



PERSPECTIVES

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Welcome Back to Mubarak's Egypt

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The latest chapter in the Egyptian Revolution is being celebrated by many as another victory for democracy and freedom. However, it is nothing more than a return to the military dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak. Egypt's troubles may only be beginning.

The Egyptian army's announcement of an ultimatum "to heed the will of the people" in retrospect said it all. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Minister of Defense appointed by the democratically-elected president he was about to ouster, talked about "the will of the people" in the typical manner of dictators, as if the people were united. In fact, the people were deeply divided between an opposition that wanted President Mohamed Morsi's head and his supporters who believed that the first president in Egypt's history to be elected in free elections should be allowed to remain for the full four years in office, as stipulated by the constitution. This constitution, they argued, was supported by 63 percent of voters in a national referendum.

The army's moves on the ground clearly showed that it sided completely with the opposition. All of their demands were met and more: Morsi was ousted and placed under arrest, the constitution was suspended, a government that included the military was set to take over, and new presidential and parliamentary elections were called for the distant future. Just to make sure, the military refrained from committing itself to any timetable.

The clearest indication that Egypt is moving back in time – restoring what the Egyptians call "the deep state" that prevailed under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak – was the decision to replace the ousted democratically-elected president with the President of the Constitutional Court, Adli Mansour. Mansour's bio reveals that he started his legal career in the legislative section

in the President's Office under Gamal Abdel Nasser, showing clearly that he is not the man that will allow any moves to restore democracy.

Ironically, the same upper-middle class youth who ousted former president Hosni Mubarak were now instrumental in the comeback of Mubarak's Egypt. The same youth who just a year ago shouted "down with the military" and were used by Morsi in his confrontation with the army, were now equally used by the military and others in the "deep state" to bring themselves back to power. The military lost power to Morsi after ruling Egypt ineptly for eighteen months in the aftermath of Mubarak's ouster. Just one year later they find themselves back on top.

The youth, the military, and the United States should have been wiser. They should have allowed Morsi his full term in office to fail. At that point, a weak president ruling over an even weaker state might have been pressured to hold democratic elections once again. Washington could have placed pressure on the Egyptian government to hold free elections in such a situation, reminding Morsi that an American withdrawal of financial and technological aid could cause Egypt to collapse. The Muslim Brotherhood, in the biggest and most important Arab state, would have then been elected out of office. This would have delivered a clear message throughout the Arab world that politics is about electing people who are armed with policies needed to address society's pressing problems, not with guns and other modes of suppression. The focus on the highly contentious issues of religious and national identity would have given way to an emphasis on the pragmatics of enhancing human welfare and citizen rights.

Instead, the bitter adherents of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Salafist groups (and at a later stage the youth in Tamarod once they realize that they were wronged again) might learn an entirely different lesson, an ominous one played out in other revolutions: the beheading of potential counter-revolutionaries in a manner they themselves refrained from doing after Mubarak's ouster. Despite the fireworks and roars of Egypt's opposition as Mubarak's military took over the reins of power, Egypt's trials and tribulations are hardly over. They might only be unfolding.

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