

The current situation in Egypt: Spotlight on an eventful year

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The political and social crisis (first six months of 2013)

After six months in power, the Muslim Brotherhood had revealed its inability to respond to popular demands. This caused social anger, with a big wave of strikes, sit-ins, social protests, demonstrations and protests in poor neighbourhoods against the run-down state of public services. The popular mobilization was massive. People had the hope of changing their lives, and the class struggle reached a level that had not been seen since the 1970s.

In parallel, there was also a political crisis, because the Brotherhood proceeded to exclude all other political currents. Liberal forces as well as those of the former regime felt themselves marginalized in the political landscape. And these forces had control of the media, which enabled them, especially through private satellite channels, to conduct an ongoing campaign against President Mohamed Morsi, although they had pretty much the same economic and social project.

Simultaneously, from January 2013, tensions were visible between the deep state [[1](#)] and Morsi. This was seen principally in the police. Morsi had not reformed and increased police salaries. He thought he could attract them to his political project. But the police and intelligence services began to work for his downfall.

In the end, it was these different forces, with different backgrounds and goals, that allied around the objective of bringing him down.

The emergence of Tamarrod and the role of the NSF

It was in this context that there appeared the Tamarrod movement. At first, the links between Tamarrod and the intelligence services were not obvious, especially for us. But subsequently these links appeared clearly.

The main demand of the petition calling for the overthrow of Morsi was the holding of early

presidential elections. This demand was very popular before the call to demonstrate on June 30.

Established at the end of 2012, the National Salvation Front (NSF) was a broad coalition of liberals, democrats, social democrats, socialists, Stalinists, etc. It was the NSF that began to appeal to the fellows [2] of Mubarak in order to get rid of the Brotherhood. It relied on them for financing, logistics, printing leaflets, etc. This was a big blow for the revolutionary forces, since with the fellows the revolutionaries found themselves faced with another obstacle. The NSF was one of the main forces to have appealed to the army. It issued statements asking why the army did not intervene. The NSF paved the way for the coup d'état.

Intervention of the army

On June 30, 2013, the mobilization was enormous and looked like increasing even more. The role of the army began to appear clearly at the end of June. Sissi issued an ultimatum. On July 3, he made a second declaration announcing the dismissal of Morsi and the appointment of a new President of the Republic. From that moment, it was the army that took control of the country. The message was: "Go home! We will take care of everything!".

Sissi also called for demonstrations on July 26 to give him a mandate to combat terrorism, and the mobilization was very great. July 26 marked the end of an episode. From that date, the main policy that was implemented was repression. The main political forces supported the army. The Islamists were the main target: the main slogan was "Crush them, Sissi!" The bloody dispersal of the Islamist sit-ins in Rabaa and Nahda was accompanied by thousands of deaths.

But the repression was also directed against the right to demonstrate and to organize sit-ins, rights that were earned after January 25, 2011.

Situation after 3 July 2013

In the course of the two or three months following July 3, there were not many protests because the situation was not very clear. But then, the social movement began to recover.

The main demands concerned bad living conditions and the absence of concretization of the main goals of the revolution. During the first three months of 2014, there were approximately 1,200 strikes and sit-ins.

The government used several methods to deal with the social movement. In the first period, the main policy of the government of Hazem el-Beblawi was either to make promises or to ignore it completely. As the wave of social protest intensified and there was a change of government, the media said that it was the workers who had brought down the government.

But in fact, the purpose of the change of government was not to satisfy the social demands of the workers, but to strengthen the repression against the Islamists: the Beblawi government had been criticized for having had a "trembling hand". People demanded that the new government should have an iron fist.

The other objective was to strengthen the repression against the social movement.

The end of the Beblawi government (February 27, 2014)

In the Beblawi government, there coexisted alongside the military component a current that can be classified as “democratic left” with Beblawi and Ziad Bahaeddine of the Social Democratic party, the Nasserist current with the former independent trade unionist Kamal Abu Aita, the liberals with Hossam Issa of the Destour Party; Mohamed El Baradei, of the same Destour Party, was Vice-president of the Republic until August 15, 2013. [3].

They were not opposed to the policy of Sissi, but they tried to put the brakes on a little. The Deputy Prime Minister Ziad Bahaeddine, for example, wanted a reconciliation with those members of the Muslim Brotherhood who had not committed acts of violence. Kamal Abu Aita talked about the minimum wage and the law on trade union freedoms, etc. But they ended up by accepting the policies of the government to which they belonged. They accepted the freezing of the bill on trade union freedoms and the repression of sit-ins. However, at the end February 2014, even a slightly discordant voice was no longer acceptable for the regime. As if by removing the government, things would work better.

The policy of the government of Ibrahim Mahleb

The two major changes with the new government were:

- * An escalation of the repression against the Islamists;
- * increased repression against the social movement.

The government therefore had two adversaries: the Islamists and the workers.

In the first communiqué of the Mahleb government, it was moreover stated clearly: “The state must confront two dangers, the Islamists and strikes by workers”.

As regards the Islamists, there have been repression and show trials, with collective convictions. As regards the workers, the army began to intervene, as for example in Suez. It also came to arrest workers in their homes in Alexandria and Port Said, as well as in other places. And that had not been seen in Egypt since the 1970s.

The government has also adopted laws hostile to workers.

- * The new draft Labour Code weakens workers’ rights, particularly with regard to wages;
- * A draft document forbids employees to file appeals against even fraudulent privatization of their companies;
- * A law of 19 November 2013 prohibits strikes and sit-ins;
- * The law on trade union freedoms fell by the wayside.

Attacks take place against independent unions. The ETUF, the official trade union federation before 2011, is once again the sole interlocutor recognized by the government.

We hear less about the minimum wage.

Prices have begun to rise again, and the expected increase in the price of petrol will cause a general

increase in prices.

The presidential election

The climate in which the next presidential election will take place is completely different from that of the elections of June 2012.

Within the population, there is great disillusion, and even hostility to the revolution. Attacks have taken place against the revolutionary movement, including the Revolutionary Socialists. The April 6 Movement, which was at the origin of the events leading to the January 2011 revolution, was banned three days before the 1st of May.

Approximately 90 per cent of political forces are at present behind Sissi. The only other candidate for the presidential election is the Nasserist Hamdine Sabahi.

These developments have had an impact within the parties that emerged after the beginning of the revolution. These parties, and in particular their young people, began to discover that they had been deceived, that Sissi had stolen June 30, and that his objective was to restore the Mubarak regime.

There is a revanchist tendency in relation to the revolution. The security apparatus of the state has regained its control over the street, so that many young people who mobilized on June 30 are now opposed to Sissi. This is particularly the case of the April 6 Movement.

If we categorize the population by the type of attitude it has, there are three categories:

* disappointed, even desperate;

* fence-sitters waiting to see what Sissi will do;

* and a minority which sees Sissi as a prolongation of Mubarak.

It is these divisions within the coalition of June 30 that encouraged Sabahi to stand in the presidential election. That is one of the reasons why, despite the criticism that we have of him, we are supporting him in the coming election [4].

Hisham Fouad

Interview by Hany Hanna and Alain Baron

P.S.

* * From International Viewpoint. <http://internationalviewpoint>

* Hisham Fouad is an Egyptian journalist and longtime activist of the Revolutionary Socialists. He was interviewed by Hany Hanna and Alain Baron, at the end of April 2014.

Footnotes

[1] What is called in Egypt the “deep state” consists of the institutions of the state, with all their national and local ramifications, and also the officials who run them.

[2] The term fellouls is used to designate the residue of Mubarak’s reign.

[3] Whereas El Baradei resigned from his position as Vice-president in the wake of the massacres of Islamists on August 14, 2013, the former independent unionist Kamal Abu Aita remained in place until February 27, 2014.

[4] Just before the election took place, the RS finally asked Hamdine Sabahi to withdraw his candidacy.