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Egyptian Military Secures Far-Reaching Powers

The Silent Putsch

By Ulrike Putz

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Egyptians went to the polls to elect a new president on Sunday, but the country's military ended up with the power. New amendments to the interim constitution guarantee that the generals will have a significant say in future matters of government. Renewed protests could result.

The timing couldn't have been more carefully chosen. While Egyptians were focused on the emerging results of their first free presidential election held on Sunday, the ruling military council issued eight amendments to the country's interim constitution that effectively secure the generals' power.

The move means that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) will take on parliament's lawmaking duties until the parliament -- which was dissolved on Saturday -- is elected again. At the same time, the military council has also taken charge of the national budget and the development of a new constitution. The new president, to whom the council says it wants to hand power over to at the end of June, will have no sway over the country's military forces. Already on Tuesday, the army gave itself far-reaching legal authority through a sort of

emergency law, which will allow them to try any Egyptian before a military court. The military now holds legislative, executive and judicial power -- at least in part.

But Egyptians didn't seem to realize what had befallen them until Sunday night. The country's citizens had been fixated on the votes being counted on live television for the [presidential election](#). Late in the evening, both candidates made victory announcements, with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohammed Mursi and former Mubarak associate Ahmed Shafiq each claiming they recieved 52 percent of the vote. The official count isn't expected until Thursday.

The predictable conflict over the election result was the perfect distraction, but then the outrage spread quickly. In an interview with broadcaster Alhayat, renowned commentator Aiman Sadshad warned that the future president would have no possibility of controlling or stopping decisions by the military council. "The president will be unable to change the defense minister or the members of the council," he said, adding that the SCAF was now "untouchable."

Muslim Brotherhood Vows Resistance

Hossam Bahgat of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights tweeted that his country had become a "military dictatorship." Meanwhile, Egyptian diplomat and former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohamed ElBaradei, called the military document a "grave setback" for democracy and the revolution. "SCAF retains legislative power, strips president of any authority over army and solidifies its control," the Nobel Peace Prize winner wrote.

The most noteworthy changes are the following:

- There is no civilian over the army. The commander in chief of the military is no longer the president, but the head of the military council. Furthermore, the council will elect its own leaders, and the president can declare war only with the council's approval.
- The military council has given itself the right to veto the yet to be developed constitution, which means that the 100 members of the current constitutional assembly will have to present their proposal to the council. If the council objects to an article, the passage must be rewritten. Disputes on such matters will be heard by the judges of the constitutional court, which is filled with judges from the era of deposed President Hosni Mubarak. And, should the constitutional assembly encounter too many difficulties, the council can dissolve it and appoint a new one.
- When a new constitution is finally hammered out, it will be ratified through a referendum. But only one month after this occurs can a new parliament be elected. This means that the Egyptian people are likely to go without representation for quite some

time. In the transitional period the SCAF will take over legislative power. But one of their amendments already gives the army the right to tackle domestic unrest.

The new Egyptian parliament, freshly elected this winter, was dissolved by the military council on Saturday after the constitutional court ruled that one-third of the seats had been illegally assigned. Mandates reserved for independent candidates were allegedly given to party members, according to the verdict. It was aimed primarily at members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who dominated the parliament thanks in part to these seats. The Islamist party has alleged that by dissolving the parliament, the military council is trying to correct election results to suit its preferences.

Overnight, the Muslim Brotherhood and other political groups declared the constitutional amendments introduced by the military to be invalid. But the deciding factor will be the winner of the presidential election. Should former Mubarak associate Ahmed Shafiq win, the generals are likely to get their way despite resistance from the Islamists. As Mubarak's last prime minister and a former air force general, Shafiq is likely to cooperate with them. Massive protests, however, could easily result, with many Egyptians fearing that the old elite is making a comeback by slowly turning back the gains of the revolution.

But if Islamist Mursi takes the presidency, things won't be any easier. He could confront the military, and the Muslim Brotherhood has already declared it would resist the military council, calling for the full assembly of the dissolved parliament on Tuesday. At the very least, the entrance to the building, surrounded by soldiers, could become a site of unrest.