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The True Face of Egypt's Military

by ESAM AL-AMIN
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The masks dropped. The cards are shown.

For over a year, Egyptians have wondered who was leading the efforts to frustrate and obliterate their nascent revolution, or what was dubbed in the local media as the “third party” or the “hidden bandit.”

But the mystery is no more.

It was none other than the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the same body that took power from deposed president Hosni Mubarak under the guise of leading the transitional period towards democracy. It was a masterful work of political art.

The final act was on display on Thursday, June 14, 2012, when Egypt's High Constitutional Court (HCC) not only ruled against banning the military's candidate and Mubarak's last Prime Minister, Gen. Ahmad Shafiq, but also dissolved parliament, the only institution that represented the political will of the people in post-revolutionary Egypt. It is important to note that all the justices on the HCC were appointed by Mubarak, and that most if not all are considered regime loyalists.

Incidentally, last March, Parliamentary Speaker and MB leader, Dr. Saad Katatni, said that he was told, in the presence of SCAF's deputy commander, Gen. Sami Anan, by SCAF's appointed

Prime Minister Dr. Kamal Ganzouri, that the order to dissolve the parliament was in the drawer but would come at the appropriate time.

This dramatic announcement was therefore followed by the parliament passing a law banning most of the former senior officials of the Mubarak regime (including Shafiq) from politics on the grounds of corrupting Egypt's political life and institutions for decades. Nevertheless, Shafiq was shortly reinstated by the Presidential Elections Commission (PEC) even though it had no jurisdiction on the matter. It is perhaps important to note that the head of the PEC is also the Chief Justice of the HCC. He declared on the same day that the parliamentary elections' law (that resulted in the victory of the Islamic parties, led by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), winning seventy five percent of the seats) was unconstitutional. It was the same law that several of the same justices assured all political parties last summer that it passed constitutional muster.

With this brazen act of thwarting the political will of the Egyptian people, the emerging Islamic and revolutionary parties have now been totally stripped of their political ascendancy, less than five months after their rise to power. This was accomplished simply by utilizing the institutions of the deep state crafted by a regime that was controlled for decades by corrupt officials, senior military officers, and intelligence agencies. Further, a Mubarak era military man is now on the verge of being "elected" president using the assorted tools of the democratic process.

One of the major demands of the revolution was to end the three-decade old emergency law that allowed the security agencies and the military to arbitrarily arrest and abuse the civil and human rights of any activist at will. But under tremendous public pressure throughout last year, these laws were repealed at the end of last May. But what was kicked out of the door crawled back through the window. Egypt's Justice Minister announced this week, less than two weeks after the repeal went into effect, that he was empowering all military officers and intelligence personnel to arrest indefinitely any person deemed a security threat to public order.

In a transparently coordinated fashion, before parliament could react to this shameless challenge to the essence of the revolution, it was dissolved within 24 hours by the High Court. Further, within minutes of the decision to dissolve the parliament, hundreds of military and security officers occupied its buildings, preventing any member to enter or even clear their offices. In short, Egypt has come a full circle, the transition to democracy was aborted, the process hijacked, and its remarkable revolution put on life support.

The final act of quietly killing the hopes of Egypt's youth and the aspirations of its people is coming this Sunday when the presidential elections end in the declaration of a Shafiq presidency. The other candidate in this charade is represented by the MB's Dr. Muhammad Mursi. For weeks, the MB has been warning against elections fraud perpetrated by the institutions of the deep state and led by its security and intelligence services.

For example, the Elections Commission has refused to hand over the voter lists, which it had no problem doing last winter during the parliamentary elections. But the problem is that these same lists have now increased by a whopping 4.5 million voters, raising suspicions of multiple registrations of regime loyalists who might vote multiple times in different provinces over the two-day elections process (for example 200 thousand regime loyalists voting in twenty different

precincts.) Furthermore, elections officials announced that they would refuse to allow elections' monitors to stay in the same rooms where the ballot boxes are left unattended for 12 hours between the first and the second days of the elections, although they were allowed to stay in and watch the boxes overnight in the previous parliamentary elections last winter.

In addition, the government announced that it is giving all its 6 million employees a two-day vacation and free public transportation to boost participation (an indirect prodding of government employees and their families to vote for Shafiq). In a blatant violation of elections' laws, hundreds of millions of pounds have been spent on media propaganda to boost SCAF's candidate, as well as payments to local officials especially in the delta region, to secure the peasants' votes.

In a nutshell, the intense involvement of the security state is now in the open. But most Egyptians are frustrated and feel that they have been robbed of making a choice consistent with their sixteen-month popular uprising. Before their own eyes they see how the Mubarak regime is slowly being re-invented with the full backing of state institutions under the direction of SCAF, the same military that promised to fulfill the objectives of the revolution.

Most pro-revolution groups, activists, and public intellectuals have called on MB's candidate Mursi to withdraw from the presidential elections so as to deny the military's candidate any claim of legitimacy once he is "elected." But in its desperate attempt to show any achievement in its one-year dalliance with SCAF, it appears that the MB is pressing ahead with the elections. Once again the Islamic group has demonstrated its inability to join in, let alone lead, any revolutionary path, even though its leaders understand fully the determination of SCAF and the state institutions to manipulate the elections and force their candidate on the rest of the people.

During his final interview before the elections, Mursi understood the stakes and his long electoral odds as the elections are being manipulated. Although he believed that he would easily win in a free and fair elections, he admitted that elections' fraud were certain to take place. He further said that he was recently told by President Jimmy Carter that Mubarak was for decades "sleeping in Israel's bed," and that "Shafiq would follow in his footsteps." The former president, who raised many concerns about the first round elections, had earlier stated that he did not believe that the military would hand over power to civilian rule.

Meanwhile, Shafiq, who does not deny his admiration for Mubarak and considers him a role model, has brazenly declared that his first state visit would be to the U.S. in order to signal that he was its preferred candidate. He also said that he would not only keep the peace treaty with Israel, but would also deepen it.

Thus, the MB's delusion that SCAF will allow it to contest power will soon be exposed. Sooner or later the group will realize that it simply can neither outmaneuver nor win against the military or the deep security state on its own. It will have to fundamentally change its strategic choices and genuinely adopt the revolutionary path in order to defeat the entrenched interests of the deep state. Even if by some miracle their candidate wins the election, the past year has demonstrated that in every state-controlled institution, including the judiciary, no real change will take place unless all the counter-revolutionary elements are purged, a concept that is lost on the MB's

leadership that is used to slow approach reforms or behind-the-scenes questionable deals to preserve its interests.

Disappointed, yet again, with the MB's attitude to ignore their consensus, most of the revolutionary groups have vowed to press on with their revolution that has been deeply, but not yet gravely, wounded. Former presidential candidate Dr. Abdel Moneim Abol Fotouh, a favorite among many revolutionary and youth groups, has declared that the latest decisions by the High Court allowing the candidacy of Shafiq and the dissolution of parliament were nothing short of a soft coup d'état orchestrated by the military. He called for the immediate establishment of a revolutionary leadership council comprised of all pro-revolution groups and leaders to challenge the military hold on power and Shafiq's inevitable presidency.

Sensing these threats dozens of such groups that have sacrificed so much since the early days of the revolution, have vowed to join in and continue the difficult struggle to dislodge the military and achieve the main objective of the revolution in establishing a true democratic civil state and ending the culture of the deep security state. Thousands have taken to the streets, while hundreds started a sit-in in Tahrir Square.

They now quietly admit that a hard lesson has been learned. This time their slogan is not "the people and the army are one." Rather their cry is: "This time we are serious, we will not leave it (the revolution) to anyone."