
Egypt : Coup d'État, Act II

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For two years now I have often been asked why I have not visited Egypt, where I had been forbidden entry for 18 years. Just as often I repeated that on the basis of the information I was able to obtain—confirmed by Swiss and European officials—the Egyptian army remained firmly in control and had never left the political arena.

I never shared the widespread “revolutionary” enthusiasm. Nor did I believe that events in Egypt, any more than in Tunisia, were the result of a sudden historical upheaval. The peoples of these two countries suffered from dictatorship, from economic and social crisis ; they rose up in the name of dignity, social justice and freedom. Their awakening, their “intellectual revolution,” and their courage must be saluted. But to accept or justify a simple-minded, linear explanation of the political, geostrategic and economic issues would have been totally unconscionable. Nearly three years ago, in a book and then in a series of articles, I alerted my readers to a body of troubling evidences, and to the underlying geopolitical and economic considerations that were often missing from mainstream political and media analyses, and that insisted on submitting the euphoria that accompanied the “Arab spring” to critical analysis.

The Egyptian army has not returned to politics for the simple reason that it has never left. The fall of Hosni Mubarak was a military coup d'État that allowed a new generation of officers to enter the political scene in a new way, from behind the curtain of a civilian government. In an [article published on June 29 2012](#) I noted an Army high command declaration that the presidential election was temporary, for a six-month to one-year period (its title made the premonition explicit : “An election for nothing ?”). The American administration had monitored the entire process : its objective ally in Egypt over the past fifty years has been the army, not the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The latest revelations (see the [International Herald Tribune, July 5](#), and [Le Monde, July 6](#)) confirm what was already clear : the decision to overthrow President Mohamed Morsi had been made well before June 30. A conversation between President Morsi and General al-Sisi indicated that the head of the country's military had planned the overthrow and imprisonment of the president weeks before the popular upheaval that would justify the military coup “in the name of the people's will.” A clever strategy ! Orchestrate demonstrations involving millions of people in order to make believe that the army truly cares about the people ! Coup d'État, second act.

How then to analyze the immediate reaction of the American administration, which avoided using the term “coup d'État” (which, if accepted, would mean it could not provide financial support to the new regime) ? A curious position for a government that in its ‘surprise’ uses exactly the right words to exert full political, economic and legal leverage over the coup makers. European governments will follow suit, of course : the army has responded “democratically” to the call of the people. It's all too good to be true ! Magically, chronic blackouts, gasoline and natural gas shortages came to an abrupt end after the fall of the president. It was as though people had been deprived of the basic necessities in order to drive them into the streets. Amnesty International observed the strange attitude of the armed forces, which did not intervene in certain demonstrations (even though it was closely monitoring them), allowing the violence to spiral out of control, as though by design. The armed forces then accompanied its intervention with a saturation public relations campaign, providing the international media with photographs taken from its helicopters, depicting the Egyptian population as it cheered and celebrated their military saviors, as confirmed in [Le Monde](#).

Nothing, then, has really changed : the “Arab spring” and the Egyptian “revolution” continue under the guiding hand of General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi. Trained by the United States Army, the general has kept close contact with his American counterparts. The [New International Herald Tribune \(July 6-7\)](#) informs us that General al-Sisi is well known to the Americans, as well as to the government of Israel, with which he “and his office”, we are told, continued to “communicate and to coordinate” even while Mohamed Morsi occupied the presidential palace. Al-Sisi had earlier served in the Military Intelligence Services in the North Sinai, acting as go-between for the American and Israeli authorities. It would hardly be an understatement to say that Israel, like the United States, could only look favorably upon developments in Egypt.

What, after the fact, is surprising, is the simple-mindedness, the lack of experience and the nature of the mistakes made by Mohamed Morsi, by his allies, and by the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization. For the last three years, I have been sharply critical of the thinking, action and strategies of the “Liberty and Justice” party, as well as of the MB leadership (over the last twenty-five years, my analyses and commentary have been and remain sharply critical). The trap seemed glaringly obvious ; my writings on the subject ([book, and articles written between March and December 2012](#)) pointed to grave shortcomings. President Morsi cannot be fairly criticized for not doing all he could to establish relations with the opposition, either by inviting it to join the government or to take part in a broad national dialogue. But his approaches were rejected out of hand, with the opposition bitterly opposing his every initiative. The fact remains, however, that his management of the

business of state, his failure to listen to the voice of the people and even to some of his trusted advisors, his exclusivist relationship with the highest echelons of the MB leadership, his hasty and ill-considered decisions (some of which he later acknowledged as errors) must be unsparingly criticized. But on a more fundamental level, his greatest fault has been the utter absence of a political vision and the lack of clearly established political and economic priorities, his failure to struggle against corruption and poverty, and his egregious mismanagement of social and educational affairs. The demands of the International Monetary Fund (and its deliberate procrastination) placed the state in an untenable position : the Morsi government believed that the international institution would support it. It is only today, now that President Morsi has fallen, that the IMF appears prepared to remove what were previously insurmountable obstacles. This, coming a mere three days after the overthrow of a democratically elected government.

The naivety of the president, of his government and of the Muslim Brotherhood has been stunning. After sixty years of opposition and military repression (with the direct and indirect benediction of the US Administration and the West), how could they possibly have imagined that their former adversaries would support their rise to power, invoking democracy all the while ? Did they learn nothing from their own history, from Algeria in 1992, and, more recently, from Palestine ? I have been and remain critical, both of the (superficial) content of their program and the ambiguous strategy of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood (compromise with the armed forces and the United States, surrender on the economy and the Palestinian cause, etc.) but their lack of political awareness has been quite simply stupefying. To hear President Morsi tell General al-Sisi, a mere ten days before his overthrow, that he might well demote him (after all, he had appointed him) and that the Americans would “never permit a coup d’État” was as mind-boggling as it was surrealistic.

Some observers were startled to see [the salafis](#) , in particular the an-Nour party, join forces with the military alongside the “democratic” faction opposed to President Morsi. Were the outcome not so tragic, it would be tempting to label it farce. The Western media were quick to label the “Islamist” salafis as allies of the Muslim Brotherhood while ; in point of fact, they were and are allies of the regimes of the Gulf States, who are in turn the regional allies of the United States. The idea was to undermine the religious credibility of the Muslim Brotherhood, and to force it into extreme positions. At the moment of President Morsi’s overthrow, they not only betrayed him but revealed their strategy and their strategic alliances for the entire world to see. It is hardly surprising to note that the first countries to recognize the new coup d’État regime were the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, whose powerful organizations provided, and still provide, direct and indirect financial support to the Egyptian salafis (as well as to their Tunisian counterparts). A superficial reading might lead one to believe that Saudi Arabia and Qatar support the Muslim Brotherhood ; in reality they are the mainstays of American power in the region. The strategy is to sow division among the various political Islamic trends, to foment confrontation and to destabilize. This same strategy focuses on contradictions between Sunni political organizations and exacerbates divisions between Shia and Sunni. The United States and Europe have no quarrel with the political Islam of the salafi literalists of the Gulf States (and their denial of democracy, their non-respect of minorities, their discrimination against women, and the application of a strict “Islamic” penal code described as “shari’a”) ; they protect their geostrategic and regional economic interests while their repressive and retrograde domestic policies, as long as they are applied domestically, could not matter less to the West.

It’s all about keeping up appearances. Millions of Egyptians rallied in support of the “second revolution” and appealed to the armed forces, which were quick to respond. They now promise to turn over power to the civilians. The leader of the opposition, Mohamed al-Baradei, has played a central role in the process, and his prominence has been growing apace. He has been in close touch with the youthful cyber-dissidents and the April 6 Movement since 2008 ; documents of the U.S. State Department, which I quote in my book, point to his close connection with the American administration. His visibility has been promoted by a clever strategy, and even though he has declined the position of Prime Minister (and announced that he will not be a candidate for president, which has yet to be seen), he has emerged as an important player on the Egyptian political scene. He has notoriously—and democratically—[defended the arrest of members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the closing of their television stations](#) and the entire range of repressive measures imposed on citizens who continue to support President Morsi, even though they may not be MB members (some are supporting democratic legitimacy). The weeks to come will provide us with more details about plans for fleshing out the civilian character of this particular military state. It must be remembered that for decades the Egyptian army has managed close to 40% of the national economy as well as being the leading recipient of an annual American aid package of \$1.5 billion.

An elected president has been toppled by a military coup d’État. There is no other word for it. The people, in their legitimate desire for a better life and for survival, for justice and dignity, have been unwitting participants in a media-military operation of the highest order. The situation is grave ; the silence of Western governments tells us all we need to know. There has been no “Arab spring” ; the perfume of its revolutions burns the eyes like tear gas.

In our day, it is not unusual for writer who does not accept the official consensus to be dismissed as a “conspiracy theorist,” for his analysis to be rejected before studying the facts upon which it is based. Are we to conclude that in our globalizing age, with its networks of national security policies and structures and its new means of communication, political scheming, malicious stratagems, manipulation of information and of peoples are a thing of the past ? “Conspiracy theorist” is a new insult devised for those who think the wrong thoughts, who don’t fit in ; paranoids, people who ascribe occult powers to certain states (the United States, the European countries, Israel, the Arab and African dictatorships, etc.) that they really do not possess. We must forget what we learned about the conspiracies that have left their mark on the history of Latin America and Africa (from the assassination of Salvador Allende to the elimination of Thomas Sankara) ; we must overlook the lies

that led to the invasion of Iraq and to the massacres in Gaza (both presented as legitimate defense) ; we must say nothing about the West's alliance with and support for the literalist salafis of the Gulf sheikhdoms ; close our eyes to the benefit for Israel of regional instability and of the most recent coup d'État in Egypt. We must remain naïve and credulous if we are not to notice that the United States and Europe on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other, have agreed to disagree on Syria, and that the 170 Syrians who die each day count for nothing against the strategic and economic interests of the Great Powers.

Our obligation is to stick to the facts, to avoid oversimplification. The polar opposite of an over-simplified reading of events is not "conspiracy theorizing" but that of intelligence informed by history, by hard facts and by a detailed analysis of conflicting interests. The interpretation presented here may well be wrong or inexact, but substantial and verifiable evidence has repeatedly confirmed it. From those who have criticized or challenged our analysis, we look forward to a fact-based counter-analysis far from denigrations and facile slogans. When people refuse to call a military coup d'État by its real name, and when most media avert their eyes, the hour for critical conscience has struck.