

IN THE NAME OF STABILITY?

Jayantha Dhanapala surveys the troubled Egyptian landscape and unearths a fact file

The dramatic and controversial military coup in Egypt on 3 July continues to have repercussions well beyond the borders of that ancient land. A year before the coup – after a succession of pharaohs, kings and army dictators in its rich history of over 5,000 years – this major country in the Arab world elected Mohamed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood as its President with 52 percent of the vote, in an undisputed democratic process.

A year later, the Muslim Brotherhood was out of power with its leader Morsi arrested by the army, an interim Government put in place, and fighting in the streets of major Egyptian cities between Morsi supporters and opponents causing many deaths.

How could the Arab Spring turn into winter so abruptly in only a year? And how can the army and the Tahrir Square demonstrators accept a military coup so soon after overthrowing Hosni Mubarak?

The answers to these questions have relevance for all who believe in democracy, good governance and the rule of law; especially for us in Sri Lanka, where we have survived several threats to democracy in our independent existence since 1948.

Egypt, the lynchpin of the Arab world, is like Sri Lanka. It is a founder member of the Non-Aligned Movement, a leading developing country in the Group of 77 and a flag



BITTER DIVISIONS Thousands of supporters of ousted Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi march towards Cairo University during a protest in his support in July. They are carrying posters reading 'Down With Military Rule' and 'No to Treason, no to Military Coup,' along with pictures of fellow Muslim Brotherhood supporters who were killed in clashes with the security forces. Rival rallies defending Morsi's overthrow have underlined Egypt's bitter divisions in recent weeks.



bearer of so many causes dear to the global South, including the establishment of a Palestinian state. As important is the question whether democratic elections are valid only when parties conforming

to conventional norms and secularism participate, leaving out extremist parties of the left and right as well as fundamentalist religious groups even when a plurality of the vote elects them.

What if the Bodu Bala Sena won a majority in a free and fair presidential or parliamentary election in Sri Lanka? Or what if the white supremacist British National Party in the UK or Marine Le

The writer is a former Ambassador of Sri Lanka and UN Under-Secretary-General. He is currently President of the Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs.



AFP PHOTO/KALEB KAMEL

during the period of British rule in Egypt. It is regarded as the origin of Hamas and has spread to other Islamic countries. But its popularity diminished after it turned against Gamal Abdel Nasser, whom it first supported when the army overthrew King Farouk in 1952.

Banned from time to time, the Brotherhood transformed itself into a democratic party when democratic political space was created after the ouster of Mubarak in 2011. As a well-organised and broad-based political force, it won 47 percent of the seats in Parliament as against its Islamist rival the Al-Nour Party, which secured 24 percent.

At the presidential election in 2012, former Professor of Engineering Morsi was its presidential candidate and the centre voted for him, seeing him as a moderate.

The rise and fall of Morsi recalls a cautionary tale of another tragedy in the Arab world. Two decades ago, in Algeria in 1991, the Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front) despite gerrymandering and other repressive tactics, won 48 percent of the popular vote and 188 (out of 231) seats in Parliament.

This alarmed the army and those who led the heroic revolution against the colonial French regime. The army cancelled the elections and declared a state of emergency to the applause of the French and the rest of the Western world. A civil war was the result for 12 long years, leaving an estimated 200,000 dead and a devastated economy. Is that the likely result of what we have witnessed in Egypt?

It is true however, that Morsi over-reached himself in his first year in power, either out of

CURRENT AFFAIRS



Pen in France were elected to power?

Supporters of liberal democracy are confronted with this moral dilemma as they react to events in Egypt. President Barack Obama for example, does not call the events in Egypt a 'coup.' But he appeals for Morsi's release

and an end to harassment of the Brotherhood, while neo-conservatives in the US rejoice over the army takeover. Is the legitimacy of an elected government vitiated by large-scale popular demonstrations, or should we wait for elections?

The Muslim Brotherhood

(or the Society of the Muslim Brothers) is one of the oldest, largest and most influential Islamic movements in the Arab world. It was established in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, an Islamic scholar, and has been associated with political violence – including assassinations, especially

inexperience or incompetence. The protests against Morsi were huge and could not have been inspired by a minority of dissidents. The Tamarrud youth movement was at the vanguard. The economy was mismanaged, inflation and unemployment rose alarmingly, and electricity cuts and rising crime rates added to the problems of the people.

Morsi did little to broaden his base, and the Christian and Shia minorities grew nervous. Appointments were confined to Muslim Brotherhood members and independent institutions were undermined. The decree conferring immunity on himself was the beginning of the end. Ultimately, people power which had ousted the dictatorship of Mubarak and elected Morsi was also the cause of the latter's fall.

The army acted after due warning, when unruly mobs estimated at as high as 14 million continued their demonstrations against Morsi for days, with no sign that he was ready to compromise. On 3 July, the army deposed Morsi and took him into custody... and a transition plan was announced.

Adly Mansour, a non-controversial Supreme Court judge was appointed interim President, former IAEA Director-General and Nobel Peace Laureate Mohamed ElBaradei as Vice-President and well-known diplomat Nabil Fahmy as Foreign Minister. The transition plan comprised the

“

Most international commentators were caught in a cleft stick – do they stand for democratically-elected governments or their expulsion by the army, with the promise of elections and stability in the future...?

following elements: 10 legal and constitutional experts have 30 days to draft changes; a panel of 50 people from across Egyptian society are to consider the proposed amendments; the final draft is to be put to a referendum; and parliamentary elections are to be held in early 2014, followed by presidential elections.

However, none of this has helped to abate the protests, and the Muslim Brotherhood continues to reject the interim Government and demand the return of Morsi. Many foreign governments including the US have called for the release of Morsi from custody. Ironically, the popularity of the army has been restored among those who oppose the former president. This can only be explained by the need for stability and secularism in an unstable region.

The Saudis have backed the army, and Qatar, which had bankrolled Morsi, quickly pledged its support for the new Government. The West, unhappy over the role of the army ousting an elected government, grudgingly acquiesced since the Islamist policies of the Brotherhood were the greater evil. And most international commentators were caught in a cleft stick – do they stand for democratically-elected governments or their expulsion by the army, with the promise of elections and stability in the future? The West's fear of militant Islam will finally determine its reaction to Morsi's ouster.

A more positive example for all the parties in Egypt to follow is the example of Turkey – now turning a little sour, but for different reasons than army-

civilian relations. In Turkey, the army had acquired iconic stature with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his modernisation of the country after the founding of the republic in 1923. It became the guardian of secularism and frequently intervened to topple elected governments post World War II.

The election of President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party in 1997 was viewed warily when it first emerged. The army warned that the secularism it had established should not be violated. Gradually, both sides grew accustomed to each other and mutual accommodation was possible. Over a period, the army's influence in politics waned while the Islamist policies of Prime Minister Erdoğan's party were also moderated, enabling him to be re-elected three times.

Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood need to acquire the political skills for this kind of cohabitation. Much now depends on the interim Government and its ability to pave the way for fresh elections, when a genuinely representative government will emerge. The Muslim Brotherhood must also change – it must settle for a compromise and reconciliation in the larger interests of the stability and prosperity of Egypt and its people.



ONE SECRET OF OUR SUCCESS

LMD'S TRACK RECORD: ZERO BRIBES IN 19-PLUS YEARS OF DOING BUSINESS IN SRI LANKA

EMAIL corporate@lmd.lk AND TELL US HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THE SPREAD OF CORRUPTION IN THIS COUNTRY