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المعهد المصري للدراسات
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

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Anniversary of Jan. Revolution

Policy Analysis Unit



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TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: info@eis-eg.org

Egyptian Situation after 9th Anniversary of Jan. Revolution

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The ninth anniversary of the January 2011 revolution has come after several months of relative movement of the Egyptian situation, but this time in a different way in the midst of calls for new demonstrations, something which perhaps was not available in the past five years since the 2015 mobilization.

Following are the most prominent connotations of the recent events that have taken place over the past few months, including the ninth anniversary of the January revolution – concluded through a number of workshops and debates:

1- Restoration of a semi-revolutionary situation once again in the Egyptian street on September 20, 2019 after halt of revolutionary mobilization for nearly three years, specifically since the call to the so-called “revolution of the poor” in November 2016. The September 20 protests came as an interaction with the call of artist and contractor Mohamed Ali during September 2019. However, Mohamed Ali, afterwards, invested that revolutionary situation, in coordination with various parties, and called for a popular mobilization on January 25, 2020.

2- The popular mobilization that Egypt witnessed in many governorates on September 20, 2019 indicated that the fear barrier in the hearts of the Egyptians – due to the unprecedented state of oppression that the Sisi regime has worked on over the past seven years – was relatively shattered. It appeared that people took to the street for several reasons, including the nature of the new discourse of Mohamed Ali, presence of evidence of likeliness of change in case part of the regime backed the call on Egyptian people to take to the street, as well as signs of security complacency on that day.

However, despite the shattering of the fear barrier in the September 20, 2019 demonstrations, the interaction with the call on the part of the demonstrators was characterized by anticipation and caution for fear of the response of the regime’s security apparatus. Only three days after September 20, 2019 protests, specifically after Trump's meeting with Sisi on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meetings, when Trump clearly expressed support for Sisi, the response of the regime came

quickly, where security forces arrested thousands of demonstrators, blocked squares, and deployed security personnel on the streets to spread fear once again in the hearts of people who want to react with the calls for protests on September 27, 2019. Perhaps this was one of the key factors of the poor level of interaction and mobilization both on September 27 and in the ninth anniversary of the January revolution. The repression practiced by Sisi on the Egyptian people is still present in their minds; and perhaps those who aspire for change do not want to participate effectively in mobilization without having real guarantees for likeliness of change, to avoid payment of high costs of harm and suffering without achievement of any gains.

3- Reviewing the interaction of the Egyptians on social networking sites after the mobilization of September 20, 2019, and before the calls for demonstrations on January 25, 2020, it was noticed that the frequency of interaction on social media increased significantly compared to the past few years, and that the Egyptian masses were ready to take to the street in case of presence of an effective and reliable leadership as well as likeliness of occurrence of change.

4- One of the most important reasons behind failure of the January 25, 2020, mobilization, in taking shape was the lack of leadership on the ground to organize and direct protests, as was the case during the January 2011 revolution.

5- It has become apparent that the one-day-revolution model, such as the Mohamed Ali call, adopted and desired by many people, cannot constitute a successful and reliable foundation, as the revolutionary act is a cumulative and continuous activity that requires interaction and participation of broad categories of people, much sacrifice, and mechanisms that would compel the ruling regimes to comply with the popular will.

6- The mobilization of September 20, 2019, as well as the calls for demonstrations that followed afterwards, have manifested an important factor, namely the positive impact of the populist discourse on the masses. In fact, the simple populist discourse presented by Mohamed Ali significantly affected the Egyptian society with its various social classes, for being different from the usual political discourse used by opposition politicians. It also appears that populist rhetoric has become popular not only in Egypt, but also within Western societies in general. The current US President Donald Trump used a populist discourse in his election campaign, as well as the current British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, who is considered the last European leader to catch up with the train of populism that is

sweeping the world of politics these days. It is also worth noting that the existing political vacuum helped the emergence of Mohamed Ali and motivated him for seeking leadership.

7- The majority of those who participated in the demonstrations of September 20, 2019, and also those who were interacting with the mobilization of January 25, 2020, albeit on social networking sites only, whether individuals or some opposition forces, were aware that there was an ongoing stampede or even "mere skirmishes" within the sovereign bodies between two parties, each with strong powers and potential, while the revolutionaries had no powers or capabilities to enable them to be a third party for engagement in this action. However, the desire to engage in some way or another in this state was to achieve interim tactical goals hoping that the anti-Sisi party inside the sovereign bodies would succeed in resolving the dispute in its favor. Among the most important interim goals were the release of detainees and the departure of Sisi, as a first step in the democratic transformation in Egypt targeted by the January revolution. This awareness was missing in the past, which is considered a positive factor in the recent mobilization that both the Egyptian people and opposition forces have developed over the past years, based on the concept of setting goals according to potentials and capabilities.

8- One of the positive elements witnessed by the political situation in Egypt in coincidence with the ninth anniversary of the January revolution, namely reaching a consensus document agreed upon by almost all opposition forces from all the Egyptian political spectrum, which was not available in the past years and is considered a progress, albeit slight, on the path of coordination between opposition forces, bypassing an obstacle that lasted for many years, since the military coup.

9- The recent events also revealed that the opposition's discourse carried a revolutionary breath "taking to the street to remove the regime in one day" when the political tracks were blocked, in contradiction with the above-mentioned interim goals. The opposition does not possess any tools of revolutionary action, and therefore it is not appropriate to proceed with such move at the current stage; therefore, the opposition forces must bear in mind that the political action does not mean 'defeat', but it functions as 'preparation for change' and beyond.

10- The recent events have revealed that the international and regional systems maintain provision of support to Sisi, such as the United States, especially in Trump's comment during his meeting with Sisi after the September 20, 2019 protests, where the US President's message was addressed to the

Egyptian armed forces and all parties opposing the regime that Sisi still has the support of the US administration. Also, the current conditions, including pushing for carrying out the so-called 'deal of the century' and the interventions in Libya, strengthen the need for the Egyptian role, which significantly strengthens Sisi's position in government.

However, on the other hand, it is noted that the informal international community have comprehended the Egyptian issue well, although there is no way to invest this understanding in creating a real breakthrough in the official foreign role in supporting the Sisi regime. It was also remarkable that the international media paid special attention to the phenomenon of Mohamed Ali, which indicates that the international community can interact with the Egyptian situation in case of existence of a real opportunity for change in Egypt.

11- The recent events have revealed that Egyptian society in general has become indignant with the current regime for two important reasons:

- The deterioration of the economic situation, which affected the lives of most Egyptian people.
- The unprecedented human rights violations and repression witnessed in Egyptian society.

Reviewing some democratic transformation experiences, such as those of Argentina, Chile and Indonesia, it is apparent that the most important factors that led to the fall of military coups in these countries include:

- The decline in international support for the military regimes in those countries, whether by losing the ability to play the required functional role, or due to the massive human rights abuses and blocking the political sphere completely, thus exposing the international community to embarrassment in case of maintaining support of these regimes.
- The deterioration of the economic situation, which led to the boredom of the people and made the military institution sure that the military institution as a whole may be exposed to harm if the military regime continues to control political life.
- The human rights file, including the widespread violations that these military regimes practiced against their peoples.

In fact, both the second and third factors are available in the Egyptian case, and the first one is destined to occur, as different historical experiences indicate.

Therefore, the Egyptian opposition must invest these factors, which can lead to the movement and development of the Egyptian position if they are invested well.

12- Among the positive aspects of the opposition's discourse, in coincidence with the ninth anniversary of the January revolution, is that it was not directed against the Egyptian army as a whole, focusing only on Sisi and the group that he is relying on in his rule, which is a positive message for the army officers who are subject to army senior commanders' attempts to persuade them during educational seminars that the popular mobilization targets the military as a whole and aims to destroy the army and the State. However, the demonstrators' chants on September 20, 2019, for example, were not hostile to the army but were calling for the departure of al-Sisi only. Also, the discourse of most opposition figures over the past months was sticking to preservation of the State and defending it, which is a very important message.

It is worth noting that since July 3, 2013, there have been groups inside the military that attempted to change the situation from inside and worked to displace Sisi using several methods, including constitutional and legal means such as Lt. General Sami Anan, Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq and Col. Ahmed Konsowa, who attempted to run against Sisi and peacefully compete with him in the presidential elections that were held in the first quarter of 2018, while some others used rough means. Although these groups wishing to change the situation within the military have sought to achieve goals different from those of the revolution, most notably to keep the military away from engagement in politics, however, the Egyptian opposition and a large segment of the people it is to achieve tactical interim goals that the opposition, and with it a large segment of the people, realized that they should cooperate with such groups based on a well-studied plan by the Egyptian opposition forces, in attempt to convince them of the seriousness of the army's flagrant intervention in the civilian life and its negative impact on the military itself, and on the higher interests of the nation in general.

13- Another development that took place months before the ninth anniversary of the January Revolution, is the death of President Dr. Mohamed Morsi. Sisi was using the issue of legitimacy as a scarecrow to quell any dissenting voice within the military, claiming that any call for change would open the door for President Morsi to come back again, which was not welcomed by a broad sector

within the military. However, with the death of President Mohamed Morsi, legitimacy has returned to the Egyptian street again, and this is what the Muslim Brotherhood affirmed within the framework of Mohamed Ali's call for demonstrations on January 25, 2020, which also opened the door to a broader consensus between various opposition parties, which is an important factor.

14- It has also appeared since the mobilization of September 2019, until now, the great technical development witnessed by the security services in monitoring, penetration, and dealing with all opposition groups, through the use of modern technology in addition to force.

15- Despite some mistakes committed by the anti-regime media, it has remained the main influential and painful force against the regime, which requires continuing to back and support it.

16- Immediately after September 20, 2019, the Sisi regime was in a state of confusion, because the call for demonstrations came from a new party that is not affiliated with the movements of political Islam, or even the traditional opposition, but it rather came from an insider who was very close to army commanders, which required Sisi to work to contain the situation before the demonstrations on January 25, 2020.

Sisi after 20 September 2019, is completely different from Sisi before that date, specifically during the period from July 3, 2013 to September 20, 2019, with respect to dealing with inter-regime forces. Al-Sisi has realized the danger that is threatening him and is currently redrawing a new map for his regime. He started to contain his opponents within the sovereign institutions, whom he believes may pose a real threat to him and his regime, taking advantage of the mobilization of Mohamed Ali to achieve their ends. Therefore, is now trying to redraw a new map for his regime so that he can remain in power for many years to come. Sisi is currently adopting a new different policy to overcome the crisis he has faced since 20 September, whether the current crisis or the potential future threats from within the army and sovereign institutions, provided that such policy has nothing to do with the political opposition.

Sisi learned the lesson after what had happened to Hosni Mubarak due to his intransigence and insistence on inheriting power to Gamal Mubarak, in disregard of the army's disagreement, which eventually led to overthrowing him. At the present time, Sisi seeks to ease the conflict between him and the military leaders opposing him, and appease them in one way or another, through dismissing

February 7, 2020

some leaders known to be close and loyal to him and appointing others who are agreed on by both parties, being popular and neutral within the army ranks as well as other leaders that are counted on the party that opposes Sisi's policy with the aim of calming the tense atmosphere.

The reshuffle of senior military officers in December 2019 included reassigning some old guard officers within the military institution, that had been dismissed by Sisi before, as well as the restructuring of the General Intelligence Service and the release of Lt. General Sami Anan, who may have been leading the anti-Sisi party. and the removal of figures close to Sisi from important positions such as Major General Mostafa al-Sharif who was removed from his post as head of the Presidential Court.

Perhaps, Sisi's measures he has taken for appeasing of the military leaders opposing him since the September 20, 2019 mobilization and immediately before the ninth anniversary of the January Revolution will not be the last, because Sisi has been working since the early days of his rule on turning the governance system in Egypt, from the rule of the military institution as a whole – as established by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954 – to the rule of the military individual.

Therefore, in mid-2018, after Sisi removed Sedki Sobhi from his position as Minister of Defense, Sisi worked to appease senior army commanders through the Law on Treatment of Senior Army Commanders, which gave the military junta members from January 2011 and beyond unprecedented privileges. It is not clear whether Sisi's recent measures are a kind of soft coup against the desire of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi after the September 20 protests or Sisi still has the power to impose more control and domination on the scene but only attempted to contain the situation temporarily?

The old guard officers had had differences with Sisi in many files, such as waiver of the Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir, for example; will we witness a change in the Egyptian position on this issue? Will Lt. General Sami Anan return to practicing politics or he will remain under house arrest as part of his release deal, as had happened with Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq before?

Will we witness some openness in the political space, as was planned on the agenda advocated by Lt. General Sami Anan in his election campaign? Will we witness a different policy in the face of the armed insurgency in North Sinai? Will the authorities release some of the detained army officers, such as Colonel Ahmed Konsowa and others, during the coming period, amid calls within the military to

release them? What about the other prominent figures who had supported Anan in his presidential bid and were later arrested, such as councilor Hisham Genena, Dr. Hazem Hosni and others?

The answer to these questions and others will determine the fate of the recent changes in management of the country's affairs. In my view, the coming few months will provide answers to all these questions.

Conclusion

It seems that there is no real horizon for what the opposition and a broad section of the Egyptian people have recently hoped – that a part of the regime would align with the Egyptian people's will against Sisi, which could create some kind of change in the Egyptian situation.

However, despite the current state of complete blocking of the reform and change path in Egypt, it is impossible to imagine continuation of the current situation for long periods, as the state of popular congestion is escalating, and the regional situation warns of exploding, which requires development of serious and deep perceptions of the desired change and the path that must be taken to get Egypt out of its crises and put it on the path of the emerging countries again.