



BULLETIN

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Strange Coup d'Etat: The Army's Removal of the Egyptian President

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The Egyptian military's decision to suspend the country's constitution and remove President Mohammad Morsi from office strengthens the army and weakens elected state institutions. The next government will inherit the same economic, social and political problems Morsi faced, and risks the equally rapid loss of popular support he did as society's high expectations cannot be met. The end of the Muslim Brotherhood's rule in Egypt sends a signal of caution to other ruling Islamist parties in the region, i.e., in Tunisia, where the division into Islamists and anti-Islamists is equally deep.

On 3 July, the head of the Egyptian armed forces, Gen. Abd al-Fattah as-Sisi suspended the country's constitution, adopted only in December 2012, and removed President Mohammad Morsi from office. Adli Mansour, chairman of the High Constitutional Court, was sworn in as interim president. The ousting of President Morsi followed talks between the army, the opposition and Muslim and Coptic leaders. The army's "road map" promises the establishment of a technocratic government, new election laws, presidential and parliamentary elections, measures to empower young people in state structures, and the formation of a higher committee for national reconciliation. The army's decision is yet another step in the political changes that have followed the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, but it also raises many concerns and will have profound consequences for the country and the region.

Controversial Decision. The removal of Morsi from office is a move by an undemocratic military structure against democratically elected institutions. In May and June 2012, Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice party candidate, was elected president in the first democratic elections in Egypt. A couple of months earlier his party won a little over 47% of the votes in the country's first democratic parliamentary elections, then together with other Islamist parties controlled more than 70% of parliament. The army, on the other hand, does not have civilian oversight, its budget is outside of state control and according to unofficial estimates produces a third of the country's GDP, and it runs Egypt's strategic foreign relations, i.e., with the U.S. and Israel, without an appropriate constitutional framework. Until June 2012, nearly a year and a half after Hosni Mubarak was deposed, the army governed Egypt by means of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which lost popular support by incrementally increasing its own role at the expense of civilian institutions. Right before handing power over to Morsi, the elected president, in June 2012, SCAF dissolved the democratically elected parliament. Over the past year, social discontent moved from the army to MB.

As a result of Morsi's removal, the army has been strengthened while civilian state institutions have been weakened. Even if the "stability function" of the army may prove useful in times of street unrest and upheavals, the speed with which the army intervened against the president (and earlier against the parliament) shows that there is a clear danger of it exceeding its legal and socially acceptable roles.

Internal and International Implications. Since the beginning of the current crisis on 30 June, both the Muslim Brotherhood and the opposition demonstrated a clear lack of responsibility for the country, which for the first time since the fall of Mubarak was clearly divided into two camps: supporters and opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood, or Islamists and anti-Islamists. President Morsi showed a lack of any will to reconcile by refusing to make goodwill gesture towards his political opponents (i.e., reshuffling the government, reopening the debate over the constitution). For their part, the opposition, united as the National Salvation Front and the "Tamarrud" movement, preferred

fighting in the streets to putting up with Morsi as president. The attitude of both sides hinders national reconciliation, guarantees the emergence of a strong opposition to any future governing force and promises widespread populism and creating a wider ideological gulf in the Egyptian political scene.

The removal of Morsi does not diminish Egypt's economic, political and social problems. According to the likely scenario, the technocratic government that will soon be formed will have to introduce urgent but socially unpopular economic reforms, including cutting down on subsidies such as food and fuel. These will directly affect Egyptians. The ousting of Morsi will most likely put off the best experts from joining the new government as it entails taking on a risky responsibility that may cost them their careers. Furthermore, Muslim Brotherhood supporters (which still account for almost 40% of society, according to polls) are disillusioned with state institutions, and the removal of their man from the presidency only exacerbates the divisions in Egyptian society. It may lead to a hostile political alienation of the MB or even an attempt to sabotage the new government and institutions. Likewise, one cannot exclude the possibility of the Freedom and Justice Party winning the upcoming parliamentary elections again, although most likely it will not be able to repeat the 2012 result.

The decisions and rhetoric of both camps' leaders will play a decisive role in taming the level of tensions. The key MB leader in this regard is not so much Morsi as the group's supreme religious guide, Mohammad Badi, and his deputy, Khairat El-Shater. In the other camp, the National Salvation Front's leaders represent radically different political views, and it is rather unlikely that they will be able to stave off populism in their ranks. Even though the street protests will continue, there is high confidence the situation will not turn into violent conflict as the potent army has secured the strategic points throughout the country.

Egypt is the first "Arab Spring" country where the Islamists have failed to govern effectively after the fall of the dictator. By taking power in 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood lost the distinction of being in the opposition and took on the responsibility for running the state. As predicted, they floundered in their task, both in their attempts to steer the country out of its economic crisis (marked by an outflow of investments, low foreign reserves, rise in unemployment and high debt) and in social perceptions (lack of security, justice, dignity). That it failed may have regional repercussions as the Muslim Brotherhood epitomises a certain model of a religious political party that has been copied in other countries: Tunisia, Syria, Libya and in the Palestinian territories. The loss of power and some of the initial support of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has written a certain scenario that can be repeated in other "Arab Spring" countries.

The ousting of Morsi by the army poses a major policy dilemma for the EU and Member States about whether to accept undemocratic regime change in a country in its vicinity. As they were unsupportive of MB in general, EU Member States and the U.S. have officially responded to the changes cautiously but *de facto* favourably. However, the seemingly permanent social discontent in Egypt, interrupted occasionally by outbursts of joy at change, may give the army a pretext to intervene in the future at will. It should be noted that both of the governments that came to power after the fall of Mubarak—SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood—gradually lost popular support to the point of a state crisis. Realistically in the current circumstances the next government will not be able to meet society's expectations. It is a matter of time until yet another anti-government wave arrives. The uncritical international acceptance of the removal of Morsi sends the army a wrong signal for what to do in the future.

Furthermore, much to the discontent of the Egyptian street, the MB modelled its economic agenda on the Turkish AKP government, including accepting and espousing free market economics. It may be questionable then whether the next cabinet, if comprised of representatives of mostly leftist figures in the opposition, will be willing to take on the liberal economic reforms expected by the EU and U.S. It may well turn out that the MB government's economic policies were more palatable to Europe than its successors' will be. Overall, the EU and the Member States need to incorporate in their policies a general fact that the existence of a large, religiously inspired group is ingrained in the modern Egyptian social specificity. That part of society has to have proper representation in state structures. In this regard, the decision to crack down on the leadership of MB, the largest organisation representing this specific part of Egyptian society, should not be accepted by the international community.