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Morsi's Ouster and the Struggle to Revive the Egyptian Revolution **Yoram Meital**

Over the past year, a recurrent argument has been sounded that in Egypt, the Arab Spring has turned into an Islamic winter. Those making this claim cited the victories by religious party candidates in free and fair elections to government institutions and the process of Islamization promoted by President Mohamed Morsi. However, proponents of this view have focused on one side of the political spectrum, and have tended to dismiss the existence of a significant opposing camp that includes the sectors that led to the civil uprising that toppled the Mubarak regime, as well as the profound influence of the security forces and the judicial system. In fact, the dramatic events now marking Egypt should be examined in the political and social context that characterizes the revolutionary transitional phase underway since the fall of the Mubarak regime.

The Mubarak regime was another link in the authoritarian order established in Egypt with the July Revolution of 1952. The military coup carried out by Gamal Abdel Nasser and his colleagues 61 years ago strove to replace the monarchy with a governmental system based on democracy and social justice. Along with gaining prominent social and political achievements, the Officers regime laid the foundations for the establishment of an authoritarian regime that continued for decades. The constitution was annulled and the parties and parliament dispersed. The short honeymoon between the Free Officers regime and the Muslim Brotherhood ended with the movement being banned and thousands of its activists imprisoned. The security forces sowed fear among the general public, which opted to keep its distance from any political activity.

Under the leadership of Presidents Anwar Sadat and Husni Mubarak, controlled party activity was gradually permitted, and the opposition resumed public activity, even though authorities made it difficult for the opposition to function, including by prohibiting the Muslim Brotherhood from operating as a party. Nevertheless, the growing criticism of the

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regime was evident in the public sphere, and government authorities had a particularly difficult time thwarting the extensive public activity of the Muslim Brotherhood. The constitution permitted independent candidates to run for office, and the achievements of Muslim Brotherhood candidates in elections to the parliament and trade unions established the organization's position as the leading opposition group in Egypt.

The civil uprising that took place in Egypt in early 2011 reshuffled the cards politically, and symbolized the power of civil society. Military intervention forced the President to relinquish his position, but only after millions of Egyptians fought with determination to topple the regime. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took it upon itself to run the affairs of state, but the goals it sought to promote were substantially different from those of the forces that had led the civil uprising. The steps taken by General Hussein Tantawi and his colleagues disturbed many of leaders of the civil uprising, and the dispute sharpened when SCAF published a roadmap for the transition period which called for elections for the parliament and the presidency before the drafting of a new constitution was completed. The plan received critical support from the Muslim Brotherhood, which saw it as an opportunity to gain power in the elections and shape the new governmental order. The Muslim Brotherhood's leadership benefited from an efficient organizational apparatus and far greater financial resources than the other parties. Most of the non-religious parties and the groups identified with the young generation movement demanded that elections be held only after the approval of the constitution, which among other things was to define the powers of the government, the status of Islamic law (*sharia*), and the extent of the civil liberties. Opposition to the continued rule of the military grew, but it was determined to enforce the framework it had designed.

In free and fair elections to both upper and lower (parliament) houses, Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist candidates scored unprecedented achievements. Nonetheless, it quickly became clear that taking over the government was far easier than governing. In the presidential election campaign, Muslim Brotherhood leaders promised to fulfill the objectives of the January revolution, include different groups in managing the affairs of state, and protect the interests of all citizens – in short, to lead as an inclusive governmental movement. In practice, the massive majority they enjoyed in the legislative and executive branches and in the constitutional drafting committee put into a test the Islamists' commitment to serve the entire Egyptian public, not just the religious.

In the year of his presidency, Morsi's conduct underscored the gap between these commitments and the policy he promoted. It quickly became evident that he adopted a governing style that more than anything was reminiscent of Mubarak. His plans to save the economy from the grave crisis and to restore internal security failed to bear fruit, and

the economic distress grew worse. Various opposition parties and movements contended that Morsi, a former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, failed in his handling of domestic problems because his policy sought to serve the interests of the movement. The issue of the Islamization of governmental and social institutions became the center of the dispute between the President's supporters and opponents. Critics pointed to hundreds of appointments of individuals identified with political Islam to the most senior positions in the government, the local administration, and the media. There was also sharp criticism of the manner in which the President intervened in the work of the constitutional committee and in particular, his hasty decision to hold a referendum on the constitution in spite of broad public opposition to the move, which was referred to as underhanded opportunism. Criticism of steps taken by the President has also been evident among the security establishment and the top ranks of the judiciary.

However, the process that led to President Morsi's ouster was begun by a group of young people who in late April launched a campaign called *tamarud* (rebellion). This initiative gained unprecedented public support, and within a few weeks the signatures were collected of more than 20 million citizens, calling to move up the presidential elections. Organizers of the campaign also initiated the huge anti-Morsi demonstrations on June 30, 2013 and declared their intention of launching a civilian rebellion if the President did not resign immediately. Morsi categorically rejected these demands, and the Muslim Brotherhood launched a campaign in support of the President. The military's call to the opposing sides to reach understandings within a few days failed to bear fruit. More than 20 million citizens demonstrated around the country, and the fear of paralysis and of an outbreak of violence grew. The ultimatum published by the military clearly favored the President's opponents, and in fact, Morsi was deposed forty-eight hours later.

Although stunned by the President's ouster, the Muslim Brotherhood leadership quickly recovered and decided to fight back. It called upon its millions of supporters to demonstrate until Morsi was returned to the presidential palace, and defiantly declared that it would fearlessly oppose the perpetrators of the military coup that it claimed had taken place. Its political rivals were described as serving the interests of the Mubarak regime, and army commanders were presented as traitors who had betrayed the trust of President Morsi.

Thus far government and military leaders have taken limited steps against supporters of the deposed President. The authorities ordered the shut down of Islamist-run television channels, and arrested dozens of activists and leaders of both the Muslim Brotherhood movement and Salafist radical groups. The civil and military leadership that now holds the reins of power has declared its resilient intention to put the January revolution back on its original track, and to ensure civil liberties as well as law and order. However, these

objectives can be achieved only if the current leadership acts sincerely to heal the unprecedented rift in Egyptian society.

The process that characterized President Morsi's ouster indicates that there is little basis to the common claim that post-Mubarak Egypt has entered an Islamic winter. However, it is incorrect to assume that establishment of a governmental order based on values of freedom and social justice will be possible without the inclusion of the Islamists in the Land of the Nile.

