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Abdel Fattah el-Sisi: a chronicle of foretold failure?

Egyptians' Discourse on the Social Networks

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On June 8, 2014, the people of Egypt had their say: Fieldmarshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected Egypt's sixth president. His election ended the long-running public debate whether the June 30, 2013 events resulting in the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi were a revolution, or rather a coup?

The fate of Egyptian presidents in the last 60 years was not particularly bright: Nasser died of a heart attack, Sadat was assassinated, and the last two presidents – Mubarak and Morsi – are serving time in jail. Since the army overthrew Morsi and following el-Sisi's declaration in July 2013 that he had no intention of running for President, many firmly believed that el-Sisi would choose to remain behind the scenes and continue as kingmaker rather than become king.

In the nine months preceding the presidential election, el-Sisi was concerned with four key issues: changing the slogan of the ousted president from "Islam is the solution" to "security is the solution"; passing the "anti-protest law," banning the Muslim Brotherhood and designating them as a terrorist organization; and holding a referendum in January 2014 to seek electoral legitimacy for his policies.

El-Sisi was responsible for overthrowing the Muslim Brotherhood regime headed by Mohamad Morsi (July 2013). These events have resulted in the death of 2,500 Egyptians, approximately 16,000 members ended up in prison, along with 20,000 or so revolutionaries, opposition leaders, journalists and regime opponents. In addition, TV channels were shut down, satirical shows taken off the air, and private newspapers were banned.

Nevertheless, the newly elected President still rides a wave of soaring popularity. The domestic discourse on social media in Egypt provides an understanding of el-Sisi's image and allows us to understand how come, as Egypt enters the fourth year of the revolution, the majority of Egyptians voted for a military general as president. They also reveal the challenges he faces, his chances of succeeding, and the chances for a third revolution.

"The king is dead, long live the new king"

For better or for worse, once he announced his candidacy, el-Sisi sealed his fate. The social media in Egypt make it clear that people are willing to support him in order to restore stability, even at the cost of oppression. The majority of the Egyptian middle class – especially those in the lower-middle class –

suffered from the economic consequences of the chaos over the last three years, to the extent that they will do anything for the promise of some form of normality. Most of the public is disappointed with revolutionary fervor, demonstrations, and strikes. People want to work, put food on the table, and be able to send their children to school. People want security, stability, law and order - "the country has to be ruled" they say. The public wants a drastic change, and they want it now.

El-Sisi announced that, "There will be no such thing as the Muslim Brotherhood when I am president. And that's final!" He promised to wage war on terrorism and crime, and stabilize Egypt. He even declared that "I believe in hard work." The emerging image is mythical, a messiah, a savior and a hero, "great Egyptian hope." "Egypt's backbone," "the lion," "the light of our eyes," "undefeatable," "unbeaten," "a nationalist and a patriot," and "the man of the hour" are only some of the many images we can find on the internet. Such a cult of personality has not been seen in Egypt since Nasser's day. Women kiss his posters and cry. In Egypt, one can now buy mugs, pajamas, jewelry, dolls and bracelets bearing his image. On the other hand, Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers, along with liberals, secular people, young revolutionaries and those interested in promoting democracy and human rights are worried. Some see in him a modern-day Pharaoh, a dictator, an oppressor and a king.

There is an unbridgeable gap between el-Sisi's unrealistic image and reality that is impossible to live up to. This gives rise to the question: will the disappointment be as immense as the expectations?

The fourth year of the revolution: great challenges and empty slogans regarding the economy, terrorism and stability

Workers' strikes, power cuts, energy and gas crises, high unemployment rates, a collapsing lower middle class, students killed on university campuses, soaring food prices, a serious water shortage due to a mismanagement of water resources, a dwindling tourist industry, an untrained workforce and truncated productivity, domestic terrorism and a fight against jihadists in northern Sinai, a polarized society as volatile as a powder keg – all of these are part of the reality the new president must face should he wish to have a different end to his tenure, even before he tackles the demands of the revolution for social justice, freedom and democracy.

As Defense Minister, el-Sisi and the army were in charge of national security and securing the borders. Since becoming President, in addition to all of that they are also in charge of the price of bread and tomatoes, housing and jobs.

The cost of success and the price of failure: is a third wave of revolution ahead?

The good news is that el-Sisi has two possibilities: He either succeeds or fails. In order to succeed, he will need to create policies that will lead to true reforms in:

- a. The economy: el-Sisi must adopt an economic policy that leads to sustainable reforms leading to economic growth and employment.
- b. Legislation and laws: reforms in state institutions and service sector.
- c. Corruption: controlling and limiting corruption throughout the government.
- d. Policy and security services: reforms leading to modernization of the police and security services, allowing them to effectively fight crime and terrorism.
- e. State finances: el-Sisi must employ efficient fiscal management to reduce the deficit, repay the national debt, and reform the subsidies (some 6 million people are employed by the state).

- f. The judiciary system: reforms in the judicial system to restore public trust that it can function efficiently. Without a reliable court system, there will be no foreign investments.
- g. Restoring tourism: the country has the one of the worst public images world-wide, as it is engaged in a "war on terror."

In order to implement these reforms, el-Sisi must stabilize Egypt. To stabilize Egypt, he must attain national consensus. Without it, there will be no stability; without stability, there will be no security; without security, there will be no foreign investments; without foreign investments, there will be no food on the table.

Two main factors responsible for the instability

The young revolutionaries and the Muslim Brotherhood are the main factors responsible for instability in Egypt. El-Sisi will have to find political deals or compromise with at least one of them to facilitate stability. Neither one of those deals is realistically achievable. El-Sisi believes that the Muslim Brotherhood can only be handled through a security solution rather than a political one. It will make the price of future political solution exponentially higher, while the war on terrorism continues unabated for at least the next two years, as per el-Sisi's promise.

The price of failure

Any attempt to cut corners, use old methods, or maintain the status quo will result in failure for el-Sisi and Egypt. Half measures or temporary solutions will not suffice and will not be accepted, given the social and economic situation in Egypt four years after the eruption of the first revolution. His failure would not only end his short political career, but also end the myth that only the generals can rule Egypt. This myth will join the myth of the Islamic state in the trash bin of Egyptian history, as explained by one of the bloggers in Egypt; only an echoing failure of those two unworkable models will make the general population admit that it has to come up with a civil alternative capable of building a democracy and bringing Egypt into the 21st century.

Conclusions

When assessing el-Sisi's chances for success or failure, the vast majority of Egyptian social media users say that his success would be excellent news, viewing it as the success of the revolution. At the same time, a majority of leaders of public opinion on social media feel that for this to happen, el-Sisi needs a miracle.

Some welcome the restoration of stability and order to Egypt, while others are dismayed with "the revolution's robbery." However, they should remember that the spring brought the revolution; winter brought political Islam; summer brought the generals. The process is still in its early stages. Like the seasons of the year, Egypt's reality is changing fast. The one sure thing is that come what may, success or failure, Egypt will move forward.