

## Egypt after the Arab Spring

**By Adrien Orlowski**

***Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies***

The fall of former president Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 left the Egyptian people with a real momentum for democratic aspirations. By electing Mohamed Morsi to power, many believed that time had finally come to see their expectations finally translated into concrete policies.

Today, however, this remains an illusion. So far, all Morsi has been able to achieve is to consolidate his power through populist rhetoric, thereby hoping to reduce the number of revolts still happening throughout Egypt. Despite these attempts, Egypt continues to suffer from profound political, economic, and social problems, which are unlikely to end if the executive does not assume its responsibilities.

### **The absence of the state?**

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, the *Egyptian Gazette* shed light on a series of public lynching committed by civilians in various parts of the country. This type public vigilante justice, encouraged by the state, seeks to punish outlaws at a time where security forces have been largely absent from the streets. Many question the role of the state in providing public order and protection to the people. Ali Naggui, a teacher at an Egyptian governmental school, told the newspaper that violent incidents increasingly have become common since Hosni Mubarak's ousting two years ago, adding that "they have become symptomatic of the growing chaos in Egypt."<sup>1</sup> After decades of slow growth, President Morsi is struggling to revive the economy and inflation is rising. The government's failure to address fundamental economic problems such as inflation and unemployment only fuels anger. It becomes more apparent every week that Egypt is heading towards a sudden economic crash, which is likely to lead to a political one in the near future.

### **A military intervention?**

In the past, when the government of Egypt became vulnerable, the army would take the lead in an attempt to restore calm and security. This was the case after Mubarak was ousted out of office. However, it is widely believed that, despite divergences, the military and Morsi recently made a deal that clearly defined each other's roles. Now guaranteed by the Egyptian Constitution, these mandates imply that the military is very unlikely to interfere in the political affairs of the state and the Muslim Brotherhood. "On the contrary, they appear to be quite content to remain distant from the presidency, as well as from exercising any governing authority at all, as long as their own autonomy is assured"<sup>2</sup>, H.A Hellyer, a fellow at the Washington-based Brookings Institution, said.

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<sup>1</sup> Wael Salem, "Taking the law into their own hands," *The Egyptian Gazette*, April 4, 2013 available at <http://213.158.162.45/~egyptian/?action=news&id=28969>

<sup>2</sup> Rabie, Dalia. "Military denies interest in intervening in presidential affairs, but remains cautious," *The Egypt Independent*, 4 April 2013, available at

## Increasing human rights abuses

As the government faces growing criticism, it has recently arrested and sued television satirist and comedian, Bassem Youssef, for allegedly "insulting the president". Also calling for the withdrawal of the TV channel that screens Bassem Youssef's show, the Muslim Brotherhood claiming Youssef violated "religious principles." The Cairo court dismissed the case at the end of last week but the story illustrates the alarming escalation of politically motivated arrests and prosecutions. "Recently, up to 33 people have been targeted within the last two weeks for the same reasons", Amnesty International affirmed.<sup>3</sup> With growing worries about a massive crackdown on freedom of expression, minority groups and women's right also remain at risk. Overall, this growing criticism points towards the increasing vulnerability of Morsi's government.

## Into his predecessor's footsteps

Just like his predecessor Hosni Mubarak, Morsi's government continues to be running on a set of dysfunctional institutions, still marred by corruption. As journalist Amr Adly concludes, this explains why no relevant political and economic decisions can be made.<sup>4</sup> As long as this goes on, Egypt is set to plunge in a never-ending spiral of political turmoil, social strife, and economic decline, he adds. Where the people ask for more political and civil representations, the government follows the former regime's footsteps by further oppressing their right to freedom expression instead of addressing the demands.

## Silencing the people's voice

This phenomenon is not surprising, according to Aly El Raggal, journalist at *Egypt Independent*. To him, efforts by the current government to suppress dissenting voices and demands can be seen in four attempts by the Muslim Brotherhood to clamp down on the public sphere. First, after winning the Parliamentary majority in 2011-2012, the Muslim Brotherhood asserted that the revolution was over. Their aim was to reduce the dynamics of the revolution and transform it into procedural mechanisms: "The streets were no more the proper place to express opinion."<sup>5</sup> Second was the attempt to legitimize "revolutionary acts" only if they supported of Morsi's decisions. When uprisings were organized against the president, new exclusionary practices, such as demonizing the opposition or attacking the media, began to arise. The third attempt involved the ratification of the Constitution. The Constitution seeks to limit the right to assemble, criminalizes protests, and gives the police and military the upper hand over

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<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/military-denies-interest-intervening-presidential-affairs-remains-cautious>

<sup>3</sup> "More face charges in Egypt's escalating free speech and dissent crackdown", Amnesty International, 4 April 2013, available at <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/31474/>

<sup>4</sup> Amr Adly. "What's Egypt's politics all about", *Egypt Independent*, 13 March 2013, available at <http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/what-egypt-s-politics-all-about>

<sup>5</sup> Aly El Raggal. "The Muslim Brotherhood, the state, and the public sphere", *Egypt Independent*, 12 March 2013, available at <http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/muslim-brotherhood-state-and-public-sphere>

civil spaces. Finally, the fourth attempt is the Brotherhood's efforts to regulate coffee shops and other spaces of public sphere.

Although it might still be too early to draw conclusions from the post-revolution situation in Egypt, the government is struggling to respond to the democratic aspirations of its people. More interested in consolidating its power, the state does not realize that as long as socio-economic issues are not addressed, the socio-political context will worsen and lead the state to use harsher measures against the people. Morsi will have to radically reconsider his strategy if he ever wants to put an end to uprisings.

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