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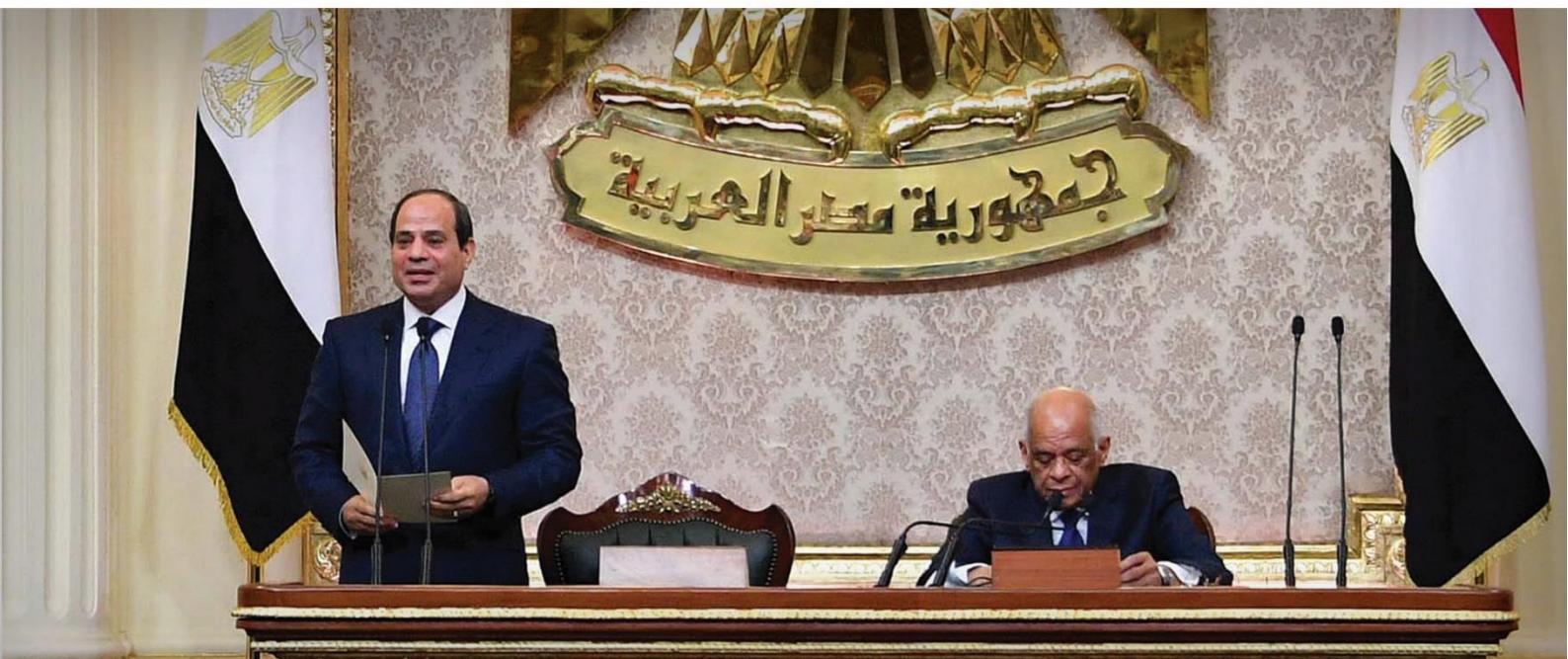
30 JULY 2018



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Sisi's oath of office and re-production of polarization

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Introduction

In the speech that he delivered immediately after he was sworn in for a second term as president, Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi suggested the “redefinition” of Egyptian identity, and pledged that his second term would witness major projects in the “mental”, “cultural”, and “health” areas, claiming that the Egyptian identity has been under the threat of being looted and replaced. As it is usual in the speeches of anti-revolution figures, Sisi ended his speech accusing Islamists of distorting the Egyptian identity – although Sisi had earlier referred (in his speech) to attempts to steal the homeland: sometimes under the pretext of civil democracy, and sometimes through religious discourse.

In fact, such discourse has sought over 60 years to cover up the conduct of a centralized elite that has expropriated the homeland and committed brutal massacres against their own people.

First: Scenarios of redefining Egyptian identity

The issue of “redefining Egyptian identity” came within Sisi's talk about development of education and health. However, there are two scenarios for attempting to redefine the Egyptian identity, namely:

- 1- Exploitation of the educational process, or
- 2- Reproduction of the state of polarization that was prevailing during the 1980s.

Scenario 1: Changing the direction of the educational process

Although Sisi's first term in office witnessed confiscation of all private schools, especially those owned by Islamist charities, in order to stop the process of “building

the resisting mind", especially after the military coup suspended any satellite TV channels that used to adopt an Islamist discourse at the very early moments of the military coup, even before declaration of the coup statement, and later suspended all websites that adopted a different discourse, including social networking sites.

The first scenario regarding the "redefinition of Egyptian identity" involves a broad modification of Egyptian educational curricula, as Sisi's statement coincides with an actual trend to change the education system entirely within twelve years. However, achievement of any educational progress is questionable under a ministry dominated by corruption, according to the data of the Central Auditing Organization. In fact, education systems operating under authoritarian regimes usually produce non-critical and non-creative minds.

Scenario 2: Reviving the polarization discourse that prevailed in the 1980s

This track aims to maintain the containment project associated with the process of redefining the Egyptian identity. In addition to spreading fear - whether from the security chaos, or from the consequences resulting from change (in exploitation of the models of Syria and Iraq) - the Sisi regime seeks to re-produce the "intellectual fear" that was used during the Sadat and Mubarak eras in the 1980s. In the Sadat era, the relationship between the elite and the State turned into a political game, in which President Anwar Sadat wanted to strike a balance for facing the influence of the pro-Nasser elite (the elite of his predecessor, Gamal Abdel Nasser). To achieve this, Sadat encouraged the capitalist elite to engage in the political action, and released the Islamists from prisons and allowed them to engage in the public action. However, in spite of the limited margin of movement, the Islamists were able to build a strong social political discourse, form cohesive organizations, and produce and sometimes contain political and intellectual leaderships.

With the advent of Hosni Mubarak, his advisers suggested adoption of a “project of intellectual and existential fear” employing Abdel Nasser's elite to counter the growing influence of Islamists. Mubarak also contained the Coptic Church (through exploitation of the then fabricated incidents of sectarian strife), and Al-Azhar (especially after the death of Al-Azhar's Grand Sheikh at the time, Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq) to achieve this goal.

Today, the Sisi regime believes that the project of fear is a necessity. Sisi's advisers warn him that the rise of the so-called post-Islamism, as Professor Asif Beyat puts it, could bridge the “historical hatred gap” between the Islamic and the civil democratic currents with all their spectrums. Also, the growth of the “post-organization trend”, both in Salafist and moderate currents, could undermine the State's ability to manipulate Islamist organizations.

In addition, the Islamic movement has the ability to recover and innovate, especially after understanding the central role that media can play in helping achieve their objectives.

For all these considerations, it is difficult to expect that the Sisi regime will be satisfied with the mechanisms currently in use, as they are not reliable amid the growing state of maturity in the surrounding environment. Everyone knows that such maturity is likely to reach its peak with civil-Islamic convergence, which provides an ideal chance for the new force to lead the street movement again, just as happened in 25 January, 2011.

Second: Potential containment tools

The Egyptian Spring has revealed the existence of two democratic projects for change. The first project is the Islamist project that includes the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic parties, and the Salafist movement. The second project - the secularist civil

project - includes the democratic wings of the liberal and leftist currents. However, the pro-state stream, which has mostly led the counter-revolution, succeeded in launching the "fear project" again to enable the brutal security tool to repress the larger democratic force in Egypt, the Islamists. This move later helped in the containment of the civil democratic current; and unfortunately both the Islamist and liberal currents have become prisoners of the repressive regime. However, with the erosion of public satisfaction, the Sisi regime seems to be moving back to the political/security track (the same policy that was adopted by the Mubarak regime), rather than the current security track which has almost lost most international complacency:

1- Sisi's Party

The talk about establishment of the so-called "President's Party" similarly to the National Democratic Party during the Mubarak era, and "combining the opposition" in various entities, are among the most prominent manifestations of the current trend toward adoption of a political/security policy. The elimination of the liquidity of the opposition political scene is one of the most important needs of the Sisi regime to control the political/security path. In this context, the new combined opposition platforms will serve as a containment tool for the civil democratic currents – except for their discourse about democracy.

2- Egyptian elites between collusion and coercion

Burhan Ghalioun, a thinker, believes that the "pro-state elite" is responsible for the state of backwardness in general, and the state of "lagging far behind democratic practices" in particular. In order to cover up its failure to express the aspirations of the Arab peoples for the achievement of renaissance, this elite promoted a kind of analytical discourse to divert attention from the fact that they (the pro-state elite)

turned into a tool to curb Arab peoples aspirations. However, we should take into consideration that this elite with its wealth and prestige as well as all the material and moral gains it has gained by controlling the state and harnessing the people to serve it, will be the first victims of any democratic transformation. However, it seems that such arguments will be among the most important mental/psychological tricks for containing the civil elite, and convincing them that in so doing they are serving the country.

In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between two processes: collusion and coercion. It is clear that there is a strong pro-state political and partisan elite in Egypt, and that such elite has played an important role in the empowerment of the counter-revolution that took place against the liberation of enlightenment project of 25 January, 2011. Therefore, such elite will undoubtedly be the cornerstone of the transition to the political/security track through which the Sisi administration will restore its control over the public life. But this utilitarian scene is accompanied by the largest process of political/cultural coercion in the history of Egypt. This process is one of the features of the expected Egyptian internal policy following Sisi's first term in office.

3- Laws as instruments of domestication

There are several laws that have been produced to achieve this purpose, including the "Protest Law", the "NGO Law", the "Judicial Authority Law" and the "Media Law", as well as the amendments to articles of the Penal Code, including Article 102 and the articles from 171 to 191 on libel, spreading false news, violation of privacy, contempt of religions, posing damage to the reputation of the country, and other "bad-end" texts, including decisions to withhold media websites.

Third: Political lining up alone is not enough

It was natural with the spread of ignorance and the July 3 coup's reliance on the illiterate and the semi-educated alike to export an image of "popular satisfaction" toward the coup d'état – it was natural that the January revolutionaries (in reference to the January Revolution in 2011) consider the spread of "awareness" as the most important factor in the battle of "liberation" of the homeland. In this context, the administration of the July 3 coup d'etat deprived its "January-elite" opponents from the tools of such battle, until some media outlets appeared in Turkey, London, Qatar and even Egypt, with various trends and discourse - despite attempts to jam, block, and circumvent them - which helped bridging the gap between the components of the January Revolution.

Conclusion

It can be stated that the efforts of the peaceful resistance have achieved substantial results, despite the horror of the "massacres against the Muslim Brotherhood" and the heinous "assassination of Shaima Sabbagh" and efforts of "security hegemony over the Egyptian street". The peaceful resistance also achieved remarkable results with regard to owning media outlets and development of their content and discourse, as well as establishment of "think tanks". However, the January elite must go beyond political lining up - to produce national cultural constants that prevent the production of "fear projects" and counter cultural polarization.