

Military Coup and Constitutional Amendments:
Building Legitimacy for Authoritarianism in Egypt

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Abstract:

Much of the hope for Egypt's transition to be democratic was lost when military seized control of the transition process in 2011. The problem is not that Egypt rushed to elections early. Truth is that elections do not always deliver democratic results; and for Egypt it was no mystery at all. Any party that would have come to power would have wielded its own idea into the process of constitution drafting. For society as such, it was a two-edged sword: not going to polls meant giving Army too much time, which would have been a severe political mistake given its past experience; and going to polls early meant that any party that would come to power can misuse the vote as a referendum for anything they wanted to include or exclude from the constitution. Throughout the transition period, the Egyptians were called to polls over and over again. Since military was to overlook the transition process, it called Egyptian people to polls to approve a series of constitutional amendments in March 2011. This paved a way for the new constitutional order to be built. This phase of election received a mixed response: with Islamists embracing the referendum as it promised a quick transition process. But this did not get along with the idea of non-Islamists. Given the apprehensions that Islamists might *hijack* the revolution, they rallied behind the idea that the process of writing the constitution should come first. This paper aims to assess how the military and the *deep state* worked hand in glove to build legitimacy for the military coup that ousted the elected government. The paper will also highlight how the redrafting constitution under military influence will push Egypt further into the clutches of authoritarianism.

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Introduction:

When Mohamed al-Bouazizi, a young Tunisian street vendor, set himself on fire, little did he know that he was going to change the course of history in the region. This ‘desperate attempt of defiance’² prompted the inhabitants to take to streets. For now, people beheld no certain destination. The humiliation on the hands of dictators had violated all the confines of tolerance, and the society in general wanted a change. And chance did happen; somewhere utterly and somewhere only nominal, though.

With Bouazizi’s death, a revolutionary wave spread throughout West Asia and North Africa, so did it in Egypt. But whatever was happening on the streets of Egypt is not at all a ‘revolution’. There was no politically motivated idea as a driving force for the uprising in Egypt. It was rather a political necessity; people took to streets to give vent to their long-suppressed feelings. Such a pattern of events and the mobilization that it followed raises questions about the dominant sociological theories of rebellion and revolutionary movements.³ Although it was quite obvious that people across the region overcame the fear of repression, it is too complex to understand the pattern of political developments that occurred. More persuasive is the complex nature of *destiny* that such political developments eventually met.

Truth is there were no specific “professional revolutionists”⁴ upon whose emancipation the movement could have been run. A focused ‘*political idea*’ plays a significant role in ‘shaping the revolutionary action’⁵. This process of ideology invariably shapes the attitude of people towards the set objective which in turn shape the revolutionary process. But in Egyptian situation more than one ideology was governing the process of uprising. The dissimilarity of approach towards the process of uprising made it difficult for the people to predict the final destination. Rendered helpless by the destitute political, economic and security situation, people followed the

² Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: From Opposition to Power* (London: Saqi Books, 2013), 211.

³ Mansoor Moaddel, “The Arab Spring and Egyptian Revolution Makers: Predictors of Participation,” *Population Studies Centre, Report 12-775*, (September 2012): 3.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, The Viking Press, (1963) in Moaddel (2012).

⁵ Charles Tilly, *The Formation of Nation States in Western Europe* (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1975) in Moaddel, (2012).

wave of events deeming them as the revolution. Whatever the outcome of such events, these demonstrations were the manifestation of decades of frustration and humiliation Mubarak regime distraught people with.

The Fall of Pharaoh

It took the Egyptian society only 18 days of unflinching commitment at *Tahrir* Square to remove Hosni Mubarak – who had been a dictator over the past three decades. The events that happened during the process were primarily driven by a desire for bread, freedom and social justice,⁶ reflecting the economic and social problems of Egypt. Although the Egyptian society demonstrated the ousting of Hosni Mubarak across the country, protestors notably set their base at the Tahrir Square. The ‘*Day of Anger*’ was over. In the coming days the number of demonstrators only increased. Initially police used force which resulted in killings of several protestors. Then on January 28, Egypt witnessed mass demonstration across the country that was named as ‘*Day of Rage*’. Here, military replaced police to ‘*crush*’ the demonstrations.

With each passing day, the protests only gained more support as army used force to suppress the uprising; dozens of civilians were killed. This prompted the ‘*revolution makers*’⁷ to stand firm in sustained protests. Symbolic events – like ‘*March of Millions*’, ‘*Friday of Departure*’, and the ‘*Sunday of Martyrs*’ – followed. After 18 days of unprecedented emancipation by people at *Tahrir* Square, Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign. Initially, power was transferred to his Vice President, Omar Suleiman; after sometime the Supreme Council of Armed Forces took control of governance temporarily.

The Arab Spring in Egypt brought together different groups – on social networking sites and outside the domain of social networking – unified by a same goal: end of dictatorship. There were certainly some evident ideological disputes among the groups – some saw this as an

⁶See M Tadros, ‘Where is the “Bread, freedom and justice” a year after Egypt revolution?’ Guardian, 25 Jan, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/jan/25/egypt-bread-freedom-social-justice>.

⁷In the context of mass uprisings, individual participation of general people is contextualized as *Revolution Makers*. Their primary role is to increase the number of people in widespread dissent. See Moaddel (2012)

opportunity for the democracy to flourish, others celebrated it as the triumph of Islamism – but that did not overtake their idea of dissent. This is an illustration of the fact that the opposition to authoritarian rule of Hosni Mubarak was a blend of frustration at human rights violation, unemployment, curtailment of freedom of expression, stemming from the Emergency Law that had been in operation within Egypt since 1967. People rested their belief in the values of equality and freedom which eventually motivated them to act despite the memories of emergency law.

Individuals with strong attitudes tend to participate more in the revolutionary action than those with weaker attitude;⁸ in Egypt, this no longer held significance. People, out on streets, had overcome the fear of repression; their attitude was guided by the urge of giving vent to their anger. At certain point, several analysts claimed the role of foreign intervention in the mass mobilization of Egypt. The global powers – particularly the USA and the UK – do certainly have a sort of involvement in almost every political activity that happens around the world. But Arab Uprising was so random it did not provide the global powers with sufficient time to influence the movement. For face saving, however, the US, the UK, Russia and some other global actors made statement in favor of or against the Uprising.

The Egyptian people have been told that there was a transition of authority, but it is not yet clear that this transition is immediate, meaningful or sufficient [...] The Egyptian people have made it clear that there is no going back to the way things were: Egypt has changed, and its future is in the hands of the people.⁹

What Comes First: Election or Constitution?

The transition period in Egypt – from the fall of Mubarak till the Brotherhood came to power through elections – was run by SCAF. For decades, Egypt had not been exposed to a kind of situation where people can think without fear. So, all the incidents that followed the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak were, to some extent, more out of excitement. People could imagine an Egypt

⁸Mansoor, (2012).

⁹White House, ‘Statement of President Barak Obama on Egypt’, press release, 10 February 2011, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/10/statement-president-barack-obama-egypt> (accessed on 10, February 2011).

free of fear, humiliation, corruption and chaos; an Egypt where people will earn their bread with dignity; an Egypt where everyone – men and women – is equal; an Egypt where police brutality will no longer be accepted and where emergency laws will have no place. But the sequence that the events were to follow Mubarak's departure was blurred by the absence of political logistics. People only knew what they did not want – the dictatorship. During the post 'revolution' era, when people feel powerful, it becomes even harder to run a country. Once the commitment at *Tahrir* demonstrations rewarded people with freedom, the military yet again took control of the situation that was going to follow.

The state of chaos came to fore when the Egyptian society displayed the scenes which confirmed a divide over the issue of what should come first: Election or Constitution? Neither of the two could have been ignored. When people take to streets putting their life at stake, it is not possible to stop them from casting their vote. Egyptian people were more desperate in this case given their historical anxiety. But the political actors – fearing that any party which comes to power would misuse the electoral win while drafting the constitution – stressed that constitution should be drafted first.

"Two things were needed for Egypt's post-2011 democratic development: a broad agreement among elites on the rules of the transition, and a procedure that allowed people to express their will early without having all matters settled in the backroom deals. Without general consensus on the rules, spoilers would convert the landscape; without popular participation, there might be a stable outcome, but it would not (necessarily) be democratic."¹⁰

When voters supported what they were told 'amendments,' the military decided not to insert the approved language into the old constitution. Instead, hiding behind the cloak of what they called '*revolutionary legitimacy*,'¹¹ the generals opted to write a new, temporary 'constitutional declaration' that inserted the clauses voters had approved into a forest of other articles on how the state would be run during the transition. The document was issued by the military fiat, thus

¹⁰Nathan J. Brown, "Tracking the Arab Spring, Egypt's failed Transition," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 24, no. 4, (October 2013): 46.

¹¹Omar, Manal, 'We Want to Move On', January 15, 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/01/15/we_want_to_move_on_egypt_constitution (accessed on 15, January 2014).

setting dangerous precedent of insisting that the constitution was whatever those in power said it was.¹²

Islamists were hopeful. They accepted the March 2011 constitutional declaration with a back-up idea that they will rise a concern for election where past would come to their rescue. Once elected, they could easily take away Army's authority to directly intervene into the constitutional issues by strengthening institutions of democracy. This would have empowered Islamists. But things did not go the way Brotherhood would have expected.

During the late 2011 and early 2012, Egyptians were called to polls again. Several rounds of voting took place – first for the lower house of parliament and subsequently for the upper house. Although those elections declared Islamists as victorious, it did not satisfy non-Islamists and secularists. The primary interest of people was not in enacting a particular government charter to which they will unanimously declare allegiance. There was a much severe threat they faced. They wanted to find a way to move the country forward. They primarily needed to bring attention back to the much-needed social and economic reforms that inspired the 2011 revolution.¹³

Fears regarding the final outcome of election had crept into both the Islamist and liberal camp. Liberals felt that Islamists were gaining more support. On the other hand, Islamists felt that they were being rendered irrelevant despite the electoral victory, “because military had taken control of the constitutional declaration to ensure that new parliament would have no power to oversee the cabinet or pass legislation without the generals’ approval.”¹⁴ This was, however, going to last only as long as a president is sworn in. After that, the constitutional process was not to be influenced by any formal intervention by military.

After the elections, the two houses of parliament were to choose a committee of hundred Egyptians who would spend six months to draft a final document which would then follow a

¹²Brown, (2013): 47.

¹³See Omar, Manal, ‘We Want to Move On’, January 15, 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/01/15/we_want_to_move_on_egypt_constitution (accessed on 15, January 2014)

¹⁴Brown, (2013): 47.

voting approval. Here Islamists made a mistake. They selected a body with most of its members – almost half of it – drawn from the parliament. The rest half represented various social groups. Secular and non-Islamist political forces opposed the move and some of them turned towards the court to stop the entire drafting process. After a severe resistance by opposition forces, an administrative court sided with them. It disbanded the hundred-member committee formulated by the Islamists to take care of the constitution claiming that it neither represented Egyptian majoritarian sentiment nor the genuine aspiration of society. The court produced further objection that parliamentarians ‘could not elect themselves’ as the members of the committee which was to draft the constitution.

The failure of reaching to a viable political solution further deteriorated the situation. Non-Islamists, on their part, remained stubborn not to approve any political move by the ruling Islamists as far the drafting of constitution was concerned. Left with little options to fall back upon, Islamists elected a new body which was not much different from the one disbanded earlier.¹⁵

The process of calling people to vote continued: This time to elect the president. After the first phase of Uprising, lots of politically ambitious people filled their nominations to run the race of presidential elections. Due to the fresh ‘revolutionary’ vigor, objections were put forward against some favorites resulting in their disqualification. Egypt seemed to have made a commitment not to allow any controversial person run the presidential race. In the process, Muslim Brotherhoods first choice, *Khairat al-Shater*, was also banned from contesting the elections citing the charges that Mubarak regime has lodged against him. Brotherhood immediately named their second choice – Mohammad Morsi. And in the battle of first ever democratically held elections, Morsi managed a narrow win.

After decades of repression by dictators, Islamists were finally in the saddle to ‘transform’ Egypt. But ‘political success’ was barely anything as easier as perceived by Brotherhood. Every time Egypt seemed to come closer to the stability and democracy a new

¹⁵ Ibid

problem surfaced. In the current Arab world, prevailing indigenous models of democracy has historically worked to side-track genuine political reform. Given the contestability of "democracy," it is minimally defined here as a form of legally conditional and limited rule standing in contradistinction to that most widely practiced rule in the Arab world: autocracy.¹⁶

During the post-Hosni Mubarak era, political instability seemed more rigorous, violent and persistent phenomenon than ever with uneven happenings drifting the situation back to square one. When people were going to vote, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court issued a ruling that the law under which the parliament had been elected was unconstitutional. The SCC ruling further maintained that the lower of parliament should be disbanded. To pile over the agony, military also passed a new constitutional declaration under which president was deprived of any significant power. This declaration also carved a very strong role of military in the constitution writing process that was underway.

The Islamist camp did not show any reaction initially. They waited. Once elected to power, Mohamed Morsi reassembled the support against these steps and eventually moved to court demonstrating the suspension of the same. He negated the authority military was trying to hold, and issued a constitutional declaration that all such powers belonged to presidency. This move was followed by yet another decree nullifying the military's recent actions. With the sequence of unfolding events, apprehension that presidential power may go unchecked crept severely in the Egyptian society. The ruling FJP invited the opposition to dialogue about the constitution drafting and other controversies that had been simmering. But the opposition "continued to refuse to involve themselves in the constitution process which grew increasingly shrill in their criticism of Islamists."¹⁷

When deadline for drafting the constitution came near, Morsi alleged that some secular elements and the supporters of old regime were conspiring to dissolve the constitutional assembly. He tried to control the situation in a different way: he issued a constitutional

¹⁶Labri Sadiki, "Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratization," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Cambridge University Press, vol. 32, no. 1 (Feb., 2000): 73.

¹⁷*Ibid*

declaration removing the issue of constituent assembly and others matters from judicial review. This amounted to the base of second uprising – this time against Morsi, as the opposition took it an ‘assertion of absolute presidential power.’ In the meantime, the constitution assembly finished the draft work and Egyptians were called to polls yet again to pass a referendum. The constitution was passed in a very low voter turnout: only 33 per cent of the population took part in it.

The non-Islamist opposition built their movement primarily on this initiative. A sense of insecurity was induced in the Egyptian political psychology on the claim that Islamists were trying to ‘hijack the revolution’. Protests continued. Although people demonstrated sincerely to ‘save their revolution’, the protests were no more independent peoples’ movement. With every passing day, the protests against the Morsi regime intensified. On 30 June, 2013, mass demonstration took place across Egypt. Army issued a warning to the political actors to resolve the issues within 48 hours, but to no avail. The persistent denial to engage in dialogue by opposition allowed army to intervene on July 3. This was totally an unjustified move by army. But Egypt was not alien to such a situation. It was the death of democracy.

Morsi’s Miscalculation

On 22 November 2012, President Mohamed Morsi issued a constitutional decree with an ostensible purpose to safeguard the upper house of parliament and the constitutional assembly against the potential dissolution by the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC). The SCC had earlier in the year dissolved the lower house which increased apprehensions of insecurity for Mohamed Morsi. The decree went a step ahead and granted Morsi sweeping presidential powers. This move prompted a more severe criticism regarding the policies and probable intensions of Morsi’s Freedom and Justice Party; and provided the opposition with yet another opportunity to mobilize support against the erstwhile democratically elected government. Following massive

protests, Morsi scrapped the declaration. But it was too late. In a low voter turnout, the constitution was approved by 64 per cent referendum.¹⁸

Since 2011 Uprising, Egypt experienced numerous protests – some against SCAF, later against Morsi. There were different actors behind protests which at times were even with a particular driving force. But the recent campaign was launched by *Tamarrod*, a little known organization. The chaos and disbelief of non-Islamist opposition after FJP won the elections, was evident. Despite successive electoral losses, the opposition tended to adopt maximalist demands vis-a-vis the Brotherhood and repeatedly boycotted Morsi's invitation to dialogue.

Tamarrod's momentum grew more rapidly than what Freedom and Justice Party could have imagined. The slogan that it carried – *irhal*(leave) – could no longer be winked at. *Tamarrod* focused upon the burning flames of the 2011 uprising and raised apprehensions with the society that the 'revolution' was being hijacked by the Muslim Brotherhood. It raised a concern over the deteriorating economic and security conditions. With the subtle support of non-Islamist opposition, the *Tamarrod* campaign was joined by people across the sections of society.

Prior to the day of demonstration, Defense Minister, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, had urged the political actors to solve the dispute by dialogue. But the unwillingness of both the opposition and the Morsi to compromise gave Army what it called as, 'legitimacy'¹⁹ to side with protestors. On July 1, SCAF gave Morsi a 48-hour-long ultimatum to meet peoples' demands. Morsi possibly miscalculated the intentions of army. The FJP could not reach to a point of consensus with the demands of protestors. On July 3, Army deposed the first ever democratically elected president: an erroneous step to crumble the infant democracy.

End of Democracy?

¹⁸See "Marching in Circles: Egypt's Dangerous Second Transition," Crisis Group: Middle East/North Africa Briefing, (7 August, 2013).

¹⁹The role of Army in any society is more so confined to provide the security to the country. The problem with West Asian societies is that Army is always eager to step the issues related to 'democracy' whenever they find an opportunity. Egypt has particularly been a witness to this mayhem. And this time the move by Army was no exception or surprising except for the miscalculations of Morsi.

The military's '*unconstitutional move*' to oust the elected president clearly marked the failure of Egypt's two-year-long struggle to realize a transition to democracy. The fall of dictatorship and the subsequent electoral win of Morsi had given people a hope that the region might see a new phase of politics where everyone will live with dignity, where human right would be safeguarded, where leaders will be accountable to people.²⁰ But the unforeseen military intervention left Muslim Brotherhood shattered. For decades they had waited for the opportunity to gain political acceptance in Egypt. When the wave came their way, they could not '*command*' the power; the regime slipped out of their hands.

Egypt's military was back in business. A varied set of reactions came to fore. For some of the analysts unfolding events represented a veritable military coup or '*soft coup*'²¹ and for others the military intervention saved 'Egyptian revolution' from being hijacked.²² Morsi regime did not entirely fail to keep the promise they made before being elected to power. The way a section of society viewed and analyzed the political developments, and the way non-Islamist opposition presented the performance of FJP, intensified the prospects of disillusionment and discontent of general public. Mass gatherings do not always have a chiseled idea to pursue. They can be swayed and influenced. And in Egyptian case where Islamists have seemingly strengthened in the post-Hosni Mubarak era, Army, which has long been tested to jeopardize the country political future to serve their own interests,²³ influenced the gatherings.

In the wake of '*soft coup*' a sense of polarization took birth between the supporters and opponents of Mohamed Morsi. With the attitude adopted by either side, the chances of political instability automatically increase. To uphold their claim of 'stopping the revolution being hijacked' military were convinced to suppress the demonstrators by all means available.

²⁰Brown (2013).

²¹ Amr Shobaky's editorials in *Al-Masry Al-Youm*

²²Colombo and Meringolo, (2013).

²³See Andera Teti and Gennaro Gervasio, "The Army's coup in Egypt: for the people or against the people", in openDemocracy, 10 July, 2013 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/andrea-teti-gennaro-gervasio/army%E2%80%99s-coup-in-egypt-for-people-or-against-people> (accessed on 6 April, 2014).

Brotherhood, on the other hand, was distressed by what it calls as the unlawful overturn of its democratic mandate.²⁴

Al-Noor's Subtle Change of Alliance:

When Mohamed Morsi passed the controversial presidential decree, Al-Noor had a subtle change of heart towards the coalition. Since Al-Noor had earlier given their support to the Brotherhood at the time of formulating coalition, they did not put the issue of their reservation with Brotherhood in the public domain. As a political outfit driven by the 'hard-core' Salafi ideology, Al-Noor believes in the fundamentalist Islamic principles. When Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won majority of the seats in the first post-Mubarak elections, Al-Noor did not have enough strength to formulate the government independently.²⁵ Left with very little choice, it gave its support to Brotherhood. By so doing, they became a part of mainstream.

Soon after, when the 'secular' opposition of Egypt escalated their protests against Brotherhood, Al-Noor behaved differently. At a certain point it looked evident that if military ousts Morsi, the members of Muslim Brotherhood will have to face the wrath of the security agencies. Al-Noor chose to take a defensive stand. They initially displayed their annoyance with the initiatives of Muslim Brotherhood and eventually took the side of army, and secularists, who they have been hitherto demonizing for not subscribing to the idea of Sharia politics. For the fear of consequences Al-Noor altered their otherwise 'hard-core' Islamist stand.

Not only al-Noor's attitude, the regional, and in certain cases global, political psychology gradually had a shift towards Muslim Brotherhood. More important was the role of Saudi Arabia. Coming to the rescues of their *Salafi* allies, and in 'defence of Autocracy'²⁶, Saudi Arabia declared Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization. The move was more or less motivated by Saudi Arabia's annoyance with Qatari foreign policy towards Egypt – which has long been in

²⁴See Marching in Circles: Egypt's Dangerous Second Transition, by Crisis Group: Middle East/North Africa Briefing, 7 August, 2013.

²⁵Pargeter, The Muslim Brotherhood: From Opposition to Power, (2013).

²⁶Emile Nakhleh, "The Egyptian-Saudi Coalition in Defense of Autocracy" <http://www.lobelog.com/the-egyptian-saudi-coalition-in-defense-of-autocracy/> (accessed on, 15 April, 2014).

favour of Brotherhood. Before the ‘soft coup’, Al-Noor did not politically hold much significant status in Egypt. When the military ousted Morsi’s Islamist regime, cracking down on their protestors leaving hundreds of Morsi supporters dead, *Salafists* got away with the military wrath. By so doing, they only became more insignificant adding to the worries of Saudi Arabia’s idea of ‘regional leader.’

New Constitution, Old Resolution:

The ‘soft-coup’ that forced Muslim Brotherhood out of power was followed by a sham civilian interim government. A ‘cult of personality’²⁷ grew around the Army General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi – the man behind the coup. With an establishment of ‘men in uniform’ behind him and the position of deputy prime minister in charge of national security made al-Sisi regimes de facto strongman. Ironically, some of the politicians who passionately advocated the need of civilian government after the fall of Hosni Mubarak embraced this move.²⁸

Immediately after Morsi’s overthrow, General Sisi proposed a new roadmap taking in confidence Shiekh al-Azhar and Pope Tawadros II. Besides these, assistance of NSF and the Al-Noor leaders was also sought. In a bid to gain ‘apparent legitimacy’ the SCAF also tried to reach out to Muslim Brotherhood. They contacted the head of FJP to participate in final discussion about the new roadmap. The leadership of Brotherhood refused to participate in any such discussion that would legitimise the army ‘coup’ against Morsi. SCAF went ahead with its plan. The head of Supreme Constitutional Court, Adli Mansour, was sworn as the interim president.

On July 8, Adli Mansour passed a constitutional decree which granted him the authority to convene a legal committee which would amend as many articles of 2012 constitution as it deems necessary.²⁹ On one side the amendment process continued, on the other side the Muslim Brotherhood leadership continued to reject any such initiative claiming that their overthrow is

²⁷Juan Cole, "Egypt's new Cult of Personality: The Beatification of Saint Gen. al-Sisi" <http://www.juancole.com/2014/04/egypts-personality-beatification.html> (accesses on 1 April, 2014).

²⁸See, *Marching in Circles Egypt's Dangerous Second Transition*, By International Crisis Group, MENA, 7 August, 2013.

²⁹See, *Marching in Circles Egypt's Dangerous Second Transition*, By International Crisis Group, MENA, 7 August, 2013.

utterly unconstitutional. The SCAF and secularists, however, left no stone unturned to convey a 'sense of normalcy.' Everything the opposition blamed Brotherhood for was embraced by opposition itself with unseemly enthusiasm in July 2013.³⁰

Failure of 'democracy' was essentially the miscalculation of 'main political actors' in Egypt. Democracy is not something that can be established overnight, particularly in a place where dictatorship has been the rule of law for generations at stretch. May be, Brotherhood did not have any out-of-box policy to get rid of the deteriorated economic conditions, but they definitely made attempts to resolve the issues of social security. At such a situation, political stability would have meant more support of society in favour of Islamists – particularly Muslim Brotherhood – and inevitably making the non-Islamist opposition irrelevant. Fearing the *political-irrelevance* in the longer run, the opposition never sincerely supported Morsi's initiatives regarding social stability.

After the 'coup':

Soon after the 'coup' the military launched a massive manhunt to arrest the stalwarts of Muslim Brotherhood in a bid to reduce their influence on public mobilization. The office of Muslim brotherhood was ransacked, their assets were seized and their activities were banned. Not only this, the rigid military apparatus even shut-down the pro-Islamist media channels. Military confronted Morsi loyalists on the streets, used severe force against them. Hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were killed; thousands of others wounded. While fear caught hold of Egypt, the Brotherhood supporters remained protesting with an unflinching courage.

The road to violence in Egypt seemed stretching. When the critics came down heavily upon the military move, with General Sisi placed at the centre of this criticism, military issued statements in defence of its honour. In a Crisis Group interview on 23 July, 2013, a senior security official said: the Islamists have not given army any choice...the country cannot afford more instability...the Brothers have brought this upon themselves.

³⁰Brown, (2013)

As the deteriorating security situations displayed no signs of respite, polarization within the community further worsened. Convinced of the ‘illegitimacy’ of ‘soft-coup’, brotherhood decided to repeat what their opponents did – to stick to the street protests which would eventually wither Army’s support at domestic and international platform. Much of what happened was as Brotherhood seemed to have planned. But neither could the internal disparities fail Army nor did any international pressure work in favour of FJP.

At such a crucial occasion, Brotherhood was left alone. Al-Noor Party joined non-Islamist opposition in favour of ‘coup’.³¹ The Sheikh al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyeb, which had long stood for the Islamist governance, urged people through a televised address to accept the army’s roadmap. Not only that, the very liberals who earlier cried for the establishment of democracy joined their hands with the military in the ‘soft coup’

Military-backed Constitution Draft:

When Egyptians came out to vote for the military backed constitutional draft, third since the fall of Mubarak, one thing that was essentially clear was that it was not a referendum for the final draft. Besides this, the response of voters was barely going to make a difference. The constitution was doomed to pass by a landslide.³²

Apparently, the document which was widely seen as an opportunity to end the political debacle in Egypt incorporates more rights and freedom than the last constitution. The document also affirms Islamic law as the main source of legislation. But behind the veil the situation is very grim. The document, which apparently seems to be empowering the society, provides Egypt’s ever-stubborn military with greater autonomy. Strengthening the autonomous powers of

³¹The Al-Noor party showed signs of ‘defection’ (*floor-crossing*) in early 2013. It urged Morsi for early presidential elections. Though it supported the Islamist passed constitution during the initial phase of Morsi’s regime, later it endorsed the road-map proposed by army.

³²Umar Manal, “We Want to Move On,” 15, January, 2014 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/01/15/we_want_to_move_on_egypt_constitution (accessed on 15, January 2014)

the military as sovereign authority, the new constitution shields it from parliamentary oversight. It states that the Defence Minister must be a military general who will also head the SCAF.³³

The constitutional draft empowers Supreme Police Council (SPC) and the military-dominated National Defence Council (NDF) to control policymaking in their domains and determine (or block) sectorial reform; the parliament is left with no authority to exert oversight over the single-figure budgets of those institutions. Besides this, the draft also leaves a room for the civilians to be tried in the military court while both the security institutions – SPC and NDC – are shielded from legal action in civilian courts.³⁴

Empowering the president to confirm the Defence Minister and Interior Minister, the constitution only makes the President much more powerful than the parliament. In addition, the 2014 constitution allows the president to declare a state of emergency after merely consulting the cabinet, and he can renew it beyond three months if he obtains a majority support from parliament. The president also has the power to nominate a candidate for prime minister. If the parliament does not approve the candidates, two times consecutively, the parliament is dissolved. Apparently, the only real power of the parliament is to remove the president by a two-third majority.

Military-backed interim government launched a subtle campaign demonstrating an implied but clear message: “YES to the referendum. NO to darkness”. The Muslim Brotherhood supporters, who had been demonstrative against the ‘unconstitutional military coup’, out rightly rejected constitutional draft and boycotted to vote. Like Brotherhood, for many of the political actors and parties who formulated the part of ‘2011 revolution’, participating in the referendum process was certainly not a choice given their own reservations. With limited freedom of expression under the interim government, a call for NO vote was not an option either. There was an obvious freedom that people enjoyed to exercise their campaign against the Brotherhood's

³³Ann M. Lesch, “Resurgence of the Security State,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, (March 2014).

³⁴*Ibid.*

constitutional draft in 2012. No such freedom existed when people were to vote for the military-backed constitution. Anyone advocating 'NO' was labelled as traitor.³⁵

Neither the referendum that was passed under Brotherhood regime nor the military backed one really hold enough 'legitimacy' to claim being the representative of Egypt's genuine aspirations. In either of the two, the approval was done with a less than half of the population casting their vote: in 2012, the Brotherhood backed constitutional draft was passed with 63.6 per cent strength, but only 32.9 per cent people exercised their vote; the military backed constitution was passed above 90 per cent voting, but only 39 per cent people participated in the electorate.

Rise of General Sisi:

Around three years after the fall of Egypt's last dictator, Hosni Mubarak, the destiny of Egypt's lost revolution appeared already written. With the rise of yet another army general, Egypt's political landscape shows no signs of defeating authoritarianism and, as analysts predict, the country is unlikely to see democracy anytime soon. Sisi's control over the political sphere is strengthening with every passing day.

General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi is the outcome of 'libertarian propaganda', the 'culture of silence' and his benevolent destiny. The fall of Morsi has given a meteoric rise to General Sisi, as a political personality on a regional and global level. Away from the scene of appraisals and glorifying press statements about Sisi's calibre to bring Egypt back on track, the political divide in the country is widening persistently. The use of force by military to nab the protestors, mostly Morsi supporters, on January 25 – the anniversary of 'revolution' – is a narration for the same. The society, which is traumatized by the unending violence in post-'revolution' era, is insecure about the risk of supporting Sisi as the future leader of country. People desire stability – political and economic. But the country's authoritarian trajectory has rendered them with little less hope.

Over the decades of dictatorship, Army had been an essential part of Egypt's external policy. After the Uprising, Muslim Brotherhood ignored the statements of Army: a mistake for

³⁵ Lesch (2014).

which Brotherhood paid dearly. Long before the ‘soft coup’ of July 3, General Sisi had subtly warned about the role Army could play if the political parties fail to reconcile. “Army is a fire...Do not play against it and don’t play with it.”³⁶

For most of the time, General Sisi has kept himself aloof from the debate over the deterioration economic situation. Like Muslim Brotherhood, Sisi too lacks any pragmatic economic model that could take the country out of mess: at least he hasn’t come up with any such model till now. So, the idea of falling back upon the financial aids from other countries will only perpetuate the miseries of Egypt. As of now, there is no space for society’s apprehensions regarding it. “No one dares openly challenge the field marshal today. But what if six months after taking up residence at the Ittihadiya Palace, Sisi is unable to arrest Egypt’s economic decline or some exogenous shock produces a solvency crisis?”³⁷

Reaching towards the end of 2013, when Sisi mobilized sufficient sympathy and support for him to run for president, he asserted that he cannot turn away ‘when the majority wants me to run for president.’³⁸ Within the Defence Ministry, General Sisi certainly enjoys a widespread support, but that would neither absolve him from fulfilling the responsibilities, nor would it allow the political and security issues be ignored.

Procedurally, General Sisi prepared himself for presidency soon after the ‘soft coup’. Knowing the intensity of panic that the non-Islamist opposition created in society about the “Brotherhood threat”, he made sure to convey a message to the public that Brotherhood shall never come to power again. His 300-page electoral platform demonstrates to improve the living conditions of society.³⁹ Before stepping down as the Minister of Defence, Sisi made sure to

³⁶Lesch, “Playing with Fire: The Showdown in Egypt between the General and the Islamist President,” FPRI E-note, March 2014, <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2014/03/playing-fire-showdown-egypt-between-general-and-islamist-president>

³⁷Ibid

³⁸“I cannot turn my back when majority wants me to run for president’, says Egypt’s El-Sisi,” speech to an officers’ graduation ceremony, MENA, March 4, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/95852.aspx>

³⁹“Ashton calls on Sisi to declare stance toward elections,” March 18, 2014, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/2435000>, in Ann M. Lesch, Egypt: Resurgence of the Security State, March 2014

secure his position. In this pursuit, Sisi took calculated steps and re-shuffled some key military positions – which will apparently rescue him whenever their support is needed.

Given the political vacuum Egypt is facing, there is a possibility that a new political party will emerge to support Sisi's agenda. And with the absence of Muslim Brotherhood, and the weakness of secularists, such a party could sweep the elections. This would produce a new version of Mubarak's National Democratic Party, designed to support the president while also enhancing its members' individual interests.⁴⁰

Egypt Under the Interim Government:

The referendum on the military-backed constitution – which took place on January 14 to 15, 2014 – set stage for fresh elections in Egypt. Eventually, it will also mark the end of transitional government, which ruled Egypt since oust of Mohamed Morsi. All through this period, Egypt was ruled by security bodies sitting behind the curtain. They controlled the presidency, cabinet, media and judiciary.⁴¹ The interior ministry mobilised the public opinion in favour of Sisi and did everything it could to press that the Muslim Brotherhood be declared as a terrorist organization.

Most of the people in the Interim government comprised the close associates of Al-Sisi. During this time a video went viral in Egypt showing the 'political ambitions' of Al-Sisi. The video showed General Sisi deliberating with other officials about his plans to control media. "It takes a long time before you are able to affect and control the media. We are working on this and we are achieving more positive results, but we have yet to achieve what we want."⁴² In its 'war against Brotherhood,' these officers proved very loyal to Sisi. They won, and controlled, media to an extent that everything that was to go on air for public was filtered to suit Sisi public appeal.

⁴⁰Lesch, M. Ann, Egypt: Resurgence of the Security State, March 2014

⁴¹See BahayEldin Hassan, Director, Cairo Institute for Human Rights, "Pharaohs, Caliphs and Field Marshals," The New York Times, February 13, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/13/opinion/pharaohs-caliphs-and-field-marshals>

⁴²DaragahiBorzou, "Recording reveals Sisi's political ambitions in Egypt," Financial Times, October 16, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/coms/s/0/e5c8f42e-359b-11e3-952b-00144feab7de.html> (in) Lesch, (2014)

With the control of state institutions in its command, the armed forces took advantage of its position to deepen its hold over the economy. At one side the general economic scenario of Egypt was deteriorating perpetually, at the other ‘military as an economic institution’ was further strengthening. To gain the trust of army – upon whose mercy he will fall at the time of crisis – General Sisi announced a multi-billion dollar deal between military and a Dubai-based company Arabtec Holding. “The lack of transparency and accountability of military projects – where there is no competitive bidding, the military budget is secret, conscript labour is used, and the military controls all desert land – makes an assessment of the viability of these projects impossible.”⁴³

The interim government had no out-of-box economic plan to face the prevalent crisis. They looked favourably towards the financial assistance from GCC – particularly from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. That was not enough. “The economy stagnated. Exports and imports shrank and tourism dropped precipitously. Meanwhile, the burden on the government for subsidized goods and services soared; fuel subsidies alone consume 20 per cent of the state budget.”⁴⁴

Months after Morsi was deposed, the failure of interim government to tackle Egypt’s transition made them face harsh criticism from within and outside their ranks and file. Annoyed by the attitude of Interim government – towards the Brotherhood sympathisers and the subsequent declaration of Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, and Protest Law – the Deputy Prime Minister, ZiadBahaaEddin resigned on January 27. Unable to handle the situation as per their own idea, the entire cabinet was fired on February 24, in a sense demonstrating the impenetrable authority of the top-level decision making process. Ibrahim Mehlab, one of the very ardent advocates of Sisi, became the new Prime Minister.⁴⁵

Media Manipulations:

⁴³Lesch (2014).

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Hamza Hendawi, “Egypt: New Premier Urges End to Protests,” March 2, 2014, <http://www.statesman.com/ap/ap/top-news/egypt-new-premier-urges-end-to-protests/nd4M>

It would be no exaggeration to argue that social media – primarily Facebook – was used as the primary platform by protestors to mobilize the widespread support. Over the years, social media had been performing such role across the globe. The flexibility and assess of this network to the individuals enhances it potential as a ‘*role player*’. But besides this, the role of mainstream media has been quite manipulative and biased.

The role of mainstream media was dichotomized: a portion of it supporting the uprising and another, although very small, segment opposing the uprising against Hosni Mubarak. But when the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) came to power, a third segment emerged in media. This third segment displayed a cold stand of ‘*neutrality*’⁴⁶ – which in truth is a stage of chaos and confusion where in the organization is not able to reach the position to take a stand for or against anyone.

Throughout his time, Hosni Mubarak, like all his preceding dictators, used state controlled media extensively as a tool of propagation. For decades they spread misinformation and disinformation in the society striving to achieve public sympathy. When the Uprising took place, Mubarak used the same old tactics. But this time around, political dimensions had taken a turn, so had the role of media in reporting these dimensions. Initially, the Mubarak regime tried to ban the media that was against him, but to no avail. Al Jazeera emerged as an important platform to counter the propaganda of pro-Mubarak media. Pertinent to mention is that Al Jazeera operates as a visual ideologue of Qatari foreign policy⁴⁷ which holds a pro-Muslim Brotherhood editorial policy.

⁴⁶The script of one of the famous French Cinema work – Between the Lines – argues that there is nothing like the ‘*state of neutrality*’. When somebody remains silent about the truth, it is actually taking the side of falsehood – the oppressor.

⁴⁷Mabon, Simon. “Aiding Revolution? Wikileaks, communication and the Arab Spring in Egypt,” Third World Quarterly, vol. 34, no. 10, (2013): 1843-1857.

“A television station does not create a revolution, nor does it participate in it, despite what some researchers may think. At most, it is a panel on the highway telling the revolutionaries: You are on the right path.”⁴⁸

Towards a New Military President:

On March 24, Egypt's military-backed Interim government manifested yet another etiquette of its non-seriousness towards democracy. In a bid to 'terrify people' not to participate in the demonstrations against the 'army coup', the Egyptian judiciary issued a verdict of mass death penalty to 529 people allegedly involved in killing a police officer in the demonstration in 2013. Although the defence lawyers boycotted the proceedings accusing Saeed Youssef Mohamed, the judge who presided over the mass trial, of being 'unfair', the court proceedings were continued anyway.

The verdict, which was widely condemned by the Human Rights authorities across the world for being unfair and unjust, "has not only dealt another blow to Egypt's reputation abroad, but it has shown how far some elements of the state are prepared to go in crushing supporters of the former Islamist government."⁴⁹ In a court hearing which lasted not more than 45 minutes, according to the media reports, the witnesses were barred from producing their testimonies before the judge. Media reported that the judge adjourned the session without any serious discussion and deliberation and demanded the submission of a written defence from the lawyers.⁵⁰

Among other unconstitutional things, the verdict produces yet another example that there is a section of the society – howsoever small – particularly with a secular tint, which favours the escalation of violence against the Muslim Brotherhood. As long as the non-Islamists political

⁴⁸ A Hijjawi, "The role of Al-Jazeera (Arabic) in the Arab Revolts of 2011," The Next Web, 10 July 2011, Report published by Heinrich Boll Stiftung, (2011): 70-71, https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/assets/boell.de/images/download_de/Perspectives_02-10_Aref_Hijjawi.pdf (accessed on 6 April, 2014).

⁴⁹ Bel Trew, "Egypt's Bloody Purge Is Just Beginning," March 25, 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/03/25/egypt_s_bloody_purge_is_just_beginning (accessed on 6 April, 2014).

⁵⁰ Political analysts across the world called this an unfair decision. The Human Rights Watch condemned the decision and called it as 'sham'. There were, however, others in the pro-military Egyptian media who spoke in favour of this decision and expressed their happiness.

parties fear Brotherhood as their major political opponent, they will use all the powers to reduce Brotherhood's influence in the society, even if it comes at the cost of jeopardising the entire judicial ethics. The verdict of mass death penalty is an anecdote in this favour; it was not a verdict; it was a massacre.