

## ***DATELINE MEI***

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### **Messiah of Failed Revolution**

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**F**alse messiah! This is perhaps the best way to depict Mohamed Morsi who was deposed on Wednesday as the President of Egypt. Exactly a year ago, he became the first Egyptian President to be elected by popular vote. He also became the first leader of the Muslim Brotherhood to be elected to the highest office of an Arab country. Within a year, he squandered the mandate, disillusioned millions and catapulted the military to the centre-stage of Egypt. Even if his supporters do not accept the ‘illegal robbing’ of the popular mandate, it is obvious that Morsi has failed to live up to the Egyptian challenges. His lack of the political acumen needed to steer the post-Mubarak Egypt was there for all to see.

From the very beginning, Morsi was a man in a hurry and sought to Islamize Egypt within a short time. Far from seeking reconciliation of post-Mubarak Egypt, he pursued a narrow agenda that angered different segments of the Egyptian people. The Constitution that was drafted and hurriedly endorsed through a narrow referendum last December had indicated his dangerous direction.

That millions of protesting Egyptians should have egged the military to put an end to Morsi’s misrule is a telling example of how much things had deteriorated within a short time. Announcing Morsi’s removal through a televised statement, Defence Minister and Army Chief Gen Abdul Fattah al-Sisi outlined a roadmap that is, admittedly, short on details. As expected the new Egyptian Constitution that was heavily slanted in favour of the Islamists, has been suspended. On Thursday, an interim administration headed by the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court Adly Mahmoud Mansour was sworn in, pending ‘early presidential elections’.

It is essential to recognize that in recent months the Constitutional Court had a running battle with Morsi and overturned a number of his key decisions. Just weeks before Morsi’s ouster, courts had declared the Shura Council (Upper House of the Egyptian Parliament) election to be illegal and unconstitutional. Similarly, it struck down the Lower House last June.

Seeking to keep the Army away from direct public glare, Gen Al-Sisi pledged a civilian Government of technocrats until presidential elections are held. The Army also pledged to review the unpopular Constitution and to prepare the country for parliamentary elections. To ensure wider acceptance, Gen Sisi has reached out to prominent political and religious figures and secured their consent for his roadmap.

The turn of events should not be a surprise to serious observers of the Middle East (West Asia). One of the most notable features of the Arab Spring has been the removal of fear. The popular protests which broke out in Tunisia in early 2011 marked the end of fear and intimidation that governed millions of Egyptians and other Arab citizens for decades. The February 2011 Egyptian revolution not only marked the end of the three-decade old reign of President Hosni Mubarak, but also the power of the rulers to subdue popular anger and resentment.

Millions who assembled in Tahrir Square in early 2011 did not aspire to replace Mubarak with another dictator in the form of the Islamist Morsi. If it took Egyptians three decades to rise against Mubarak, Morsi needed just a year to raise the popular anger.

Morsi forgot that his victory had been narrow. Not only he did not secure an outright win in the first round of elections but that his margin of victory in the second round was also not large. His victory margin was 3.4 per cent or just over 880,000 votes. In other words, over 12 million Egyptians voted against him in the second round of elections held on June 24 last year. Indicating non-partisanship, before taking office, Morsi resigned from the Muslim Brotherhood, but his subsequent actions revealed his failure to emerge as the leader of all Egyptians. In recent weeks, over 22 million people had signed a petition seeking his removal.

Morsi's reading of the electoral verdict was horribly wrong. The victory of the Islamists in both the parliamentary and the presidential polls was not an endorsement of their policies. Rather, it was the result of a constellation of factors, including the organizational capabilities of the Brotherhood and its prolonged social welfare network. Morsi, however, saw in the victory an Egyptian mandate for his Islamist agenda. After having vilified his dictatorial predecessor, Morsi was quick to assume special powers, in name to consolidating the revolution.

Moreover, from the beginning Morsi rubbed the military the wrong way. Removal and sidelining of key figures in the Supreme Military Council that ruled Egypt after Mubarak's exit did not go down well. His inept handling of the spate of violence in the Sinai Peninsula angered many and resulted in rebellion among low-level security personnel. A few weeks ago, he nominated a member of the extremist Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya group as the Governor of Luxor province. In November 1997, members of this extremist Islamist group had carried out terror attacks in the historic Hatshepsut Temple in Luxor, killing 58 foreign tourists.

A couple of weeks ago, Morsi spoke at a rally in support of the Syrian opposition in Cairo. Some Islamist speakers called on the Sunni masses the world over to carry forward a *jihad* against the Syrian regime and vilified 'infidel Shia'. Neither of this augurs well for the secular Egyptian image. Above all, the plight of the minority Coptic Christians had deteriorated in recent months. In the final week of Morsi's presidency, not only the military but also his non-Islamist Cabinet colleagues, including the Foreign Minister, chose to desert him.

In short, far from being the leader of all Egyptians, Morsi used his position to marginalize the military, intimidate the secular population, embolden Islamist agenda and pander to Salafi elements. Removal of Morsi will not solve Egypt's political, social and economic problems. Having intervened to prevent a possible civil war, the Army has to deliver and deliver quickly. It has taken upon itself the task of drafting a new Constitution that would be more accommodative of secular and non-Islamist sections of the Egyptian population.

Morsi's fall will also make the Islamists across the region to ponder over their future strategies. They would have to reach a *modus vivendi* with the military and recognize the redlines of the latter. As part of its long-term strategy for wider acceptance, Islamists might look to the Pakistani example and seek to infiltrate and, thereby, influence the military to make it more sympathetic towards their Islamist agenda. This would be the flip side of Morsi's departure.

**Note:** This article was earlier published in *The Pioneer* on 8 July 2013. Web Link:  
<http://www.dailypioneer.com/columnists/oped/messiah-of-failed-revolution.html>

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