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Egypt: 1805 – 1952 – 2012

Oded Eran

Egypt's modern history spanned two types of regime. The first, the monarchy, began when Muhammad Ali assumed the reins of government in 1805. The second started on July 23, 1952, when a group of young army officers ousted King Farouk. Do the presidential elections in Egypt represent the end of Egypt's military regime?

The results of the first round of voting managed – just barely – to answer only one question: who the two candidates in the second round of voting will be. Just barely – because the two candidates who did not make it to the next round announced that they would appeal the results of round one, and request that the election process be suspended.

All other questions remain unanswered. The first relates to the gap between the results of the parliamentary elections and the current presidential elections. On the one hand, the results showed overwhelming success for the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist Nur movement, which received three-quarters of the seats in the parliament. On the other hand, Mohamed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate for president, earned only one-quarter of the votes, though this was enough to give him the lead. It is hard to ascribe a single reason for this meager show of support. It will undoubtedly put pressure on the movement to rally in order to ensure Morsi's victory in the next and decisive round. One may assume that most of the Salafists stayed at home as they are indifferent to the fate of the Muslim Brotherhood candidate; the question now is: can the Muslim Brotherhood give the Salafists any incentive to vote for Morsi in the decisive round?

The second question relates to the ability of the other two candidates – Ahmad Shafiq who took second place, and Amr Moussa who placed fifth (both of whom are, at least on the basis of their careers, identified with *l'ancien regime*, i.e., Mubarak) – to win one-third of the votes. Shafiq represents the attempt of the Supreme Military Council to stop the Muslim Brotherhood from taking control of Egypt's governing institutions. The questions raised by this attempt are numerous. For instance: Does the Supreme Military Council intend to help Shafiq in the decisive round, or was its intention merely to hint to the Muslim Brotherhood that it doesn't intend to give up its role in the Egyptian power structure without a fight? Complete identification with Shafiq would not ensure the

Council a simple solution, even were he to win and become Egypt's next president. Shafiq's securing of the second place in the first round aroused a wave of irate responses and questions about the elections' validity. Moreover, a victory in the decisive round would confront the Military Council with the question of presidential authority in Egypt's new constitution. The respective parties with presidential candidates asked that the question of presidential powers be postponed until after the elections. These parties will, of course, seek to reduce the president's authority drastically should Shafiq be elected. In such a case, should the army insist on leaving most of the authority in the president's hands, as was the case with Mubarak, it is sure to encounter massive, perhaps even violent, opposition at Tahrir Square and elsewhere. Other factions that supported Shafiq, such as the Copts (even though the Coptic church announced that it has no preference), will have to decide if they are prepared for more incitement in the streets and violent confrontations with the disappointed parties – the mosques, on the one hand, and the mostly secular factions that led the January 25, 2011 revolt, on the other.

However, the army's attempt to drastically curtail presidential authority should Mohamed Morsi win would also place the military in a confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood and open it up to criticism as acting contrary to popular will.

The success of the socialist-Nasserite candidate, Hamdeen Sabbahi, who won 20 percent of the votes, also raises questions about possible cooperation among the secular factions, despite the hostility between Sabbahi and Mubarak's regime, which prevented Sabbahi's party from receiving official standing until after Mubarak's deposal. At first glance this looks like an impossible coalition, but the millions of voters who supported Sabbahi, who will want to leave their mark on the nature of the future Egyptian regime, will have to make that difficult choice. The two candidates will have to present a personal benefits package to the losing candidates – the Muslim Brotherhood is already going this route by offering the vice presidency to other candidates – as well as more direct benefits in the form of adopting sections of the other candidates' platforms.

From the Israeli perspective, the presidential race – unless radical changes happen by mid-June – is the harbinger of difficulties, though not necessarily crises. One may assume that Ahmad Shafiq, even with limited powers, will not call for more than minor changes in the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

The declarations liberally made by Mohamed Morsi suggest another cooling-off of relations, especially at the most senior echelons. Morsi has stated that Egypt will stop being “a strategic treasure” for Israel and that he would not meet with Israelis, although he would allow his foreign minister to do so. In an interview with CNN, Morsi said that Egypt would honor the peace treaty if Israel does. President Carter, who was one of the foreign elections monitors, said that based on his talks with the Muslim Brotherhood he feels that Egypt would not unilaterally abrogate the treaty, though it could seek to modify

it. The most radical stance belongs to Hamdeen Sabbahi, who has described Israel as a “hostile, racist, territorially expansionist country that does not desire peace.” Any involvement on his part in the new Egyptian regime would make it difficult to conduct Israeli-Egyptian relations, even at a lower profile than in the past.

Should Morsi win the final round, slated to begin on June 16, the third regime change in the history of Egypt of the last two centuries will have been completed. Furthermore, it will mark the end of a monolithic era, whether monarchic or military. A Shafiq victory will only postpone – not prevent – the transformation. Egyptian politics will have to learn to live with a new, hitherto foreign concept: the coalition. Israel, too, which until now had a single entity to address in Egypt with which to solve both regional and bilateral problems, will be forced to adapt to a situation in which decision-making in Egypt no longer belongs to one single, exclusive power center.

