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EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

POLITICAL
ASSESSMENTS

Problematics of Egyptian opposition and quest for solutions

10 JUNE 2021

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Problematics of Egyptian opposition and quest for solutions

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This paper sheds light on the features of the imbalance that afflicted the Egyptian opposition in general, and presents proposals to address the problem of the crisis, so that it would move from its current stalemate and be more effective, feasible and influential in the Egyptian scene.

Egyptian opposition's main weaknesses

First: Structural problems

Most Egyptian opposition entities suffer from a structural imbalance, whether at the level of ideas, or systems and structures; where some of them are completely controlled by only one person, in absence of a tight organizational structure that may allow circulation of ideas or a smooth transfer of power among members of these entities. It is remarkable that the authoritarian, individualistic nature of power in Egypt has been reflected on the opposition factions that are supposed to seek ending authoritarianism in the country.

This structural imbalance can be divided in terms of political behavior and action into three packages¹:

A- Political groups

Political groups here are intended to be party and revolutionary entities that are motivated by personal political interests, not by a superior security will or direct interests, taking into mind that amid the security repression in Egypt, it is difficult for those entities to make their own decisions independently, away from regime pressures. These entities, both at home and abroad, include: the Anti-Coup Alliance (National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy), the Muslim Brotherhood, the 'Strong Egypt' Party, the Building and Development Party, the Wasat Party, part of the 6 April Movement, as well as individual figures.

¹ Mamdouh Almuneir, Muslim Brotherhood and Management of Relations with the Pro-Revolution Political Forces, Egyptian Institute for Studies, 20 January 2015, [link](#)

B- Functional groups:

Functional groups are those entities that do not originally have a real political project, but only perform specific roles dictated to them by the security services, or interest groups. These groups are not at all concerned with national consensus, partnership, or concepts that can reunite the revolutionaries. Although some of these entities have political projects, they are more formal rather than realistic projects. Examples of these entities include the Tagammu (Grouping) Party, the former Salvation Front, the Wafd Party, the Free Egyptians Party, the Nour Party, the parties that were established at home in the wake of the 3 July military coup (2013)².

C- Non-ideological revolutionary groups:

Non-ideological revolutionary groups are the entities that have mostly emerged after the coup, as a reaction to the practices of the regime, and are predominantly elitist, most of which were founded outside Egypt, such as the Egyptian Revolutionary Council, the International Coalition for Egyptians Abroad, and others³.

Second: Absence of leadership

The Muslim Brotherhood's withdrawal from the opposition leadership in the aftermath of the military coup was a heavy blow to the revolutionary movement – specifically in the last quarter of 2015, when the Brotherhood's internal crisis started to come to the surface – which directly led to cessation of anti-regime mobilization on the ground⁴.

As a result of the structural crisis mentioned above, none of the revolutionary forces or political movements was able to fill the leadership vacuum left by the Brotherhood's withdrawal from the scene. Consequently, the Egyptian revolution has virtually become headless, and accordingly almost altogether ceased. Reviewing experiences of revolutions throughout history, we find that there is not a single revolution that succeeded without an effective leadership capable of managing the conflict, seizing opportunities, and searching for alternatives.

² Militarization of parties... Sisi's generals' plan to monopolize political life, Noon Post, May 21, 2018, [link](#)

³ Map of Egyptians Abroad: Spread and Influence, Egyptian Institute for Studies, 9 January 2016, [link](#)

⁴ What is happening in the corridors of Egypt's Brotherhood? Noon Post, 30 May 2015, accessed 8 February 2020, [link](#)

Third: Absence of a change project

Despite the passage of more than seven years since the coup, no party or movement has taken the initiative to present a model for the desired change project or suggest a solution to the crisis in Egypt⁵. Most of the opposition forces have been contented with reacting to the regime actions, where the Egyptian regime has in fact become the one that directs the compass of the opposition in this direction or that. However, all the initiatives that came out mostly focused on generally addressing the post-coup phase and management of the transitional period.

The first of these attempts was the Brussels Statement, which was declared by Egyptian political and diplomatic forces and figures on 7 May 2014, to restore the January Revolution and the democratic path, according to the statement.⁶

However, no one provided an answer to the main question, that is: How can Egypt's coup be defeated? Or how to solve the Egyptian crisis in favor of the revolution?

Efforts in this aspect were focused on individual cases⁷ or entities that claimed they had a vision to solve the Egyptian crisis, but has failed to announce it since the coup until now.

Fourth: Divide and lack of confidence

In fact, the opposition exploded and splintered into many discordant parts. It is worth noting that this division did not start in the wake of the military coup, but rather long before that, from the early months of the January revolution in 2011. But after 3 July 2013, the differences and divisions between various opposition forces exacerbated, notably in the National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy⁸, which witnessed early splits (with the withdrawal of the Al-Wasat, Al-Watan, Al-Istiqlal parties, as well as the Salafi Front), followed by the Muslim Brotherhood's internal division, then the division in the Revolutionary Council, as well as differences and accusations between various other parties; which badly weakened the revolution.

⁵ In March 2014, the National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy suggested a road map for the Egyptian revolution, which wide responses at the time, on the grounds that it represented leadership of mobilization at the time.

⁶ Egypt's Islamic Group has reservations about the Brussels Document, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 16 May 2014, accessed 9 February 2020, [link](#)

⁷ Mamdouh Almuneir, Project to Rescue the Revolution, 12 April 2015, updated file, accessed 10 February 2020, [link](#)

⁸ National Alliance for Supporting Legitimacy, Al Jazeera Net Encyclopedia, 28 May 2015, accessed 10 February 2020, [link](#)

The opposition's crisis was not only in division and differences, but it was also manifested in the exposure of most of its currently leading elites amid loss of credibility among the pro-revolutionary sector, both at home and abroad, which made them lose effectiveness, movement and ability to influence.

This pushed the revolution's allies to turn against it: Instead of dealing with the opposition as forces that seek to save Egypt, the countries that embrace the Egyptian opposition started to address the situation from a humanitarian rather than a political perspective, where the Egyptian opposition turned into a burden in the eyes of some of these countries⁹.

Conclusions

Based on the above, it is not possible to count on the Egyptian political forces for a qualitative change in the pattern of relations among them, at least in the immediate future, as long as the repressive military coup continues to exist. Moreover, under the current suppression and complete security control, it is difficult to provide an appropriate environment for incubating a successful or mature political dialogue inside Egypt.

This atmosphere makes it difficult, if not impossible, to search for a national consensus with the use of the natural tools of political action available in democracies, where reliance on creating partnerships and alliances in this environment seems extremely difficult.

Also, no real change is expected to take place in the short term in the inter-relations of opposition forces abroad, in terms of unification and alignment together; for the lack of leadership and change project, and the structural imbalance. However, it is still possible to work for laying foundations on which a state of national alignment can be later built.

Recommendations

1- The opposition entities abroad should first line up together, based on their ideological and intellectual convictions, so that there would be two or three ideologically and politically compatible

⁹ Eric Trager, The Muslim Brotherhood Is the Root of the Qatar Crisis, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 July 2017, accessed 9 February 2020, [link](#)

groups, instead of the existing scattered and discordant groups. Subsequently, these compatible groups can turn into entities, where relationship between members is regulated by clear policies for managing the work and differences between them. Finally, there can be a kind of coordination between different entities based on consensus on procedures in the first place, before agreement on methodologies thereafter.

2- These entities should coordinate their work on specific issues that are not of a political nature, so as not to lead to re-emergence of polarization and disagreement, such as the issues of: the detainees in Sisi's prisons, the crisis of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the Sinai turmoil, as well as various economic issues; where the opposition can agree on these files without fear of falling into the trap of polarization and ideologization, or delving into controversial issues.

3- Only technocrats should technically manage these issues in the early stages of work, so that confidence can be gradually restored between different opposition fronts, with the aim of ultimately unifying the opposition ranks and building a strong alliance to face the current regime and its policies.

4- Each opposition faction shall maintain its media platforms and keep its political convictions on the revolution and its future, while other independent institutions shall work to ignite the revolutionary situation by adopting a media discourse defending the homeland-related issues, away from any political orientations.

This proposition is likely to provide a meeting point for various opposition forces, and gradually restore confidence between the Egyptian people and the opposition, given that it will express and defend the people's actual needs.