



# Post-revolution blues

The Egyptian public's initial high hopes for a better future have largely dissipated

**WHILE MUCH** of the region's attention is naturally focused on the progressive disintegration of the Syrian state, the Egyptian ship of state is sailing through steadily rougher waters, with no sign of calmer seas in sight.

At the eye of the storm are President Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood movement. Ten months after Morsi's historic election as president, he and his cohorts have displayed much incompetence, failing to knit together a broad consensus which would ensure social peace and begin ameliorating the country's dire economic straits. If anything, the new Egypt appears more polarized than ever and the public's initial high hopes for a genuinely better future have largely dissipated.

As one disgruntled cab driver told an Egyptian blogger, "[former president Hosni] Mubarak was a thief, but at least I never waited for hours in a queue trying to put some gas in my car."

One ongoing difficulty is posed by the fact that the military and judicial systems remain commanded and staffed by holdovers from the Mubarak era, with all of the attendant privileges that came with it. As such, they take a dim view of the Brotherhood's own heavy-handed attempts to gain control over their institutions, including the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Constitutional Court. An as yet unpublished report commissioned by Morsi to investigate the violence during the Tahrir uprising, which overthrew Mubarak, apparently is a searing indictment of the security forces, which can only make them that much more hostile to the regime.

In the area of human rights, the picture is particularly grim, to the dismay of



A protester holds the Koran and a cross during clashes with riot police in front of the High Court in Cairo April 6

ABDALLAH DALSH / REUTERS

liberal and youthful elements of Egyptian society who played such a crucial role in the uprising. A new draft law being advanced by the Brotherhood-dominated Shura Council will severely restrict the freedom of domestic NGOs to operate outside of government control. Meanwhile, the breakdown of order and public safety has put women at unprecedented risk. And government sanctioned torture of opposition protesters may be even worse than before.

For decades, the increasing potency of the Islamist current in Egypt has been of concern to its Coptic Christian minority (some 10 percent of the population). These concerns, and violent sectarian incidents, have dramatically spiked since the revolution, and untold numbers of Copts have emigrated.

More than a score of Copt protesters were killed by the security forces in October 2011; early in April, five Copts were killed and shops and homes belonging to Copts were burned by Muslim militants in a northern Cairo district. Moreover, their funeral procession was attacked with gunfire, and the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo itself was attacked with firebombs during

subsequent violent clashes between Islamists and Copts that left two persons dead and almost 100 injured. Coptic leaders laid the blame squarely at the feet of the authorities for failing to protect their community and sacred sites, and tolerating incitement from radical Islamist preachers.

Underpinning all of Egypt's troubles is the perilous state of the economy. The official unemployment rate reached 12.7 percent at the end of 2012, direct foreign investment has dwindled (apart from Qatar's generous input), vital tourism revenues are 20 percent below those

of 2010, the country's budget deficit stands at 9.5 percent of GDP, and Egypt's foreign currency reserves can cover only three months of imports.

The government has announced plans to cut wheat imports by 10 percent, but domestic production cannot fill the gap that will be left. Negotiations with the IMF for a \$4.8 billion loan are moving forward, but will require the government to make huge cuts in basic subsidies, with all of the attendant political and social costs.

The ailing Mubarak, still on trial in Cairo, was wheeled into a courtroom mid-April. He seemed more animated and even defiant than at any time since his overthrow. Perhaps he was trying to convey a message of "I told you so."

In any event, Egypt's ongoing troubles confirm that toppling an entrenched authoritarian regime, however difficult, is simpler than constructing a cohesive, productive and legitimate new order. ■

*The author is a Principal Research Fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University.*