

Egypt's State of Rebellion

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Jun 18, 2013

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Brief Analysis

Recent clashes between Muslim Brotherhood and neighborhood youth highlight tension and the group's desire to control the Egyptian state's vital institutions.

On the eve of June 12, 2013, as youth from the campaign “*Tamarod*” or “Rebellion” collected signatures from passers-by on Abu Soliman Street in al-Raml neighborhood of Alexandria, they were confronted by a group of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) youth. Clashes ensued between the groups, and neighborhood residents interfered, forcing the MB members to seek refuge in a nearby mosque, failing to consider the sanctity of the mosque as clashes continued.

Two issues are worth noting with regards to this incident: First, residents of this area who now sympathize with the “Rebellion” campaign and attacked the MB youth have been known to sympathize with and support the Muslim Brotherhood in the past, to the extent that over 90% of the electorate in the area voted for the MB candidate in the 2005 elections; and second, residents of this area now hate the Muslim Brotherhood so much that they violated an Egyptian norm of holding places of worship sacred when they cordoned the MB members inside the mosque.

When President Morsi became Egypt's first elected president on June 30, 2012, Egyptians were optimistic that their new president would put an end to the era of injustice and corruption. The MB was then at their strongest and most popular state even though civil forces harbored doubt and skepticism about the MB's candidate.

The president started his rule with a speech that confused many, using words and terminology that are common among the Brotherhood, yet strange to the ears of average Egyptians. In time, President Morsi proved he was not the Egyptian president, but the president of the Muslim Brotherhood.

After assuming power, Morsi and the MB clashed with their opponents on several fronts: they excluded from the scene all other political powers; they engaged in a war with the media; and they clashed with the judiciary. Even the police were not spared from conflict after American researcher [Eric Trager \(/experts/view/trager-eric\)](/experts/view/trager-eric) revealed a scandal by publishing a statement by leading MB figure Mohamed al-Beltagy, who said that he was responsible for restructuring the Ministry of the Interior (I should note here that I acted as the fixer and interpreter for the

arrangement of this meeting). Then, of course, there was the clash with the military, represented by the appointment of Defense Minister al-Sisi. Even the MB's strategic allies such as Salafi al-Nour party turned against them, entering into a battle of statements and an exchange of accusations.

The clashes demonstrate the Brotherhood's greed and its desire to control all of the state's vital institutions, or its plan to consolidate power. These clashes have been gradually reflected in the Egyptian street as the arrogant tone of MB speeches becomes clearer and its members' treatment of others worsens in villages and governorates.

The state of tension has increased with economic deterioration, specifically the repeated fuel and bread crises as well as power cuts and the devaluation of the Egyptian pound. As a result, the popularity of the president and the MB has regressed as people sense that nothing has changed after Mubarak's ouster. Many Egyptians are even wishing for the return of the days of Mubarak.

Furthermore, Morsi's popularity has suffered due to his tendency to issue a decree, then later backtrack, making him untrustworthy in the public's eyes. Beyond this, Egypt's international image has been marred after a number of flops by Morsi at international events and venues.

As a result of popular rage triggered by disappointment in the president's performance and apparent disregard for any group other than the MB, the "*Tamarod*" campaign appeared. Started by a group of young people unaffiliated with any political party, the idea of the campaign is to gather 15 million signatures on a form calling to withdraw confidence from President Morsi and turn them in to the constitutional court on June 30, 2013, the one-year anniversary of Morsi in power. (It is worth mentioning that Morsi was elected by 13 million Egyptians.) The organizers of the campaign are also calling on people to take to the streets and stage a sit-in at the presidential palace to pressure Morsi to step down and allow for early presidential elections.

From the start, the campaign received tremendous support from the people, surprising many, including its founders, who did not expect such a response. According to the campaign's official figures, almost 15 million Egyptians have signed thus far. Civil powers and political parties adopted the campaign and announced that they too would be taking to the streets on June 30.

The situation now is very tense as the MB has begun to form coalitions with some of the Islamic parties – though notably not with the Salafi Nour party – in an attempt to create a line of defense for the president. The MB has recently implied that its members will preemptively take to the street on June 28 in order to scare people away from protesting out of fear of violent clashes.

However, the police force has declared that it will not stand with the MB and the Interior Minister announced that not one policeman will be in the street on June 30. The army also made it clear that it intends to remain uninvolved when it announced the cancellation of festivities marking the 44th anniversary of the air force slated for June 30 after the president said he would be attending the celebration.

Hence, June 30 approaches, and the MB finds itself with no support except for some Islamic forces; the police and the army are unbiased, and the media, judiciary, and civilian powers as well as the revolutionary youth are in fervent opposition. The country is now facing several possible scenarios:

First, the millions who signed the "*Tamarod*" petition will take to the street and stage protests in the squares, stripping the president of his legitimacy and forcing him to make some concessions, the least of which would be a government of national reconciliation, and the most drastic outcome dependent on the strength and steadfastness of the protests.

Second, the protests will turn to clashes, igniting the situation in such a manner that would eventually lead the army to return to power. This scenario, however, I find to be unlikely.

Third, millions will take to the streets, but protests will not escalate. This will trigger the political opposition forces to take advantage of the situation and the dwindling popularity of the MB and rally political support in advance of the parliamentary elections. In this scenario, the civil parties could potentially win a majority in parliament, contesting the power of the presidency. Morsi would then complete his term under pressure from the parliament. In my opinion, this would be the best-case scenario.

Fourth, Morsi will preemptively call for a referendum on his presidency, which would necessarily abort plans for June 30. This would be playing with fire, and I doubt that the MB would take such a risk.

Which scenario will it be? I believe the ball is in the people's court, which was the exact intention of the “ *Tamarod*” campaign's founders. Egypt is now witnessing a state of rebellion.

Maged Atef is the general manager of EgyptFixer and a political activist based in Cairo. ❖

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