



Egypt's Tragedy: Islam, Democracy and Soldiers

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Following the recent coup in Egypt and subsequent removal of first elected President of Egypt, Mohammad Morsi, the term like 'state of ferment' and radicalisation and moderation to describe the Arab world seems to have become redundant. Post-Arab Spring democratic project in Egypt has pushed the country in disarray with an undefined political future. It was a short chaotic experiment with democracy in Egypt which has not only destabilised the national polity but also left an already stagnant economy lurching. It is the biggest irony for a nation which was chanting 'Down with the army' not long ago at Tahrir Square, a symbol of freedom liberation, is now celebrating the military coup.

Freedom and Justice Party (JFP)'s victory in the 'democratic' election last year had set the idea of democracy in motion in Egypt. But short-lived romanticism with democracy came to an abrupt end on the night of July 3, 2013 when General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Chief of the Egyptian Armed Force, in a televised broadcast announced the dismissal of President Morsi. During the pronouncement, General al-Sisi was flanked by his subordinates, religious authorities and prominent political figures.

He also announced the nomination of Mr. Adil Mansour, head of the Supreme Constitutional Court of Egypt and an arch foe of Mohammad Morsi as the interim President. Mr. Adil suspended the constitution, dissolved the parliament, and shut down most of the media

houses owned by the Islamist. The top leadership of Muslim Brotherhood (MBH) have been put behind bars and army has prepared a road map for the future, promising an election and a new constitution very soon.

The ouster of Mr. Morsi has set a wrong precedent for the whole region which is passing through a political transition. Mr. Essam al-Haddad, Morsi's senior foreign policy advisor wrote on the face-book, "Let us call what is happening by its real name: military coup... And the message will resonate throughout the Muslim world loud and clear: democracy is not for Muslim[s]".

Now the opposition group backed by army and Morsi's loyalists are involved in a bloody conflict with each other that has led to a loss of more than two hundred lives in different parts of the country. Armed forces, an agency for the protection of the people, has itself become a party to the political turmoil in the country . General Abdel Fattah , in a televised address to the nation, asked the Egyptians to come on the streets to defeat the voice of violence and terrorism. He presented himself more as a populist strongman and less as a General of the armed force. Army-backed Tamarrud group and the opposition have endorsed the army's call and are pressing for Mr. Morsi's trail.

A new blame game has started between the Islamists and the oppositions. Morsi's loyalists have accused the opposition of hobnobbing with the army and western powers to topple an elected government. They have also blamed Israel and the liberal forces of the country for the present fiasco. While the opposition forces have accused Mr. Morsi of flaunting all democratic norms, ignoring the opposition's demands and showing no inclination of reconciliation with them. Opposition forces are cheering the removal of Mr. Morsi and claiming that the act was in consonance with the sentiments of millions of Egyptians. The Islamists have been accused of failing to work with state institutions like the army, the intelligence services and the judiciary. Anti-Morsi camp is composed of army, police force, loyalist of old regime and non-Islamic revolutionary who punished Morsi for his incompetence and brought down the government.

After the coup, 'the democratic zeal' of the nation appears to have died down on the streets of Cairo and the cheerful mood of the masses seems nothing short of Déjà vu of February 2011 when Hosni Mubarak was dethroned. Once again, the regional and global regimes seem to

be torn between the democratic rhetoric and empathy towards the evolving democratic ethos of the region.

The present turmoil in Egyptian politics has further sharpened the political and ideological division in the country. Spate of violence is being witnessed on the streets among different political and Islamic affiliates deepening social divides and causing spurt in religious radicalisation.

The inclusion of Al-Nour Party, a radical Islamic group in Egypt, in the proposed road map of the army would weaken the moderate voices within the national politics. The adamant refusal of Al-Nour party to back the interim President's choice of Mr. ElBaradei as Prime Minister is a testimony to the enhancing power of radical groups there.

The danger of the 1992 Algerian crisis looms larger over Egypt too when the Islamic Salvation Front was deprived of its democratic victory after the Algerian Army had annulled the results. Commenting on development in Egypt, one of the Algerian Islamist figure, Abdelkader Hachani warned the MBH and said, "Victory is more dangerous than defeat". Egypt has been already witnessing crackdown and in a single shootout, more than 50 protestors have been killed on the street of Cairo refreshing the memory of the harsh treatments meted out to the opposition during the heydays of Colonel Nasser.

The whole region is witnessing an intense diplomatic frenzy and countries like UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have pledged US \$ 12 billion to Egypt in recognition of the new regime, while Qatar's earlier package of US \$ 8 billion seems to pay no dividends for them. It is feared that the regional powers would be caught in a fresh curve of ideological rivalries among themselves causing political instability.

This act of unfaithfulness towards an evolving democracy may push Egypt and perhaps the region towards ideological and sectarian polarisation. The overall outcome may not be friendly to democracy. Egypt is likely to see continuing confrontation between the army and Morsi's loyalists, thus causing disastrous impact on the region.

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