

## Egypt Analysis: Why This is Not a "Soft Coup" (Foley)

Sunday, June 24, 2012 at 8:02

Scott Lucas in EA Middle East and Turkey, Middle East and Iran, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi



*Pro-Military Rally, 23 June 2012 (Photo: AFP)* **Sean Foley** writes a guest analysis for EA:

Last week's decision by Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court to dissolve the democratically elected Parliament and a series of decrees issued by Egypt's highest political authority, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, sent out shock waves. Both prominent Egyptians and foreign analysts characterised these acts as a "soft coup", looking to protect the military's power and to check the rising influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had dominated the now-suspended legislature. Soldiers were stationed at the Parliament building to prevent deputies from entering.

Many saw the changes as especially problematic because they coincided with the second round of the Presidential elections this week. While either the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi or former Mubarak regime figure Ahmad Shafiq would nominally claim the office, he would be curbed by SCAF's expansion of its power.

A "soft coup"?

Here is what has gone unnoticed in that reaction. Within hours of the election, SCAF offered a series of important concessions to the new President, even as initial, unofficial results showed that Morsi had triumphed. SCAF would transfer power to the President, who would be able to appoint the Minister of Defense, by the end of June 2012. The generals who led SCAF distanced themselves from the Court's dissolution of Parliament and proposed mechanisms through which they would govern in co-operation with the President while a new legislature was seated. Such concessions were surprising for men who supposedly engineered a seizure of power, exercised absolute political authority, and were accountable to no one.

SCAF's actions testify to a paradox of Egyptian life over the past year. Although the chief mantra of the 2011 revolution was "ash-sha'b yurid isqat an-nizam" ("the people want to overthrow the system"), Egypt's political and socio-economic systems were unaffected by the departure of Mubarak from office. As Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and a handful of other prominent exiles returned, there was never the mass exodus of people from the country, which had accompanied the French Revolution, the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, or the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Nor was there the redistribution of wealth and power or the courtroom sentences which usually accompany historic revolutions --- the headline [trial](#) of senior regime figures resulted in acquittals for everyone involved, except former President Mubarak and his long-time Minister of Interior Habib El Adly.) The chief candidates for Egypt's presidency in 2012 represented the central political divide in the country since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War: secular "state" authoritarianism

versus Islamic political activism.

Despite the hype about Tahrir Square and the Twitter and Facebook uprisings, it would be difficult to classify the final results of these protests as a true "revolution". Millions of Egyptians took to the streets of Cairo and other cities to demand both better governance and better socio-economy systems. But this has happened several times in Egypt's modern history.

Something profound did occur in Egyptian society in 2011. But that profound change came not on the streets but within SCAF's base of power in the military.

While considerable attention has been devoted to the place of civilian activists like former Google executive Wael Ghonim, there has been little notice of Abdel Rahman Mansur, who jointly ran the "We are All Khaled Said" Facebook page with Ghonim that was a catalyst for the uprising. Significantly, Rahman Mansur was serving in the Egyptian army in January 2011, and his presence on-line pointed to the deciding factor in the revolution: the loyalty of the country's military.

Although the primary focus of the Egyptian military was to [deal](#) with a host of external threats, its leaders also worked fervently to prevent the institution from being used as a vehicle to overthrow the central Government and the socio-economic elite of the country. Only officers whose loyalty was clear and who could be counted upon to act correctly in a domestic or foreign crisis were promoted to positions of real authority.

When a crisis appeared in February 2011, Egyptian military leaders confronted a problem that they could have never imagined: how soldiers and officers would act if asked to shoot demonstrators. They were equally tired of Egypt's old politics and wanted to see some form of change. Young recruits and junior officers were just as tied to social networks as Ghonim and other young Egyptians.

The military's leadership decided that it preferred to see President Mubarak leave office than issue an order that might be ignored and jeopardise the chain of command. And, in a clear sign that they understood their problem, they started their own Facebook page shortly after Mubarak fell. Today that page has 1.7 million likes and its administrators have aggressively targeted anyone, including *New York Times* columnists or Egypt's leading universities, who appear to threaten them.

Still, the steps of the military's elite are not necessarily a long-term safeguard. More than a year after the fall of the Mubarak regime, few of the economic, political, and social issues that drove millions into the streets have been addressed, let alone resolved. Egyptians may wait patiently for a better future, but they will not wait forever. If social discontent merges again with a renewed political consciousness among soldiers and junior officers, then Egypt may face a far more dangerous revolutionary situation than it did in 2011.

An example from Russian history may be instructive. While we often talk of the Russian Revolution in 1917 as a single event, it was in reality a series of revolutions, the first of which took place in 1905. That uprising brought millions to the streets demanding social justice and a new governing system, but it did not result in the fundamental changes that the masses desired. Thus the way was paved for the October 1917 Revolution. The leader of that climactic event, Vladimir Lenin, would later write that "without the "dress rehearsal" of 1905, the victory in October 1917 "would have been impossible".

So no revolution in February 2011 and no "soft coup" in June 2012; however --- given Egypt's

current political and socio-economic dynamics --- these may only be the prelude to events which will merit those labels.

---

Article originally appeared on EA WorldView (<http://www.enduringamerica.com/>).

See website for complete article licensing information.