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EGYPT NARRATIVES: A BRIEF CRITIQUE OF THE REASONS ADVANCED TO JUSTIFY THE EGYPTIAN MILITARY COUP OF JULY 2013

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In light of the recent developments in Egypt, and in particular the escalation of violence following the July military coup, The Cordoba Foundation is pleased to publish this important paper by Dr Wael Haddara, Senior Advisor to the deposed President Mohammed Morsy. The paper, Egypt Narratives, attempts to dissect some of the major issues that currently abound and deals with the events of the past year.
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Introduction

I expect people reading this to be quite busy and so I will forego the usual essay style and use a point format. As a preamble, there are two arguments I will *not* make. I will *not* argue that the President's first year in office was mistake-free. There were many and the President alluded to some during his most recent speech before the coup. The second argument I will not make is that the coup has no popular support. Without a doubt, there is significant resentment among a considerable portion of the Egyptian population towards the President. Nevertheless, neither of those considerations – mistakes and alienating part of the electorate – constitutes reasonable grounds (if ever such an adjective could be used) for a military coup.

Coup apologists are using a number of accusations to justify the coup.

- a. Egyptians lack the "basic mental ingredients" for democracy
- b. President Morsy was not inclusive during his year in government and was unable to unite the country. But for the military coup, the country would have descended into chaos and civil war.
- c. The President, and the Muslim Brotherhood, were intent on building an "illiberal" democracy, one where there was voting, but where human rights including freedom of speech and expression as well as women rights are limited.
- d. The economy was imploding due to the poor management of the country and the Army had to intervene.
- e. This was not a coup. This was a popular uprising and the army merely supported the people as of February 11, 2011.

I will not distinguish (a) above with a response. The remainder of those arguments, even if there is some truth to them, is entirely without merit *as a justification for a military coup* that derails the democratic transition of the country.

Inclusiveness

President Morsy's record on inclusiveness began as Chairman of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). The FJP specifically eschewed a coalition with the Islamist Salafist Nour and the Building and Development parties in favour of building a coalition with secularist forces such as Al-Wafd Party, the liberal "Ghad Al-Thawra party", the Nasserist Karama Party and others. Al-Wafd Party withdrew from the "Democratic Alliance" believing it could win more seats on its own than within the alliance but committed to ongoing coordination with the coalition.

The President did not polarise the country. Egypt was deeply polarised and divided when he assumed office. At the time of the Presidential elections there were some 30 political parties, all but four of which were represented in the People's Assembly that was subsequently dissolved on June 14, 2012. In the first round of the Presidential elections 13 candidates vied for the country's top office and indeed 5 of the 13 obtained more than 10% of the vote.

Immediately after assuming office, the President attempted to heal this divide. In his first two months of office, the Presidency coordinated meetings with every segment of society. One of the first meetings was with

- Representatives of all Christian denominations (June 27, 2012) and
- Leaders of political parties (June 28, 2012).
- Media figures and the head of the Journalists' syndicate (July 19, 2012) and
- Specifically with Coptic Church leaders (July 21, 2012) as well as with
- Labour leaders (July 24, 2012 and 2012) and
- Artists, actors and writers (September 6, 2012).

The President also sought to reconcile Egypt's present with its past, for example, granting Past President Sadat as well as General Sa'deddin ElShazli posthumous medals for their contributions to Egypt.

Violent attacks against the President and indeed attempts to unseat him began almost immediately after he assumed office. The first of those was August 8, identified by his security personnel as an attempt on his life. This was followed by a call for a revolution on August 24 which saw the first attacks on the Presidential palace and again on October 12...etc.

Calls for "million man marches" continued unabated through the year. In total, there were 24 calls over 12 months – in effect every 2 weeks. In addition there were 7709 protests throughout the country.

In a private meeting held between the first and second rounds of the Presidential elections, the President offered two presidential candidates Vice President position with "defined roles and responsibilities." One candidate (Sabbahi) rejected the offer out of hand while the other (Dr

AbulFotouh) declined but suggested he would nominate someone from his party. A third presidential candidate (Khaled Ali) was offered the portfolio for Social Justice, again with defined responsibilities. He neither accepted nor declined. The three top presidential candidates as well as Abul'Elma Maadi attended the meeting. Khaled Ali attended at the tail end of the meeting. The meeting was held on June 5, 2012 at the Kempinski hotel. All three candidates descended on Tahrir that evening calling for the results of the first round of elections to be voided and for a "council for the presidency" to be formed.

The President's choice for PM was not an MB or FJP member. The President sought to appoint a technocrat and he chose a minister who had served in the previous cabinet. Hesham Qandil was appointed July 24, 2012 and cabinet formed August 2, 2012.

Members of the FJP constituted 14% of the first cabinet, (5 out of 36 ministers). That number increased to 22% (8/36) in January 2012 and 28% (10/36) by May 2013 . The proportion of Governors was similar – 37% of governors belonged to the FJP (10/27), also phased in over two stages.

The cabinet also retained four ministers from the previous Ganzoury government including the powerful Foreign Affairs and Finance portfolios.

The President had the authority to appoint a third of the members of the Upper House (90/270). In December 2012, 75% of the appointments made were *not* affiliated with Islamist parties. A number of political and legal personalities were appointed including 10 labour leaders. The President also appointed 12 Coptic Egyptians. In the Upper House of 2010, there were 3 appointed Coptic Egyptians and the largest number before that was in 1979 (10). Several declined or withdrew immediately after being appointed.

The President had initially indicated he would appoint 5 VPs. Due to a number of considerations, the President instead elected to appoint a single VP in keeping with the existing constitution. He appointed 4 Assistants (rank: deputy PM) including one nominated by the Nour Party, one nominated by the Coptic Church, one from the FJP and the first Egyptian woman to occupy this rank.

Starting in December 2012, the President called for a number of national dialogues. The first dialogue related to the November 22, 2012 constitutional declaration issued by the President through which he sought to immunize the constituent assembly and the Upper Shura House from dissolution. The President was legitimately concerned that the Supreme Constitutional Court would annul both leaving Egypt without an elected house and without a mechanism for writing the constitution. (In June 2013, the SCC did in fact proceed to rule that both bodies were unconstitutional and but for the passage of the Constitution, both would have been dissolved).

For a variety of reasons, some legitimate, others political, the constitutional declaration was met with extreme disapproval, including violent street demonstrations and attacks on the Presidential palace. The President extended an invitation to public figures, legal experts and opposition

parties. Most opposition parties refused to participate. The President gave the assembled group carte blanche to amend the declaration as they see fit and eventually ratified the resolution they adopted. That dialogue was co-chaired by M Saleem Al-Awa, a presidential contender and Dr Ayman Nour, head of the opposition Ghad Al-Thawra party.

I do not recall an example in living memory where a President agrees beforehand to the results of deliberations chaired by a former rival and an opposition figure. Yet that is precisely what the President agreed to.

The President proposed a dialogue on the Elections Law, and another on constitutional amendments, in early January 2013. Recognizing that some opposition figures may find it politically difficult to participate in a dialogue headed by the President, the President graciously appointed his Vice President, Mahmoud Mekky to lead the dialogue. Again most opposition parties refused to participate. The former was conducted and led to a proposed elections law. The latter dialogue never materialised. VP Mekky subsequently reported that Mr El-Baradei in particular told him that the "street is not in a mood for dialogue."

Throughout the year, most invitations for dialogue or participation were rebuffed. The excuses were many. During the formation of cabinet, some claimed that this government would not be able to govern effectively because of military hegemony. Others were unavailable, or the task was too difficult. Others took the position that there is purity in opposition and power was too corrupting...etc. Whatever the excuses and reasons given, the pool of available opposition figures willing to shoulder part of the responsibility was small from the outset and became progressively smaller as the scope of the challenge became evident.

Inclusiveness, like the Tango, takes two.

Rights and Democracy

Democracy

The President strongly believed in the need to set Egypt on a path towards representative government that could not be reversed. And so, despite choruses that his popularity is plummeting, the President sought to have parliamentary elections as quickly as practicable. In my conversations with him, the President seemed to believe that as political parties gain seats in Parliament, they will have to be more constructive and focused on resolving the mounting problems facing Egypt.

Twice the Supreme Constitutional Court rejected the Elections law, delaying elections that could have naturally produced an opposition or at least a coalition government.

Under the Egypt constitution of 2012, the PM enjoys widespread powers and indeed, articles 139 and 141 set severe limits on the President. The President selects the PM, but the House of

Representatives must approve the PM. Outside of defense, foreign policy and national security, the President “wields his powers through the PM”.

It remains *incomprehensible* why, in the face of such widespread dissatisfaction, the various political opponents could not wait a few months for elections that would have delivered a sharp rebuke to the President.

It is also incomprehensible how a temporary president appointed by the Military and who wields unlimited and unrestricted powers and controls the Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers for an unspecified period of time is somehow better for Egyptian democracy.

Rights

Realising a society of rights was a priority for the President. He appointed an entire working group at the Presidency concerned with navigating Egyptian Human Rights in the aftermath of the Revolution. The group was led by Dr Nermeen AbdelBari and worked on a number of files over the brief life of the Presidency. This is in marked contrast to any previous administration in Egypt over the course of the past 60 years.

The meaningful realisation of human dignity and human rights depends on a virtuous circle of economic and political stability as well functioning law enforcement and judicial branches. For Egypt, almost all of those elements were absent at the time of assuming office.

The President took a number of early decisions to affirm the State’s commitment to human rights. Immediately after assuming office (June 26, 2012), the President formed a legal committee to examine cases of civilians tried before military courts. The President issued pardons for 557 civilians tried before military courts on July 19 and a further 58 civilians on August 2, 2012.

The President was keen to see the Constitution ratified because it spelled out specific rights and protections. While it may not have been perfect, the document provided a vast improvement over the existing situation.

The Constitution remained ineffectual because Parliament had been dissolved. Hence, many of the protections afforded by the Constitution were never realised.

Security services in Egypt after the Jan 25 revolution did not succeed in transforming into law enforcement agencies with a community service focus. The President adopted a gradualist response vis-à-vis the security services. There was widespread corruption in the services and he was concerned that a massive cleansing campaign would lead to the sort of effect seen after de-Baathification in Iraq with numerous aggrieved officers now with time on their hands. The President adopted an approach of changing top leadership, empowering them to create change and relying on the Prosecution and the Judiciary to hold accountable those who continue to be corrupt. It is too early to assess the wisdom of that approach, but it is clear that the President

approached the issue seriously. The President also created the position of Deputy Minister of the Interior for Human Rights to improve police compliance and also ordered the formation of a unit to combat sexual harassment.

Notwithstanding the above, citing the lack of security sector reform as justification for the coup is nonsensical. The Coup welcomed back the security services with open arms. Police officers, much reviled since Jan 25, were carried on shoulders and neck in Tahrir. The repressive organ of State Security is being reconstituted and several of the changes instituted by the President to improve rights have been overturned.

As I write these lines, news is filtering in of massive casualties against peaceful protestors in support of President Morsy at the Republican Guard HQ. Those numbers have now reached 57 (official death toll) and 101 (reports by independent physicians). Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International condemned the massacre and confirmed the use of overwhelming force against peaceful protestors. The Guardian has published a detailed review of the events confirming that the protestors were entirely peaceful and were set upon in a coordinated fashion.

It is clear, in the aftermath of the coup, that the security apparatus of Mubarak's era remained entirely intact, unreformed and unrepentant. The pervasive lack of security and failure to investigate crimes and apprehend perpetrators was not merely an act of omission on their part, but an act of commission aided and abetted by an equally unreformed and obstructionist judiciary.

In many of the cases above (security sector reform, judiciary reform, etc) the depth of corruption was extensive. The President continually assessed several options for reform, all of which would have been massive and he was reluctant to invoke extra-judicial powers in enacting such reforms for fears it would set a precedent.

Sectarian violence was one of the most painful aspects of the absence of security. Violence against Copts increased in 2011. By June 2012 when President Morsy assumed office, there had already been a number of attacks against churches. Unfortunately those actions continued and culminated in the attack on Saint Mark cathedral in April 2013. The ongoing failure of the MOI in this particular instance was exasperating for the president. The wheels were set in motion for a number of interventions. Law graduates were to be appointed into entry ranks of the police services in large numbers and a broad-based security reform initiative was to be launched. The former was announced in the President's speech on June 26 and the latter was scheduled for August of this year.

Furthermore, the constitution obligated the state to enact the right of religious communities to have places of worship as regulated a law. Until such law was enacted by Parliament, the President issued presidential decrees for two Churches to be built within a few months of his Presidency. Of note, there had been 16 churches built in the past 30 years.

Women's rights

The President appointed an advisor on Women's Rights and Empowerment and initiated a national dialogue on the empowerment of Egyptian women. The initiative was launched with the cooperation of the National Centre for Social and Criminal Research and the participation of many governmental and civil society organizations including the National Council for Women, the National Council for Motherhood and Children, representatives of syndicates, and members of various political parties. Six major workshops and 54 roundtable discussions were underway at the time of the coup.

The role of NGOs

The President initially gave the Minister of Justice responsibility for developing a new NGO law to invigorate and protect the role of civil society organization in the New Egypt. The Ministry of Justice, dominated as it was by security elements held over from the old regime, proposed an extremely restrictive draft law. The Presidency took matter into its own hands and prepared its own draft. The Presidency initiated a dialogue with a large number of local and international stakeholders to develop the best possible law under the circumstances. Internationally, the Presidency sought out the input of both the Venice Commission and the UK Charities Commission and incorporated a number of their recommendations in the final draft. While the draft was not perfect, it was a vast improvement over anything that the country had seen in decades and stood a good chance of strengthening the civil society sector.

The Economy

Egypt's economy, while in rough shape, was not imploding.

Between January 2011 and June 2012, when the President assumed office, Egypt's foreign currency reserves dwindled from approximately US\$38 billion to US\$15 billion. The ruling Supreme Council for the Armed Forces bled the country's foreign reserves to stem the tide of a devaluing Egyptian pound. During the President's year in office, foreign currency reserves were generally maintained through a combination of grants, loans and deposits.

Despite these challenges, there have been significant achievements in some sectors, and an ongoing drive to implement the government's vision. In a very difficult global economic environment, real GDP still rose from 1.8% to 2.4%; actual investments rose 7% to 182 billion pounds and tourism registered a return to near pre-revolution levels.

In 2013, the wheat crop achieved record levels, reducing the need for importing wheat using foreign currency.

Structural reforms in the areas of food and fuel subsidies were successfully implemented. Food and fuel subsidies account for approximately half of Egypt's budget deficit. Despite that massive investment, it was approximated that only a quarter of the money spent on subsidies reaches the poor. Reform led to exposing an extensive network of corruption. For example, recent

implementation of a smart card system for fuel distribution revealed that some 8% of fuel stations registered to receive heavily subsidized fuel were in fact non-existent. These reforms will have had a major effect on reducing the budget deficit.

Income tax brackets were revamped to reduce the tax burden on middle and lower income earners while increasing government revenues through a modest increase in the tax brackets of higher income earners.

Some 6.4 million public sector employees will see have seen their pay rise by nearly 40% in 2013-2014 compared to 2011-2012.

Comprehensive health insurance was extended to approximately 13 million pre-school children.

Egypt was able to attract major foreign investment such the largest Samsung operation in the region; a redevelopment and expansion of the Suez Canal as well as a number of other projects that were underway.

These improvements in the economic situation during the President's year in office occurred though cabinet worked under the most challenging circumstances with some 7000 labour disruptions, strikes or protests in that year alone and an uncertain security situation.

The Coup As The Answer

Given the above, was a military coup truly the answer to Egypt's problems? While that question may have been theoretical in the first few hours of the coup, it is abundantly clear now what is at stake.

Immediately after the end of General Sissi's coup address, five independent tv channels were yanked from the air, their offices raided and crews arrested. The FJP newspaper also found itself harassed.

Arrest warrants were issued for hundreds of political figures on charges of "incitement". A number of arrests took place without warrants eg. Khairat Al-Shater's arrest according to eyewitness testimony. For some reason, the junta seems threatened enough by the 84-year old past Guide of the MB, Mahdi Akef to order his arrest.

There were a number of extra-judicial killings (number still uncertain, but approximately 70-80. This number will likely increase between the time of writing and distribution). This includes a father of two who was shot point-blank in the head for approaching a barbed wire fence to place a picture of the President.

The military junta has installed a president who now wields unlimited powers – executive, judicial and legislative – without any timeline for devolving those powers. President Morsy used his constitutional declaration to ensure the completion of a constitutional draft and that the Upper

House remains intact. The junta has used its first constitutional declaration to dissolve the country's sole remaining elected body.

One of the conditions that IMF placed on Egypt to conclude the loan was that the President must secure wide spread political and societal support for the hard economic decisions that must be taken especially regarding subsidies and sales taxes. The President proceeded with some of those decisions without hesitation. But it is difficult to see how a non-elected government that comes to power on the back of "street legitimacy" can implement such decisions.

Every day since the coup, news of further arbitrary arrests, detentions and seizures of funds are emerging.

Implications for the Region and the World

Santayana's observation that those who do *not* remember history are condemned to repeat it is very apropos of the current situation. The history of the Middle East is defined by specific years and incidents. One significant event is the military coup in Egypt in 1952 and subsequent brutal suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954 and 1965. Another is the pre-emption of elections in Algeria in 1991 to remove Islamists from power and their subsequent suppression. Both gave rise to violent extremist and maximalist groups who saw violence as the only way to participate fully in public life. In other words, the lesson learned by those groups was that unless they control public life, they would be violently excluded.

It is already clear that some in the region are drawing those lessons. The Muslim Brotherhood will almost certainly remain a political and social movement that eschews violence as a means to bring about social change. However, challengers on the right may become a more dominant force. The New York Times has already reported on how Libya's armed militias are interpreting the events in Egypt. I think it is safe to say that it is only a matter of time until the gloating voice of Ayman Zawahiri is heard. And reports are also that Syrian fighters are already shifting strategy to accommodate the lessons learned from Egypt.

Conclusion

In closing, there is much more that can be written. We were at fault for under-communicating, in real time, many of the developments that took place and the challenges that we faced. Today I am limited by working largely from memory and in the absence of the Principals central to these events. Nevertheless, the above, limited as it is, should give some insight into the past year. The "uprising" of June 30th was a pre-planned military coup aimed at removing a democratically elected president with significant public support.

I do not claim that the performance of the Presidency was perfect or stellar. But neither do the facts support the contention that the administration of Muhammad Morsy was so damaging, exclusionary or autocratic that a violent military coup was necessary to remove him from office.

And as we are currently witnessing, a significant portion of Egyptian society will simply not stand idly by and allow the coup to succeed.

Dr Wael Haddara, Senior Advisor to President Mohammed Morsy
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Appendix

The Numbers

There is ongoing debate on whether the events of July 3 constituted a coup or were merely an extension of the Jan 25 Revolution. Outside of the semantics of the debate, two important issues are important to address, both for historical accuracy as well as for the sake of understanding subsequent actions by the military.

1. Crowd estimates

One of the myths of June 30th now being propagated is that the numbers were large. There have been now a number of reports that have analyzed the numbers and it is clear that the number of protestors at its peak could not exceed 1-3 million across the entire country and no more than 200K in Cairo.

Sources:

- BBC News report by Ruth Alexander, "Counting crowds", July 15, 2013. Mark Joseph Stern, writing in Slate.com traced the bogus claims on numbers to a single tweet by N Sawiris.
- Slate article attributing the large numbers "estimated" to a single tweet by Naguib Sawiris. (http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2013/07/03/are_the_egyptian_protests_the_largest_in_human_history_probably_not_though.html)
- Associated Press report describing the numbers as in the "hundreds of thousands" <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/egypt-protesters-gather-demand-morsis-ouster>
- Ha'aretz article variably describing the numbers as in the millions, hundreds of thousands and even tens of thousands. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.532885>
- See Mathematics and Egyptians don't mix for a detailed crowd estimate <http://egyptreborn.blogspot.be/2013/07/mathematics-and-egyptians-dont-mix-july.html>

Based on similar methodologies, estimates of the pro-democracy protests are in the range of 1-5 million, depending on the day. The most conservative estimates are that a 1-1.5 million Egyptians have been *continually* on the streets since the coup, with the numbers reaching 5 million on days where there have been special calls for demonstrations.

About The Cordoba Foundation

Founded in 2005, The Cordoba Foundation (TCF) is an independent Public Relations, Research and Training unit, which promotes dialogue and the culture of peaceful and positive coexistence among civilisations, ideas and people. We do this by working with decision-making circles, researchers, religious leaders, the media, and a host of other stakeholders of society for better understanding and clearer comprehension of inter-communal and inter-religious issues in Britain and beyond.

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