

Egypt's Troubled Transition: Elections without Democracy

With the convening of the country's first post-revolutionary parliament in late January 2012, Egypt's troubled transition has entered a new phase. As the battle over Egypt's future shifts from Tahrir Square to the newly elected People's Assembly, Egyptians may be facing their most difficult challenges yet. The country's interim rulers, the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF)—a 20-member body representing all four branches of the Egyptian military (similar to an expanded U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff)—have laid out an ambiguous and problematic roadmap. With presidential elections and the drafting of a new constitution scheduled to take place by July 1, the transition is imperiled by an ever-present threat of popular unrest as well as an economy teetering dangerously close to collapse. Yet, it is increasingly clear that the most formidable threat to Egyptian democracy comes from the ruling military council itself, through its manipulation of the political process, growing repression, and desire to remain above the law.

Meanwhile, recent events have reconfigured the delicate power balance among the country's three main centers of power—the military, the Islamists, and those who started the January 2011 uprising. While the ruling military council retains its virtual monopoly on power, its legitimacy has been greatly eroded by its own gross mishandling of the transition. Recent elections handed the Islamists a decisive parliamentary majority, giving the once-banned Muslim Brotherhood an electoral mandate by which to challenge military rule. Meanwhile, the revolutionary youth groups that launched the uprising in

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The most formidable threat to Egyptian democracy comes from the ruling military council itself.

Tahrir Square as well as other pro-democracy forces continue to be marginalized by regime repression and a political process that has passed them by.

While Egyptians and well-meaning outsiders continue to hope that recent elections will open the way for a better transition and facilitate the military's exit from power, parliamentary politics alone may not be enough to reverse the damage done over the previous year or quell the revolutionary fervor simmering just beneath the surface.

While a democratic outcome may still be possible in the long run, it will require major changes in how, and by whom, the transition is being managed.

Election Fallout

That elections were held at all last fall, much less on time, seemed remarkable given the events of the previous week. On November 19, just nine days before the first round of voting in Egypt's long-awaited parliamentary elections, Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square once again erupted in mass protest. The "second uprising," as it later became known, looked remarkably like the first, as thousands of young Egyptian protesters battled with hated police forces in Cairo and other Egyptian cities, leaving 45 protesters dead and thousands more injured—including a disturbing number who were shot in the eye. In a bid to quell the street anger and with the entire electoral process now thrown into question, the ruling military authorities sacked the government and appointed a new prime minister. While rejecting calls for an immediate handover of power to a civilian "presidential council," the SCAF formed a new Advisory Council to assist it in administering the transition until a new president was elected, and agreed to relinquish power to an elected president by July 2012 (previously the SCAF said it would leave sometime in 2013). The concessions were not insignificant, though they fell far short of the demands of the protesters, who insisted on the military's immediate departure and its permanent banishment from politics.

Even stranger than the eruption of pro-democracy protests on the eve of the country's first democratic election was how little impact the turmoil and bloodshed seemed to have on the elections themselves. Despite predictions that safety and other concerns would keep large numbers of Egyptians away from the polls, voter turnout reached an unprecedented 60 percent and remained high throughout the six-week process. Even a second wave of protests and regime violence in mid-December did little to dampen voter enthusiasm. In the end, the

electoral alliance led by the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) did better than expected, capturing 47 percent of the new parliament. But the biggest surprise came from the ultraconservative Salafist parties, which took around 24 percent of the parliament, while the two main secular groupings, the Wafd Party and the Egypt Bloc, came away with about 8 percent each.¹

The prospect of an overwhelming Islamist majority in parliament sparked concerns at home and abroad over the future place of women, secular-minded Egyptians, and the country's substantial Christian minority. The Brotherhood has attempted to reassure anxious Egyptians and foreigners alike, pledging to work with a broad array of social and political actors, respect minority rights, and uphold Egypt's international obligations. The Brotherhood's electoral dominance consolidated its position as the chief powerbroker of the transitional period, and at an especially crucial stage of the transition. While the powers of the new parliament remain vague and will no doubt be the subject of a great deal of struggle with Egypt's military rulers, the one authority it does have is the ability to name a 100-member constituent assembly tasked with drafting a new constitution. The process of writing the country's first post-revolutionary constitution, however, will require the kind of consensus-building and inclusiveness that has been in rather short supply throughout most of the past year.

Beyond winners and losers, the parliamentary elections also raised some troubling questions about the nature and trajectory of Egypt's transition. To some, the record turnout, even amid violence and uncertainty, looked like a rejection of the Tahrir protests and all that they stood for—or perhaps even an endorsement of the SCAF's handling of the transition. The liberal parties' poor showing at the polls combined with the unexpected electoral

success of the Salafists, many of whom opposed the January 25 uprising and have even decried electoral democracy as an affront to Islam, also pointed to a distinctly illiberal, if not anti-democratic, undercurrent in Egyptian society.

But parliamentary election results may be less a repudiation of democracy than a reflection of the underlying tensions and contradictions that have plagued the transition since February 2011. The unprecedented enthusiasm for the elections despite ongoing violence in Tahrir suggests that Egyptians, while still eager for change, preferred less-disruptive methods. On the other hand, the resumption of large-scale protests, even in the face of mounting regime violence and on the eve of highly-anticipated national elections, pointed to major deficiencies in the SCAF's handling of the transition.

Post-Mubarak Egypt has been an almost surreal collection of paradoxes and contradictions.

Indeed, post-Mubarak Egypt has been an almost surreal collection of paradoxes and contradictions. As one Egyptian blogger facetiously observed in a post-election tweet: “[We have] a deposed government overseeing an election for a parliament with no power held under an authority that has turned against a people determined to make electoral history by electing those who say democracy is *haram* [prohibited under Islamic law].”² Moreover, since Mubarak’s ouster in February 2011, Egypt’s transition has been characterized by two seemingly paradoxical trends. On one hand, successfully convening the country’s first freely-contested elections in many decades bore witness to the vastly-expanded political space of the new Egypt, including the proliferation of dozens of new political parties and a burgeoning, often rancorous, media culture. Even established powers like the Muslim Brotherhood, the country’s most formidable opposition force, began to undergo major transformations with defections along generational and philosophical lines. On the other hand, the transition has also been marked by growing instability, social and political polarization, and communal strife.

Such paradoxes can be traced to an even more fundamental contradiction that lies at the very heart of Egypt’s turmoil: the fact that the military establishment, one of the country’s most secretive institutions and the backbone of the dictatorship for nearly six decades, has now been charged with leading the transition to democratic rule. Perhaps the ultimate irony of the elections and the violence that accompanied them, then, was in demonstrating just how little had actually changed since the SCAF took control.

The only genuine changes introduced thus far have been opening up the political arena and holding parliamentary elections. While by no means insignificant, the advent of multi-partyism and the holding elections, with virtually no other reforms, has failed to stabilize the transition and may even have exacerbated matters.

The SCAF: Manipulator-in-Chief

From the outset, the SCAF was keen to retain as much of the old system as possible—including most of the old constitution and both houses of parliament, the People’s Assembly and the Shura (Consultative) Council, all of which were “suspended” but never abolished following Mubarak’s ouster. Even the outdated parliamentary quota requiring that half of all seats be held by “farmers” and “laborers,” a relic of Nasser-era socialism and derided by Egyptian parties across the ideological spectrum, was retained—not least because it served as a conduit for military officers to gain entry into the parliament. More crucially, the vast security–intelligence apparatus that has undergirded the military regime since the 1950s remains intact, as does the hated Central Security Force implicated in

killing protesters in last year's uprising. Even the criminal indictments of former regime figures, including Mubarak and his two sons, were the result not of systematic attempts at accountability but rather as reluctant (and as yet, ongoing) concessions in response to massive popular pressure and sustained protests.

The current state of affairs was not inevitable; it had a good deal of help from all sides. While it is true that both the revolutionary youth groups and the Islamists overplayed their hands at various moments since February 2011, the ruling military council bears the overwhelming share of the blame. Not only has the SCAF repeatedly rejected any and all proposals to share power with a civilian authority, its increasingly Mubarak-like repression against its political opponents and brazen attempts to manipulate the legal and political environment have been a major source of instability throughout the transition.

The exclusive focus on politics—namely *electoral* politics—adversely affected the transition in several ways. First and foremost, it gave the SCAF a virtual free hand in manipulating the process. While the outcomes may not always have come out as intended, the generals have been determined to engineer a transition process which safeguards their interests and ensures their dominance. This necessarily further marginalized groups which were already politically disempowered including the

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youth, Copts, women, and labor. It also detracted from other badly needed reforms in the economic, security, judicial, and other spheres, adding to the huge reservoir of resentment which had been building over the previous year.

The sudden shift from a depoliticized to a hyper-politicized public sphere was bound to have a destabilizing effect on the country in the short term, including deepening age-old ideological rivalries between Islamist and secular forces, and sharply increasing sectarian tensions and even violence. Meanwhile, the virtual paralysis of Egypt's political class and the absence of competent decisionmaking over the past year have been especially ruinous for the country's economy. Ironically, by holding the transition hostage to the emergence of new political institutions such as the parliament and a new constitution, the ruling military council denied itself the very stability it had always sought and helped sustain the protest movement it so desperately sought to quell.

As the highest military body in the country, only the SCAF had the ability to force Mubarak out of power without substantial bloodshed. Yet, the SCAF's decision to remove Mubarak was not premeditated, and it did so only reluctantly.

In addition to their overriding concern for stability, the generals were unhappy with Mubarak's plans to groom his son, Gamal, for the presidency. After 18 days of sustained protest by millions of Egyptians, and with chaos in the streets and the economy in free fall, the military saw Mubarak's removal as the least bad of all available options and the surest way to end the protests and restore normalcy.

In doing so, the military also sought to protect its carefully-cultivated reputation as defender of the people. Throughout the uprising, the military carefully positioned itself between the public and the regime as a stabilizing but ultimately neutral force, urging protesters to go home while vowing never to attack them. Troops deployed to maintain order in Egyptian cities held to their promise not to fire on the people, but they did not intervene to protect them from attacks by Mubarak's police and hired thugs. Even so, the military successfully parlayed its political neutrality throughout the uprising into a perception that the army had in fact sided with the people all along, a view readily accepted by most Egyptians who hailed the army as heroes amid chants of "the people and the army are one hand!"

Most important, the SCAF also sought to preserve its numerous social, economic, and political privileges. The Egyptian military serves more than national defense or even political functions; it is also a major engine for economic growth and development in the country, controlling a vast network of economic assets in all sectors. The military's highly-secretive shadow economy, estimated at between one-tenth and one-third of the national economy,³ also required immunity from public scrutiny and governmental oversight. Egypt's generals may be genuine in their desire to cede authority and return to the barracks, but they are determined to do so with their power, prestige, and privileges intact.

Dealing with the Islamists . . .

In a bid to preserve their interests and ensure their dominance, Egypt's military rulers have resorted to time-worn "divide and rule" tactics, especially when it came to exploiting decades-old animosities between Islamists and secular forces. As an institution that values power—and one not especially prone to sentimentalism—the military establishment naturally gravitated toward those it believed were capable of delivering. For Egypt's military rulers, the high degree of organization and discipline of the Islamists in general, and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, made them at once natural allies and potential enemies, both of which called for close coordination.

The first cracks in the opposition camp after Mubarak's fall, and the "original sin" of the transitional period, emerged when Islamists rallied behind the SCAF's plan to hold parliamentary elections before drafting a new constitution ahead of a March 19 referendum. Islamist groups, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, hoped

to consolidate their newfound legitimacy by moving to elections quickly. Fearing the better-organized Islamists would dominate the process, most secular and liberal groups opposed the measure, but it passed overwhelmingly with 77 percent approval. The SCAF's insistence on holding elections first not only exacerbated tensions among Egypt's rival camps, it also prevented any real progress by making basic reforms, crisis management, and even the development of a coherent vision for the future a function of political horse-trading and power politics rather than operational consensus.

Whether there was a secret deal between the military and the Islamists, as alleged by some secularists but never proven, or simply a mutually beneficial arrangement based on a temporary convergence of interests mattered little. The fact that the Islamists have generally eschewed mass demonstrations and have remained relatively muted in their criticisms of the military also allowed them, for the most part, to avoid running afoul of the SCAF, at least until the weeks leading up to elections.

The first major falling out between the military and the Islamists occurred in early November, with the release of the so-called Selmi document. The document—named for its presumptive author, vice premier Ali Selmi—laid out a set of “supra-constitutional” principles aimed ostensibly at protecting minority rights and the “civil” character of the state. In reality, however, the document would have usurped the incoming parliament's authority in naming the constituent assembly responsible for drafting the constitution while codifying the military's status as a “state within a state” in the constitution. The document, which some secular groups welcomed as a check on the Islamists, was enough to send the Brotherhood back to Tahrir Square for only the second time since Mubarak's ouster. After promoting the Islamists during most of the transition, the military began to shift the other way. No sooner were election results for the first round of voting announced in early December than SCAF member General Mukhtar al-Mulla all but dismissed the outcome and suggested the parliament's authority over the constitution would be severely curtailed.

The Islamists' coziness with the military council was never strategic and was always precarious. For both historical and philosophical reasons, the two sides remained deeply distrustful of one another. To the Brotherhood, the SCAF represented an opportunity to achieve the one thing that had eluded it throughout most of its 83 years: normalization. Haunted by memories of 1954—when a brief honeymoon with the military junta that led to Egypt's first revolution ended in a bloody crackdown as well as by the experiences of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front in 1992 and Hamas in 2006—the Brotherhood is determined never again to be driven underground. For the SCAF, the Islamists were useful, particularly in neutralizing mass street protests, but ultimately still expendable. The moment the generals sense any sort of threat from the Islamists,

well before it reaches the stage of an “Islamic takeover,” they will not hesitate to act swiftly and decisively against them—much as they did in 1954.

...and the Revolutionary Youth

If the Islamists were the poster children for accommodation and political compromise with Egypt’s military rulers, the revolutionary youth were their polar opposites in virtually every way. Not only have the youth of Tahrir sustained the culture of protest throughout the transition, in defiance of the SCAF and its attempts to impose stability, they also have been among the most vocal critics of the military and its special prerogatives. Their chief demands have revolved around issues such as bringing former regime figures to justice, punishing those responsible for the killing of roughly 900 protesters during the uprising and another 100 since the SCAF took over, and compensating families of the killed and wounded.

For the youth of Tahrir, the persistence of past abuses such as torture, media censorship, and the hated emergency law were signs of how little things had changed since Mubarak’s ouster. “Over the past year,” observed Human Rights Watch, “Egyptians have experienced many of the same human rights abuses that characterized Mubarak’s police state.”⁴ But new forms of repression such as assaults on female protesters through so-called “virginity tests,” and subjecting more than 12,000 civilians, including many protesters, to military trials seemed specially tailored for them. Add to these the sheer brutality of the violence unleashed on protesters throughout the fall of 2011 and one begins to understand why, even after a full year, protests have persisted as long as they have. This may also explain the severity of their treatment at the hands of the SCAF.

The revolutionary youth’s palpable contempt for the SCAF and its leader, Field Marshall Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, was quite mutual. The military has always taken a dim view of protests and protesters, blaming both for the country’s economic and security problems. As criticism of the military council mounted, the SCAF began lashing out with greater severity at any who would challenge it. With the aid of a compliant state media apparatus, military officials launched an all-out assault on the Tahrir youth and other pro-democracy forces. Activists and bloggers were brought before military tribunals while revolutionary groups such as the April 6th movement and Kefaya! (“Enough!”) were dubbed “foreign agents” and accused of all manner of treachery and sedition. The campaign against pro-democracy activists and groups intensified leading up to the first anniversary of the January 25 uprising, culminating in the raids of a dozen pro-democracy groups in late December accused of “illegally” receiving foreign funding, including three with ties to the U.S. government. Several Americans employed by these organizations were later barred from leaving the country

pending investigations and possible criminal prosecution, sparking a fresh crisis in U.S.–Egyptian relations, including threats to cut Egypt's \$1.3 billion aid package.

Unlike the Islamists, who represented powerful political and social forces, the youth were seen as a politically-marginal and numerically-weak constituency that could be handled with relative impunity. Indeed, it seemed the more socially and politically marginalized a group was in the eyes of the SCAF, the harsher the treatment meted out to them. The October 9 killing of 26 mostly Coptic Christian protesters outside the Maspero state TV and radio building marked a turning point in the transition. Even as videos taken at the scene captured gruesome images of protesters being crushed to death under the massive wheels of army APCs, state TV broadcast live appeals urging citizens to defend their soldiers against bands of “angry Christians.” The SCAF denied any wrongdoing, instead blaming the violence on “hidden hands” bent on undermining Egypt's stability and of course on the protesters themselves.

During the pre-election “uprising” in November, which left 45 protesters dead and thousands wounded, protesters were again depicted as “thugs” and “hooligans.”⁵ A second crackdown just weeks later, which left 17 protesters dead and 700 wounded, was especially brutal in dealing with female protesters, as captured in the now infamous video of soldiers brutally beating a young woman stripped down to her bra. Once again, despite the existence of indisputable video and photographic evidence, the SCAF denied any wrongdoing and instead blamed the violence on mysterious third parties working on behalf of “foreign agendas.” Those who doubted the military council's willingness to exploit security mayhem for political advantage—whether by neglect or active encouragement—need look no further than SCAF Decree #85 issued in response to the clashes of November 2011, which amounted to a call for mass vigilantism.⁶

The military's relentless campaign against the youth of Tahrir has resonated with many Egyptians. The SCAF has succeeded in conflating the “military council,” a political body appointed by the former dictator, with the “army,” a beloved national institution. As an army of conscripts, the military remains one of Egypt's few truly national institutions, and one of its most revered. In the wake of the uncertainty created by Mubarak's departure, it also became a source of comfort and continuity. Meanwhile, growing impatience with highly disruptive protests and an overriding desire for normalcy has turned large segments of the Egyptian public against the protesters, even if they did not buy into SCAF-inspired conspiracy theories. The protesters have also been discredited by their own provocations, internal discord, and lack of strategy. Yet, while the military's campaign against the youth may have succeeded in capturing the hearts and minds of the so-called “silent majority,” it cannot explain why, a full

year into the transition, the youth and other disaffected groups continue to push their demands through street mobilization instead of normal political avenues.

What Next?

With the battle over the presidency and a new constitution looming on the horizon, the first half of 2012 will be a crucial time for all groups in Egypt, but none more so than the Muslim Brotherhood. Exactly how and in what order these two major events will take place are as yet unknown, but whether the new parliament and the political processes which come out of it will be able to overcome the problems associated with the first phase of the transition and the SCAF's mishandling of it is now largely in the hands of the Brotherhood. Key questions, then, follow. In particular, can a Brotherhood-led parliament forge something like a new national consensus, including with groups that may not be well represented in the parliament or have been cut out of the political process? Can it begin to address some of the monumental problems which have accumulated and deteriorated in the last year? Those problems begin with stabilizing economic and security conditions, but also include eventually addressing key demands of the revolution like justice for those killed and injured since the uprising as well as accountability for other past crimes.

How far will the Brotherhood go in pushing back against the powerful military council?

This is obviously an enormously tall order, and the process could easily stall on the dire economic challenges now facing the country. Foreign reserves are down to \$10 billion, less than two months worth of imports. Continued pressure on the Egyptian pound could lead to inflation, which combined with a youth unemployment rate estimated at about 25 percent could lead to further civil unrest.⁷ But the answers to these questions also depend on how the Brotherhood relates to the other two actors in Egypt's

transitional drama. In particular, how far will the Brotherhood go in pushing back against the powerful military council? Perhaps as important, how will it relate to a weakened protest movement that is increasingly leery of the Brotherhood for reasons that have little to do with ideology?

The SCAF: Nowhere to Go but Down

The military council still holds the balance of power, despite being humbled somewhat by the extent of the Islamist victory, and has a number of cards it can play against the Brotherhood and virtually any parliamentary alliance it can muster. As the acting chief executive, the SCAF has the ability to block

parliamentary legislation—assuming it allows the body to legislate independently—as well as its own ability to issue unilateral decrees. With politics displacing protest as the primary vehicle for change, the SCAF will almost certainly ramp up efforts to play one faction off another. The SCAF will also retain the ability to appoint and dismiss governments until a new constitution and a new president are in place, augmenting its ability to co-opt and incentivize.

Even so, time is not on the side of the SCAF, particularly if it decides to overstay its July 2012 deadline, which remains a possibility. The military council has already lost the confidence of several key constituencies, including much of the youth, Copts, and large swaths of the political elite and civil society. Remaining on the scene, especially if it continues to operate with the same heavy hand it has shown throughout the previous year, will only accelerate calls for its departure and imperil its broader interests. In short, the longer they stay, the less popular they become, and the more exposed they are to the sunlight, the more questions will be asked of them. While the military's popularity remains high, it has nowhere to go but down.

Tahrir: Down But Not Out

The youth and other revolutionary groups seem to grasp the SCAF's vulnerabilities, even if they have thus far failed to capitalize on them. As unpopular or politically marginalized as the Tahrir protesters may be, however, it would be a mistake to count them out in the current phase. The protest movement has repeatedly shown an ability to affect events far beyond its numbers. That most major concessions by the SCAF thus far resulted from pressure generated by mass protests, including the most recent confrontations at the end of 2011, has no doubt fueled the movement. If there could be no revolution without the Brotherhood, then there would be no stability without Tahrir. It was they after all—and not the Muslim Brotherhood or other established parties, despite weeks of political negotiations—who forced the SCAF to accelerate its departure date to July 2012. Such concessions no doubt came at a painfully steep price, in this case the deaths of 45 of their fellow protesters and wounding of thousands more, but the cost does not appear to have diminished their resolve and may even have increased it.

For all its flaws, the movement also continues to have a disproportionate influence on the political discourse of the country and is beginning to show signs of maturity, as demonstrated during the first anniversary of the January 25 uprising. The anniversary, which coincided with the opening of the new parliament, and accompanying media coverage and fanfare, gave the protest movement a badly needed boost. The specter of a million-plus Egyptians gathered peacefully in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2012 defied the SCAF's

apocalyptic warnings of impending chaos, as did the smaller but still respectable turnout the following Friday. Though still lacking cohesion and strategic direction, the protest movement's recent (and long overdue) targeting of state-run media could suggest a qualitative shift in its tactics.

The Brotherhood's Dilemma

The post-election picture remains highly fluid and, at this stage, nobody knows for certain which way the Brotherhood will go—perhaps not even the Brotherhood itself. Nonetheless, there are two prevailing schools of thought with regard to the Brotherhood's likely course. The first holds that the Brotherhood, true to form, will seek an accommodation with the SCAF if not an outright deal. Indeed, even after the elections, the Brotherhood has continued to show a willingness to accommodate the military council, most recently by supporting the SCAF's timetable for leaving power in July when most other political forces were insisting on moving up its departure to April or even earlier. Some Brotherhood leaders have also shown growing disdain for the protest movement, echoing the military's rhetoric about "anarchists" and "stability." With the Brotherhood now part of the establishment, ongoing street protests and civic unrest may be seen as threats to its position. Despite repeated denials by the Brotherhood, however, talk of some sort of arrangement persists. Of course there are clear dangers with any accommodation of the SCAF, which could give the military sufficient cover to crush the Tahrir revolutionaries once and for all, or perhaps even pave the way for a kind of majoritarian tyranny.

Others, meanwhile, point to the vastly divergent goals of the Brotherhood and the military and see an imminent confrontation. There is already talk of promoting the Salafists as a counterweight to the Brotherhood, much as Mubarak did, and the military is likely to continue seducing smaller secular parties into signing on to various anti-Brotherhood initiatives. The newly-created Advisory Council, which has been boycotted by the Brotherhood, could become another tool by which to encroach on the parliament's role in shaping the new constitution. According to this view, now that the Brotherhood has achieved the ultimate form of legitimacy—a clear parliamentary majority—it will be more inclined to flex its muscle vis-à-vis the SCAF, particularly over issues such as the extent of the parliament's powers or the military's insistence on a constitutional carve-out.

A sound hypothesis to be sure, but an unlikely one all the same. It seems illogical to expect that the Brotherhood, after having fought for inclusion in and then mastered the political game, would simply abandon it whether through revolution or some other means. If the Brotherhood was reluctant to resort to protests before the elections, it will be all the more so after having been elected to a parliament it now controls. Moreover, those issues most likely to threaten

the SCAF's interests (transparency, oversight, accountability, etc.) have not been central to the Brotherhood's platform or its political base's "bread and butter." The only scenario that is likely to put the Brotherhood back on the streets in full force is if the military remains beyond the July 1 deadline. At a more fundamental level, going back to Tahrir undermines the Brotherhood's central argument that "elections are the solution." If protest was the key to change all along, it would mean the Brotherhood's decision to favor normal politics was a major strategic error.

Although the Brotherhood's current dilemma is often painted as a stark choice between confrontation and accommodation, the reality is likely to be more nuanced. If the Brotherhood can come to an arrangement with the SCAF on other areas of mutual interest—like stabilizing the economy for example—it may be more inclined to forego issues seen as red lines for the SCAF. In other words, the Brotherhood is likely to continue doing what it has done throughout the transitional period—and with great success—which is to triangulate between all of its potential rivals simultaneously.

For reasons of both internal politics and political optics, the Brotherhood is unlikely to opt for a complete break with the protesters and the "revolution," which still commands a degree of legitimacy in the public psyche. A hint of this was on display during the January anniversary commemorations, when the Brotherhood came under attack from revolutionary groups and much of the media, first for equivocating over whether to join the demonstration, and then when it did for appearing to "celebrate" a revolution that many view as still unfinished. At the same time, as the biggest winners in the elections, the Brotherhood is far too invested in the political process to risk it all on the unpredictability and volatility of mass protests. The Brotherhood is also hemmed in by the success of its Salafist rivals, which poses a direct threat to its Islamist base, as well as by its own internal tensions. It will therefore need to balance its democratic posture with an emphasis on its Islamist credentials.

The Brotherhood may seek an informal arrangement with the SCAF which allows the military to retain its economic interests, and perhaps even immunity from prosecution, in exchange for certain key reforms, particularly in enhancing parliamentary powers at the expense of the president. The SCAF also has an interest in a weakened president, who while certainly more than a figurehead would not be the commander-in-chief. With its trademark patience and pragmatism, the Brotherhood may be prepared simply to wait the process out, taking solace in the experiences of its Turkish counterparts, the Justice and

Egypt may end up looking less like Turkey and more like Pakistan.

Development Party (AKP), in the hope that the military will gradually be pushed out of power.

Tough Choices

Whether it will be possible for the military to “rule without governing,” or what exactly this might look like, is still unclear. If the first phase of the transition is any guide, however, Egypt may end up looking less like Turkey and more like Pakistan, where a military that refuses to truly relinquish power results in a weak and dysfunctional government. In the meantime, it is now clear that the SCAF has neither the will nor the ability to oversee a transition to genuinely democratic civilian rule. The advent of parliamentary politics, while positive, is unlikely on its own to stabilize Egypt’s transition, and could even exacerbate matters by further entrenching existing social and political divisions.

Nevertheless, the newly-elected parliament does have the potential to play a critical role in the current phase of the transition, provided it is prepared to exercise its legislative and oversight responsibilities with full independence and vigor. Although its institutional powers may be limited, as the only freely-elected government institution in the country, the parliament has a moral authority that neither the cabinet nor the military council enjoys. In the end, the composition of the Brotherhood’s parliamentary coalition may be less crucial in shaping the current phase than its ability to work with other forces outside the legislature.

The rift is growing between those seeking a new political order and those reforming the old one.

The parliament’s ability to push back on the military is likely to be enhanced significantly by working in tandem with the youth of Tahrir, which includes a substantial number of its own cadres.

If the transition’s first year was marked by divisions between Islamists and secularists over Egypt’s identity, its second may be defined by the growing rift across the ideological divide between those seeking to create a new political order and those content with reforming the old one. As the Brotherhood moves from the theoretical realm of opposition politics to practical matters of governance, its ability to triangulate other actors and straddle the political fence will naturally diminish. Once the constitution and president are in place, the Brotherhood is likely to face even greater pressures from within, and without, regarding its ambitious reform agenda on issues like stabilizing the economy and initiating police reforms. The responsibility of making real-life decisions is also likely to accelerate the process of soul-searching triggered by the uprising,

perhaps leading to new fissures both within the movement and between it and its political party. At the same time, the relationship between the Brotherhood as an organization and the FJP as a party is also likely to come under increased scrutiny from outside.

As Egypt's most important western ally, the United States faces difficult and uncomfortable choices of its own, ones even more complicated than the normal dilemma between interests and ideals. With the Muslim Brotherhood poised to play a leadership role alongside the military, Washington is caught between a stalwart ally that behaves badly and a traditional foe that speaks nicely. After a year of trying to "get Egypt right" in the hope that it might serve as a model for other Arab states in transition, the Obama administration now finds itself with limited or no leverage with all key Egyptian actors. The United States has shown increasing displeasure with the SCAF's growing brutality and open manipulation but is not yet willing to put its strategic partnership with Egypt on the line.

The Obama administration now finds itself with limited or no leverage with all key Egyptian actors.

Just as it was late in supporting last year's uprising in Tahrir, the Obama administration remained relatively silent throughout most of the transition in the face of growing abuses by the SCAF. At the same time, the United States has had to reverse decades of official policy shunning the Islamists and must come to terms with the newfound legitimacy and political dominance of a group with whom it has had profound political and philosophical differences. The administration studiously avoided expressions of concern over the Islamists' success and has wisely initiated dialogues with all parliamentary factions, including the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists. Although there may be reason to question the democratic credentials of Islamist groups, they have thus far played by the rules. The same cannot be said of Egypt's military rulers.

After months of expressing misplaced confidence in the SCAF, the Obama administration became more vocal in its criticisms of the SCAF only after several crises forced its hand. It took several days of a brutal crackdown on Tahrir protesters in late November 2011 for the administration to call for a transfer of power to a civilian authority "as soon as possible."⁸ The crisis over the American democracy workers will similarly test the limits of U.S. patience and influence.

As the SCAF's principal sponsor, the United States should insist that it adhere to its July 1, 2012 deadline for transferring power to a civilian government while encouraging the generals, both publicly and in private, to loosen their grip on the reins of power and engage in a genuine power-sharing arrangement with the newly-elected parliament. The Obama administration

must also be more willing to openly call out the SCAF, frankly and in real-time, on human rights and other abuses, including withholding the country's \$1.3 billion military aid package if necessary. In the meantime, the United States should make clear to all parties in Egypt that while it will avoid directly interfering in the constitution-drafting process and other internal matters, it expects Egypt to adhere to basic human rights standards and democratic norms.

More broadly, in Egypt and elsewhere, U.S. and other aid programs should place far greater emphasis and resources on areas such as the rule of law, citizenship training, transitional justice, and other non-electoral reforms. While it is reasonable to expect democracy to come about at the end rather than the beginning of the transition, insisting on greater respect for the rule of law and basic rights could help ensure that Egypt does not succumb to increased civil strife or revert to authoritarian rule in the interim.

Notes

1. See <http://www.elections2011.eg/>.
2. See <https://twitter.com/#!/amrbassiouny/status/141811372995510272>.
3. Charles M. Sennott, "Inside The Egyptian Military's Brutal Hold on Power," *Frontline*, January 24, 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/foreign-affairs-defense/revolution-in-cairo-foreign-affairs-defense/inside-the-egyptian-militarys-brutal-hold-on-power/>.
4. Human Rights Watch, "The Road Ahead: A Human Rights Agenda for Egypt's New Parliament," January 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/egypt0112webw-cover.pdf>.
5. Melissa Bell, "Egyptian protesters' videos detail violence in Tahrir Square," *The Washington Post*, December 20, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/egypt-confessional-videos-detail-violence-in-tahrir-square/2011/12/20/gIQArnz86O_blog.html.
6. See <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=306787796008143&set=a.191412130879044.43504.191115070908750&type=1&theater>.
7. "Egypt's Economic Crisis," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/21/opinion/egypts-economic-crisis.html?_r=1.
8. "Statement by the Press Secretary on Recent Developments in Egypt," The White House, November 25, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/25/statement-press-secretary-recent-developments-egypt>.