



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES

BOOK REVIEW

Egypt 2013

Dr. Anwar Mahmoud Zanati | May 2012

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Series: Book Review

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Egypt 2013

By Ahmed Fahmi

Publisher: Al Bayan Research and Studies Center

Pages: 211

Date of issue: February 2012

Edition: First

Egypt 2013, written by political writer and analyst Ahmed Fahmi, was published in association with Al Bayan Research and Studies Center. The book covers the political scene in post-revolution Egypt via theoretical concepts related to democratic transition in countries that witnessed revolutionary movements. It features a theoretical concept of the process of change, its mechanisms, phases, and issues, and applies such concepts to the Egyptian case. It does so in seven chapters, as well as the conclusion.

Chapter One: The State and Revolution – A Theoretical Approach

In this chapter, the author covers several terms, most notably the concept of the State; he, ultimately, questions both the 'model' sought by revolutionary political forces in Egypt and their vision of the political transition trilogy: demolition, amendment, and construction.

This chapter also explores the concept of revolution and the different approaches in defining such a term. Many definitions encompass 'violence' as an inseparable characteristic of revolutions, linked with the act of revolution and practiced by revolutionary forces themselves, rather than as a reaction to the revolution. However, history shows that many revolutions were free of violence and adopted a peaceful way to change.

In general, he stresses five key elements that lead to a growing social capability that can later develop into a revolution:

1. An internal development that depends on foreign parties
2. A repressive, exclusionary, and autocratic State
3. A growing culture of resistance and opposition to order
4. A heightening economic crisis
5. A gap in foreign politics which leads to a temporary weakness in the control from external powers, thereby allowing the eruption of a revolution without global powers being able to intervene directly

The book cites other theoretical approaches, which seek to explain political transition and whether or not it reached the phase of revolution. These approaches include structuralism, the elite theory, the theory of disappointment, crowd psychology, and geopolitical analysis.

The Arab revolutions have invalidated the thoughts of several Western sociologists and political scientists, including Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History*, and sociologist Jeff Goodwin of New York University, among others who have maintained that the age of revolution was over. In this, they have based their views on several factors, including the fact that secularism has destroyed the logical premises of revolts and that the age of colonization is over.

Chapter Two: From the State to Revolution

This chapter addresses the outcome of Mubarak's 30 years in power, and summarizes Mubarak's tenure in the emergence of a corrupt ruling elite that sought to protect its own interests using a firm security grip. According to the *US Foreign Policy* periodical, Mubarak ranked fifteenth on the list of "Worst of the Worst" in 2010. During his reign, Egypt was a "soft state," according to economist and political sociologist Gunnar Myrdal of Sweden, meaning one in which laws are passed but not enforced, where laws contain loopholes are devoid of respect from anybody. Those with a higher income pay no heed to laws because they have the money and power that can protect them, while those who do in the lower pay scales charge bribes to turn a blind eye.

The personal traits of ousted president Hosni Mubarak heightened the softness and corruption of the State. He was a shallow person, with a modest level of education, a lack of depth, and little political experience.

According to the elite theory, the Egyptian political situation during Mubarak's regime showed that:

1. The society was divided into two categories: a minority with authority and power and a popular majority deprived of either. The minority undertook allocation of resources apart from the majority.
2. This ruling minority constituted the upper economic and social classes, with individuals from the majority penetrating only after a difficult and lengthy process.
3. The policies of the elite did not reflect the demands of the majority.

4. The ruling elite had much impact on the majority and were rarely affected by them.

The corruption of the ruling elite reflected the mechanism of selecting senior officials for the State's executive bodies, as the criterion for being appointed to such positions was not qualification, and personal connections became key to assuming such posts.

The corruption of the elite got worse when the president's sons, Alaa and Jamal, joined suit. It was no surprise to see both of them turn, over time, into a center for managing corruption with any major corruption issue eventually leading to one or both of them.

One of the basic manifestations of corruption was the president's extraordinary powers that gave him significant control over the executive branch. Exploiting political tools, such as the National Democratic Party, or security tools, such as the State Security Service, the president managed to expand his powers and informal influence over the three governmental branches – the executive, legislative, and judicial. In this way, he explains how the State's general policies were drafted through the exchange of opinions between the president and his close circles away from the political elite, who had significantly little say in policy making.

Mubarak's policies led Egypt into a risky position on the Failed States Index where Egypt remained in the second category, a county with threatened political stability. The author explores the security grip aimed at protecting the corrupt elite.

When service agencies failed to deliver the demands of citizens and political representative bodies fell short of expressing and adopting such demands, it was time for security bodies to curb demands and suppress the seekers and supporters of such claims. With the Mubarak regime getting increasingly used to turning a blind eye on popular claims in the past years, the role of security bodies ultimately dominated the landscape.

The book discusses an important deep-rooted issue in the Arab political arena – the confusion between the State, regime, and authority. We can detect four distinct signs that summarize the security grip of the autocratic state in Egypt:

1. Muscle flexing and the use of force
2. The development of the state security concept
3. The philosophy of citizen humiliation
4. The phenomenon of political bullying

Chapter Three: From the State to Revolution

This chapter reviews the path taken by revolutionary forces from the moment the acts of revolution stopped through to the fall of the autocratic regime and the completion of the new regime. This path is dubbed, in the literature of politics, as “change” and it is a very serious phase for the reasons below:

- The downfall of incumbent regime leads into a state of “revolutionary sluggishness”
- The forces that fell with the regime start to reorganize themselves into groups
- The downfall of the regime does not mean a disassembly of its pillars

Many revolutions failed to pass through this difficult phase, some managed to do so in few months, and others took decades to finalize the change process. At the start of this phase, revolutionary forces must own a clear vision for the future. Most importantly, however, such future vision should show the nature of the regime revolutionary forces are willing to change into.

Chapter Four: The Road to the State – the Military Council and Political Transition

This chapter covers the level of change applied by the Military Council in terms of leadership and legitimacy, and highlights two issues:

1. The ambiguous decision-making process within the Military Council, and
2. The conflicting sources of legitimacy on which the Council relies.

The chapter maintains that the Military Council had no clear strategy for cultural change; rather, it has a media strategy similar to that of the former regime. The chapter assumes that the Military Council has adopted a policy of disseminating a “culture of disunity” instead of a “culture of unity” and/or “cooperation” among political powers.

The performance of the Military Council can be structured as follows:

1. Preserving the prevailing institutional culture derived from the former regime and taken from its major Western source, in line, of course, with economic globalization

2. Retaining the remnants of the former regime in key positions across the State's formal bodies

The Outcome of Policy Change

The general policies not only include what the government wants to do, but also what it refrains from doing and the so-called negative policies, which have important and sometimes serious impacts. Some researchers evaluate the policies made as: bad faith, bad planning, misunderstanding, and mistrust. The ambiguous powers of the prime minister, who enjoyed little independence in making decisions, were most notable in the executive performance. These negative policies show failure, though some claimed all were a deliberate act to slow political transition.

Chapter Five: The Constraints of Political Transition

On the road to transition, there are several constraints and challenges in all fields, internally and externally, including:

1. Difficulty in establishing real democratic structures after anti-dictatorship revolutions
2. Deep rooted foreign-reliance for development, which can hardly be spared
3. Failure to found a revolutionary political culture, which would help build a new society, due to the existence of several sub-currents
4. Counter reactions by external powers and regional allies
5. Given the above, the wide-range coalitions that had been effective for sparking revolutions cannot be maintained due to the vast difference in opinions on how the society can be reconstructed.

Political leaderships need to make conclusive decisions to be able to face a vast array of issues, while facing an opposition that is similar to a people's revolution. The post-revolution regimes tend to give financial grants to a wide range of the people through raises or employment benefits, or they improve services, all of which places more financial burdens on the government.

The author emphasizes that it is hard to cover all possible constraints in the Egyptian case, stressing only two for their special importance: natural chaos and planned chaos/counter-revolution.

Natural Chaos

When popular revolutions are successful, a sharp transition occurs, going from a repression and restriction of political and cultural freedoms to freedom and openness. In Egypt, that transition brought about a state of expected chaos throughout the regime, as well as citizens' political and daily life. Some have wrongly attributed this chaos to the revolution as an original source, though its true source is the former regime.

The state of lawlessness was a striking feature of chaos, with the general reasons possibly being:

1. The security personnel's partial or total abstention from taking over their duties
2. The absence of the police agencies' role in detecting the violations of community relations
3. The level of chaos is such that it has infected the administrative structure of the ministry of interior itself
4. The intensification of bullying
5. The behavioral changes demonstrated in how violence has manifested in the society as new segments of unemployed people have assumed bullying as a profession
6. The wide-scale possession and use of weapons

However, some analysts consider such natural chaos as "corrective" as it reformulates the equations of balance within different political, social, economic, and cultural ranks of the society, from the bottom of the society to the top of the regime. In this case, the elite theory shall be replaced with a group-based theory, where policies get charted based on the nature of competition among the different societal forces.

Counter-revolution

The national powers concerned with the preservation of the revolution, and the completion of political transition, are facing the issue of the corrupt elite who have, for decades, been at the helm of political decision. When segments of the elite fell and disassembled after the revolution, the rest combined forces with them, both having the same interests in curbing revolution and reversing its direction (i.e., a counter-revolution).

The counter-revolution parties can be outlined according to following motives:

- Those who lost all gains and influence, and were imprisoned as a result of the revolution

- Those who lost significant influence and are still at-large.
- Those whose opportunities and ambitions could be harmed by the revolutionary momentum, though their opportunities are created by the revolution itself
- Those who have seen new horizons and ambitions that must be pursued if they changed their tone and established a new regime
- The new hypocrites or the old, who simply converted their rhetoric

All of these segments are intertwined, complementing each other and controlling one another. Some have even transformed themselves into recipients of external support, influence, and directives so that they divert the path of the revolution. Others have big goals of founding a new political regime, and yet others have smaller goals (i.e., individual gains). The goals are usually in line with the political capability of the members of each segment.

The Plan of the Counter-revolution

The plan of the counter-revolution stands on the dissolution of the components that made the revolution successful, putting each component off the revolution's track to prevent any potential unity. This includes components such as the political forces, intellectual elite, youth groups, revolutionary public, and revolutionary goal.

Chapter Six: The Islamists' Path to Power

As per official figures, there were 50 million eligible voters across Egypt at the beginning of the People's Assembly election. Around 30 million voters (60%) turned out and of these, approximately 21 million (70%) gave their votes to Islamists. The author believes the most important lessons drawn from the Islamists' victory are:

1. Dubbing Islamist currents as moderate or hardline or using any other negative descriptions is no longer valid;
2. The Islamists can introduce legal or constitutional changes with their majority, over two-thirds of seats;
3. This percentage should be automatically, yet gradually, reflected in subsequent governments;
4. Islamists have a historic opportunity to rebuild the nation;
5. The absolute control of Islamists will significantly cut corruption;
6. The majority empowers Islamists to reform the security mindset and military culture;
7. If the Islamists managed to deliver a positive political model in the country, people across the region would demand a change;
8. Such a majority puts the external powers in front of the de facto; and

9. Such desired fulfillments are dependent on stable relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis.

Disagreement between the Brotherhood and Salafis

Given the true nature of the Brotherhood-Salafi relation, direct experiences, and published literature, the factors pushing towards separation and disagreement can be divided into five groups:

1. Violations of Sharia rules
2. Issues of establishment
3. Interpretation of reality and how to deal with it
4. Leadership and influence
5. Field competition

Rapprochement between the Brotherhood and Salafists

The author discusses the first, hard-to-achieve scenario: fusion or integration. This is mentioned in the book based on a thematic necessity, yet it is practically impossible. It is still a welcome scenario from a purely Sharia point of view. The book cites seven scenarios:

1. Fusion
2. Integration
3. Coalition
4. Partnership
5. Advocacy
6. No-harm
7. Containment of dispute

Characteristics of the Rapprochement Strategy

The above scenarios are valueless if both currents have no strong motives to achieve them; additionally, a positive impact must be exchanged between both currents apart from formal relations and communication. Not only do some Salafis are closely related to the Brotherhood, in terms of the way of thinking and thoughts on change, some Brotherhood members have Sharia rhetoric and options very close to Salafis. The Salafists' growing strength and political presence has made rapprochement more likely than divergence, and individual communications with the Brotherhood's top figures brings about better results than collective communications. Lastly, one of the final characteristics that must be in place is the general control and redlines that must be developed to avoid media attacks.

Chapter Seven: Possible Scenarios for Egypt

There are three scenarios: the intuitive scenario, which relies on direct information, analysis, and experience; a regular or model scenario, which depends on methodological models and quantitative data; and an interactive scenario that combines both. The author cannot discuss the second and third scenarios for the following reasons:

1. Egypt's political scene is fluid and there is little accurate data on key variables available
2. Most of the effective powers in the post-revolution time are new to the arena or practice new roles
3. Positions fluctuate frequently
4. The variable has a great impact but is unlikely to happen.

Factors Impacting Future Scenarios

The military's role

The Military Council's role is very ambiguous, making its subsequent options or actions hard to predict due to the clear confusion in how it drafts political views and options; this is also true given that military culture is based on ambiguity and confidentiality. We anticipate the path of the Council in the next phase based on the following four methods:

1. A historical approach comparing it to the experience of the Revolutionary Command Council of 1954
2. Comparison with the experience of Algerian military thwarting the experience of the Islamic Salvation Front in early 1990s
3. A theoretical approach considering the patterns of power reservation in the Arab world
4. Actual approach by exploring fixed patterns through the preservation of the military performance during the past year

Political powers

After the People's Assembly election, Egypt has four main powers: the Freedom and Justice Party, Al Nour Party, Al Wafd Party, and the Egyptian Bloc. Such powers make up 90 percent of the Parliament. The future will test their ability to build a balance and

mutual agreement equation, leading to the creation of a unified stand vis-à-vis the Military Council.

The key factor that will impact the stability of the regime is how successful political powers will be in setting rules for mutual relations. These rules shall be fused by mutual agreement, not via a majority's opinion. The first rule is that the minority recognizes the majority's right to pass laws and legislations. This seems difficult given the evident "state of despair" voiced by some secular minority parties on their political future. Such minority insists on raising alternatives to the concept of a majority (i.e., mutual agreement and the legitimacy of Tahrir square, which fuels the democracy of the elite concept that deprives the people from decision).

The external role

Foreign intervention is the scourge of revolutions. The geopolitical approach adopts a main assumption in the interpretation of revolutions – the countries situated in conflict areas often have a relatively stable setting due to the propagation of "external threat". In safe geographical areas, internal powers get involved in internal affairs. Many regimes in "third world countries" aggressively seek to sow tensions across the region where they lie to ensure internal unity.

Focusing on the Arab case (i.e., the Arab Spring), the regional confrontation strategy can encompass two more steps: (a) halting a recurrence of the scenario of "the deposition of rulers" as happened in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, where rulers managed to escape, and were tried or assassinated, for psychological and political reasons, and (b) aggressively seeking to prevent the establishment of a successful Islamist government model in the Arab region.

Internationally, Western countries totally reject any alternation to the system created in the Arab countries after they obtained dependence. Such systems consisted of two elements: founding a corrupt ruling elite, secular or military, and ensuring the political, structural, and economic subordination. Below are the major factors Washington expects to be charted out for the new regimes:

1. The differentiation between a democratic regime led by Islamists and an Islamist regime
2. Caution against isolating the Egyptian regime from the Western economic regime
3. Rejection of changing the military conviction of the armed forces in such a way that may threaten a balance with Israel
4. Caution against touching regional balance by exporting the revolution or the Islamic model
5. No Islamization of the Palestinian cause

The major external means aimed at thwarting the revolution are: economic secularism, civil society interventions, and the intelligence's role with secret activities.

Conclusion: Egypt 2013

The author argues that the best scenario sought by the majority, at least as indicated by the results of the elections, consists of four elements:

1. A new elected president with full powers and specific tenure
2. The army returns to barracks and ceases to interfere in politics
3. A Parliament with an Islamist majority and full powers that plays its role to full extent
4. A government formed by the Parliament majority headed by Islamists

These elements shall coincide with positive signs in the performance of the regime as a whole, including an improved economy, progress at the purging and restructuring of institutions, positive changes on the cultural dimension of political transition, and the execution of urgent policies to improve living and social conditions.