



Power Change in Egypt – Internal and External Repercussions

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Executive Summary

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- Under the Ikhwan, Egypt is presently making bold strides in the direction of becoming a key player in, and even the leader of, the Islamist-dominated new Middle East. Moreover, as the domestic socio-economic situation continues to collapse, and there is virtually nothing anybody can do to reverse the slide, the Ikhwan's Cairo will feel compelled to focus public attention on populist-Jihadists external challenges to the detriment of long-term regional stability.
- By late August 2012, Morsi and the Ikhwan have all but completed their consolidation of total control over Egypt – both government and society. In Cairo, both supporters and detractors talk of the swift and comprehensive "Ikhwan-ization" of Egypt. Given the inherent power and influence of the Egyptian authoritarian system of governance – it is only a question of time before the "Ikhwan-ization" of official Egypt will evolve into the profound "Ikhwan-ization" of Egyptian society.

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ANALYSIS

On August 12, 2012, Egypt's President Muhammad Morsi consolidated the Islamist hold over the Egyptian government and governance through the unceremonial sacking of Field Marshal Muhammad Hussein Tantawi Soliman and several other senior officers. These firings resulted in the de-facto abolition of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which was supposed to balance the Islamists' power.

The Muslim Brothers' anti-military coup launched in early August was inevitable since the SCAF's handling of the Egyptian presidential elections between mid-April and mid-June 2012. That it took Morsi almost two months to exert revenge has more to do with the internal politics of the Muslim Brothers Movement – the Ikhwan al-Muslimin – than with an institutional power struggle in Cairo. Simply put, the ascent of the Islamists to unchallenged power in Egypt has long been certain, and the defiant-yet-doomed attempt by the military to block the Ikhwan has never had any chance of success.

Under the Ikhwan, Egypt is presently making bold strides in the direction of becoming a key player in the Islamist-dominated new Middle East. Moreover, as the domestic socio-economic situation continues to collapse, and there is virtually nothing anybody can do to reverse the slide, the Ikhwan's Cairo will feel compelled to focus public attention on populist-Jihadists external challenges to the detriment of long-term regional stability.

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The Islamists' ascent to absolute power in Egypt was inevitable from the very beginning of the Intifada in early 2011. The Islamists' dogged drive for power began in 2006/7 and hasn't stopped for a single moment. The travesty of the December 2010 parliamentary election, condoned and endorsed by the Obama Administration, convinced the Ikhwan to start actively preparing for a confrontation with the Mubarak Administration. The self-immolation of the vegetable vendor in Tunisia was God-sent for the Egyptian Islamists. The Hizb ul-Tahrir leadership in Europe, followed by other Ikhwan-affiliated Islamist movements in Europe and the Middle East, quickly capitalized on, interpreted and exploited, the incident in a small Tunisian town in order to incite the masses all over the Arab World to revolt against the existing political order in the name of political Islam. In Egypt, the Ikhwan were ready. But so were the security forces.

Since the late-1940's, and particularly since the Free Officers' coup of 1953, the Egyptian Military has rallied behind a small group, or council, of dynamic officers who jointly made decisions and who nominated one of them to front for their group policy and interest. In recent years, Mubarak sought to profoundly break this age-old crux of power by sidelining Tantawi (the military's choice for successor) and instead nominating his own son Gamal as his successor. The military would not let it happen. Capitalizing on the first opportunity that came their way – the Intifada – the SCAF recaptured power and nominated their original front-man – Tantawi – as the de-facto president. It was the SCAF's threat of a military coup and arrest that made Mubarak resign and leave Cairo on 11 February 2011.



Over the next year – early 2011 to early 2012 – SCAF made every conceivable effort to hold onto their power. The senior officers were not oblivious of the dominant grassroots influence of the Islamists. Therefore, SCAF resolved to make deals with the Ikhwan to preserve their own power despite the forthcoming elections. SCAF offered the Ikhwan a compromise where the Islamists would dominate society while foreign policy and strategy issues would remain in military hands. As was the case since the 1950's – there evolved a tenuous mistrustful relationship, with both sides attempting to neutralize the other side's leaders when they felt threatened.

The Ikhwan leadership, however, was adamant on seizing power and considered all relationship with SCAF temporary at best. Over the same year, the Ikhwan patiently prepared for the fateful confrontation with the military they knew would inevitably come in the aftermath of the presidential elections scheduled for summer 2012. The two dominant leaders of these preparations were Dr. Khairat al-Shater, formally Deputy Chairman of the Muslim Brothers and the organizer of their military underground and combat cells, and Muhammad Badie, the Supreme Guide and chief ideologue of the Muslim Brothers. While Shater was to emerge as the first presidential candidate of the Muslim Brothers, Badie hid behind the cloth and his academic standing at al-Azhar University to state in the name of Islam what the Ikhwan al-Muslimin politicians could not state and get away with SCAF.

As a presidential candidate, Shater repeatedly emphasized his basic conviction that “indeed Islam is religion and state.” Speaking at a conference in Alexandria in April of 2011, Shater articulated the Ikhwan's ultimate aspirations. “The role of the Muslim Brothers is to mobilize the nation to establish a way of life based on Islam.” Toward this end, Shater explained, the Ikhwan “are continuing to build the individual and the House and the Muslim community, and prepare for the stage of the Islamic Government [which will come after] the application of a renaissance of the community on the basis of an Islamic reference, [and, subsequently,] even access to ruling on the world stage and the return of the Islamic State.”

In late December 2011, Badie delivered a sermon in which he articulated the Ikhwan's political approach in Egypt's post-revolutionary era. He noted that the Ikhwan's ultimate goal – the establishment of a global Islamic Caliphate – can only be achieved gradually and without coercion. In practical terms, the Muslim Brothers have two goals. The first is “an immediate goal, which becomes evident and yields fruits as soon as a person joins the Brotherhood. It starts with purifying the soul, amending behavior, and preparing the spirit, the mind and the body for a long struggle.”

The second goal is “a long-term goal, which requires utilizing opportunities, waiting for the right time, making preparations and planning in advance. It [entails] a total reform of all domains of life, in which all the nation's forces should participate, and [also] involves changing and transforming all the exiting conditions, so that the Islamic State and the Law of the Koran may live again.” Badie stressed that the long-term goals of the Muslim Brothers can only be achieved gradually – starting with “reforming the individual, then restructuring the family, then building society and the government, then [establishing] the rightly guided Caliphate, and [finally achieving] mastership of the world.”

Badie emphasized that the Muslim Brothers were determined to attain these goals by convincing, and without any coercion, all elements of Egyptian society to join the mutual effort to build a true Islamic society. “All these purposes and goals ... must be realized ... through unity of ranks, by persuasion, not coercion, and by love, not by force.” Badie warned his audience not to fall prey to “attempts to split up the united ranks and drive a wedge between young and old, men and women, Muslims and Christians, and schools and groups.” Ultimately, the key to political victory was pragmatically manipulating the unique circumstances created by the revolution-



ary process unfolding in Egypt. “Do not fight the ways of the world because they are overpowering,” Badie told the Ikhwan. Rather, “try to overcome them, use them, change their course, and pit some of them against others.”

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The parliamentary elections consolidated the Islamists’ hold onto power.

The election to the People’s Assembly of Egypt – Egypt’s Lower House – was held from 28 November 2011 to 11 January 2012. The election had been originally scheduled for September 2011. The postponement was a result of a series of SCAF maneuvers to build pro-military candidates while undermining the established parties – both socialist and Islamist – under the pretext that they would gain undue advantage in case of speedy election. The results left no doubt as to the preeminence of the Islamists. Muhammad Morsi led the Muslim Brothers’ affiliated Freedom and Justice Party to a victory with 235 seats (37.5 % of the votes), and Emad Abdel Ghaffour, led the Salafists’ al-Nour Party to second place with 123 seats (27.8 % of the votes) – thus giving the Islamist bloc dominance over Parliament. Moreover, numerous independent candidates announced their joining the Islamist bloc – thus increasing the majority even further. Consequently, SCAF used legal maneuvering and dissolved the parliament. However, the dissolution was ruled unconstitutional by both the courts and Parliament itself – and Islamist-dominated Parliament was reinstated.

The election to the Shura Council – Egypt’s Upper House – was held between 29 January and 22 February 2012. Once again, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won a major victory – winning 105 of the 180 elected seats. During the first Shura Council session on 28 February 2012, FJP member Ahmed Fahmy was elected Speaker of Parliament.

In mid-April 2012, the SCAF made a desperate effort to better control and manipulate the presidential elections. They used the courts to have the election commission disqualify most of the leading candidates. The excuses ranged from the valid to the legal nitpicking. In the case of Shater, the election commission determined that he since he had been released from prison in March 2011 – his candidacy was in violation of election rules stating that an individual had to be released from prison for at least six years before he could run for office. Under Mubarak, Shater had been in prison repeatedly, mostly for organizing militant cells and underground networks.

The Ikhwan – specifically their political front the Freedom and Justice Party – quickly placed Muhammad Morsi as the substitute candidate for the presidency. However, nobody in Cairo had doubt that Shater remained the real force behind the scenes. This is not to say that Morsi is a “nobody” – but rather that Morsi was expected to implement the ideologies, strategies and policies of those above him – mainly Badie and Shater. Moreover, because Morsi was considered politically expendable, he could be very audacious and bold in taking on SCAF and the Cairo traditional power structure – as he would indeed do immediately after coming to power.

Nevertheless, the leadership of the Muslim Brothers elected to have other notables articulate the Islamist themes of their campaign in mass rallies and on Egyptian TV while keeping Morsi stick to ostensibly moderate themes. Morsi’s presidential elections campaign was launched in a big rally on April 29 which was broadcasted by Islamist TV stations on May 1. The keynote address – which was interrupted repeatedly by cheers and yells from the exited audience – was delivered by the influential cleric Safwat Higazi – a frequent guest on Islamist TV. Higazi was very clear why Morsi should be elected. “We can see how the dream of the Islamic Caliphate is being realized, Allah willing, by Dr. Muhammad Morsi and his brothers, his supporters, and his political party.



We can see how the great dream, shared by us all – that of the United States of the Arabs. ... The United States of the Arabs will be restored, Allah willing. The United States of the Arabs will be restored by this man and his supporters. The capital of the Caliphate – the capital of the United States of the Arabs – will be Jerusalem, Allah willing,” Higazi declared to a cheering audience.

Meanwhile, it was Shater who formulated in the spring, and implemented in the summer with Morsi fronting, the Ikhwan’s strategy for seizing power from the military. At the core of the strategy were three “red lines” that SCAF must abide by to prove they can be partners in power. The first demand was the restoration of the dissolved parliament. The second demand was the rescinding of the decree that gave SCAF nearly unlimited power, including over the writing of the new constitution. The third demand was to guarantee the smooth handing of executive powers to the new president once he was elected freely and fairly. The SCAF refused. On the eve of the presidential elections, Shater hinted on the forthcoming confrontation. “We came to think positively of the SCAF and accept its promises to share power,” he said. “Those promises were not fulfilled.” consequently, the Ikhwan were “forced to change [their] position because the people of the SCAF were not intending to hand over real power.”

There were 23 candidates in the first round of the presidential elections that took place on 23 - 24 May 2012. As expected, the candidate of the Islamists – Morsi – and the SCAF’s candidate – Ahmad Shafik (a former general and the last prime minister under Hosni Mubarak) – received the plurality of votes. Morsi and Shafik faced each other in the second round that took place on 16 - 17 June. And there troubles began.

On the eve of the second round, Israel and other “interested parties” conducted extensive polling throughout Egypt in order to gauge public opinion. All the pre-election polling showed that under free and fair conditions – Morsi would get almost 70 % of the votes and Shafik slightly over 30 %. The Muslim Brothers conducted their own extensive polling and reached similar results.

However, on 17 June, the initial reports of the results coming from SCAF sources hinted that Shafik won. Consequently, Islamist leaders started warning friends and foes alike that the ruling SCAF “is planning to complete its coup against the revolution by preparing to announce former Premier Ahmad Shafik as the winner of the presidential election.” The Islamist leaders further asserted that the SCAF “has already made necessary arrangements with the US to complete its planned coup by placing Shafik ahead of the Ikhwan’s Muhammad Morsi in the race.”

Numerous Islamist sources, not just the Ikhwan, alleged widespread and sophisticated tempering with, and manipulation of, the voting process by SCAF. Most significant were accusations attributed to Secretary General of the Supreme Presidential Elections Commission Hatem Bagato that the SCAF delivered to the polling stations special US-made ink aimed to damaging the election process by fading hours after being used by voters to mark ballots. This way, Bagato alleged, ballots with votes for Morsi became no-vote empty ballots. This was but one of a series of elaborate plots Bagato and numerous Ikhwan leaders insisted were being used by the military-appointed election committee to oversee the election in order to rig the vote in favor of Shafik.

Islamist leaders emphasized that having had to endure back in December 2010 the manipulation and rigging of the parliamentary election that had deprived them of an overwhelming victory – they were not going to do so again. All Islamists were adamant on retaining their majority in Parliament and have Morsi duly elected as the president of Islamic Egypt. They considered the latest ostensibly legal maneuvers by the SCAF a thinly veiled coup against the Islamists’ ascent to power – and rightly so – and vowed to resist this coup by all means neces-



sary including armed revolt. With weapons and volunteers streaming from both Libya and Sudan, and with the rank and file of the Egyptian military increasingly Islamist – this was a very serious threat.

Meanwhile, the Ikhwan leadership used its “election observers” to conduct a swift informal count of the votes in order to get a read of the real situation. In the pre-dawn hours of July 18, the Ikhwan’s senior leaders were notified that their own polling and vote counting prove beyond shadow of doubt that Muhammad Morsi won with slightly over 61 % of the votes, while Shafik got less than 39 %. They acknowledged that Morsi won by less votes than they had anticipated (around 70 %) and attributed this to rigging and cheating, as well as to voter intimidation, by the SCAF authorities. Still, this was a clear victory for Morsi and the Ikhwan leaders decided to insist on its being recognized.

Shortly afterwards, the SCAF responded to the Ikhwan’s assertions about the election’s results. According to SCAF leaders, initial counts and the SCAF’s own polling proved beyond a shadow of doubt that Morsi got less than 51 % of the votes while Shafik got over 49 %. Hence, the SCAF stressed, the results were currently way too close to call a winner. There existed the possibility that the winner would be decided by a few votes determined through recounts in contested areas. In other words, the SCAF was preparing the political arena to a lengthy process of challenges and recounts that could very well lead to the declaring of Shafik as the winner by the court rather than clear-cut vote counting. Meanwhile, SCAF also started pushing a new interpretation to the constitution that would necessitate new parliamentary elections that, SCAF hoped, would be properly rigged to prevent the Islamists from winning. The Ikhwan leaders promised to challenge these procedures as well.

Throughout, real vote counting continued. In the early morning hours of June 18, Egyptian and other Arab liberal-secular correspondents reported that their sources at the election committee had just told them that with slightly over 80 % of the over 13,000 polling stations nationwide counted – the real results were 52.5 % of the votes for Morsi and 47.5 % for Shafik. However, most of the polling stations yet to be counted were in the cities’ slums and remote rural areas – that is, areas that are predominantly Islamist and thus pro-Morsi.

Adamant on preserving hold onto power virtually at all cost, on 19 June SCAF formed a new institution called “the National Defense Council” solely in order to shackle the presidency with yet another SCAF-dominated institution. Officially, the Council was formed on 14 June – but there is no indication or evidence that this is the case. Indeed, the formation of the Council was not formally announced by the SCAF and there was only a hidden brief mention in the gazetteer on 19 June. Moreover, SCAF leaders refused to provide a description of the tasks that were, or should be, assigned to the Council. The National Defense Council would be comprised of the president, several ministers (some filled by individuals designated by SCAF) and the entire military High Command so that the SCAF had an overwhelming majority. According to the gazetteer note, the council would be comprised of the following members:

- The President (Head of the National Defense Council),
- The Parliamentary Speaker,
- The Head of the Cabinet of Ministers,
- The Foreign Minister,
- The Defense Minister,



- The Military Production Minister,
- The Interior Minister,
- The Finance Minister,
- The Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces,
- The Director of Egyptian General Intelligence,
- The Chief Naval Commander,
- The Air Force Commander,
- The Commander of Air Defense Forces,
- The Assistant Defense Minister,
- The Chief of the Operations Authority of the Armed Forces,
- The Chief of the Military Judiciary and
- The Director of Military Intelligence and Reconnaissance.

The Muslim Brothers leadership chose to simply ignore the announcement regarding the formation of the National Defense Council and instead focus on ensuring honest vote counting.

Toward midnight (Egypt time) on 20 June, excellent sources in the Egyptian military warned that SCAF decided to do what it takes to block the rise to power of the Muslim Brothers irrespective of the outcome of the presidential elections. “The Military Council is determined not to allow the Muslim Brothers to seize power,” the sources reported. “It will not relinquish the reins of power until a new constitution is issued and the arena is set for a balanced political process.” The SCAF was ready to conduct what amounted to a thinly-veiled military coup despite the explicit opposition of the US and the EU.

The sources acknowledged that the SCAF was already meeting resistance from the Cairo political elite and, consequently, the irritated public at large. “There are political forces that want to discredit the political process by making people believe that matters are being decided by political deals,” they explained. However, the SCAF leaders concluded that empowering the military elite was preferable to succumbing to the radicalization trends engulfing Egypt’s political scene. “To avoid any sudden shifts that could lead to confrontation and drive the situation to the brink, the Military Council remains the only force capable of regulating the political process so as to preserve the stability of the state,” the sources explained.

The sources singled out the Muslim Brothers’ leadership as the primary threat to the overall stability of Egypt. They noted that the Ikhwan had already escalated and exacerbated the situation by unleashing “unacceptably popular protests” to the High Constitutional Court’s verdict that led to the dissolution of the Islamist-led parliament. Moreover, the Muslim Brothers’ leadership had attempted to monopolize the Constituent Assembly responsible for drafting a new constitution. Consequently, the sources warned, all future contacts between the Muslim Brothers’ leadership and SCAF “will be of a confrontational, rather than friendly, nature.”

The SCAF was surprised by this turn of events, they acknowledged. “For the first time in their history, the Muslim Brothers are adopting a confrontational attitude, after having long depended on a policy of negotiation.” This is because the Ikhwan’s widespread grassroots power-base had been consolidated on the notion of the Ikhwan’s being the perpetual opposition to the corrupt political power. Hence, the grassroots were having



profound problems with the transformation of the Muslim Brothers into the power holders in Cairo. “Their performance during the transitional phase put them in a weaker position than ever, and now they’re doing everything they can to regain their popular support base,” the sources explained.

The sources emphasized that SCAF was alarmed by the Obama Administration’s support for Morsi and the Muslim Brothers because SCAF had considered them inherently anti-Western. Consequently, Cairo was finding itself under growing Western pressure to hand over power to the Ikhwan. “The United States and the European Union have both been sending messages reflecting their preference for Muhammad Morsi as Egypt’s president. In the belief that they enjoy this support, they [the US and the EU] have adopted a policy of pressuring Egypt’s interim rulers regarding upcoming political arrangements,” the sources communicated. The Obama White House was most active in subverting the SCAF’s attempts to sustain power in Cairo in close cooperation with the Muslim Brothers’ leadership. Toward this end, the sources noted, “the Muslim Brothers’ Guidance Bureau has been exchanging messages with the US – to which Israel is privy – containing reassurances about the group’s stance on HAMAS, Gaza and the Camp David accords.” Moreover, Washington adamantly refused to formally disclose these communications to the SCAF. Hence, formally, “it remains unclear [to SCAF] whether the US would prefer to see Morsi or Shafik in Egypt’s highest office.”

The sources concluded by reiterating SCAF’s resolve to protect Cairo from the ascent of the Muslim Brothers. They noted that Tantawi was in Saudi Arabia for Prince Nayef’s funeral and raised the issue of preventing the rise of Ikhwan with King Abdallah and won his blessing for resisting the US pressure.

The Ikhwan’s senior leaders were not oblivious to these maneuvers and moods. On June 20 and 21, senior Muslim Brothers officials met repeatedly with key SCAF officials and warned them in no uncertain terms that they “will demonstrate every day until SCAF gives them Morsi as president.” On 21 June, the Ikhwan officials raised the ante – warning SCAF that they, the Ikhwan, would not be able to control highly frustrated Jihadist elements should they decide to use violence against the military. SCAF sources considered the situation in Cairo “highly explosive” and warned that the entire Egypt was “unstable to the extreme”.

Nevertheless, the SCAF leaders, and particularly Tantawi, remained adamant on preventing the Muslim Brothers from attaining power irrespective of the outcome of the presidential election. On 21 June, late at night, Shafik was informed by SCAF emissaries that he had won the presidential race. He was urged by the SCAF to wait for the official results from the Presidential Elections Commission before announcing his victory. Western officials immediately contacted senior SCAF officials to confirm the above. Most insisted that they hadn’t heard about a decision – must be Tantawi’s – to declare Shafik the winner.

The next day, 22 June, senior SCAF officials asserted that Shafik would be declared the winner on Sunday, June 24. According to the SCAF’s data, Shafik won just under 50.7 % of the votes. These results were confirmed after numerous recounts in which “several ballot boxes were discovered” while “many many votes” were found to be fraudulent.

Little wonder that the Ikhwan did not buy these explanations. Ultimately, there was a major explosive issue under the surface. Even with all the rigging and tempering - Morsi had a discernable majority simply because SCAF had underestimated the extent of his support and Ikhwan’s ability to get people to the polling stations. Moreover, the Islamists-Jihadists were determined not to have the elections stolen away from them the way Mubarak did in December 2010 and Tantawi had just attempted to do with the dissolving of the Parliament. Hence, should Shafik be declared the winner – the Islamists-Jihadists would launch an armed rebellion – and



the SCAF was cognizant that the military's rank and file would in all likelihood join the Islamist-Jihadist rebels.

Hence, SCAF and the Egyptian government decided to meet on June 23 and spend the day in a desperate effort to convince the Ikhwan to cooperate or face a massive crackdown. The SCAF officials expected and dreaded a confrontation. Confident in their electoral victory and popular support – the Ikhwan leaders were uncompromising. Shater presented anew their “red lines” and asserted in no uncertain terms that the Ikhwan would not give up, or even compromise, on these demands. Overnight, the SCAF conducted several informal consultations at the end of which the SCAF decided to throw the towel.

On 24 June 2012, the election commission formally announced that the candidate of the Muslim Brothers affiliated Freedom and Justice Party – Muhammad Morsi – narrowly won the presidential runoff with 51.7 % of the votes. Ahmad Shafik won 48.3 % of the votes. The Ikhwan leadership decided not to contest the numbers and focus instead on the quick swearing in of Muhammad Morsi as Egypt's first popularly elected Islamist president.

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Morsi was finally sworn in on 30 June 2012. Throughout July, both sides – Morsi and the Ikhwan against the SCAF – kept posturing in what rapidly became an increasingly hostile face-off. It was clear to all that the Islamists were looking for an excuse to finish off the military high-command but lacked the legal and political justification – particularly vis-a-vis the West from whom Cairo still needed very lavish financial aid.

In early July, the Muslim Brothers moved to reinstate the parliament that had been disbanded a month earlier. Morsi ordered the immediate return of the legislators as elected in 2011. Morsi selected Hesham Qandil to form the new government. Formally, Qandil is a US-educated politically independent senior public servant known to be sympathetic to both the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis. On 2 August, Qandil was sworn in as Prime Minister. Shortly afterwards, Qandil rammed through regulatory moves annulling constitutional provisions limiting presidential power that Morsi had objected to.

Meanwhile, Morsi began pushing for a new strategic-regional posture for Egypt based on a face-off, if not outright conflict, with Israel and supremacy against all regional contenders, including a nuclear Iran. Back on June 24, Morsi talked to an Iranian senior official about his “enthusiasm for the further expansion of ties with Iran” as the key to a new regional posture. “The issue will create a [new] strategic balance in the region,” Morsi declared. He also promised that Egypt “will reconsider the Camp David Accord.” The Iranians promptly published the discussion as an interview with the Fars News Agency, prompting a denial from Morsi. Now, in early August, even with Morsi firmly installed as President, Morsi's was still an audacious move because it both raised sensitive issues not previously addressed in political circles, and the mere suggesting of different policies constituted a challenge and affront to the SCAF – legally the custodians of national security. Hence, initially Morsi preferred to publicly present his strategic goals through the media using “talking heads” associated with the secular-Westernized elite.

On August 6, the pro-Ikhwan TV broadcasted an interview with retired General Abd al-Hamid Umran. The subject was the main challenge facing Morsi's Egypt. Umran argued that Morsi must immediately commit to an Iran-style nuclear program in order to acquire nuclear weapons and establish a balance of terror with Israel. “There can be no Egyptian national security without an Egyptian nuclear program. An Egyptian nuclear program – let's call it peaceful for the sake of argument – is about uranium enrichment. It's not about someone running a power plant in Mersa Matruh or somewhere, but about [domestic] uranium enrichment. Obviously, if you do,



the entire world will turn against you, but for the sake of Egypt, President Morsi, or anyone in power, should withstand the pressure. They will give us hell, but at the end of the day, we will have the power to prevent anyone from insolently attacking us. For this reason, we must have an Egyptian nuclear program.”

In conclusion, Umran stressed that Egypt might soon find itself in a major security crisis with an Israel “willing to use a nuclear weapon against Egypt, if it finds itself in a difficult situation. What can prevent them from doing so is for Egypt to possess nuclear weapons and establish nuclear deterrence.”

What Morsi needed at this point was an excuse to complete the purge of the SCAF. On the night of August 6 – he got his wish. A group of Jihadists entered the Madina Tahrir position of the Egyptian Border Guards for the Iftar dinner. Apparently, the Jihadists believed they had an agreement with the local troops to receive from them three Fahd armored cars for an attack on the nearby Kerem Shalom border crossing with Israel. Something went wrong and the Jihadist ended up killing 16 Egyptian troops. They then attempted an attack into Israel where they were all killed by the IDF.

Morsi leaped on the incident as a proof the SCAF was moribund. He was not interested in the crisis in Sinai. Starting August 7, Morsi’s statements regarding the killing of the 16 Egyptian troops focused on the perpetrators of the crime – that is, the individuals who actually shot and killed the troops. He promised to pursue them relentlessly, hunt them down and punish them for killing the Egyptian troops. However, Morsi did not address the larger issue of Jihadism in the Sinai Peninsula. He did not say anything about the danger they constitute to the Egyptian State, let alone the imperative to address the Jihadist threat.

Morsi’s was a provocation and trap Tantawi stepped into. By 8 August there developed a veiled crisis between Morsi and Tantawi. Despite Morsi’s very narrow definition of the military’s mission in the Sinai, Tantawi issued a command order for Operation Eagle that included fighting and destroying the entire Jihadist infrastructure. Morsi immediately countered this command, and both privately and publicly reiterated the narrow scope and objective of the military operation. Moreover, Morsi used bureaucratic technicalities to delay the approval of any reinforcement of the Egyptian forces in Sinai except for a hundred-odd military police that arrived to secure Morsi’s own visit to El-Arish and two Apache helicopters.

Morsi also immediately purged the military elite. Intelligence chief and Tantawi stalwart Gen. Mourad Muwafi was forced into early retirement. He was replaced by Maj. Gen. Muhammad Shehata. Shehata is a political general very close to the HAMAS and the Gaza Strip’s Jihadists (with whose leaders he worked closely on the Gilad Shalit deal). Morsi nominated Muhammad Osama as the new chief of the security and intelligence directorate in Cairo – a new position directly under Morsi that was aimed to reduce and counter-balance Tantawi’s influence with Egyptian intelligence. Morsi also dismissed the governor of North Sinai, Abdel-Wahab Mabrouk, and Maj. Gen. Hamdy Badeen, the commander of the military police.

In its late-night edition, state-run TV announced without comment or detail that Morsi also appointed Major General Hamed Zaky as the head of Republican Guards and Major General Maged Mostafa Kamel as the head of the Central Security Forces. It seemed that Morsi was capitalizing on the Sinai incident in order to purge the Cairo-area military of senior officers deemed too loyal to Tantawi for their own good.

On the night of 8 August, Morsi began capitalizing on the Sinai crisis to start purging the entire government of undesirable elements. He fired the editors-in-chief of the two main government controlled newspapers – *Al-Ahram* and *al-Jumhuriyah*. No explanation was given but their replacements were junior journalists known to be stalwarts of the Muslim Brothers. Morsi also issued a decree forbidding Egyptian media to communicate



with, interview and otherwise be in contact with Israel and Israelis.

An indication what was afoot came from Essam al-Aryan, the acting president of the Freedom and Justice Party – the political front of the Muslim Brothers. He praised Morsi for beginning the long-overdue cleansing of the government. “Today, the president began to exercise his power,” Aryan gloated. “These decisions are a message to all officials that Egypt has a president and its people have a will, and that you will be sacked if you do not respect that will.”

Meanwhile, back in early August, Morsi resolved to push further the strategic realignment with Iran despite the SCAF’s doubts. Tehran dispatched a senior intelligence official Muhammad Gerami to Cairo for high-level secret discussions with then intelligence chief Muwafi and other senior officials. The meetings covered the restoration of strategic cooperation with Iran, the prospect of an understanding on regional cooperation, including an Iranian commitment not to sow unrest in Egypt, as well as anti-US and anti-Israel joint operations. The Muwafi-Gerami talks were most successful. Although Muwafi was fired shortly afterwards as part of the Sinai-related purges, Morsi remained determined to improve relations and strategic cooperation with Iran.

The Iranian initiative was so important as to warrant a pause in the purges of the SCAF. On 8 - 10 August, Morsi focused on the quiet but crucial visit to Cairo by Iranian Vice-President Hamid Bakaei. Officially, Bakaei arrived in Cairo to hand Morsi an invitation to the NAM Summit in Tehran. In reality, the primary reason for the visit was to build on the Muwafi-Gerami talks in order to lay the grounds for official rapprochement between the two countries and coordination of strategic positions regarding all pertinent and priority issues in the greater Middle East. Indeed, Bakaei spent long hours privately with Morsi. By the end of Bakaei’s visit, Morsi resolved to go with Iran because Tehran’s policies were in the spirit of the Egyptian “Islamist Awakening” launched by the Ikhwan. Given this decision – all senior officials that might stand in Morsi’s way had to go expeditiously.

Hence, on 12 August, Morsi moved to swiftly and decisively complete the purge of the military elite and thus destroy the SCAF. In the morning Morsi sent to forced retirement both Defense Minister Hussein Tantawi and Armed Forces chief Sami Annan. Tantawi was replaced by Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Sissi – the current chief of military intelligence who had resisted acting on the Israeli intelligence warning regarding the Sinai. During the anti-Mubarak upsurge, Sissi was one of the generals most amenable to Ikhwani influence in the name of national unity. Annan was replaced by Lt. Gen. Sidki Sayed Ahmed – a grey military bureaucrat. As well, SCAF member Gen. Muhammad al-Assar was appointed deputy defense minister in order to cut into Sissi’s powers. Morsi also sacked on August 12 Air Force Chief Rezza Abd al-Megid, Navy Commander Mahab Muhammad Mamish and Air Defense Chief Abd Al-Aziz Muhammad Seif.

Most important, Mahmoud Makki, a senior judge and Islamist stalwart, was appointed vice-president. Makki’s task would be overseeing the legalese of the forthcoming profound transformation of official Cairo. By the end of the day on August 12, Morsi relied on a legal analysis by judge Makki – the new vice-president – and unilaterally annulled the Amendments to the Law that gave the SCAF broad powers and facilitated the handover of power from the military to Morsi and the civilian authorities. On 21 August, Morsi completed the transferring of the legislative powers from the SCAF to himself that started with the issuing of the constitutional declaration on 12 August. Morsi formally overruled an official request to transfer the legislative powers to the Shura Council – Egypt’s Parliament. With the process legally completed, Morsi now had more power than Egypt’s military rulers – Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak – at their peak. Hence, Morsi needed an external crisis to both divert attention from his swift grab of power and justify his need for such executive powers in order to resolve the crisis.



Meanwhile, apprehensive that the military elite might rebound and launch a military coup, back on the morning of August 13 Morsi assigned government investigators to check whether “formal army leadership [was] behind attack in Sinai last week with collaboration with Islamic and fanatic elements.” The Ikhwan were now insisting that the SCAF orchestrated the attack in order to embarrass Morsi and return to power. Hence, Ikhwan senior officials insisted, to save Egypt and the revolution Morsi had to purge the military elite.

On 24 August government lawyers at the behest of Egypt’s General Prosecutor started preparing indictments against senior politicians and military figures, starting with Tantawi, for their alleged role in deaths in Port Said (the riot at the football match), outside the Cabinet building (in clash between demonstrators and police), and a host of suspected assassinations. Formal complaints (which permit summoning for interrogation, instituting travel restrictions, seizing assets, etc.) were filed against Hussein Tantawi, Hamdy Badeen, and former interior ministers Mahmoud Wagdi and Mansour El-Essawi. Even if Tantawi and the others would not go to jail – their careers and ability to influence the political scene in Cairo were already doomed.

Morsi had another major victory at the expense of the Army, and specifically the SCAF, on August 30. The Constituent Assembly approved several amendments to the constitution proposed by the Assembly’s committee on systems of governance. Most important was the resolution that gives the President the power to declare war only with the approval of the People’s Assembly. Coming to parliament, though, the President should acknowledge prior “consultation” with the National Defense Council – which means that the President is not obligated to adopt and follow the advice of the Council. Significantly, the Assembly rejected a legal opinion that the President be required to seek the approval of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces for any declaration of war or use of force. In practical terms, this parliamentary decision removed the last major element of power that the SCAF had – thus turning the SCAF into an informal body devoid of any executive and/or legal power. Morsi’s Islamist revolution was moving along swiftly.

In early September, Morsi and the Ikhwan seemed adamant on thoroughly destroying the military elite. On 2 September, Morsi ordered his new defense minister General Sissi to retire 70 army generals and order other SCAF members into early retirement. Six other senior generals were removed from the SCAF but allowed to remain in the military for the time being. On 9 September, the presidential judicial authorities authorized the filing of over thirty complaints against Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi and his deputy General Sami Annan for suppressing by force last year’s popular uprising. This meant that Tantawi, Annan and a host of lesser generals would now be immersed in lengthy and complicated litigation even before any case went to trial. In the process, they were legally prevented from seeking public office or engaging in any other public-political activities. Simply put – these military leaders, and the SCAF institutionally, have been silenced by a stroke of Morsi’s pen with the possibility of standing trial like Mubarak hanging over their heads.

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By late August 2012, Morsi and the Ikhwan have all but completed their consolidation of total control over Egypt – both government and society. In Cairo, both supporters and detractors talk of the swift and comprehensive “Ikhwan-ization” of Egypt. In the nearly two months since Morsi’s swearing in – the Ikhwan completed the most profound purge and reconstitution of the institutes of governance in the history of modern Egypt. Given the inherent power and influence of the Egyptian authoritarian system of governance – it is only a question of time before the “Ikhwan-ization” of official Egypt will evolve into the profound “Ikhwan-ization” of Egyptian society.



Morsi started with the sweeping purge of Egyptian officialdom. In about six weeks he fired close to a hundred generals and admirals, as well as thousands of lower rank officers. Consequently, the old-guard core of the Egyptian military – that had sustained “the officers’ state” and its vast economic resources since the late 1940’s – was no more. Morsi also purged the Egyptian media – removing over fifty editors in the government’s extensive and influential media empire. He then began purging the governors of Egypt’s 27 regions, as well as hundreds lesser local-government officials such as mayors and village heads.

The secret to the enduring success of Morsi’s “Ikhwan-ization” of Egypt is that he has well prepared lists of handpicked members of the Muslim Brothers and loyal Islamist sympathizers for the myriad of vacated positions. These stalwart Islamists are fairly qualified for their positions so that Morsi can point to professional justification for their nominations. Nevertheless, Islamists now dominate the Egyptian high-command, most cabinet and advisory posts, governors, heads of state-owned news organs, the powerful media council, and the national council for human rights. On 27 August, Morsi further strengthened his presidential powers when he named 21 advisers and aides with executive authorities. The vast majority were politically-reliable Islamist-leaning stalwarts, although the list also included three women and two Christians as a token compromise. Subsequently, Morsi ignored his campaign promises to appoint a Christian and a woman as vice presidents, insisting that the nomination of advisers was sufficient.

In early September, Morsi and the Ikhwan were fast assuming total control of Egypt. Morsi’s new bureaucracy is now focusing on entrenching long-term Ikhwani and Islamist authority. Morsi’s appointees now dominate the committee charged with drafting the new constitution, and are directly responsible for such key issues as the relations between religion and state, the role of the military in the state, the form of local government and governance, and, most important, the structure and rules for future elections. Ultimately, the Ikhwan will succeed because they tightly control the recruitment and placement of all future candidates for employment by government – civil, police and military – in the government schools that are mandatory for the launching of careers in government service. Significantly, throughout these undertakings, the Muslim Brothers and their affiliated entities continued operating under strict secrecy as if they were still under persecution. The Brothers tightly protect their funding and budget, the recruitment and member retention policies, and, most important, their clandestine decision-taking process under the Supreme Council whose membership is unknown. Therefore, no matter how much attention is focused on Morsi’s office, Egypt’s real source of power and policy formulation – the Ikhwan’s leadership – remains hidden and secure from the outside world.

Morsi’s next objective is to consolidate the Ikhwan-led Egypt as the undisputed leader of the new and evolving Arab World. The primary outcomes of the Intifada’s and the Arab Awakening have been the demise of the modern Arab State and the ascent of the Ikhwan-inspired Islamism. Under such conditions, the Egyptian Muslim Brothers and their theological bastion in al-Azhar University constitute the undisputed guides of the Islamist trend all over the region. In the aftermath of the Arab Awakening throughout the Middle East, the demise of the US standing, and the ascent of the Muslim Brothers in Cairo, time is ripe for the return of Egypt as the Leader of the Arab World. Under such circumstances, Morsi is convinced, Egypt is in position to replace Turkey as the dominant Sunni power.

In his first two months in office, Morsi focused on restoring Egypt’s regional preeminence. He reached out to the three most important states in the region – Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. He not only delicately balanced his bilateral dealing with these important states and their influential leaders – but he sought to ameliorate disputes that might affect their relations with Egypt by proposing a common objective – acting jointly as



regional arbitrators for the Syrian crisis. More than indicating Egypt's interest in the future of Syria – Morsi considers his Syrian initiative, irrespective of its outcome, as an affirmation of his own, and Egypt's, rejuvenated quest for the role of "the Leader of the Arab World" and perhaps even the entire Middle East. Ultimately, Morsi is convinced, the West will also accept Egyptian dominance as "the Leader of the Arab World" and the world's gateway to the Gulf oil and gas.

Internationally, Morsi distanced Egypt from the special relations with the United States. His first trip outside the Arab world was to Beijing where he held strategic and economic talks about having the PRC counter-balance US influence in the Middle East. Morsi stressed he does not consider Egypt beholden to any commitment to, or alliance with, the US. Defying explicit demand from the Obama White House, Morsi attended the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran where he raised several anti-Western themes. Morsi and Ahmadi-Nejad had a private meeting the afternoon of August 30 on the side of the summit in Tehran. It was a "love from first sight" meeting from the first minute. After Morsi said that Egypt and Iran are "strategic partners" – Ahmadi-Nejad corrected him that both countries are "strategic allies". Morsi concurred with a broad smile. (The difference between the term in both Arabic and Persian is significant. Partners denotes the primacy of interests, allies denotes being soul-mates and emotions-religious-values commitment.)

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The ultimate objectives of the Muslim Brothers and Morsi's Egypt were articulated on August 14 by the influential cleric and Morsi stalwart Safwat Higazi. He argued that the new era of the Muslim Brothers – that is, the era of the Islamic Movements – already ushers in new vistas for the regional and global ascent of Egypt. This dynamics will necessitate confrontation with Israel "in order to make Jerusalem the capital of the 'United States of the Arabs'" led by Egypt's Ikhwan. Ultimately, Higazi explained, the consolidation of Egyptian-Ikhwani preeminence over the Mashriq and the ensuing establishment of the United States of the Arabs are only the first steps in the Ikhwan's destiny. "One of the tenets of the Muslim Brothers, which they cannot renounce, is the Islamic Caliphate and the ruling of the world. Yes. The day will come when we will be the masters of the world." One has to start somewhere and sometime, Higazi added, and for the Ikhwan it is in Morsi's Egypt.

Remarks: *Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.*



About the Author of this Issue

Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State. He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (*New York Times* No. 1 Bestseller & *Washington Post* No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (*New York Times* Bestseller & *Foreign Affairs Magazine* Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports. Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



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