

# EGYPT'S LEADERLESS REVOLUTION

Secular Liberals and Islamists Alike Shattered a Democracy Dream

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**T**he January 25 Egyptian uprising always had scant possibilities of success. The country's secular and Islamist revolutionaries were odd bedfellows right from the start. They agreed on forcing President Hosni Mubarak from power, but harbored different dreams and notions of a new Egypt, and often followed conflicting strategies. Other political forces, including the revolutionary youth, were weak and poorly organized. In the end, the uprising led to a totally different outcome than what the millions who took to the streets envisaged, and by early 2013 it had run its course.

If the possibility for success was limited, the uprising was not completely doomed from the start. For over a year following the forced departure of President Mubarak, different choices by leaders and political organizations might have led to a degree of success, although not likely to a full-blown democracy.

We should begin by stipulating what the term “success” meant in the Egyptian political context of the 2011–2013 period. Both secular and Islamic activists held up placards demanding “Bread, Freedom, and Dignity,” sometimes substituting “social justice” for the latter mantra. What they pushed for immediately, however, were authentic free and fair elections, freedom of speech and assembly, and an end to authoritarian rule. The key components of their ideal new political order included a multiparty democracy, a parliament with real powers, an independent judiciary, and unfettered media—including social media. In the end, most Egyptians probably would have settled for less. But no group, regardless of ideological and theological differences, would initially have

considered the restoration of authoritarian rule to be anything but complete failure. Only with the advent of Islamist rule under the Muslim Brotherhood did Egypt's old upper class, including the so-called liberals, come to redefine success to the point of welcoming the return of military rule.

▷ Mohamed ElBaradei  
marching in protests,  
Cairo, Jan. 28, 2011.  
*Khaled El-Fiqi/European  
Pressphoto Agency*



The Egyptian drama from authoritarianism to uprising back to authoritarianism unfolded in four distinct phases: 1) the unsettled period preceding the uprising; 2) the eighteen days of mass demonstrations leading up to Mubarak's departure; 3) the subsequent year under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF); and 4) the brief period of Muslim Brotherhood rule under President Mohammed Morsi.

### **Cusp of Revolt**

In late 2010, the social and economic situation was exceedingly ripe for revolution. An economic boom starting six years earlier had doubled Egypt's Gross Domestic Product to \$218 billion but widened the gap between the poorest and richest and put the middle class in an economic cramp. Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, who came into office in 2004, had lifted constraints on the private sector with the full backing of President Mubarak and above all of his two businessmen sons, Gamal and Alaa. The result was the rise of a class of nouveaux riches led by a small number of oligarchs. However, the middle class and particularly the five million civilian government employees did not benefit from the boom and in fact came more and more under financial stress. Inflation had reached 13 percent while the official minimum wage had remained the same since 1984, at about seven dollars a day. And 44 percent of Egyptians were living on less than two dollars a day.

Most dangerous politically was the plight of twenty million Egyptians between the ages of 18 and 29 who constituted the "youth bulge" and accounted for 90 percent of the country's jobless. A 2010 United Nations report noted in particular that Egypt faced an "ever growing supply of unemployed graduates." (The year of the uprising, 343,500 more Egyptians graduated with university degrees.) Already by 2008, a report by the United States Agency for International Development was warning of trouble ahead. "Accelerated growth juxtaposed with persistent poverty can generate social tension and instability as people become frustrated by insufficient opportunity for upward mobility," the report said.

The frustration was most evident within Egypt's labor force affected by the privatization of numerous state-run industries resulting in massive job reductions. Just as vexing were persistent low wages in both the private and public sectors. The extent of labor unrest came to public notice in 2006 with the strike of 27,000 workers over wages and conditions at the state-run Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Mahalla El-Kubra. By 2010, unemployed workers were camping out day and night outside the parliament building in the capital's downtown. A report by the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations called it "the largest social movement Egypt has witnessed in more than half a century," and estimated that 1.7 million workers had engaged in more than 1,900 strikes or other protests between 2004 and 2008.

Persistent labor unrest gave rise in 2008 to the first attempt by a pro-democracy civil society group to link discontented elements in the work force to the struggle for political reform. On April 6 that year, young pro-democracy activists from Cairo went to Mahalla to show their support for striking workers as part of a national protest on their behalf. Thus was born the April 6 Youth Movement that would play a central role in January 2011. Its Facebook page quickly attracted tens of thousands of supporters. The link between the workers' economic demands and the young protesters' political ones was never firmly established, however; and this became one of the weak spots of the uprising.

Meanwhile, Egypt was preparing for the succession to Hosni Mubarak. In office since 1981, the president was ailing and his future uncertain, but the country's power elite was deeply divided over who should replace him. Mubarak's rumored plan for his son, Gamal, to succeed him in elections scheduled for the fall of 2011 had roiled the leadership of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). The Old Guard wanted to see Mubarak run for a sixth term while younger modernizers championed Gamal. The succession issue became much more acute after Mubarak was flown to Germany in March 2010 for an operation to remove his gall bladder. Gamal's presidential bid was opposed not only by the NDP Old Guard, but most importantly by the military. Every president since the 1952 revolution led by Gamal Abdel Nasser had been a military officer, but Gamal Mubarak had never served in the army and had made no effort to cultivate ties with its leadership.

Yet another factor in the unsettled succession equation was the return in February 2010 of Mohamed ElBaradei, the longtime head of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, and 2005 Nobel Peace Prize winner. He immediately launched a bold campaign against the entire Mubarak regime, demanding authentic free and fair elections and an end to the twenty-nine-year-old state of emergency. Although he never declared the intention to run for the presidency, he was widely viewed as the most viable candidate to wrest power from the Mubaraks. His supporters set up the National Association for Change, which began gathering one million signatures on a petition demanding all kinds of constitutional and other reforms. The staid diplomat warned Egypt had become a "time bomb" and advocated street protests and even civil disobedience to press for reforms. His appearance on the political scene galvanized the opposition as never before, with leftist parties, civil society groups, and the Muslim Brotherhood rallying to his cause. Finally ElBaradei laid down the gauntlet calling for a boycott of parliamentary elections in November 2010 with the declared aim to "deprive" the Mubarak regime of its legitimacy.

Those elections primed the pump for the uprising. The NDP had one goal in mind: to drive the Muslim Brotherhood—whose candidates running as independents

had won eighty-eight seats in the People's Assembly—entirely out of politics. In the run-up to the elections, it arrested 1,200 Brotherhood organizers, broke up its rallies, and blocked a number of its candidates from running. So it came as no surprise that in the first of two election rounds on November 28, the NDP won 209 seats outright and the Brotherhood not a single one. In reaction, both the Brotherhood and the liberal secular Wafd Party decided to boycott successive rounds, allowing the NDP to win more than 90 percent of the seats. ElBaradei described the elections as a national “tragedy” and “the straw that broke the camel’s back.” He also called for a boycott of the presidential election scheduled for the fall of 2011.

Altogether, nearly all developments that took place throughout 2010 were extremely favorable to the ignition of an uprising. The level of public discontent with economic conditions was spreading from the working to the middle class. President Mubarak was in failing health. The ruling party was divided over whether to back him or his son Gamal. Both the military and pro-democracy groups were opposed to another Mubarak as president. The November elections had seriously alienated not only the Muslim Brotherhood, but also secular opposition parties and pro-democracy civil society groups. A credible alternative presidential candidate, ElBaradei, was openly challenging the established elite for the first time in contemporary Egyptian political history.

But conditions were less favorable to the transformation of an uprising into a sustained movement for change. Egypt lacked strong political organizations other than the outlawed but tolerated Muslim Brotherhood. The April 6 Movement had failed either to forge an alliance with labor or build bridges to the Muslim Brotherhood. ElBaradei's National Association for Change had not gone beyond collecting signatures on petitions. Nor had civilian pro-democracy activists made any contacts with the military even though both opposed another Mubarak as president.

### **Taking the Square**

The scope and initial success of the street protests on January 25 caught everyone including its organizers and the security services by surprise. The April 6 Movement had been gearing up to launch a nationwide protest the coming summer to contest the expected nomination of Gamal Mubarak as the ruling party's candidate in the fall presidential election. But the flight of President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali from Tunisia on January 14 emboldened Egyptians by demonstrating that even a ubiquitous police state was vulnerable to the street. Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian activist working for Google, mused on Facebook on the day of Ben Ali's departure, “If 100,000 take to the street, no one can stop us... I wonder if we can?” Most unexpected was the readiness of virtually all segments of Egyptian society including entire families from the middle

class, even some from the upper class, to swell the crowds gathering in Tahrir Square and on streets of cities from Alexandria in the north to Minya in the south. Muslims and Christian Copts stood side by side defending one another against the repeated attempts of security forces to clear the square. Women came out in huge numbers. Muslim Brotherhood youth fought alongside soccer fan toughs known as Ultras in the name first of “Bread, Freedom, and Dignity” and then “The People Want the Overthrow of the Regime.”

Also favoring the uprising's success was the collapse of the 325,000-man Central Security Forces that disintegrated under the stress of night and day confrontation with hundreds of thousands of protesters. Chaos ensued as protesters turned their ire on NDP party offices across the country and set ablaze its headquarters in downtown Cairo. They assaulted police stations everywhere, besieged the Interior Ministry in Cairo, and they freed 23,000 prisoners—many of them Muslim Brotherhood leaders and members—from Wadi El-Natroun prison. Following the January 28 so-called “Day of Rage” protest, Mubarak dismissed Prime Minister Nazif and his government, while Interior Minister Habib El-Adly handed in his resignation, declaring that his security forces could no longer contain the uprising.

What finally and irrevocably turned the tide against Mubarak, however, was the refusal of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to order the military to participate in suppressing the uprising by the use of force. On January 31, SCAF issued a statement acknowledging “the legitimacy of the people's demands” and stating that the armed forces “have not and will not resort to the use of force against this great people.” It would take another eleven days of pressure before Mubarak yielded and gave up power. But it was not the revolutionaries in the streets who finally forced Mubarak to resign on February 11 after nearly thirty years in office. Rather, it was his General Intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman, and SCAF leaders. In the end, Suleiman himself was sidelined and power passed to SCAF, leaving the military in charge of the country's fate.

With Mubarak's departure, the uprising had achieved its first and most pressing objective. The massive street protests had established for the first time in contemporary Egyptian politics the principle of “revolutionary legitimacy.” However, the rapidity with which the uprising had succeeded created a whole new set of thorny issues distinctly unfavorable to a transition toward democracy. No charismatic civilian leader had emerged to take charge. Even ElBaradei, the best placed to fulfill that role, had retreated to the sidelines when confronted with the chaos and dangers of the street. Not until February 7, just four days before Mubarak's ouster, was the “January 25 Revolutionary Youth Coalition” set up, comprising ten leading activists in what was meant to be a collective leadership. Wael Ghonim's description of the uprising seems pretty accurate: “A revolution without a leader and without an organizing body.”

Another unfavorable development during those eighteen days of revolutionary fervor was the failure of secular activists to develop a working alliance with the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, which sprang up in defiance of the government-controlled ones on the fifth day of the uprising to launch strikes across the country. The federation quickly grew to encompass 1.6 million workers organized in a hundred unions. Strikes paralyzed public transport in and around Cairo on February 7 and workers in Suez Canal service companies went out as well. On February 9, the new independent unions held a nationwide strike. But these strikes were mainly driven by grievances over wages, job security, and union rights—workers seemed more interested in taking advantage of the uprising to press their own demands than toppling Mubarak. No alliance between political and labor activists emerged from the uprising.

Strained relations between secular activists and the Muslim Brotherhood were to prove even more consequential to the course of subsequent events. Members of the Brotherhood's youth wing were deeply involved in the uprising from the beginning, and four days later the leadership exhorted its 600,000 members to join the protests. This immediately raised fears among secular protesters that Islamists were moving in to "hijack" their revolution. So much suspicion of the Brotherhood's intentions arose that on February 7, the Revolutionary Youth Coalition felt obliged to issue a statement reassuring Egyptians that Islamists had not taken over Tahrir Square.

A final heavy legacy of the uprising was the absolutely central role played by the military in ousting Mubarak. It had done this without consulting with any of the civilian groups involved in the uprising. Secular and Islamist groups found themselves equally sidelined, highly dependent on what SCAF might do next, and as suspicious of the military and its motives as they were of each other. Both were suddenly aware that SCAF was in a position to dictate the outcome of their respective bids for power.

### **The Year of SCAF**

In the almost eighteen months between the removal of Mubarak by the military and the election of President Mohammed Morsi, the contradictions that would eventually doom the uprising started emerging. It was a period of constant turmoil, with political battles played out partly in the streets and partly at the polls and in the courts.

The military was determined to follow a formally democratic political process, leading to the formation of a civilian government that would allow the military to resume its preferred role of exerting influence behind the scenes, rather than governing directly. The military, the Islamist parties, the secular parties, and revolutionary youth groups all agreed that Egypt had to move quickly toward restoring political due process. That meant holding elections for a new parliament and president as well as writing a new constitution.

There was no agreement at all, however, on the sequencing of these steps. A commission appointed by SCAF quickly revised the most controversial articles of the old constitution and submitted them to a referendum on March 19. Secular parties opposed the referendum, arguing that more discussion was needed, but everybody else supported it, including the Muslim Brotherhood. SCAF then incorporated the articles into a Constitutional Declaration issued on March 30. With this interim charter in place, Egypt would then hold parliamentary and presidential elections, to be followed by the writing of a new constitution. Secular parties again opposed the plan. First, they wanted to postpone the elections as long as possible, claiming that early elections would give the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been organizing for years, undue advantage. (It is worth noting that one of the most important secular parties, the Wafd, had existed longer than the Brotherhood.) Secular parties also wanted to be sure that the new constitution would not be shaped by Islamist parties and thus did not want it to be written by an elected body, where Islamists were bound to be well represented.

The proposed compromise solution was that all political parties should agree on a set of irrevocable “supra constitutional principles” that would bind whoever wrote the constitution. The idea gained acceptance, but different groups, from Al-Azhar, the historic center of Islamic learning, to the government itself, set forth their own sets of such principles. They were extremely contradictory, with secularists insisting Egypt must be a civil state and Islamists demanding an Islamic state with sharia the main source of legislation.

The most controversial of these sets of supra constitutional principles was the one proposed by Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Ali Al-Silmi on behalf of the government and the military in November 2011. The document reflected the demands of SCAF in stipulating that the military and its budget remain outside any form of civilian oversight. It also reflected those of secular parties in proposing the constitution be written not by an elected body, but by an eighty-member committee based on corporatist representation: seats would be allocated for political parties, labor unions, and business associations as well as for social and religious groups like workers and peasants, Muslim and Christian authorities, and even “people with special needs.” The document was rejected in the midst of angry street protests demanding that SCAF speed up the election process and return to the barracks. The principles and process it spelled out endured, however, and became the basis for the writing of the 2014 constitution.

Meanwhile, the growing imbalance between secular and Islamist political forces was becoming more and more apparent. The Muslim Brotherhood was well organized and so too, to the surprise of all Egyptians, were the newly formed Salafi parties, above all the Al-Nour Party. On the other hand, the youth groups that had led the uprising seemed to abhor strong, hierarchical organization on principle, favoring

instead egalitarianism and loose networks held together by Twitter, Facebook, and cell phones. While these means had worked well in mobilizing street protests, they failed to give youth groups any traction in organizing for elections or influencing policy decisions.

The mainstream political parties were also ineffective in generating public support and knew it. They responded by trying, unsuccessfully, to postpone elections. When the parliamentary elections in late 2011 and early 2012 confirmed their worst fears—with Islamists winning 70 percent of the People's Assembly seats and secular parties of all ideological colorations combined only 30 percent—secularists simply rejected the new parliament.

Instead, they turned to various state institutions, particularly to the courts controlled by the old elite, and used them to oppose the newly elected parliament and later the presidency. The main battle was waged between the Supreme Constitutional Court on the one side and the Islamist-dominated parliament and constituent assembly on the other. The result was the permanent dissolution of parliament and of the first constituent assembly, while the second one survived but remained under imminent threat of court-ordered dismissal.

The possibility the parliament would be disbanded by a court decision, as it eventually happened, convinced the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood to present a candidate for upcoming presidential elections, reversing an earlier decision not to do so. The decision was controversial even within the organization, where many considered it ill-advised, while other political parties saw it as an attempt to dominate Egyptian politics and impose their own form of authoritarian rule.

The presidential election was hard fought, with the second round of voting coming down to a close contest between Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Morsi and Ahmed Shafik, a former air force commander and Mubarak's last prime minister, who was favored by the old elite and military. Many had predicted that SCAF would not allow an Islamist victory, but the military council took another tack instead. On the eve of the run-off vote, it issued an amended Constitutional Declaration that specified all legislative power would remain in the hands of SCAF until a new parliament was elected, thus hemming in the president. When Mohammed Morsi won the elections by a narrow margin, SCAF accepted the victory, confident that the new president would have limited power.

In summary, this second phase of the unfolding Egyptian revolution ended in a draw. SCAF had allowed a Brotherhood leader to win presidential elections, though it still sought to hold onto legislative power. The Islamists had shown that they could muster widespread electoral support, but still had to demonstrate they could parlay that asset into institutional power. The secular parties had found out just how little

popular support they could mobilize, but discovered a way to compensate by enlisting the judiciary for their cause.

Only the revolutionary youth groups could be said to have suffered a clear defeat as they had failed to translate their claim to “revolutionary legitimacy” derived from the street into “constitutional legitimacy” based on democratic elections. Constant resort to street protest had had a positive impact in keeping the demand for change alive but also engendered a sense of fatigue among many Egyptians increasingly yearning for a return to normal life.

### **Brothers in Office**

After Morsi's election, the Brotherhood tried to play by the rules. It decided to accept the Supreme Constitutional Court's authority and thus the dissolution of parliament, although the decision was based on somewhat flimsy legal grounds. However, it successfully repealed the supplementary Constitutional Declaration that SCAF had issued in June transferring all legislative powers to SCAF. It also continued working on the new constitution through a constituent assembly, the composition of which had been negotiated with the military and the old elite. The effort to produce a constitution acceptable to all sides proved futile, however, after most secularist members of the assembly refused to participate in its work. In Tunisia, Islamists and secularists fought over the new constitution article by article, word by word. In Egypt, by contrast, secularists stayed home, and most battles were fought between the Muslim Brotherhood and the even more fundamentalist Salafis. In the meanwhile, a swirl of lawsuits threatened the Brotherhood. Some were aimed at dissolution of the constituent assembly, others at the banning of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party or of the Brotherhood itself. The cases were never adjudicated, but hearings were always postponed, thus prolonging the threat. Playing by the rules was an uphill battle. Although the Brotherhood theoretically controlled both executive and legislative power, its hold on the country was extremely flimsy because of the constant legal challenges and because it did not control either the military or the bureaucracy. Accused by its adversaries of having “brotherized” the state, the Muslim Brotherhood in reality remained on the margins of a state apparatus that had been shaped by three decades of Mubarak rule and was still largely controlled by his people.

Morsi appeared briefly to have won a major victory in August 2012 when he fired Minister of Defense and SCAF Chairman Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi as well as the Army Chief of Staff Sami Anan, replacing them respectively with General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and General Sidki Sobhi. Because Tantawi and Anan had controlled SCAF and governed Egypt directly or indirectly since the overthrow of Mubarak, their dismissal was initially seen inside and outside Egypt as a shift in the

balance of power between military and civilian. El-Sisi, many concluded, owed his appointment to Morsi and would accept his leadership. In reality, the removal of Tantawi had been negotiated between Morsi and El-Sisi, the main beneficiary of the change.

Morsi was convinced, erroneously as it turned out, that the military was now on his side and tried to exercise, even in small ways, his prerogatives as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. One example was the annual celebration on October 6 marking the 1973 crossing of the Suez Canal into the Israeli-occupied Sinai. Morsi invited to the traditional parade Islamist leaders who were completely unacceptable to the military because they had been involved in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat on the same occasion in 1981. The provocative gesture infuriated El-Sisi personally and made the rift between the two leaders unbridgeable.

Morsi only made matters worse by issuing on November 22, 2012, his own amendment to the Constitutional Declaration, putting the constituent assembly and himself above the reach of the courts—above the law, as it was generally interpreted. The provision, a last ditch attempt to prevent the courts from dissolving the constituent assembly, would only remain in effect until the new constitution was enacted, which happened a month later. But the damage was done. From that point on, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood lost whatever legitimacy they had left in the eyes of a growing portion of the general public. Their credibility had already been severely eroded by a combination of a deteriorating economic situation, secularist fears that the Brotherhood would try to impose strict Islamic law, and hostile media. The ever squabbling secular parties which had been trying for months to forge alliances that appeared to dissolve the day after they were announced were sufficiently provoked by Morsi's amendment to finally come together in a National Salvation Front.

From then on, the situation only worsened. The revolutionary mood had been replaced by a longing for stability and jobs. The revolutionary youth groups had no sense of direction and even less of organization. A new movement, Tamarod, emerged, apparently intent on renewing the revolutionary fervor of 2011 but in reality with a totally different agenda and sponsor.

The Tamarod, or Rebellion, movement declared itself in late April 2013. It claimed to be a youth group whose main aim was to collect signatures on a petition demanding Morsi's removal. Whether or not the movement was genuinely started by young people acting on their own, as its leaders claimed, it was soon taken over by state security. In a matter of weeks it spread to almost all governorates in a well-orchestrated campaign that required extensive organization and resources way beyond the capacity of such a small new group to have mustered. Soon Tamarod started calling for a massive anti-Morsi demonstration on June 30, the day he had come into office just one year earlier. It was those demonstrations engaging once again millions of

Egyptians that provided the military with the political cover to arrest Morsi on July 3. The number of protesters clamoring for Morsi's removal certainly did not reach the thirty or forty million claimed by the organizers, but the demonstrations were nationwide, massive, and more widespread than those seen during the 2011 uprising against Mubarak. They left no doubt that public sentiment had turned against the Muslim Brotherhood.

### **A Failed Transformation**

The dream of idealistic youth groups, the intelligentsia, and many secularists and Islamists of establishing a parliamentary-based democracy in place of military-backed authoritarianism vanished in July 2013. The initial uprising had begun as a spontaneous happening loosely coordinated by cyberspace-connected networks of would-be revolutionaries. Islamists had soon superseded the original organizers as the emerging political force. But eventually Egypt had been taken over by a much more powerful and well-organized coalition of the military, security services, judiciary, and state bureaucracy, all determined to bring down the Brotherhood and restore the old order.

The uprising was not doomed to complete failure from the beginning, but it quickly ran up against shortcomings in leadership and organization and the widening divide between secularists and Islamists. Major political actors bear much responsibility for the failure: certainly the Muslim Brotherhood, but also the leaders of the so-called liberal parties who, after their debacle in the 2012 parliamentary and presidential elections, turned their backs on the democratic process and looked to the courts and the military for their salvation even at the cost of renewed authoritarianism. Ironically, secularist fears that Islamic rule would mean "one man, one vote, one time" turned out to be true but not because of the Muslim Brotherhood. Secular liberal parties in alliance with the military and state institutions were primarily responsible for Egypt's return to authoritarianism.

In retrospect, it is clear that Morsi's election did not represent the triumph of the Muslim Brotherhood, but the second step in its undoing. The first step had been its overwhelming victory, together with the Salafi Al-Nour Party, in the parliamentary election. This mobilized the judiciary and more broadly the old secular elite into action to deprive the Brotherhood of power. Morsi's election then reinforced the secularist resolve to halt the Muslim Brotherhood by switching from the polls to the courts and state institutions. The Brotherhood made one last attempt to move the fight back to the electoral arena by calling for new parliamentary elections in April 2013, but the Supreme Constitutional Court aborted this plan by rejecting the proposed election law twice, even after it was amended to meet its own demands.

Muslim Brotherhood leaders were extremely slow to understand that the political dynamics had radically changed. Perhaps because they had invested so much in the formal political process, they remained convinced that elections conferred upon them unassailable “constitutional legitimacy.” They confused legitimacy and effective power, which continued to reside with the military and state institutions where the Brotherhood had a minimal presence. Even their legitimacy in the eyes of the Egyptian public was quickly dissipating as a result of their own poor decisions and under a relentless propaganda campaign in the media.

Muslim Brotherhood leaders made many mistakes and provoked their adversaries unnecessarily, but in the end they succeeded in bringing about almost no change. They did not “Islamize Egypt” or “brotherize” the bureaucracy—they simply did not have the power or the time to commit the outrages of which they were so roundly accused. What they did was less important than what they represented: a counter-elite with a different value system and a threatening alternative to the old liberal and military establishments. Their own missteps made it easier for the military and the deep state to engineer their downfall, but a competent, well-managed government led by the Muslim Brotherhood would have been even more threatening to the old political elite and military.

That elite must share responsibility for the revolution’s failure. Weighed down by a sense of class entitlement, it made little effort to fight for popular support, the *sine qua non* for success in a democratic system. Instead, from the beginning its leaders complained of the unfairness of elections held before they had time to organize. Time was not their major problem, however. Secularists were divided and disorganized before the 2012 parliamentary elections, but they were still that way when Morsi called for new elections in April 2013. Indeed, they appeared to be just as riven by personal rivalries among competing leaders and just as disorganized in the run-up to the planned 2015 parliamentary elections.

Mohamed ElBaradei, who emerged at various times as the great hope of Egyptian secularists, stands out as an apt symbol of the old elite’s political failings. He refused to run for president on the ground that Egypt was insufficiently democratic, but did little to make it more democratic. Nor did he seem upset when his supporters tried unsuccessfully to convince the military to name him president, skipping elections. He launched the Destour Party but also did little to build it into a viable force. After the July 2013 military takeover, he readily accepted an appointment as El-Sisi’s vice president. But ElBaradei resigned six weeks later, after the military dispersed pro-Morsi demonstrators in Cairo at a high cost in lives—Human Rights Watch reports that at least 817 were killed—apparently appalled by the violence that had been predictable ever since his appointment. Whatever ElBaradei’s commitment to democracy in

theory, he was never ready to lead secularists in the hard struggle to make it a reality and was all too ready to accept unelected high positions in government.

The overwhelming victory of Islamist parties in the 2012 parliamentary and presidential elections doomed the revolution. Afterward, any hope for an Islamic-secular governing coalition such as evolved in Tunisia vanished, and polarization between the two opposing forces became unstoppable. No interposing third force emerged to mediate between Islamists and military, reflecting the persistent inability of secularists to get their own house in order. The failure of leadership on the part of the Muslim Brotherhood, secularists, and revolutionary youth made the return to military rule inevitable.