



Middle East Mediterranean

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2/2

Social Media
Evangelos Venetis

**Syria and
Egypt**
Aref Alobeid

The Future of Egypt

*Struggling Between
Modernity and Tradition*

Egypt at a tightrope
Stefanos Vallianatos

Monitoring
the Middle East

Egyptian Women and the Arab
Spring
Kleopatra Youssef

Middle East Mediterranean

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Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) is an unbiased bimonthly report of the *ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project*, focusing largely on geopolitical and economic developments, debates as well as policies, affecting the future of the Middle East. Having a global outlook MEM hosts analyses, commentaries, interviews and news, conducting research in the fields of politics, economics and culture in the Middle East and adjacent areas, such as the Eastern Mediterranean.

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CONTENTS

Analyses

Editor's Note **4**

Egypt at a tightrope: Does the return of politics = a clash of destinies? **5**
Stefanos Vallianatos

The clash of destinies has taken the shape of one between two blocks made up of Islamist, on the one hand, and secularist on the other. The Egyptians find themselves increasingly disillusioned with their revolution.

Dividing Culture from Politics: Arab Women and the Arab Spring **8**
Kleopatra Youssef

Two years ago the successful uprising in Egypt has sparked a massive movement against the political regime of the President Hosni Mubarak. Egyptian women played a vital role in the revolutionary wave of protests and demonstrations. Yet their role in the country's current domestic politics remains extremely limited.

Comments

The Role of Social Media in Egypt **11**
Evangelos Venetis

The role of Social Media in Egypt is dubious especially after the fall of Hosni Mubarak. The uncertainty of their political aims and means regarding the security of the society and the country has unfolded their dark side.

The Islamic Egyptian Government and the Syrian Crisis **13**
Aref Alobeid

The Foreign Policy of President Mursi has actually sided with Assad in the Syrian Crisis alienating thus Egypt from the majority of the Arab world who support the Syrian opposition.

Monitoring the Middle East **15**
A selection of news and comments on major developments in the region.

Editor's Note

Following the general tendency in the Islamic world and elsewhere, in the last few decades Egypt has been struggling for progress and becoming a modern state without abolishing its religious and cultural traditions. In terms of politics that means that Egypt must find a new path to follow in the future. This path of modernization has been described politically as democratic but many things need to be done first in order to achieve such a goal.

Modernity and tradition are the two poles in Egypt which define the minds and hearts of its peoples. In this context various concepts form the mosaic of ideas that are under public discussion in Egypt today. The struggle between the Islamists and the secularists in the political arena, the role and participation of women in domestic politics, the role of technology in the political participation and expression of peoples as well as the regional impact of domestic political and social developments in Egypt. These are some of the topics that the current issue of the Middle East Mediterranean focuses on.

MEM

Analyses

Egypt at a tightrope: Does the return of politics = a clash of destinies?

Dr Stefanos Vallianatos,
Hellenic Foundation for Culture

The clash of destinies has taken the shape of one between two blocks made up of Islamists, on the one hand, and secularists on the other. The Egyptians find themselves increasingly disillusioned with their revolution.

Two years after the popular overthrow of the autocratic regime that ruled them, the Egyptians, after proudly electing their new president through undisputed free and fair elections, find themselves increasingly disillusioned with their accomplishment: law and order in the streets continues to be shaky, the economy has not yet managed to take off, unemployment is skyrocketing, fuel is frequently becoming a rare commodity, as indeed is foreign currency. Against this background the political forces that emerged in the post Arab Spring era, are caught up in a confrontation that emerges as a clash of destinies. The end result is that, on the one hand, the Mubarak era is regaining its sympathizers, while on the other a take-over by the military has become more attractive.

The clash of destinies has taken the shape of one between two blocks made up of Islamists, on the one hand, and secularists on the other – indeed not uncommon anymore in the area as the case of Tunis and Turkey has illustrated. Notwithstanding electoral results, both blocks consider that they enjoy a legitimate right to govern the country: the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists as the main and leading opposition force that has suffered repeatedly and for long under the previous regime (admittedly a call expressed in political rather than religious terms), while the secularists (comprised of a variety of political parties and groups covering a wide spectrum of ideological preferences) constituted the bulk and the driving engine of the Tahrir square uprisings. Elections, which were anticipated

with eagerness by the majority (although scepticism about them taking place too early for the secular forces to be ready for a nationwide campaign was present), the end result, which was the election of Morsi as the first President affiliated to the Brotherhood, resulted in a serious split among the political forces that jointly changed the landscape of Egypt. The process is by far not unique and the confrontation not a new one, also given the inexperience of the actors involved; yet, it has followed a dangerous road, leading to polarization and eventually to violent confrontation.

Undoubtedly the secular forces had entered the electoral process with a serious handicap of lacking a nation-wide network that would have allowed them better results. Still, their performance also reflected their inexperience and the absence of an articulated, coherent agenda and a program to govern the country. Furthermore, they have failed to cooperate to support a credible candidate for the presidency and continue to be divided; only managing to coalesce under one cause, i.e. bringing Morsi down at any cost. Although their concerns are credible about the future of the civil nature of the political system, outlined in the constitution, they have repeatedly refused to participate in a constructive dialogue, one that can lead to constitutional amendments. They are

unable to accept their electoral defeat, the expressed will of the Egyptian people, i.e. the cornerstone of democratic rule, and demand that this process lead to their confirmation as the undisputed rulers. Most significantly, it is the deep rooted mistrust towards the other side as a credible partner to shape the political landscape and the future of Egypt. Hence, they have insisted on illustrating their muscles, i.e. their ability to master the squares, also assisted by the diminishing popularity of the President and his failure to deliver good and effective governance.

The Islamist block, not made up of exclusively of moderate Islamist like the Muslim Brotherhood but also of more conservative and radical Salafists, has also locked itself in a similar dead end. Their electoral victory was not only the result of the nation-wide network, also facilitated by the mosques and their religious orientation, but also by a coherent agenda. Furthermore, while in office, they did present a pragmatic face, reassuring the public and the international community about their commitment to the civil nature of the state, to the country's international commitments (especially vis-à-vis the West and Israel, yet also with regard to global investors and tourist operators), and to constitutional legality. Yet, their coming to power also illustrated their commitment to

stay there, viewing it not only as the electoral manifestation and responsibility, but their reward for their former stand under the secular authoritarian rulers. Their stand is a claim that they would enjoy the benefits of their electoral victory, functioning within the rules of the game, yet, rules that are perceived as such and have not been negotiated and agreed upon as a result of a national dialogue with the whole body of the respective stake holders (political parties and civil society alike). They do offer a set of proposals for dialogue, yet meaningless and without a hint of concession, therefore not accepted by the other side.

But most importantly their governing performance is far from the democratic practices required and promised, illustrating power outages, autocracy, sectarianism, and divisive rhetoric. The failure to deliver the required and promised results increased the pressure, whereas reverting to their ‘army’ of followers in defense of their President further exacerbated the tension and fuelled the suspicions for a hidden agenda.

The political discourse in Egypt has proved the legacy of authoritarianism that burdens its society, casting doubts about the centrality of the core disputed issue, i.e. of opposing social visions of the two camps. Both camps include a variety of groups, covering a wide

range of political inclinations, yet with an overwhelming presence of moderate views – for the time being trapped in by ambitious politicians, the lack of experience and mistrust.

Dividing Culture from Politics: The Role of Egyptian Women in the Arab Spring

Kleopatra Youssef,
Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy - ELIAMEP

Two years ago the successful uprisings in Egypt have sparked a massive movement against the political regime of the President, Hosni Mubarak. Egyptian women played a vital role in the revolutionary wave of protests and demonstrations. However, their role in the country's current political arena remains extremely limited.

Two years ago the successful uprisings in Egypt have sparked a massive movement against the political regime of the President, Hosni Mubarak. A revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests under the slogan “Ash Shab yurid isqat an-nizam” (“the people want to bring down the regime”) was raising calls for democratization, and a new constitution that protects dignity, equality, freedom of speech and fair elections.

During the 18 days of protests in Tahrir square leading up to the President's resignation, women constituted an integral part of the revolutionary movement, organising, cyber acting and marching alongside men, as witnessed on TV and social media reports. Reacting against a long standing suppression of female political participation, Egyptian women of various social and cultural backgrounds- Muslims and Copts,

activists, mothers, household wives-took actively part in the demonstrations all over Egypt.

In other instances, female bloggers such as Asma Mahfouz and Israa Abdel-Fattah, the known as “Facebook girl,” became an embodied example for young people, especially for the female youth to mobilize themselves towards claiming a new rightful state of affairs. There are others who acted in the same vein. The female activists like Mona Seif and Gigi Ibrahim, strengthened the protestors' morale by means of their courageous responses against the brutal attacks organized by the army and the police. Other women suffered greatly in the context of the uprising, being sexually assaulted in various ways. One of the ways became emblematic of violence exerted on the part of the authorities against female dignity: the so called virginity

tests. Acting on a different level of expression, female journalists contributed significantly to spreading abroad the word on the “Arab Awakening”. Such is the case of Mona Eltahawy who led an international media campaign by presenting the facts from the viewpoint of those who actually experienced them.

More than a year later, despite their critical role during the protests, women’s future as stakeholders in Egypt’s political process is being marginalized. Regardless of the movement’s call for reform, women’s political rights and participation in the committees and leadership of the post-revolution era is undoubtedly disproportionate to their active presence during the days of the “Arab Uprising.”

Female participation in the institutional committee, established for drafting the new constitution last year, was nearly non-existent, since only one woman was appointed. The new constitution has been strongly criticized by liberals and women’s organisations for curtailing of women’s rights. Specifically, the new measures concern the reduction of marriage age for girls to 14, the permission of Female Genital Mutilation and the absence of the right to health insurance for female breadwinners. Still other measures pertain to effected changes in the 2005 custody law, according to

which divorced women were entitled to the guardianship of their children till the age of 15 for boys and till marriage for the girls. The recent amendment reduces the custody to 7 years old for the boys and 9 for the girls.

It is worth noting that the female protagonists of the revolution vanished in the thin air when things settled down to a new, supposedly, more open politically historical period. Although millions turned out to vote, none were on the ballots. No women were appointed to be governors, in spite of the significant increase of female candidacy in the country’s various governorates, out of which 28.8% in Aswan and 25% in Luxor of the conservative Upper Egypt. Meanwhile, women’s presence in the Parliament was greatly diminished as the quota system was dropped, and accordingly the percentage of female parliamentarians in Egypt decreased to 2% in 2011, after having reached 12.5% in 2010.

Female participation in the ruling party “Freedom and Justice” of the Muslim Brotherhood is also extremely limited to 2.4% as only 12 seats were won by women out of a total of 498.

Where are the women in the country’s political scene?

The above fragmentary account concerns the role of

Egyptian women in the “Arab Uprisings” though indicative and quite selective it nevertheless provides us with a fertile ground for productive reflection. I will not single out anomalies merely detected in the political sphere; obviously there exists a whole array of questions regarding a major inconsistency: so many women taking part in the Arab

Spring, so few in the new Parliament and so on so forth. Be that as it may, what seems to be the most important aspect of relationship between Egyptian women and the “Arab Spring” is the expression of an old structural opposition: the actually experienced culture as opposed to the politics imposed on the people from the above.

Comments

The Role of Social Media in Egypt

Dr. Evangelos Venetis

Middle East Research Project - ELIAMEP

The role of Social Media in Egypt is dubious especially after the fall of Hosni Mubarak. Albeit the social networks had been on the lead for toppling Hosni Mubarak, their attitude has changed toward Morsi, mainly by promoting uncertainty and instability in the domestic political scene.

The social media have played a prominent role in bringing down Hosni Mubarak. By mobilizing the people in the social networks, activists were able to organize massive protests at no time and cost. The use of the social networks gave political activism a necessary tool for systematic and simultaneous demonstrations in various urban centers of the country.

During the 2011 revolution the Brotherhood was quite instrumental in mobilizing its own supporters by using social media and other, more traditional methods. Yet it was the secular portion of the population that was on the lead initially because secularists were more familiarized with this technology as a means of organizing demonstrations. The Islamists were quick enough to watch and learn,

and then move speedily and take their own share in the revolution.

The unprecedented role of social media in the political spring of Egypt did not go unnoticed by the country's military. After Mubarak's fall, elements of the military council started exploring the usage of the social media as a political tool in various ways. Their goal was and still is to make multiple use of this modern way of communication to explore and exploit political gains.

Apparently within the social media along with the army various political fractions have created more networks to influence public opinion. These networks aim to boost the mobilization, morale and will of the secular portion of the population in order to counter any similar efforts by the Islamic Brotherhood.

Thus today different online groups in the same social media that brought down Mubarak play a less clear role by promoting uncertainty, circulating false information and inciting violence. The result is impressive because people cannot check and verify the reliability of the information before their eyes. Hence it could be suggested that the role of social media now is more destructive, provoking anger and hatred and spreading unsubstantiated rumor. At the same time, however, they enable public discourse on a regular basis. For instance, the Supreme Military Council of Egypt uses Facebook to issue official statements.

The dubious and unreliable role of the social media in Egypt today results from mainly two features of this online technology: anonymity and lack of ability to verify the circulated information. Any party or individual can create false impressions regarding an event that did or did not happen. This situation is a threat to the security of the society and the political stability

of the country, especially with regard to the democratization prospects of Egypt.

The uncertainty of the social media's political aims and means regarding the security of the society and the country has unfolded their dark side. Apparently the army controlling the communication and intelligence sectors of the country has found a very useful tool in order to check and direct the public opinion to the way that the military wishes. In this process the Islamists are expected to become more active in order to counter-balance the tactical advantage of the military in this case. As for the people, they are invited to exercise their judgement further in order to avoid the prospect of being victimized by the use of what they consider to be a "good" means of communication.

The Islamic Egyptian Government and the Syrian Crisis

Dr. Aref Alobeid

Expert in Middle Eastern Affairs

The Foreign Policy of President Morsi has actually sided with Assad in the Syrian Crisis alienating thus Egypt from the majority of the Arab world who support the Syrian opposition.

The assumption of power by the Muslim Brotherhood for the first time in the modern history of Egypt is considered one of the most important geopolitical changes that were brought by the Arab Spring in the Middle East. However, the outbreak of the Syrian uprising gave initially hope to the Syrian dissidents that this Islamic Egyptian government would be one of the main supporters of the Syrian opposition, reflecting a new trend in the foreign policy of Egypt. This did not happen.

Actions such as the resumption of diplomatic relations between Cairo and Tehran after about 30 years, the identification of Egypt's policy with that of Russia on Syria, the opening to China, the continuous functioning of the Egyptian embassy in the Syrian capital, the transit of Iranian naval ships with military equipment to the Syrian port of Lattakia through the Suez Canal and the improvement of relations between Egypt and Hezbollah disappointed the Syrian opposition. Furthermore, a few

months ago the Egyptian initiative of President Morsi, which included Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt to resolve the Syrian crisis, failed and did not bring any fruitful results because of the inclusion of Tehran as mediator in the Syrian crisis. Also, this initiative was met with suspicion by the Syrian opposition which considers Iran mainly responsible for the plight of the Syrian people. However, the persistence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to implement a political solution was characterized by the majority of the Syrian opposition as identification with the position of Tehran. Many politicians argue that the claims of the Islamist President Morsi before taking power that "he will support the uprising and the Syrian people and will not meet with supporters of the Syrian regime of President Bashar Al Assad" was for electoral reasons only.

The strange and opaque attitude of Mursi could be linked to the friction between various Arab countries, for instance between the new Egyptian government and the

Arab countries of the Gulf which did support financially Cairo after the fall of Mubarak. Thus, the Egyptian officials were forced to reconsider their original position on the issue of Syria, seeking economic alliances in order to overcome the country's enormous financial difficulties.

The attitude of the Islamic Egyptian government on Syrian crisis was ambiguous because it was confined to balanced political statements and advice to some members of the Syrian opposition. Instead, the Arab Gulf countries and other foreign governments have been more active and more effective than Egypt. The Egyptian Basem Chafatzi, president of the Party of Change and Development characterized the attitude of the government of his country on the Syrian crisis as embarrassing.

Generally, the Syrian crisis demonstrated the inability of foreign policy of the Islamic government of Egypt to return strongly on the chessboard of the Middle East despite the departure of President Husni Mubarak. Additionally, it disappointed the Arab public opinion, which was waiting for several steps towards moderation since the rise of Islamists in power. Also, the new Islamic leadership has failed to end the bloodshed of the Syrian people by the Assad regime. In the two years of the Syrian crisis, Cairo has chosen the camp of Iran

and Russia. So the new attitude of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt shows indifference to the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria which constitute the majority of the opposition. We can claim that the global Muslim Brotherhood movement is not united and each organization of the Brotherhood differs from country to country mainly in the policy principles and consequently, and there cannot be a central administrative centre for every supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The recent preaching of “jihad” from the World Association of Muslim Ulama-(Clergy) for the salvation of Syria and its people from the Shiites is a focal point on the issue of Syria with multiple recipients. This forced the Egyptian president to suspend diplomatic relations with the Assad regime and called for the immediate withdrawal of the organization Hezbollah from the Syrian territories.

The political instability resulting from the policy of the Islamic Egyptian government could be due to the constant involvement of the military regime of Mubarak that has not ceased to exist behind the scenes. Additionally, the attitude of the Salafists, who started to disagree with the policy of Mursi, was another reason which may play a role in reshaping the political map of the country.

Monitoring the Middle East

Afghanistan

Karzai on the US pay roll (30, April, 2013)

According to reports surfaced in April 2013 and confirmed by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has been delivering bags of cash to Karzai for a decade, in part to buy continued access and cooperation during the war.

Bahrain

Bahrain Slams US report on Human Rights (25 April, 2013)

Bahrain has rejected a report published on April 19 by US State department on human rights in the country, according to which the Manama government has violated basic human rights of the Shiite majority population.

Cyprus

Cyprus needs €75m before bailout (08 April, 2013)

Civil servants and pensions in cash-strapped Cyprus could go unpaid this month because of a shortfall of at least €75m (£64m) in public finances, an official warned on Monday.

Egypt

Qatari Prime Minister meets with Morsi (30 April, 2013)

Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani arrived in Cairo on Tuesday for a quick visit on his way back from New York City. Minister of Aviation Wael Al-Maadawy received him at Cairo International Airport.

Iran

A recommendation to the media (25 April, 2013)

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's website released a 20 point "recommendation" to the media on how to act during the elections. The website advises the media "not to assist the enemy's goals and avoid disrespecting the Guardian Council." The statement adds, "Insulting the system is a greater sin than insulting individuals."

Iraq

Iraqi violence claims 700 lives in April (30 April, 2013)

April was the deadliest month in Iraq in about five years, with more than 700 people killed and another 1,600 wounded, the U.N. mission in Iraq said.

Comment: Iraq along with Syria are the main fronts of the Sunni-Shiite civil war in Islam.

Kuwait

Kuwait and Turkey sign eight agreements (30 April, 2013)

Kuwait and Turkey signed eight agreements and memorandums of understanding in the attendance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and President Abdullah Gul in Kuwait.

Lebanon

Clashes escalate on Syria-Lebanon Border (24 April, 2013)

As fierce clashes continue in the border villages of al-Qusayr, there are growing fears that Lebanon is being drawn further into the Syrian conflict. Salafist rebels have threatened to "move the battle into Lebanon" if the Syrian government offensive, which they described as Hezbollah-led, continues.

Libya

A car bomb hits the French Embassy in Libya (23 April, 2013)

A car bomb has hit the French Embassy in the Libyan capital Tripoli, seriously injuring a security guard in the first major attack on a diplomatic mission in the city.

Palestine - Israel

Schools in Gaza to be segregated by gender (1 April, 2013)

According to the Hamas Ministry of Education, gender segregation is already in effective in the majority of schools in the Palestinian territory but from the next school year, it will be enforced by law in every one of Gaza's education establishments, including Christian and private schools and those run by the United Nations.

Qatar

Qatar in extra \$3 bn aid offer to Egypt (11 April, 2013)

Qatar has agreed to buy bonds from cash-strapped Egypt worth \$ 3bn over and above a previously announced aid package, the Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani.

Somalia

IMF recognizes Somalia after 22 years (14 April, 2013)

According to IMF, the International Monetary Fund today recognized the federal government of Somalia, headed by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, paving the way for the resumption of relations after a 22-year interval.

Syria

Syrian Prime Minister escapes assassination attempt (29 April, 2013)

Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi has survived an assassination attempt on Monday, escaping from a blast that targeted his convoy in Damascus. One of his bodyguards was killed in the attack which left a second bodyguard and his driver seriously injured.

Turkey

Industrial production increased 3.4 percent in April 2013 (30 April, 2013)

Turkey's industrial production increased 3.4 percent in April 2013 when compared to April 2012. It also rose 1.3 percent compared to March 2013, stated TurkStat, Turkey's statistical authority. In the sub sectors of the industry, mining and quarrying increased 3.1 percent, manufacturing increased 3.6 percent and electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply index increased 2.3 percent in April 2013 when compared to April 2012. In the sub sectors of the industry, mining and quarrying increased 0.1 percent, manufacturing increased 1.4 percent and electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply index increased 1.1 percent in April 2013 when compared to March 2012.

Yemen

Yemen: Saudi fence will have adverse effects on economy and security (15 April, 2013)

There is fierce resentment among in Yemen over the new fence that Saudi Arabia is currently building along its frontier with Yemen, with some likening it to the controversial barrier Israel is building in and around the West Bank. Saudi Arabia has recently resumed the construction of a high 1300 mile-long wall designed to seal off its troubled frontier with Yemen. The barrier will stretch from the Red Sea coast in the west to the edge of Oman in the east.



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