The refusal to accept this price may lead to the kind of political disaster we are now witnessing in Egypt. Democracy, though grounded in the values of equality and liberty, is never born in societies perfectly reflecting these values. If these values are realized, it is through the patient practice of democratic politics, even when its substantive outcomes conflict with one’s political ideals. A successful democracy emerges gradually, inspired by the fierce, even fanatical, faith in the ability of democracy to improve the people’s political virtue over time. Ironically, Egypt’s most radical democrats did not have this faith.

Liberal and radical critics of the Muslim Brotherhood failed to realize that the real choice in Egypt was not between an Islamic state and a civil state, but between a state based on some conception of the public good—religious or nonreligious—and one based on pure domination. In accordance with Ibn Khaldun’s argument about the relationship between the religious conception of the state and the rational one, there should have been plenty of scope for agreement between religious and secular democratic forces. Tragically, liberals underestimated the people’s desire for security and their willingness to submit even to arbitrary and predatory power in order to achieve it. Their extralegal strategies—protests, boycotts, and, finally, military intervention—gravely undermined the prospects that the emerging government would provide this crucial public good, thus opening the door for the return of the security state.

Egypt remains burdened by years of mismanagement and ill-conceived policies that have been destructive for the common good, promoted corruption, and enfeebled the state’s nonsecurity functions. Egypt cannot have a stable democracy if it does not overcome this legacy. Repression of the Muslim Brotherhood—the country’s most organized political group and one that, at least in principle, supports democratic practices—only puts off the day when Egypt can begin these needed reforms. By advocating military intervention in the political process and,

in too many cases, backing a coup against the legitimate government, the liberal and radical opposition have for the time being ruined the conditions for democracy. If the military-installed regime fails to establish political stability, which is a real possibility, Egypt faces the prospect of political chaos and even state failure. This is the price of dogmatism in politics.

After the Coup

This essay, when first written at the start of the 2013 coup, predicted a bleak future for Egypt. Because it is so rare that the prognostications of academics turn out to be correct, they are usually happy to be vindicated when reality squares with their predictions. That is not the case here, however. I would have been delighted had Egypt, contrary to my pessimistic outlook in 2013, proven me wrong and continued on its march toward the democratic future that the January 25 revolution promised. If anything, however, early conclusions were not sufficiently pessimistic. One could not have imagined a scenario in which a former military officer with no significant accomplishment other than leading a military coup and slaughtering hundreds, if not thousands, of his countrymen, would be elected president without facing any meaningful opposition a mere three years after Mubarak had resigned. Nor could one have imagined that the Egyptian judiciary would hand out mass death sentences with a casualness appropriate perhaps for a traffic court proceeding, but certainly not for charges implicating the death penalty. Political repression has gone beyond expectations of this author as well. Unsurprisingly, there have been mass arrests of Muslim Brotherhood members, or those accused of being members of the Muslim Brotherhood. More surprising, however, has been the vigor with which the reconstituted Egyptian security state has pursued non-Islamist political activists such as Ahmad Maher, the leader of the April 6 Movement, who was imprisoned, along with countless others, for violating Egypt's post-June 30 protest law.

Other than the "election" of President Abdul Fatah el-Sisi and the referendum approving amendments to the controversial 2012 constitution, self-government has come to a halt in Egypt. As of mid-2015, Egypt still lacks a parliament, ostensibly because the government has been unable to draft an elections law that satisfies constitutional requirements. The consistent failure to adopt a constitutionally satisfactory elections law, however, in circumstances where the president has a monopoly of lawmaking power, suggests that indifference is at work here, not principled differences on what an adequate system of representation would look like. This suspicion is also confirmed by the seeming complete absence of public demands for parliamentary elections. As suggested in the original essay on which this chapter is based, the June 30 counterrevolution, far from heralding a deepening of Egyptian democracy, has heralded the death of democratic politics

and the surrender of the Egyptian people to despotism in the irrational hope that an all-powerful despot could solve the problems that they had shown themselves to be so incapable of dealing with during the short, fifteen-month democratic experiment that drew to an end with the June 30 coup.

One of the commonly heard justifications for the coup was that Egypt was on the cusp of a civil war, and, but for the military intervention, Egypt would have descended into the same kind of internecine war of all against all that has come to plague Syria and Iraq. While it is impossible to know what would have happened to Egypt in the absence of the coup, it is indisputable that armed violence against the state has escalated sharply in the wake of the coup. North Sinai is in the throes of an all-out insurgency, and Sinai-based militants have openly pledged fealty to the self-declared caliphate of the Islamic State (ISIS). The increasing intensity of the Sinai insurgency has cost scores of Egyptian soldiers and police their lives, culminating in the 2015 bold attack on the Sinai town of Shaykh Zu-waid in which countless Egyptian soldiers and police were killed. Sinai-based insurgents have also claimed credit for a myriad of bombings in the Nile valley that have claimed the lives of dozens of security personnel. In a brazen bombing in Cairo, militants successfully detonated a bomb targeting the motorcade of Egypt's prosecutor general, Hisham Barakat, killing him. While it is unlikely that this insurgency would succeed in toppling the Sisi regime, it undermines the regime's claim to legitimacy by highlighting its failure to stop these attacks. The attacks not only risk sapping the morale of security services but also, perhaps more crucially, risk undermining the confidence of investors, reducing the attractiveness of Egypt as an investment destination.

Another justification given for the necessity of the coup was that the Egyptian economy was on the verge of collapse. This, we can say with some certainty, was clearly an exaggeration. While the economy certainly stagnated in the wake of the January 25 revolution, the economy continued to grow throughout the transition period till June 30, albeit at an anemic pace. Whether this growth is sustainable is highly questionable, but there is no doubt that economic growth accelerated sharply during Sisi's first year in office. Unprecedented support from the Gulf States, as well as the \$8.5 billion expansion of the Suez Canal, undoubtedly injected massive stimulus into the Egyptian economy, with growth in the third quarter of 2014 reaching 6.8 percent. The rate of growth, however, has already begun to decline as the effects of this massive one-time stimulus dissipate, and now, with the completion of the canal's expansion, little is left to spend on other badly needed infrastructure projects. The Sisi regime, however, deserves credit for beginning to reduce the unsustainable energy subsidies that have crippled Egypt's public finances. However, despite this important measure, and despite the 2015 collapse in global energy prices, Egypt's current account deficit continues to increase, and its budget deficit is still in excess of 10 percent of its GDP. It is no surprise, then, that the Egyptian pound has depreciated significantly in 2014

and 2015, and will need to depreciate even further before it reflects the fundamentals of Egypt's economy, even if this comes at the risk of increasing Egypt's already elevated rate of inflation.

In short, no dramatic improvements have been achieved on the economic front that suggest that the coup produced an economic outcome for Egypt that is materially superior to that which would have been achieved had Egypt continued along its democratic path. The Egyptian economy continues to be on life support, dependent on outside assistance from the Gulf. Should this assistance disappear, it could have dramatically negative consequences for the stability of the Egyptian economy.

Despite the dramatic security and economic failures of the Sisi regime, it is unlikely that Egypt can now simply turn its back on the coup and renew a march toward democracy. The coalition that made the January 25 revolution possible has been completely shattered. Non-Islamist revolutionaries, with the exception of a few, are unwilling to question their participation in the June 30 coup or to consider reconciliation with the Muslim Brotherhood or its rehabilitation from its newly designated status as public enemy number one. The Muslim Brotherhood, battered by the arrest of the top three tiers of its leadership, has effectively lost control over its rank-and-file followers. If even a small percentage of them fall into the arms of ISIS, there is a real risk that the insurgency in Sinai could expand in scope and intensity in the Nile valley. This risk will only increase once the Egyptian government carries out the numerous death penalties that have been issued against members of the Muslim Brotherhood, including former president Morsi and the entire senior leadership of the brotherhood. The Egyptian state, moreover, has gone "all in" behind Sisi, making it inconceivable that significant portions of the civilian bureaucratic elite could ally itself with revolutionary groups within civil society.

What this essentially means is that unless Sisi succeeds in radically restructuring the Egyptian state, either it will eventually implode under the weight of its own incompetence and inefficiency, or some kind of revolutionary action will overwhelm it again. Sadly, the prospects of a peaceful transition to a better future for Egypt are even more remote today than they were eighteen months ago when this chapter was first published. And since there is no evidence that Sisi is succeeding in creating a new governing coalition capable of facing Egypt's challenges, Egypt's future looks grim. The only point of dispute is how grim that future will be.

Notes

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