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Consigned to the past

Egypt is turning the page on Morsi's rule despite Muslim Brotherhood resistance

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Hours before being removed from office on 3 July Mohamed Morsi issued his final address in which he promised he would protect his constitutional legitimacy with “his life”.

A week after being ousted from office Morsi and the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood are for once making good on the ex-president's vows, or almost. It's not quite the leadership's lives on the line, but rather those of the group's shock troops who appear willing to open a bloody confrontation with the army in a desperate bid to see Morsi return to the presidential palace. According to Suez Canal University political scientist Gamal Zahran, “the Muslim Brotherhood is presenting Egypt with two gruesome scenarios: either Morsi returns to office and Egypt becomes a militant Islamist state or the Brotherhood will do its best to drag Egypt into a bloody civil war.”

Since Morsi's ouster 125 people have been killed and hundreds injured. Zahran predicts more bloody confrontations as long as the Muslim Brotherhood's gerontocracy continues to issue fiery speeches about “legitimacy” and “the necessity of jihad” to protect their power. Morsi was forced out of office on Wednesday 3 July. The vast majority of Egyptians spent 48 hours celebrating before the Muslim Brotherhood's nightmarish scenarios began to unfold. The group's 70-year-old Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie, whom many assumed had been detained, appeared in Nasr City to urge Morsi's diehard supporters to remain in the streets until

they bring “their legitimate president back on their shoulders”. Within hours clashes had broken out in a majority of Egypt’s governorates between the Brotherhood and its allies and ordinary citizens, police and army personnel. More than 30 were reported dead.

Even before Badie’s speech jihadist elements in Sinai were mobilised to attack police and military checkpoints, killing at least five military personnel.

The Brotherhood’s first wave of terrorism backfired when on 7 July Egyptians turned out in their millions to confirm their rejection of Morsi’s regime. The group then escalated their activities, forcing clashes in front of the Republican Guard’s headquarters in east Cairo in the early hours of 8 July in which more than 50 of Morsi’s supporters were killed and hundreds injured. The confrontation, claims Zahran, was an attempt by the “Brotherhood’s bigwigs to send the message that they are still a major force and have not abandoned the option of open confrontation.”

“It is also clear,” warns Zahran, “that they masterminded events on 7 July to embarrass the army, tarnish its image and improve their negotiating position for a safe exit from Nasr City.” “The post-Morsi strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood is two pronged,” says Al-Ahram political analyst Ahmed Al-Naggar. “While fomenting street violence against the army, police and ordinary Egyptian citizens it is using some foreign media channels, including Qatari-based Al-Jazeera and American CNN, to portray itself as the victim of a military coup.” Media leaks have made explicit the extent of contacts between Morsi and his Brotherhood aides, Essam and his son Gehad Al-Haddad in particular, with US officials, not least Washington’s Ambassador to Cairo Ann Patterson, in a desperate bid to prevent their “fall from grace”. “It was telling to see Morsi and other Brotherhood leaders, who under Mubarak regularly described America as the biggest evil on earth and Islam’s leading enemy, pleading for help from Washington rather than from God,” says Al-Naggar.

Telling, but not surprising given, Al-Naggar says, the way Morsi had proved himself such “a treasure for America... guaranteeing Israel’s security and backing Washington on Syria”. “In this respect,” argues Al-Naggar, “Morsi was far worse than Mubarak in fostering dependency on America.”

“America’s reaction to Morsi’s fall and desperate calls for help,” notes Zahran, “was never less than pragmatic.”

“I think Brotherhood leaders are now fully aware that the old adage — whoever uses America as a cover will eventually find himself naked — has never been more true.”

On Tuesday 650 people were being questioned on suspicion of inciting violence against military personnel and property, carrying unlicensed firearms and disrupting traffic. It is significant, says Al-Naggar, that the civilian, rather than military, prosecution authorities are in charge of the investigations.

On Monday night Interim President Adli Mansour announced a new “constitutional declaration” outlining the roadmap for transition towards democratic rule. According to the declaration, a new constitution and parliamentary and presidential elections are expected within six months. This, says liberal politician Osama Al-Ghazali Harb, “is a step in the right direction”, though he warns

the timetable is too optimistic and more time is needed to allow liberal political parties to take root.

The Tamarod (Rebel) campaign also argues more time is needed, while what surprised Al-Naggar most about the declaration is that it retained “the Islamic Sharia article drafted by the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies”.

The declaration, says Al-Ghazali Harb, must be complemented as quickly as possible by a new government. “These two steps will together dispel any foreign doubts that Egypt is sliding into a civil war or falling into military rule,” he says.

The formation of a new government has already been delayed twice this week as the ultraconservative Salafist Nour Party vetoed both Mohamed Al-Baradei and Ziad Bahaeddin as prime minister.

Al-Naggar professes not to understand why “the Nour has any say in the formation of the government”.

“The Nour Party is striving to give the impression that it is not a Brotherhood lackey yet it is a party determined to drag religion into politics and turn Egypt into the kind of Islamist state millions of Egyptians rejected on 30 June,” warns Al-Naggar.

On Tuesday liberal economist and former finance minister Hazem Al-Biblawi was officially named prime minister and Mohamed Al-Baradei appointed vice president.

With a new political roadmap on the table and a liberal government in sight the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies might again resort to violence.

“The Muslim Brotherhood needs to recognise that Morsi is a thing of the past and that it is better for them to join the political process again,” says Al-Ghazali Harb. If they insist on violence and confrontation, they will find themselves excluded from the political scene for generations to come.”

“For any national reconciliation process to begin, let alone succeed, all political forces must give an undertaking that they renounce violence and reject secret armed militias,” says Al-Ghazali Harb.

“It is clear now that the Brotherhood exploited its year in office to form and arm militias,” claims Al-Naggar. “Most of its leaders are either under detention or will be very soon. No one should be surprised if the group is outlawed very soon.”

Earlier this week Minister of Social Insurance Nagwa Khalil announced that “depending on the results of investigation by prosecution authorities into evidence that the Muslim Brotherhood used its headquarters to store weapons the ministry will decide on whether the group should be dissolved.”