

RELEASE IN PART B6

**From:** Anne-Marie Slaughter <[redacted]>  
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**To:** H  
**Cc:** Abedin, Huma; Jacob J Sullivan (SullivanJJ@state.gov); Cheryl Mills  
**Subject:** an excellent read on Egyptian politics

B6

I hope you are getting some real vacation! Have just started reading "It Takes a Village" as research for my book growing out of the article; I love it.

## Military or President: Who Calls the Shots in Egypt?

RUSI Analysis, 24 Aug 2012

The relationship between President Morsi and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has always been under intense scrutiny. Morsi's removal of SCAF's leadership could have represented the beginnings of open conflict between the Morsi and SCAF, but the actual situation is far more complex.

By H.A. Hellyer for RUSI.org



The last couple of weeks have seen a shift in Egyptian politics. It appeared that the Egyptian President, Mohammed Morsi, exercised his authority over the military establishment, and dismissed Field Marshal Mohammed Tantawi. However, the reality of the situation is rather more complicated. The context of the move is exceedingly important, as we try to understand what possible scenarios are afoot for Egypt's constitutional future, and its foreign policy dynamics.

Without delving into the intricacies of Egyptian political dynamics, a few developments are necessary to take into account. Prior to the start of the Egyptian Revolution on 25 January 2011, the military leadership (the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces - SCAF) occupied a particularly privileged space within Egyptian society. They acted as a state within the state: their many economic interests were theirs to govern as they wished, and their internal structures were not subject to civilian oversight. Hosni Mubarak, in this regard, was not a civilian authority: he was a military one, and part of the same structure, which simultaneously occupied the president's office.

In the aftermath of the forced resignation of Hosni Mubarak, made possible by the intervention of SCAF, the body then assumed the powers of the presidency without the façade of elections that Hosni Mubarak had accepted. In the eighteen months that have taken place since then, SCAF have maintained very high levels of confidence from the Egyptian public, according to regular Gallup polling. However, the continued involvement of SCAF in the governing of the Egyptian state, appears to have resulted in a slight weakening of its popularity beyond the military.

### The Military's Changing Internal Dynamic

What happened *within* the military is key to understanding what has taken place recently and its future repercussions. The popularity of the military leadership, represented in particularly by Tantawi and his number two, Sami Anan, was questionable. The military establishment's track record indicates that its desire is to remain on the sidelines of Egyptian

politics, as long as Egyptian politics remains on the sidelines of its internal affairs. Tantawi and Anan, however, even after the election of Morsi to the presidency, were continuing to share power that clearly went beyond the interests of the military. With power comes responsibility - and the military establishment at large didn't, and doesn't, want that responsibility.

Tantawi had the loyalty of some officers within SCAF - but not all of them. There was a new guard that clearly wanted the military to return to the position it maintained prior to 25 January 2011, with some temporary adjustments. The divide between this Tantawi clique, and the new guard (led, it seems, by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, now Defence Minister, and Mohammed al-Assar), are real. One aspect of this is generational - the new guard is younger, and may have sought promotion, which can only happen when the old tier retires or dies. Ensuring the position of the military would probably have been another priority. Some speculate that that the new guard perceived that the Tantawi clique were on a trajectory that, intentionally or not, would ultimately threaten that position.

This new guard are unlikely to be Islamists. No Islamist would have been permitted to rise to a senior military rank by the security services had they been suspected of Islamist leanings. The new guard, and the military establishment as a whole, are pragmatists with two key interests: the economic holdings of the military (including the quality of life enjoyed by the leadership) and a maintaining of a geo-strategic situation in the region that does not require them to ever go to war. With the transitional period, they have one more interest: to never be held accountable for any criminal actions that took place under their watch. A state within a state, indeed.

### **The Military Seeks to Secure Its Position**

This was not a powerful president exercising his authority over an insolent military. This was a coup *within* the military establishment as senior officers were forced out by ambitious others. Morsi did not play the key role: he provided cover, and was a useful interlocutor, who was clearly happy to engage in that manner. Both Morsi and SCAF wanted the Tantawi clique out, a mutually beneficial arrangement, but one where SCAF undoubtedly called the shots. Morsi certainly has the support of the Muslim Brotherhood behind him but had SCAF been behind Tantawi completely, then Morsi would have been going to war with the army, the bureaucracy, the judiciary and the rest of the institutions of the deep state. SCAF is still a far more powerful actor within Egyptian politics than the office of the presidency or the Muslim Brotherhood. - However, the newly, self-reconstituted SCAF seems to have decided to step back, and to turn over as much responsibility for running the country as possible to the presidency.

Some analysts suggest that the recent killing of Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai on 12 August provided a good excuse to affect this: but the reality is that probably with or without Sinai, this would have happened. The critical factor in this move is not whether or not Sinai provided the impetus, but whether Morsi was willing to depend on the collaboration of a new guard in SCAF. If that new guard had not supported Morsi's move, then he would have found himself quite vulnerable. Moreover, it would not have been unexpected for the SCAF to retaliate with a coup.

It is not, incidentally, beyond the realm of possibility that such a coup might have been possible to sell to the Egyptian public, had this been an option the army wanted to pursue. Indeed, there were rumours that such a coup was about to take place - but these were not substantiated. There are other rumours that the US backed the move, and that this support was crucial - this, again, is wholly unsubstantiated. While it is likely the military notified the US (most of SCAF has strong ties with the US), and reports do indicate that they had some advance warning that there would be changes in SCAF,<sup>[1]</sup> it is unlikely that it was a move they knew much about very far in advance. Crucially, it's exceedingly doubtful that the US could have affected it one way or the other.

The newly reconstituted SCAF has certainly reserved certain rights for itself. Firstly they have retained responsibility for self-regulation, rather than be under the jurisdiction by civilian authorities. Hence why neither Tantawi nor Anan are due to stand trial, and why no other senior officer will either. They essentially have 'military immunity'. It's likely also that Morsi agreed, all too quickly, to two additional items: to ensure that defence policy remains within the hands of SCAF (at the very least, SCAF has a veto), and to consider the economic interests of the military beyond state purview.

Defence policy impinges, of course, on foreign policy. It is likely there will be, for the foreseeable future, a jointly decided foreign policy and security policy between the office of the presidency and the defence ministry, with the defence ministry (SCAF) holding a veto. As a matter of fact, SCAF hold a veto over much of Egypt's affairs. They have the force of arms, and their

popular standing in Egyptian society is such that, if used correctly, they could use that veto without diminishing their public support.

However, it is unlikely that we will see the SCAF actually be placed in a position by the Muslim Brotherhood where they feel they need to use that veto. As long as they feel that their interests are protected, and defence policy remains in their hands, they will leave the presidency alone with the task of running the country. That includes all national problems which are now solely Morsi's headache. This is not the military submitting to civilian control - this is the military deciding to leave the broader political scene, subject to the maintaining of its interests and privileges. Several weeks ago, this writer observed that this would be the smartest strategy for the military, but it was thought that it would take them years to come to the same conclusion.

### **Morsi's Wider Ambitions**

Some commentators have argued that Morsi, after having found SCAF willing to be neutral vis-à-vis his presidency, has two more targets. Here, he will find a much more difficult task. The first is the judiciary, full of judges appointed by Hosni Mubarak, just as the military was run by his appointed generals. In this regard the conflict will be more open, without the secret deals that characterised the deal with the military. Morsi's appointment of a famed reformist judge as his vice-president shows that he is serious about reforming the judiciary.

The next target is the bureaucratic apparatus that actually runs Egypt on a day-to-day basis. This poses a challenge that no president could best in a short amount of time. Corruption thrives therein, and while Morsi may be able to make some cosmetic changes, the bureaucracy is too chaotic for anyone to control, let alone someone who comes from the Muslim Brotherhood - a movement that the bureaucracy has spent decades fighting. Even if Morsi chose to utilise the state apparatus to implement anything remotely close to an Islamist agenda, he'd find it difficult to get anything to change therein. The hope is that if he chooses consensus policy measures, those may be forced through with the assistance of the existing bureaucracy - but none of that looks plausible at present.

There are a number of challenges on the horizon - none of which are insurmountable for this president, but which many doubt he will deliver on. The first is the writing of a genuinely representative constitution, which is ultimately dependent on a carefully designed constitutional assembly. When the Muslim Brotherhood dominated parliament tried to do this a few months ago, it promised a constitutional assembly that would deliver a consensus of society's different parts, rather than simply an Islamist constitution. In the end, the assembly was stacked with Islamists of different shades - it was eventually dismissed, under pressure from the then ruling military council. A new one was eventually assembled which was more representative, and which aims at creating a constitution in the coming weeks and months. Will it be a consensus constitution? In this revolutionary period, particularly in light of the fact that Mr Morsi's democratic mandate is not overwhelming, he should not control that process - but he can lend his voice to those who seek it to be a consensus for all Egyptians, and not simply the majority.

### **The Lack of Constitutional Balance**

The second major challenge is the existence of checks & balances on the presidency. In a normal situation, that check would be the parliament - but that parliament was dismissed prior to the presidential elections again, under pressure from SCAF. This placed the nascent new democracy in a rather peculiar position after Mr Morsi's victory in the elections. Mr Morsi, as president, essentially shared the presidency with the leader of SCAF, Mr Tantawi. An elected leader, sharing power with a non-elected military leader, with that non-elected leader acting as a check and balance over the elected official. With the restructuring over, Egypt now has the situation of an elected leader responsible for most (not all) of the country's governance - but without any checks or balances. SCAF was hardly ideal, as a non-elected and non-judicial check, but it did act as a balance. One might argue that this is inevitable until an elected parliament is put into place, along with a constitution that defines the different divisions of power - but that isn't inevitable at all. President Morsi, if he so wanted, could easily appoint a committee of sorts made up of public figures whose sign off on legislation would be mandatory - included in that committee could be senior reformist judges, as well as political figures such as Hamdeen Sabahi, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, and other revolutionary figures. None of this is ideal, but until a constitution and elections for a new parliament takes place, it's something.

This lack of accountability in the new Morsi presidency is precisely what makes the forthcoming parliamentary elections so important. The Muslim Brotherhood has already indicated that it intends to run candidates in 80 per cent or more of the constituencies - and it has the resources to do so. The question is: can non-Islamist parties do the same? So far, the non-Islamist political elite has been largely (with some exceptions) incompetent, unable or unwilling to do what it needs to in order to be an effective opposition. Many of them were not particularly strong on any ideological footing, but were simply engaging in politics to stand against the Muslim Brotherhood. In terms of grassroots political engagement, they were light years behind the Muslim Brotherhood. In the upcoming elections, they have a responsibility to be as effective as possible, in order to ensure the presence of a robust opposition. This, not their own partisan political aims, must be their objective.

Alas, it is not clear if much of the Egyptian political spectrum is able to look beyond its partisan aims; parochial, partisan interests are often equated with national ones. That, perhaps more than anything else, is the challenge of the new Egypt.

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The views expressed here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI.

NOTE

[i] The Pentagon Spokesman George Little, for example, said 'We had expected President Morsi at some point to co-ordinate changes in the military leadership, to name a new team'

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