

Introduction

What Prospects for the “Arab Spring” in Light of an Early “Autumn” of Political Islam?

Bahey eldin Hassan

The battle for the “Arab Spring” continues to be waged on three fronts¹: between the revolutionaries and remaining members of the old regimes, between secularists and those who call for the establishment of a religious state, and between various actors of the international community. The context in which this struggle is taking place has become even more oppressive since 2011, as is clearly the case in both the Arab countries which saw the fall of old regimes and in those which still aspire to catch this wave of democratic change.

One look at the Arab states which did not experience regime change in the wake of the “Arab Spring” is sufficient to understand the fate of this “spring,” for it is clear that the regimes in these states no longer feel drastically threatened by it. Rather, some of the governments in these states

¹ See the introduction entitled “The Arab Spring: A Struggle on Three Fronts,” of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies’ 2011 Annual Report “Fractured Walls, New Horizons”.

have increased counterattacks², with Sudan and Algeria being two prominent examples. The Sudanese government has carried out a wave of arrests targeting political activists and shut down or frozen the activities of a number of rights and research organizations which had played a critical role in mobilizing Sudanese society. In Algeria, the authorities prevented civil society organizations from participating in the World Social Forum in Tunis in March 2013, detaining those who were traveling to Tunisia by land and arresting a number of rights activists in an unprecedented move driven by fears of the spread of the “contagion” of the uprisings seen in Tunisia. In other states in the region as well, numerous political and rights activists have been subjected to trials lacking the basic guarantees of due process, leading in some cases to severe sentences.

The situations in the countries most directly affected by the “Arab Spring” vary. In Libya, the nascent state faces armed militias which exert their authority over much of the country. The Syrians who continue to struggle to topple the regime in Damascus cannot be sure that the situation will improve or even that the violence will cease following regime change, as grave crimes are being committed not only by the state but also by armed opposition groups. In Yemen, the struggle continues against the institutions of the old regime, which remain a center of power more influential even than the new interim president. Egyptians, too, struggle against values, principles, practices, legislation, and even a constitution belonging to the “counter-revolution,” which has come to rule in the name of the revolution. Tunisians are likewise working to resist falling prey to the same problems faced by Egyptians.

This state of affairs has facilitated the work of the rulers in the countries less affected by the “Arab Spring,” for it is not difficult to convince their peoples of the need to avoid the fate of the “Arab Spring states” and to opt instead to accept the status quo, with the hope of gradual improvements along the way.

The Egyptian example has been prominently used to convince other Arab peoples that “contentment with what one has is a treasure that does not run out” and that “one bird in the hand is worth ten in the tree,” according to popular Arab proverbs which have aided rulers in subduing their citizens for centuries. In light of Egypt’s experience over the past two years, other Arab populations have been easily deterred from running the risk of attempting to replace their current rulers with new regimes which may not prove to be any less repressive.

² For further details, see Section III of this report.

Given Egypt's size and the major influence it holds in the Arab region, the events that played out in Egypt and the ouster of Hosni Mubarak embodied a nightmare for other Arab rulers, who feared that their peoples would be inspired by and attempt to follow the example of their Egyptian counterparts. Now, however, the daily occurrences in Egypt have become a tool in the hands of these autocratic rulers, who hold up the Egyptian experience as a warning to their own citizens of the fate that awaits those who overthrow their leaders. Indeed, Egyptians have incurred severe losses in all areas – not only have they lost stability, security, and consistent access to electricity, fuel, and food, but they also find themselves on the verge of losing the very freedoms won by their revolution.

It is impossible to compare what is happening in Egypt to merely a difficult delivery before the birth of democracy. Indications that Egypt is not moving towards democracy but rather away from it include: the regular use of violent repression against the political and social protest movements; the daily harassment of media professionals and institutions – whether through bringing legal cases against them or through targeted physical attacks; the battle against the independence of the judiciary in both the constitution and legislative framework as well as through political and institutional attacks; the preparation of draft legislation which would 'nationalize' civil society organizations and transform them into semi-governmental bodies; and the use of rape and sexual harassment as a political tool to eliminate the participation of women in the political sphere. Clearly, Egypt is transitioning from one authoritarian regime to another, albeit with different features on the surface. It is the counter-revolution that has come to power, and this at the expense of the revolution that called for "freedom, bread, and social justice."

Even as Egypt's transition suffers from this multi-faceted repression, the Muslim Brotherhood was been careful to comply with the demands of the military establishment when drafting the country's new constitution. As such, the military continues to enjoy all the privileges that it had under Mubarak, the only difference being that now these privileges are constitutionally protected. Moreover, these constitutional provisions have given the military the additional right to refer civilians to trial before military courts. This is particularly surprising, as members of the Muslim Brotherhood itself suffered greatly from being subjected to military trials before the revolution, despite the fact that such trials were not explicitly allowed for by the constitution at the time – rather, the law which allowed for military trials of civilians was appealed before the Supreme Constitutional Court for its unconstitutionality. With the passage of the new constitution, the grounds for this appeal have been annulled and military trials of civilians have gained explicit constitutional legitimacy. This has

happened despite the fact that the prohibition of such trials had been one of the most important demands of the January 25 Revolution.³

Also astonishing is that while the Egyptian police carry out acts of repression on a daily basis, including arrests and even torture of political activists, the public prosecutor continues to summon political activists and media professionals for questioning. At the same time, some of the most prominent officials of the old regime have been released, and financial and other deals have been made with others affiliated with the old regime in the name of “reconciliation,” in order to prevent their prosecution by the judiciary.

It is clear that before moving on to establishing a totalitarian theocracy, the political priority of the Muslim Brotherhood is to re-establish the pillars of autocracy. The reasons for this appear to range between the unanticipated political resistance they have met and the need to avoid provoking the institutions of the state, which are still unready to accept such drastic changes, despite the fact that many had moved towards Islamization even during the Mubarak era. Another factor is the competition that the Muslim Brotherhood faces from the Salafists in promoting its project of the “religious state” after these groups surprised Egyptian society - and even themselves - with their abilities to organize and gain ground politically. This competition is exacerbated by the increasing distance between the regional players which support the two groups – namely Qatar and Saudi Arabia – as these two countries have also begun competing for influence in Syria and Yemen, after they had been acting in coordination at the beginning of the Syrian uprising.

Why has Egypt’s transition differed from that of Tunisia?

At the beginning of 2011, Egypt had appeared to be following right behind Tunisia when Egyptians rose up only eleven days after Ben Ali’s regime collapsed on January 14, 2011. The Mubarak regime tried desperately to convince Egyptians that Egypt is different from Tunisia, only to hear the response of Egyptians - determined to prove that they were no less worthy, determined, or willing to undertake the struggle for democracy than their Tunisian counterparts - echoing in the streets that Egypt was no different.

There are many important similarities between Egypt and Tunisia, not least among them that of the Islamist Ennahda movement, which gained

³ See “No to constitution establishing political and theocratic tyranny; Egyptian rights groups reject draft constitution,” Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 18 Nov 2012, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=5049&lang=en>>.

prominence in the Tunisian political sphere following the revolution, and its older counterpart, the Egyptian branch of the international Muslim Brotherhood organization. However, other factors have led the post-revolutionary courses of the two countries to differ. First among them are the historically rooted political aspirations of the Egyptian military, dating back to July 1952, whereas the Tunisian army has not sought to play a direct political role. Rather, the Tunisian army announced⁴ its consent for democratic oversight of the army by Tunisian society in 2013, in the framework of its acceptance of the implementation of the relevant international standards for democratic states. In contrast, the military establishment in Egypt sought to immunize itself in the new constitution from any form of oversight from Egyptian society by brokering a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood.

The second important difference is the value of secularism which seeped into Tunisian society both before its independence and under Habib Burguiba, Tunisia's first president, and which is reflected positively in Tunisian society to a greater degree than in Egypt. Furthermore, civil society organizations in Tunisia enjoy greater political dynamism and ability to influence political elites than those in Egypt. As a result, directly following the Tunisian revolution, a body was composed of political, union, and civil society actors – the only of its kind seen in the “Arab Spring” countries – known as the “High Commission for Achieving the Goals of the Revolution.” This Commission played a critical political and legislative role during the initial stage of the transition before general elections were held and the Ennahda movement came to power.

It is also important to note the pivotal role played by the Tunisian General Union of Workers, a unique union organization unlike any group found in Egypt. The membership of the Union is not limited to trade workers, as it also includes professional syndicates, and as such the regional branches of this union bring together workers, teachers, and other professionals in regional committees. For this reason, the Union was able to play a critical political, civil, and union role in a number of the most important periods of Tunisian history since the country's independence, particularly in the period immediately preceding the revolution and the subsequent period of transition. None of this is found in Egypt, where the General Union of Egyptian Workers has been nothing but an ambassador of the ruler to the workers and a representative of the government's interests for the past six decades. Furthermore, the new rulers – which represent the Muslim

⁴ “Jeish tunis yutalib b-ikhda' aih li-riqaba demograteyya,” Al Jazeera, 31 Mar 2013, <<http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/a7d3a0fb-f3fd-4728-9d2a-459e2e38feac>>.

Brotherhood – are anxious to entrench this traditional role for the General Union in Egypt.

Despite the fact that Egyptian rights organizations are some of the most dynamic in the Arab region, the political elites in Egypt have always been too ineffectual and uncomprehending to be able to benefit from their work, whether before the revolution or after it – with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood before it took power, as its members were defended by these organizations when they were victims of repression at the hands of the old regime. Egypt has also seen recurrent workers struggles, yet they have been fragmented and union workers often view politics as a disease to be avoided at all costs. Despite the increased number of independent unions following the revolution in Egypt, it is clear that the social protest movements of the past two years are much wider than could be contained within the framework of these unions, particularly given their fragmented state.

In a further difference between Egypt and Tunisia, the Ennahda movement in Tunisia has historically been less hostile to the principles and values of human rights than other Islamist movements in the Arab region, including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In the context of deliberations undertaken by the “October 18 Coalition”⁵ prior to the revolution, Ennahda (along with other political groups) had adopted a progressive position on women’s rights and other rights-related issues often seen as problematic by other Islamist groups. At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood was moving in the opposite direction in Egypt, having announced its political program in the fall of 2007, under which it adopted a plan for establishing a totalitarian regime with religious features.⁶

For all of the above reasons, the results of the first general elections after the revolutions in Tunisia differed from those in Egypt. This difference, in and of itself, is another factor which has caused the transitions in the two countries to diverge. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists won a majority of the seats in the People’s Assembly (the lower house of the Egyptian Parliament) and an overwhelming majority in the Shura Assembly (the upper house of the Egyptian Parliament), followed by the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood’s presidential candidate. In Tunisia, Ennahda only obtained a plurality in Tunisia’s elections, which did not allow this group to single-handedly govern Tunisia. Rather, Ennahda formed a government in cooperation with two parties – one of them liberal and the other leftist.

⁵ “Hey’et 18 oktober li-l-huquq wa al-hureyat: I’alan mushtarak howl al-‘alaqa bayn ad-dawla wa ad-dein,” E-joussour, 17 Dec. 2009, <<http://www.e-joussour.net/ar/node/3713>>.

⁶ Bahey eddin Hassan, “Bernameg hezb al-ikhwan al-muslimin fe misr min manthor huquq al-insan,” Riwaq Araby Journal, Issue 55 of 2010.

Directly following these elections, a new party known as the “Nidaa Tunis” (Appeal for Tunisia) Party began forming from the ranks of the opposition, and it is now poised to become the second-most successful party in Tunisia’s next elections, if not the overall winner.

The Nidaa Tunis party is another important indicator of the extent to which the dynamics of the political movements in Egypt and Tunisia differ. Nidaa Tunis brought together liberals and leftists – some of whom had been persecuted or exiled prior to the revolution – as well as businessmen and members and leaders of the former ruling party who had not been charged with crimes of corruption or human rights violations. As a result, Nidaa Tunis enjoys a broad social base. Furthermore, it is led by Beji Essebsi, a prominent figure in Tunisia’s recent history and a former colleague of Bourguiba who successfully headed the government during an important initial phase of the transition. Essebsi is immensely popular in Tunisia, such that after his resignation he topped the list of most popular Tunisian figures in opinion polls following the revolution. In contrast, Egypt’s main opposition group – represented by the National Salvation Front (NSF) – has been incapable of distinguishing between members of the former regime who committed crimes of corruption and violations to human rights and the vast social base of the regime, which cannot be stigmatized or held responsible for the regime’s crimes. At the same time, this segment of society – as in Tunisia – is important to address, especially since some of its members adopted positions and demands for reform from within the former regime prior to the revolution. Instead, the NSF appears to be composed of “armchair generals without any foot soldiers”, for despite the fact that it is comprised of a number of the most prominent political, intellectual, economic, media, professional, and legal experts and figures in Egypt – enough to form a dozen different governments – it only engages a limited social stratum in Cairo and a few other cities along the Nile Delta and Suez Canal. Additionally, the nature of some of its slogans and statements have led both Egyptian and international public opinion to view the NSF more as a body that either rejects initiatives or stirs up unrest, rather than having anything to do with saving the country in reality.

The National Salvation Front sees itself as the convergence of the myriad groups of revolutionary youth in Egypt, yet this is a difficult claim to make due to the significant political and organizational fragmentation among the revolutionary youth as well as to the large variance between these groups’ ever-changing – and sometimes contradicting - slogans and positions over the two years since the revolution. The ambiguity surrounding the position of the NSF on the escalating trend of violence and stirring up chaos among some groups of youth, which has come as a reaction to the violence of the

current ruling party and its supporters, will surely have severe repercussions for the future of the NSF and its cohesion and will affect whether Egyptian society views the NSF as an institution which can be depended upon.

In comparison to the lack of political agility on the part of the NSF, the Muslim Brotherhood has displayed a level of pragmatism not seen from any other political group before or after the revolution. It may confidently be stated that Egypt has never before seen a group with such a rigid ideological basis simultaneously exercise such practical political pragmatism. This is clearly demonstrated by the international relations cultivated by the Muslim Brotherhood, as the group went with surprising agility from “enemy of the West and Israel” to maintaining relations of close cooperation without officially denouncing their former position. According to statements made by Israeli officials, relations under the Muslim Brotherhood are even stronger than they were under former president Hosni Mubarak. The pragmatism displayed by the Muslim Brotherhood in domestic politics is no less astonishing, particularly due to the major deals it brokered with the military establishment. The Muslim Brotherhood has offered the military everything that the Brotherhood had originally rejected in the context of the “Selmy document” of supra-constitutional principles, such as special privileges and immunities for the military establishment as well as the right to try civilians before military courts – despite the fact that Brotherhood members had historically been among the most prominent victims of such courts. Moreover, this pragmatism is clear from the Muslim Brotherhood’s swift efforts to conduct “reconciliation” agreements with prominent figures associated with the former regime, to broker elections deals with some of these same figures who continue to carry political weight, and to create alliances with specific sectors of the security apparatus, which seek retribution at any cost against the forces which sparked the revolution. The success of such an alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian security apparatus, even if temporary, may go down in history as marking the beginning of an unprecedented regression in terms of human rights in the country. Notably, the negotiations leading to these deals occurred behind a smoke screen of accusations alleging that the opposition was seeking alliances with the remnants of the old regime.

For its part, the NSF and a number of Egyptian and international rights activists continue to deal with the security apparatus just as they had in the immediate wake of the revolution – by repeating the legitimate demand of reforming the security sector and vetting from its ranks all corrupt officers and those responsible for human rights crimes committed before the revolution and for the killing of demonstrators during the revolution. However, such demands have remained unaddressed by both the Supreme

Council of the Armed Forces and by the Muslim Brotherhood – as if time stood still on February 12, 2011, the day after Mubarak’s ouster. Hopes for such reform have further dimmed now that this demand would mean in practice that the Muslim Brotherhood – which is responsible for the killing of demonstrators in front of the Ittihadeyya Presidential Palace in December 2012⁷ and thereafter – would be in charge of vetting the police responsible for the killing of demonstrators during the revolution in January 2011. It is possible that any “reform” at this time could contribute politically to one of the pressing goals of the new regime – “Islamization” of the police – as the removal of those responsible for the killing of protestors during the revolution would only be substituted by those responsible for the killing of protestors after the revolution. Such a scenario would merely be a repetition of the extralegal removal of the former public prosecutor by President Morsi and his replacement with a new public prosecutor who has done nothing to this day except turn a blind eye to the crimes committed by the police and members of the Muslim Brotherhood against peaceful protests, including all new cases of killings of protestors, while prosecuting political activists and media professionals who voice criticism of the current regime following complaints filed either officially by the Muslim Brotherhood or by its supporters.

It is important to note the effects of the shock of the revolution on the police, which is no longer one unified body which blindly follows orders, as was the case before the revolution. Certainly, there were isolated voices of criticism which emerged from within the police from time to time, yet these were silenced through intimidation, dismissal, or forced early retirement. However, after the impact of the revolution was felt throughout the police establishment – and even despite the stubborn refusal to reform it – a new phenomenon emerged by which union-like bodies formed among different segments of the police forces, mass police strikes were staged, and demonstrations were held for various reasons, most importantly against the use of the police to confront political and social protests and against new draft legislation to govern demonstrations, which would lead to increased clashes between the police and protest movements.

Demands for security reform must take the changes that have occurred both on the level of the state and within the police into consideration, and any plan for security reform must be reviewed according to these changes in order to prevent such a project from leading to further rights violations or obliterating chances for real security reform. Human rights organizations and

⁷ See: “Will the Ittihadeyya Clashes Become a Routine Model to Settle Political Disputes in Egypt?” Report issued by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 26 Dec. 2012, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=5361&lang=en>>.

all other parties eager to see reform of the security establishment must review the plans and possible scenarios which were laid out after February 11, 2011 and which are suitable for countries transitioning to democracy, since Egypt can no longer be considered a country going through a period of transition to a better future. Rather, it is merely witnessing a transition from one repressive authoritarian regime to another. As such, the concepts and approaches of transitional justice are not applicable in the current Egyptian context, and ignoring this reality could have grave repercussions. Rather, calls for security reform in this new context should resemble those made under the Mubarak regime, i.e. calling for: an end to human rights violations committed by the police, rule of law, judicial oversight, respect for and implementation of judicial decisions, transparency and internal accountability, including human rights education in police curricula, promoting the role of human rights organizations in monitoring violations, etc.

The tyrant masked as the victim

“The security apparatus is not in the business of art, but in confronting criminal acts.” Surprisingly, this quote did not come from a dispassionate observer but from the leader of a once-persecuted group whose members were subjected to torture and other abuses by security forces. The man who made this statement is none other than Rachid Ghannouchi, the historical leader and current president of Tunisia’s Ennahda movement. Despite the fact that Ghannouchi often spoke out against torture prior to the revolution, rejecting justifications used by the regimes in both Tunisia and Egypt that the police were confronting terrorism and thereby protecting millions of lives, there has been a consistent shift in his rhetoric following the revolution.

Similarly, since the Muslim Brotherhood assumed power in Egypt, the human rights violations that sparked the revolution have continued and in some cases abuses even gotten worse. Protests have been violently suppressed on a nearly daily basis, and in the past few months more journalists and media personalities have been referred by the public prosecutor to investigation and trial on charges of insulting the president than during the entire 30 years under former president Mubarak. The independence of the judiciary has also been severely attacked, and a new constitution has been adopted that for the first time in Egyptian history allows for military trials of civilians. The draft legislation to govern civil society currently under consideration would effectively nationalize civil society and eliminate independent human rights organizations. Meanwhile,

supporters and leaders of the ruling party have publicly assaulted protesters, besieged Media Production City, assaulted media professionals, and surrounded courthouses in an attempt to influence judicial rulings or impede their deliberations, even targeting Egypt's highest court, the Supreme Constitutional Court, while the president and his cabinet sat in complicit silence. In contrast, the president did not remain silent when 40 people were killed in January in Port Said and Suez — instead, he expressed his appreciation for the police and urged them to act even more decisively.

Perhaps most astonishing is the fact that before the supporters of the ruling party tortured protesters in front of the Ittihadeyya Presidential Palace last December, they first gathered at a nearby mosque to perform their prayers. Similarly, on 22 March, after completing Friday prayers, members and supporters of the ruling party again tortured protestors, this time in a mosque in Muqattam. The Quran says, “Then, when prayer is finished, scatter in the land and seek God’s bounty, and remember God frequently; happily you will prosper” (62:10). Does torture bring us closer to God? Do their “prayers” not forbid “indecency and evil” (29:45)? Or is it possible that the interpretation of the Quran has changed now that the victim has become the oppressor?

The violent crimes committed at the Ittihadeyya palace and in Muqattam have not been investigated by the prosecutor-general. Instead, he diligently focuses on cases of insult and verbal defamation of the country’s new leaders and their interpretation of Islam. The acts of violence defame and insult Islam more than Bassem Youssef and others could ever do with mere words.

In a speech given on 6 April in Sudan, the president said that he intends to launch “a second revolution” to achieve the objectives of the “renaissance project”. One might ask: A revolution against whom? And using what means? When security and legislative repression — the regime’s chosen tactics — fail, what kind of revolution could remove the perceived obstacles to the Muslim Brotherhood’s “project”?

Although often a point of controversy, the rights of Islamists have long been defended by human rights defenders in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East. This was done despite the possible authoritarian tendencies of many whose rights were defended and regardless of whether they belonged to “moderate” groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, or to terrorist groups — all were defended equally because all humans are equally entitled to their natural rights.

This defense of Islamists was also a constant source of tension with the Egyptian regime and its security apparatus, sometimes leading to direct confrontation. Some organizations, including the oldest human rights

organization in Egypt, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, were even prevented by the government from obtaining legal recognition due to their defense of Islamists. Despite this and other types of pressures exerted by the government to get Egyptian rights organizations – largely secular in nature – to cease their defense of Islamists, many organizations rejected this message, considering that defending the human rights of all – including Islamists – is not the same as granting political support to Islamist groups. At the same time, many of these human rights defenders expressed profound skepticism about the potential for a coherent, pro-human rights, democratic trend evolving within that generation of political Islamist movements in Egypt, in contrast to the positive developments within leftist and Nasserist currents at the time.

Therefore, the community of rights activists in Egypt is perhaps not surprised by the authoritarian, anti-human rights, and anti-democratic trends seen in the Muslim Brotherhood and other political Islamist groups. What is shocking, however, is how quickly the face of the oppressor has revealed itself. Franz Fanon and others have examined the process by which the victim becomes the oppressor, a process currently being witnessed in Egypt. What happened with these Islamist groups isn't a transformation but rather a process of slipping off the mask of victimhood to reveal the true persecutor underneath.

It is unfortunate that so quickly after coming to power, the former victims began publicly denouncing the human rights NGOs that had for years defended them, shamelessly reproducing the rhetoric of their own persecutors from the Mubarak regime in their attacks on civil society NGOs as “foreign hands” and the receivers of “foreign money.” Before the revolution, Islamist leaders had no objections when Egyptian human rights NGOs exposed human rights violations in international forums or western countries. Now that the victim has become the tyrant, the Muslim Brotherhood has reclassified such criticism as interference in its domestic affairs by external agents. Brotherhood leaders recently told international organizations that since the “success of the revolution” Egypt no longer needs NGOs to defend human rights.

This shift in position makes perfect sense, since all oppressors do their best to avoid exposure of their crimes and prevent victims' voices from being heard. Unfortunately, this has become the foundation of the new alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and the security apparatus. The Muslim Brotherhood seeks to consolidate power at any price, even at the price of aligning themselves with an enemy that persecuted them for nearly a century.

Can political Islam be democratic?

After more than two years, it seems that the “Arab Spring” has thus far been unable to produce a single consolidated and stable democracy. Despite significant differences in terms of the challenges faced and the varied nature of the political and social contexts, conflict and non-democratic measures continue to affect Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. It is possible that a democratic state will be born out of the struggles of at least one of these states, yet this possibility remains fragile at best. Meanwhile, in Bahrain, the conflict has been settled for a time, which may prove to be at the expense of the democratic uprising. In the Syrian context, a statement issued in April 2013 by one of the armed opposition groups announcing its allegiance to the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization is a worrying sign, particularly in light of the continued inability of the Syrian National Coalition – headed by the Muslim Brotherhood – to formulate a political discourse and program or daily practices which address the demands of the ethnic and religious minorities in Syria. In Egypt, the situation has become clearer now that the country has moved from a continuous state of uprising into the grip of another authoritarian regime, yet this new regime’s religious features will further exacerbate the regime’s autocratic nature and indeed move it towards totalitarianism. According to the Muslim Brotherhood’s political program of the autumn of 2007 – prior to the revolution – the unannounced goal of the organization was the establishment of a totalitarian theocracy.⁸ However, the nature of the political opposition which has confronted the Brotherhood, as well as its inability to convince non-politicized citizens – including traditional Muslims – of its political, professional, or even religious merits, has prolonged the period over which the Brotherhood seeks to accomplish this goal.

Regardless of whether or not the Muslim Brotherhood succeeds in realizing the intended goal of its political program, it will – in cooperation with other Islamist parties, including Salafists, Jihadists, and the Wasat Party – continue to impose its practices and policies at all levels. In this we find the unanticipated answer to the question of whether Islamist political parties could become democratic parties and pass the first real test by contributing to the process of democratic transition in the Arab region – in other words, whether Islamist parties could become the equivalent of the democratic Christian parties in Europe. It seems that, at least in Egypt, the answer is resoundingly ‘no’, as the Muslim Brotherhood has exerted all its efforts to thwart the chances for democratic transition since they surfaced in February

⁸ Bahey eddin Hassan, *ibid.*

2011. Furthermore, it must be recognized that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is the leader of the international Muslim Brotherhood organization in the Arab region. It should be noted that the idea that Islamist political parties can transform into democratic political parties has also been challenged by the experiences of both Iran and Sudan for more than three decades. Of course, this does not mean those whose religion is Islam cannot interpret Islam to be in conformity with modern forms of secular, pluralistic democratic governance and human rights standards. Instead, this is an observation about the political platforms and religious interpretations of Islam that are put forward by Islamic political parties in their current forms.

Even as there is still room for forces within Ennahda to interact positively in the democratic process in Tunisia, it appears from the practices of the Muslim Brotherhood that any similar progress in Egypt may take at least a decade – and perhaps closer to a century – and that it will likely occur only after a new generation assumes positions of authority within the organization. Yet even this possibility remains remote, and no indications point to such a change anytime soon. Rather, any critical voices from within the Muslim Brotherhood – and they are limited indeed – have either left the organization or been forced out. In any case, we are not witnessing a mass movement of resignations from the organization nor wide internal criticism for it. The most prominent critical voice was without a doubt that of Dr. Abdel Moneim Abul Fotouh, who put himself forward as a candidate for the presidency and then formed the Strong Egypt Party. It had been predicted that this party would become a large umbrella party, bringing together those who had left the Brotherhood and other Islamists and presenting itself as the moral, democratic successor of the Muslim Brotherhood – the alternative from within the same camp. However, the party followed a different course, seeking to become an even broader umbrella under which former Brotherhood figures would come together with liberals and leftists. In doing so, the party lost the main quality which made it unique and failed to present a clear image either to the people of Egypt or to those in the outside world who had hoped that despite the fears about political Islam in Egypt, a political program could emerge from this camp based on the ideals of humanism, progress, and modernism. The ambiguous nature of the Strong Egypt Party was also clear through the positions it adopted, which completely lacked consistency and therefore, political appeal. In any case, it is clear that the Strong Egypt Party cannot be classified as an Islamist party or as an alternative to other Islamist parties.

It had been anticipated by some observers in Egypt that another limited split would occur within the Muslim Brotherhood due to the Wasat Party, which had presented a political discourse differing significantly from that of the

Brotherhood prior to the revolution. However, after the revolution and after this party became legally recognized, the positive discourse which had distinguished the Wasat Party became a thing of the past. The party turned into a mere appendage of the Muslim Brotherhood to be used against the Brotherhood's real opposition, as had been done during the Mubarak era with certain "opposition" parties whose main purpose was to counter Mubarak's opposition to the benefit of the ruling party.

The historic failure of political Islam in Egypt – with all of its organizations and parties – to adopt a consistent democratic discourse, to respect basic human rights, and to follow democratic principles in practice is a major loss for all Egyptians and is in no way mitigated by the success of these parties in elections, which is achieved through any means. Furthermore, this failure is preventing Egypt from emerging successfully from its current crisis and from avoiding falling into the grip of another repressive regime. In light of the major influence of Egypt on the whole Arab region, and due to the fact that Egypt is the center of the international Muslim Brotherhood organization, the repercussions of this failure will indeed be of historical proportions, and its effects will be felt far beyond Egypt's borders.

At the same time, we see frequent indications that religiously based groups which advocate violence are increasing their activities in the "Arab Spring" countries. Perhaps what is happening in Syria was foreseeable – despite its catastrophic nature – yet the return of such violent Islamist groups to carry out their terrorist activities under Islamist governments in Egypt and Tunisia is another indicator of the historic proportions of this failure.

Before the "Arab Spring," many analysts, academics, and politicians predicted that armed Islamist groups would give up their violent activities once an Islamist government came to power. When others would argue that this was not the case under the Islamic Caliphate – whether under the Umayyads, the Abbasids, or others – nor has it been the case in modern-day Saudi Arabia, the response was that the case would be different under democratic governments. However, in Egypt and Tunisia, Islamist groups have come to power through democratic means (or so they claim) and opened up unprecedented space for other Islamist groups, including those which are not legally recognized or which carry out armed operations. Even so, resorting to violence and even acts of terrorism as a means to achieve political or religious ends has not declined; rather, such acts have increased in these two countries since the revolution as compared to the five years prior. In Yemen, the significant participation of the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in the new government has similarly not led to a decline in armed operations carried out by the Al-Qaeda terrorist

organization in the country; to the contrary, a new armed Islamist group has emerged.

Among the paradoxes which merit examination is that under the non-Islamist, undemocratic regime in Egypt prior to the revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jihadi and al-Jama'a al-Islameyya organizations rejected violence as a means to achieve political and religious ends, yet since the Islamists came to power Egypt has seen a series of physical attacks committed by members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups against media professionals and peaceful protestors. Moreover, it is strongly suspected that assassinations of political activists have been carried out purposefully, yet the judiciary has not been able to conduct serious investigations into these cases.

It is in this context that we must ask ourselves: Are the Islamists capable of submitting to the results of the ballot box – by which they came to power – even if the result is not in their favor?

Before the Muslim Brotherhood has even completed its first year in power⁹, it is already responsible for most of the same violations which took the previous regime several years to commit. The new regime has employed both new and old tools – including the constitution, legislation, administrative mechanisms, and the security apparatus – in both a legal and illegal fashion to repress protest movements and diversity of unions, to restrict the exercise of basic freedoms by opposition and civil society activists, and to stifle human rights organizations. It has further announced its intention to impose legal amendments which fundamentally contradict the democratic principles of media freedoms, civil society participation, and judicial independence.

Once again, we raise the same question: Is it possible for a political group which exerts all of its efforts to restrict its opponents and to undermine the pillars of democratic transition - including an independent judiciary, free media sector, functioning civil society¹⁰, and independent unions – to accept

⁹ See: "Egypt: 8 Months after Dr. Mohamed Morsi Assumed the Presidency, the Rapid Deterioration of the State of Human Rights in Egypt Must be Halted," a statement issued by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and 20 other rights organizations, 21 Feb. 2013, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=5954&lang=en>>; "Joint Appeal by Egyptian Human Rights Organizations to the UN OHCHR," a letter sent by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and 21 other rights organizations, 3 Feb. 2013, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=6479&lang=en>>.

¹⁰ See: "Morsi's Government Must Withdraw Bill to Nationalize Civil Society from Shura Council and Reject FJP Bill to Stifle Human Rights Organizations," a statement issued by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and 21 other rights organizations, 28 Feb. 2013, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=6011&lang=en>>.

results which are not in its favor from the ballot box by which it came to power?

The domination of political Islam on the course of the “Arab Spring” has become perhaps the most prominent feature of this historic development – to the point that the “Arab Spring” has now come to be known as the “Islamist Spring,” a term that describes the reality that the fruits of this spring have been overwhelmingly enjoyed by only one political group.

In the end, the question remains: Is the suffering experienced by the Arab peoples over the course of the past two years really leading to the birth of democracy in the wake of the “Arab Spring”? Or have secular forms of autocracy merely been traded for religious forms of autocracy? I fear that, because of the inability of political Islam to accept and uphold human rights and democratic principles for which the uprisings occurred, Arab peoples will be forced to pay an even greater price in order to hasten the coming of autumn for political Islam before true democracy can be born out of the “Arab Spring.”

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