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## Position Paper

# The Second Wave of the Egyptian Revolution: Achievements, Disagreements and Stalemate



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The crisis that led to the outbreak of the second wave of the Egyptian revolution began with a mass demonstration in Tahrir Square on Friday, 18th November 2011. It was largely dominated by prominent Islamic forces and was meant as remonstrance against the attempt of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, represented by Deputy Prime Minister Liberal Wafd party, Ali El El-Salami, to impose a procedural constitutional document laying down supra-constitutional rules and restricting procedures for the selection of the Constituent Assembly and its work. It is this Constitutional Assembly that is meant to draft the new Egyptian Constitution in the next few days, but events crumbled to eventually morph into direct confrontation between demonstrators in Tahrir Square and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

However, the roots of the second wave of revolution are certainly deeper than the events of 28th November and subsequent days.

The following is a reading of events in the first week of the second wave of revolution, the accumulated causes that led to it, the positions of various parties, achievements, and the way out as seen by the main parties in the crisis.

## Events

The congregants in Tahrir Square in Cairo adjourned the evening of 18th November, as promised by political forces that had previously called for a demonstration. However, a group of relatives of January revolution martyrs decided to stay in the square to demand fair treatment from the government, accusing it of being reluctant towards their demands despite repeated promises to care for them. The next day, Saturday, 19th November, security forces violently attacked small groups of people in the square, leading to a number of injuries and provoking extensive reactions, especially from young activists. As hours passed, the crowd grew in the square and clashes between youth and security forces escalated. When the evening approached, Egyptian security forces returned to their old habit of using live ammunition against demonstrators and a number of deaths were announced.

The most violent confrontations took place on Sunday, 20th November when congregants in Tahrir Square were exposed to extremely violent attacks by security forces, military police and Special Forces units in the army. Two days later, a military spokesman claimed that the troops that participated in the Sunday events did not take part in the attack on protesters, but were called upon to protect the Ministry of Interior against attempts of angry youth to raid it. Observers, however, deny the validity of this claim.

Sunday witnessed hit-and-run battles over the control of Tahrir Square and ended with the complete control of protesters. A number of demonstrations erupted across the country, including in Alexandria, the Suez Canal, and other cities in solidarity with protesters in Cairo. At the end of the day, Egypt had received tens of casualties, making clear that the crisis had reached its peak.

Clashes continued throughout Monday, 21st November, wherein the demonstrators announced their initial demands: the resignation of the Essam Sharaf's government, the prosecution of those responsible for violence perpetrated by security forces during the three days, the formation of a national salvation government with full executive and legislative jurisdiction, and the holding of presidential elections in April to put an end to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces' control of the presidency, thus ending the transitional period. By Monday evening, Essam Sharaf submitted the resignation of his government, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces called on major political forces in the country for dialogue the next day, Tuesday, 22nd November.

Tuesday met the first million-man march of the second wave of the revolution. The day ended with Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi's statement to the Egyptian people, explaining what had been agreed to at the meeting of the Armed Forces council with the political forces. The statement was regarded as the victory of the willpower of the

demonstrators in Tahrir Square; it was the first time for the Council, since it had taken control of the country's affairs, to set the date of presidential elections for June. The said president-elect would assume his responsibilities, the transitional period would end, and the army would return to its barracks. Tantawi also announced his approval of the resignation of Sharaf's government, which entails an end to the debate over what was known as 'Salami's document', the insistence on holding of parliamentary elections on time, and the start of an investigation of previous events.

Intermittent clashes continued on Wednesday, 23rd November, between youth and security in Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha Avenue, which leads to the Ministry of Interior from Tahrir Square, while the impression in the square was that the statement of Tantawi did not meet the demands of the protesters. However, differences between those in square and the military council increased greatly the next day, when Tantawi announced the appointment of Dr. Kamal El-Ganzouri (78 years, a former Prime Minister in Mubarak's era) as head of the National Salvation Government, which was widely rejected by the majority of the crowd in Tahrir Square.

It was evident on Friday, 25th November, which witnessed the second one-million-man march, that the majority of the people were against mandating El-Ganzouri. As the evening fell, the congregants in Tahrir Square put forward five names, including Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh and Mohamed El Baradei, as candidates for the presidency of the Government of National Salvation, and the other three to be appointed as Vice-Prime Ministers. However, with El-Ganzouri proceeding with the formation of his government and with protesters rejecting him and insisting on the appointment of a prime minister from the list of candidates they presented, it became clear that in spite of the victory achieved in the statement issued on Tuesday by the Field Marshal, the country was going through severe crisis.

### **Accumulated Causes**

Certainly, the policies adopted by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces since the end of March are responsible for the explosion of the second wave of Egyptian anger. This is a revolutionary wave targeted directly against only the Supreme Council and its policies.

Egyptians voted in a referendum in March in favour of a number of constitutional amendments that address some of the articles of the 1971 Constitution and a roadmap for the transitional period. After the referendum, the Supreme Council issued a temporary constitutional declaration containing the articles approved by the majority. According to the roadmap, the transitional period was supposed to start by holding parliamentary elections and then the elected parliament was to choose a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution within six months. The presidential elections were to be held three months after the parliamentary elections, and before completing the process of writing the draft constitution. Had the Supreme Council committed itself to the roadmap of the Constitutional Declaration, Egypt would have completed its political transition at the end of this year. However, this is not the case.

The parliamentary elections were adjourned to the end of November and the elections will take place in three long stages that will not end until January next year. The Council declared that the Shura Council elections will be held after the completion of parliamentary elections and the date of the presidential elections will be determined only after the finalisation of the draft constitution and the people's approval of it in a referendum, which means that the Supreme Council will probably continue exercising its presidential powers until 2013. Simultaneously, however, the Salami document was put forward to determine the rules of the process of forming the constituent assembly, which is to be charged with writing the constitution. Thus, the elected parliament will lose its natural right to undertake this responsibility and the work of the Constituent Assembly will fall under the authority of the Supreme Council. In addition, the document presented other constitutional articles which give the army special status in the body of the Egyptian state and at the centre of decision-making. It was clear, however, that the

Supreme Council exploited the fears of some traditional leftist and liberal or semi-liberal forces that Islamic forces are likely to win the coming elections and sought to pass their own liberal vision of the constitution and the state.

The real source of the crisis is that the Supreme Council, immediately after the referendum on constitutional amendments and the road map, ceased to act as regulator of the transitional phase, but did the exact opposite. Simultaneously, the Council's spokespersons and senior officers stressed the willingness of the army to relinquish authority to the government and the elected President as soon as possible; and the council exerted its utmost effort to prolong the transitional period in order to drain the energy of the masses and political forces. Instead of acting as an administrator, it turned into an autocrat, tightening its grip on political and constitutional capacities of the country and working to secure its position in the determination of the destiny of the new Egyptian State.

However, the problem of the Supreme Council with the protesters was not confined to the major constitutional question. The council insists on maintaining the state of emergency and continuing the work of military courts in which dozens of young activists that participated in protest movements after February have been tried, while members of the former regime have been tried in civil courts. In addition to the worsening economic crisis, and the noticeably lukewarm steps taken to control the security situation, the council failed to address the Coptic protest movement until it ended with the bloody Maspero events. The families of the January revolution martyrs have not received decent care, and the wounded have not received the care they warrant.

The Supreme Council has slowly lost the esteem of a wide division of the people. Even those that support the council's continuance in office until the election of a new president are more motivated by the fear of chaos than by confidence in the council. Perhaps it can be said that its conduct during the transitional period reflects the belief of military leaders that the country underwent change through a coup d'état and rather than a popular revolution.

### **Divisions of the Second wave of Revolution**

The second wave of the Egyptian revolution exploded in an atmosphere of political contention between the people, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, and the major political currents in the country a few days before the People's Assembly elections, whose first stage was held on Monday, 28th November. In such an extremely complex political climate, the political unity that characterised the first wave of the revolution in Egypt is now lacking.

The Muslim Brotherhood bears the burden of confrontation with the El-Salami document, and was the main force behind the call for the Friday million-man march on 18th November, which was the starting point of the second wave of the revolution. Since the positions of the political forces towards the document varied greatly, most liberal and leftist forces declined participating in the Friday million-man march. However, soon the Muslim Brotherhood parted from Tahrir Square though it strongly criticised the violent and bloody crackdown on protesters by the security forces during the following days. The Muslim Brotherhood abstained from participation in the million-man march on Tuesday, 22nd November, believing that the forces of the Ministry of Interior were dragging them to a confrontation with the security forces, to then postpone the upcoming parliamentary elections.

In actuality, tens of thousands of young men and women from the Brotherhood participated in the million-man march on Tuesday, regardless of the position of the leadership of the group and its party. The successful organisation of those millions and the flow of masses into the square created sharp feelings against the Muslim Brotherhood and conflicting political forces in general, and it seemed that the new public mobility was developing a more radical discourse than the first wave of the revolution wherein a number of prominent political figures were expelled from Tahrir Square, and

activists emphasised the nationalist character of the crowds and denied the affiliation of the mass movement with any political party.

The problem of the Muslim Brotherhood with the Tuesday million-man march in Tahrir Square was further aggravated in the Friday (25th November) million-man march because the rationale for their abstention and fears that prevented them from participation on Tuesday were no longer enough to justify non-participation in the following Friday march, especially as supporters of the Supreme Council had worked hard for several days to organise crowds in Abbasiya Square in east Cairo in aid of the council and in condemnation of what they called the "dictatorship of Tahrir Square". The Brotherhood was supposed to enhance the position of the mass movement in confronting attempts to show the Egyptian masses as split up among themselves. There were multiple Islamist and non-Islamist political forces that announced their participation in the mass movement and support for its demands, but the absent weight of the Brotherhood and their exceptional power of mobilisation drew special attention more to them than any other political force.

Because there was division between the Muslim Brotherhood and the mass movement in Tahrir Square, another division appeared regarding the assignment of Kamal El-Ganzouri to form the government. A significant number of political parties expressed their acceptance or resorted to silence. Given that El-Ganzouri is known to be an honest man and had previously been removed from his post by President Mubarak in a degrading manner, a division around him emerged in the street as a whole. As protesters in Tahrir Square announced their rejection of him and demanded that either El Baradei or Aboul Fotouh be commissioned to head the Government of National Salvation, it appeared that a section of public opinion tended to accept or at least be indifferent to El-Ganzouri.

After the significant retreat of the Supreme Council in its statement on Tuesday, 22nd November, it appears that the division over the continuation of the mass movement in Tahrir Square and around El-Ganzouri has been in favour of the council in a game of push-and-pull with young activists from all groups and coalitions in Tahrir Square.

## **Expectations and Prospects of the Crisis**

There is no doubt that the second wave of the Egyptian revolution has achieved great victory so far not only because the light at the end of the transition tunnel is clear and specific, but also because the Salami document looks as if it has already been buried completely, especially after the announcement of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that the powers of the army will remain in the next constitution as they are in the current constitution. However, the almost complete loss of confidence in the Supreme Council has left doubts among the mass movement about the intentions and objectives behind whatever steps it is taking. The problem with El-Ganzouri is not only his old age or his long service in the former regime, but also the insistence of the Supreme Council to ignore the will of the popular movement and demand that El-Ganzouri, rather than the majority winner, proceed with the formation of his government even after the parliamentary elections. Furthermore, protesters' demands in Tahrir Square do not end with naming the prime minister, but include the need to take immediate and concrete steps to arrest and prosecute the officers responsible for the deaths of 42 young activists and the council's compliance to relinquish most of its powers to the Government of National Salvation.

Meanwhile, some among the members of the council and a number of political forces believe the council's declaration of a timetable for the transfer of power to the elected president before the end of June and the acceptance of the resignation of the Essam Sharaf's government. The council's implicit drop of the document of Ali El-Salami (who is now considered to have resigned by virtue of the resignation of government) and the statement contained in the current constitution that the army's authority will not change, are adequate steps that meet the demands of the Egyptian people. The escalation of demands in Tahrir Square will therefore seem like an attempt to insult the Supreme Council and what it represents.

## What is the Way Out Then?

The council can, of course, respond to the remaining demands of the Tahrir protesters and put an end to the crisis. Such an option would isolate the few hard-line elements in the square and would take the country towards parliamentary and presidential elections in a healthy atmosphere. However, it is unlikely that it would do so. There are some who believe that holding the first phase of elections and the huge voter turnout, particularly in the district of Cairo, imply the marginalisation of Tahrir Square and the establishment of a new formula. Regardless of how much protestors sit-in and call for million-man marches after that, public opinion will soon, according to them, appreciate the process and turn against them. This, in turn, will put an end to the occupation of Tahrir Square and the blockage of traffic in the centre of the capital.

Certainly, the success of the first phase of elections will weaken the position of protesters in Tahrir Square, but ignoring them is definitely not the ideal solution. The country is going through an economic-financial crisis, and a growing sense of insecurity. If the situation in the square continue as it is, it will further aggravate the economic crisis and deepen the sense of insecurity as well as impact the legitimacy of the elections and their results.

In case the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces refuses to respond fully to the remaining demands of the protesters, and if the youth remain in Tahrir Square and continue calling for mass demonstrations every two or three days, the council will have to take an initiative and hold a serious dialogue with leaders and representatives of the square and community leaders who are participating in the mass sit-in movement in order to persuade them to restore some confidence and come to a compromise.