

## PREFACE

The idea for this book, *‘Egypt in Crisis: The Fall of Islamism and Prospects of Democratization,’* crystalized in the summer of 2010. At that time, the cracks in the Mubarak regime were visible, and Egypt was suffering through a complicated crisis. The crisis’s key players were the National Democratic Party (NDP) and the neoliberal elite, the military, and political Islam in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). I strongly believed that Egypt would remain in a state of crisis, unless it redefined both its civil-military and state-religion relations; conducted rule of law and constitutional reforms; and undertook real economic reform. The 2011 uprising led to an almost complete reshuffle of the existing key political actors and added some new ones to the mix. It also provided the opportunity for Islamism and the MB to rule Egypt, and it ended 30 years of Mubarak’s authoritarian regime. The rise of Islamism and the MB helped solidify the concept of this book as it was, for me, a doomed ascendancy from the beginning. After Islamism had dominated parliament and before the selection of Mohamed Morsi as the post-Mubarak president, I wrote an essay in *‘Le Monde Diplomatique’* in May 2012 titled *‘Les Frères musulmans égyptiens pris au piège du pluralisme’* (Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood Divides) in which I discussed the reasons why it was so dangerous for one political force to dominate the parliament and presidency. The time periods involving Islamism in Egyptian politics were remarkable in their brevity. It took just 18 months (from February 11, 2011 to June 30, 2012) to rise to power, and they

had control for just 1 year (from June 30, 2012 to July 3, 2013). Their fall from power required just three days (and millions of demonstrators), while Mubarak had managed to drag out his regimes collapse to a full 18 days. Six months of MB rule was sufficient to realize that any possibility of democratization was dead. It was almost as if the MB went out of its way to anger as much of the population as it could, paving the way for the 2013 uprising and practically challenging opposition forces and the military to jointly remove Morsi from power.

This book is mostly concerned with the internal motivations and beliefs of Egypt's key political actors and the internal dynamics of the struggle between these actors. It also discusses the role each actor played in both the downfall of the MB and the continuation of the military as kingmaker and central power in Egyptian politics. An analysis is offered here as to how the belief system of the MB played a major role in their downfall from power and how MB policies accelerated this downfall.

The power struggle that built up to the fall of the Islamists was between three actors, the Islamist camp (the MB and Salafist Call), the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and the revolutionary and secular forces, while really it was *hizb al-kanba* (mainstream unaffiliated Egyptians) who determined the result of the struggle. Once *hizb al-kanba* took to the street in great numbers, the army stepped in under the guise of protecting Egypt's national security and toppled the president in order to bring stability and maintain the status quo.

The three players, each with their own agendas and interests, had different areas of dominance. The MB had organized structural organization, sophisticated social networks, concrete electoral bases and huge financial resources. The Salafist Call dominated mosques and Salafist satellite television stations, while the revolutionary forces dominated Tahrir Square. *Hizb al-kanba* had the majority of the vote, while the military had the majority of the guns. The power struggle between these political forces ended when they join forces to remove the MB and Morsi from power, in what has become known as the June 30 alliance, which allowed the Minister of Defense, 'Abdel 'Al-Fattah El-Sisi, to become president of Egypt in June 2014.

The Egyptian political landscape was significantly altered following the downfall of Morsi and the MB—unfortunately as part of the vicious cycle of Egypt's crisis the situation began to resemble Mubarak's Egypt. Key political actors in El-Sisi's regime are the military and security apparatuses; the General Intelligence Service (GIS); the deep state;

and the Salafist Call, which took over the position the MB once had in the Egypt political system after it allied with El-Sisi. El-Sisi is the first Egyptian president to have enjoyed the support of all these actors at the same time, something even Nasser did not accomplish. It is a functional, yet fragile, alliance built on a fear of the MB and the terrorist attacks that some link to the group and/or groups allied with the MB. Thus, the situation has become more complicated than it had been before the 2011 uprising. Egypt's civil-military relations reform has stalled after El-Sisi appointed his confidant, *Sedqi Sobhi*, as commander in chief of Egypt's armed forces. The regime's strategic alliance with Salafist Call, which is more extremist than the MB, has lessened the regime's ability to redefine state-religion relations and the role of Islam in politics. Security has deteriorated as a result of the anti-terrorist campaign led by the regime in Sinai, and the apolitical escalation of violence by the MB against the El-Sisi regime has reduced the possibility of initiating political reconciliation and real transitional justice. The ailing economy resulting from the deterioration of internal security will continue to negatively affect the Egyptian people's daily lives, especially in terms of the rise of unemployment and increases in the price of staples. Additionally, weak opposition and the regime's deliberalization policies have reduced the possibility of initiating a realistic transitional democratization period in the near future. All of these numerous factors pose a real threat to El-Sisi's regime, which built its legitimacy on the fear of the Egyptian people toward political Islam in general, and the MB and terrorism in particular. If history has taught us anything, it is that legitimacy arising from fear often backfires and lasts for just a few years.

Structurally, this book is divided into two interconnected parts. Part I includes four chapters concerning 'The Fall of the Islamists.' Part II, 'El-Sisi on Horseback,' contains a further two chapters. The book ends with an epilogue which explores new perspectives on Egypt's democratization.

This book is distinctive in that it depends predominantly on fieldwork. I have conducted interviews for this book with Egypt's main political actors and players, conducting interviews with Salafists, Jihadists, and MB members. I concentrated my fieldwork in delta towns and villages, and of course in Cairo where I conducted interviews with Egypt's political and cultural elite, businesspeople, and demonstrators. The views of a wide range of different Egyptian groups, classes, and parties were considered, but due to their influence on the outcome of the demonstrations, particular attention was given to the youth.

The crucial period of writing this publication occurred in 2012–2015, when I was senior political analyst in Centre d’Etudes et de Documentation Economiques, Juridiques et Sociales (CEDEJ) and Professor of Middle East Studies at *Université Française d’Égypte* (UFE), the French University in Egypt (FUE). I am most grateful to my colleagues in CEDEJ and UFE with whom I discussed my work, especially Marc Lavergne, the respected former director of CEDEJ, Stephen Lacroix and Patrick Hanenni.

I also wish to thank my former dean and distinguished professor Stephen Chan, at SOAS, London University, for the support he provided, and still provides, regarding this work. I must also thank my close friend Peter Harling, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria program director for the International Crisis Group (ICG).

I am also most grateful to the distinguished Prof. Robert Springborg, visiting professor in the Department of War Studies, King’s College London, and non-resident Research Fellow of the Italian Institute of International Affairs. My deepest thanks also goes to Prof. Bassma Kodmani—former spokesperson of the Syrian National Council, Executive Director of the independent research network ‘the Arab Reform Initiative,’ and Associate Professor of International Relations at Paris University—for her constant guidance.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, my two daughters, Sara and Logina, and my son Adham for allowing me the time to write this book.

Needless to say, none of the persons named above bear any responsibility for the ideas and opinions expressed in this book or for its shortcomings. For these, I alone am responsible.

Muscat, Oman

Alaa Al-Din Arafat

Egypt in Crisis

The Fall of Islamism and Prospects of Democratization

Arafat, A.A.-D.

2018, XV, 295 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-56019-9