

Abstract

Serious Challenges to Political Islam Movements in the Arab World

Egyptian Crisis Scenarios

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Since early 2011, the Arab World has witnessed a series of political shifts ranging between uprisings and reform movements. Revolts broke out first in Tunisia and Egypt, and then in Libya, Yemen and Syria, whereas reform activities took place in Jordan, Morocco and Iraq. After that, more than one country saw an interim stage, which was featured by several political, social and economic crises extending to security and military fields. Such turbulence was attributed by some to the revolts and reform movements per se and, later, to the political powers which led the scene. Some historians, sociologists and economists believe that they represent a product of structural state- and society-level problems which the Arab regimes failed to solve over the past 60 years. The accumulation of these miserable conditions could only be uncovered by the activists in both tracks.

As an atmosphere of change and fighting of corruption, injustice and dictatorship, the political Islam movements were not the only players in the Arab Spring. They constituted part of a broader national leadership inclusive of all public parties. However, the activities were accompanied by regional and international concerns due to their possible medium- and long-run consequences, mainly in terms of better democracy, public participation, political independence and comprehensive development as well as political Islam movements' access to power, whether by themselves or with partners.

In spite of the nature of ideological alignment in some Arab countries with respect to politics, the researchers believe that the current crisis is merely centered on authority and ruling, even if ideology is employed by relevant parties. The researchers also assert that it is basically a shift towards democracy after 6 decades of that kind of independence void of genuine societal, democratic dialogue.

It was natural for political Islam movements assuming power in the aftermath of uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco to encounter problems. That is basically attributed to their attempt to go into new areas of public affairs – like ruling – from which they had been excluded with other opposition parties during previous dictatorships. In fact, the miserable political, social and economic conditions inherited from those regimes and the high expectations by citizens after the revolts added to their dilemma. Furthermore, due to the absence of the theory of national partnership for different political parties, political Islam movements – despite their massive public support in ballot boxes – did not manage to cooperate with such parties. Therefore, they had to bear the responsibility of the interim stage by themselves.

As they have such a heavy presence in the Arab World, these movements have become central to the success of the Arab Spring and Democratic shift. Thus, if they are faced by any crisis, it will positively or negatively affect the reality of the Arab Spring.

In light of the current political and social developments, the possibilities of the political Islam movements' crisis and its consequences to the Arab World are not necessarily similar in all these countries. The geopolitical factors for each of these movements as well as each country's social and economic features and regional, international significance are essential in this regard.

Major scenarios here are considered as follows:

- escalation of the conflict between these movements and rival and affected parties
- reaching political settlements
- persistence of the status quo, in terms of political and public division

The following main recommendations are made:

1. Islamists should send messages of reassurance in order to pass the stage peacefully and successfully; alleviate internal and pan-Arab disputes; and accomplish the targets of uprisings and reform movements.
2. They should emphasize their commitment to a civil state with an Islamic reference, which is totally different from a theocratic state in its scientific sense, pledging to maintain the nation as the source of power whose circulation takes place through balloting.

3. Islamists should present their thoughts and programs within a consistent discourse in internal and external terms, so that citizens could deal with their propositions freely without feeling any kind of compulsion.
4. All Arab political powers (Islamists, Arab-nationalists, leftists, etc.) should resort to deep dialogue away from media.
5. The Arab states which fear revolts should realize that political Islam movements represent an integral of the Arab World. Dealing with them in security rather than political terms jeopardizes societal peace.

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The Chapter discusses the course of the Egyptian crisis in case of escalation or halt. It presents an initial perspective of the repercussions, each party's choices and likely scenarios. It also sets headlines for possible solutions by means of reconciliation efforts and initiatives if both parties are ready and the mediator acceptable. Agreement should take place according to proper basics and mechanisms of negotiation in a bid to put an end to the current crisis. However, if the situation deteriorates, it will constitute a catastrophe for Egypt, with all its components, as well as cause negative consequences to the entire Arab World and its democratic trends.

The chapter notes that neither of the two parties has a clear vision to end the crisis, although they are both in a dilemma in terms of the construction of institutions on the part of the regime and the current methodology on the part of the opposition. Each has problems weakening its advantages and eliminating the ability to overcome the calamity. As long as there are no visions or initiatives, the political crisis will most likely escalate, theories of co-existence will stay away and economy and security will keep deteriorating.

Four scenarios are suggested for the escalation. The first is a political settlement, which has good chances. The second is the current regime's failure on the democratic, constitutional track, which has weak chances in the foreseen future. The third is the regime's success in imposing new rules for the political game, which has a weak chance. The fourth is the country's slide into violence, which has also weak chances in the present national scene.

A number of choices are available for each party to end the crisis, with varying degrees of possible success. On the one hand, the regime may, firstly, gamble on the imposition of the status quo along with the

implementation of a 'future road map', which is highly expected from the regime. Secondly, it may take steps to ease tension and improve its rule, such as stopping security measures, giving freedoms of expression and demonstration and returning prohibited media. Thirdly, it can accept a compromise of agreement and collective participation on the basis of national interests and the uprising's targets, engaging all parties in an interim stage.

On the other hand, the National Alliance for Supporting Legitimacy may, firstly, choose steadfastness to carry on with the peaceful rejection of the new situation, insisting on uncovering the dangers of the coup 'against legitimacy'. Continuing with this choice is a strong possibility. Secondly, it may accept a compromise meeting most of the disputants' demands. The coalition is most likely to take this option if there are guarantees to return the democratic, constitutional track and the solutions are proposed by acceptable parties. Thirdly, it may give in to the status quo, which currently has a weak chance.

Finally, a 'way out of the crisis' strategy is proposed by the chapter within two fundamental stages: announcing a work plan for both parties as a 'declaration of good intent and trust-building', and agreement on major principles for a solution and future setting. The chapter also suggests mechanisms to implement the strategy and makes recommendations to end the crisis for all relevant parties.