



FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE E-NOTES

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THREE PERSPECTIVES ON EGYPT

We are pleased to present three diverse perspectives on the historic events in Egypt. What happened – a coup, a corrective revolution, or something else? What's ahead for Egypt? And what should the US do? This essay by Raymond Stock is the third in the series. For the other essays by Ann M. Lesch and Samuel Tadros, please visit:

<http://www.fpri.org/featured/three-perspectives-egypt>.

In addition, we offer links to related essays published by FPRI Trustees Ahmed Charai ("Egypt and North Africa's Religious Tumult," The National Interest, July 9, 2013) and Dov Zakheim ("The People's Coup," Shadow Government, July 6, 2013):

<http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/egypt-north-africas-religious-tumult-8702>

http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/07/06/the_peoples_coup

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COMPLETE THE ISLAMISTS' DEFEAT

By Raymond Stock



Raymond Stock spent 20 years in Egypt, and was deported by the Mubarak regime for a 2009 article in Foreign Policy Magazine critiquing the then-culture minister in 2010. A repeated FPRI contributor who has published broadly on the Middle East, he is writing a biography of 1988 Egyptian Nobel laureate in literature Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) for Farrar, Straus & Giroux, and is a prolific translator of his works—most recently Before the Throne (Anchor Books/Random House, 2012). He is a Shillman-Ginsburg Writing Fellow at the Middle East Forum, and a former Visiting Assistant Professor Arabic and Middle East Studies at Drew University. His earlier FPRI essays can be found here:

<http://www.fpri.org/contributors/raymond-stock>

"Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak all tried to get rid of the Brotherhood. Only Mursi succeeded."

--Sultan Sooud Al-Qassem, Facebook, July 3, 2013

On July 8, the Obama administration finally did the right thing in Egypt—by not calling what Mohamed Mursi’s historically huge opposition rightly hails as its “corrective revolution” a coup. Thus it prevented the automatic cutoff of America’s \$1.6 billion of mostly military aid, without which our connection to the largest Arab state (and perhaps the Suez Canal) would be lost. But it would be a grave mistake if the U.S. should insist that the aid would continue only if everyone—the deposed Muslim Brotherhood (and other Islamists) among them—is included in the now-rebooted “transition to democracy.” Nor should the Egyptians want to go to this route. Such would be an historic error that will sabotage whatever good might come from the already diminished influence which that aid buys – as well as from the heroic actions of the Egyptians themselves.

In addition to Egypt’s probable lack of enough secular and civil society to create a genuine democracy, the seemingly imminent civil war would not permit that transition to happen, at least not now—and perhaps not ever. With Monday’s opening clash in front of the Ministry of Defense that left roughly fifty Islamists dead and one soldier slain, after numerous other killings over the year of MB rule, and culminating in scenes such as the murder of opposition teens by throwing them off of an Alexandria rooftop last week, the much-feared Algeria 1992 redux may already have begun.

Yet as tragic—and even heartless—as this might seem, it would be better to have that civil conflict now than to wait until the Islamists are better armed and prepared, especially having been invited back into power to share the running of the state. That will give only them both renewed legitimacy and access to material resources that they do not deserve—and which the last year shows they will only abuse.

Luckily, the cost of keeping of them out may not in fact be civil war. That twenty-two million Egyptians signed the petition to oust Mursi circulated by the ad hoc group, Tamarod (“Rebel,” with which the now “old” youth movements of January 25th 2011 belatedly joined forces), and that as many evidently marched to bring him down, as compared to the relative smallness of the protests demanding his return, shows a catastrophic loss of the MB’s base. This only confirms the trend seen in the halving of votes for it between the 2011-12 parliamentary elections and Mursi’s squeaker (possibly rigged) election victory for president in June 2012. From the beginning of the uprising against Mubarak until roughly ten days ago, the Islamists drew much, much larger crowds than their detractors—now the opposite is true, in apparently gargantuan proportions. And even the ease with which the army swept away the once awe-inspiring MB machine may provoke many of those formerly in its thrall to dump it in favor of the “strong horse” that bucked it off last week.

That said, for most of the June 30 demonstrators, it was arguably more the desperate economy than the MB’s ideology that brought them to the streets. According to a Pew poll published April 30, 74 percent of Egyptian Muslims want the shari`a (Islamic law) to rule the land—which is the heart of the MB’s program. Moreover, if large-scale fighting does break out, the military might split, making the scene more like Syria than Algeria.

Nonetheless, the MB’s attempt to Islamistize (as I term it) every institution of Egyptian life—from the judiciary (which Mubarak found annoyingly independent, but—unlike Mursi—did little to change), to the educational system and the military, and all things in between—turned off even many pious Egyptians. Add to that its open alliance with convicted terrorists (releasing dozens of them from prison, trying to get the “Blind Sheikh,” Omar Abdel-Rahman and his friends out of our prisons, conspiring with Abdel-Rahman’s organization, al-Gama`a al-Islamiya to attack the U.S. embassy in Cairo and perhaps even in Benghazi last September 11 in a bid to pressure us to free him—even appointing a member of the group to be governor of the province where it carried out the devastating Luxor Massacre in 1997—and finally declaring jihad on the Assad regime in Syria), and there is simply no place for the MB and its Salafi allies (including those, like the Nour Party, have tactically turned against him now) in public life.

Add as well the numerous Coptic Christians (and finally Shi`ites, four of whom were hacked to death in Giza in June) murdered by the MB and the Salafis, with the obvious cooperation of official security forces, not to mention the scores of demonstrators butchered with blades or birdshot by the Brotherhood’s militia long before the army finally moved, offer ample proof of this truth. Indeed, the idea of taming these jihadis—and that’s what they call themselves—on the totally discredited theory that the responsibility of power will “moderate” them, is an idea only mad enough to be believed by world leaders, star journalists and Middle East experts in droves.

Hence neither the principal warning to General Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi—Mursi’s Islamist, American-trained Defense

Minister and military chief that turned against him (perhaps as much to protect the MB's Islamist program from the damage Mursi's leadership was inflicting on it as any other obvious motive) nor his own policy, ought to be about political inclusion (at least not of Islamists). Rather it should be to safeguard the still-vulnerable secular civil society and the nation's Christians and other minorities, rather than persecuting them as even the army, itself riddled with Muslim militants and their sympathizers, did even before Mursi.

Despite the dangers of growing violence, the removal of Mohamed Mursi is a truly promising moment for Egypt—and should be for us all. The Islamists have suffered their first great setback since the launching of the Arab Spring, one that threatens all their gains everywhere, from Cairo to Tunis, Tripoli to Benghazi, from Aleppo to Sanaa, and even perhaps to their Turkish neighbors in Ankara and Istanbul who have really begun to rebel under Recep Tayyep Erdogan's slier version of MB rule. Egypt has a long, long way to go to create a truly open, prosperous, and democratic society, and the path may be even more bloody, but only now does she have even the slightest chance to succeed. This is what we should be focused on now, rather than expecting a smooth, stable democracy while placating the forces of darkness—who can never be appeased.

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