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# And the winners for now are ... the Brotherhood

By Ezzedine Choukri Fishere

When I [last wrote in the Financial Times](#), in February, my wife and I were waiting for our baby to be born, as well as for Egypt's uprising to deliver. Despite the repression, curfew and other forms of collective punishment, we were hopeful.

While predicting the fall of the last pharaoh, I recognised three main dangers facing Egypt in its labour: the risk of prolonged instability, stemming from a lack of political flexibility either by design or incompetence; a slide to hegemony by the Muslim Brothers, which had, I thought, a better chance of out-manoeuvring other groups; and the legacy of six decades of military-backed authoritarianism. For the moment the first and third predominate, but it is the second that may prove more significant.

Since February, the Muslim Brothers have indeed out-manoeuvred their competitors, locking the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) into an ill-conceived plan that positions them to dominate the nascent political institutions. The military adopted a minimalist approach to change. As predicted, liberal forces failed to ready themselves to cope with the better organised and funded Muslim Brothers, or to face the military.

In recent months both the Brothers and the council have sought to use the poorly organised liberals to expand their influence – in the case of the former, successfully. As for the latter, the divide separating the young liberals from the authoritarian old generals has led to an unfortunate divorce. The council lost the youth gradually and ended up standing alone, facing pressure from the increasingly confident Islamists. Desperate for political support, the council sought help from elements of the 'old regime'. This alienated the liberals and exposed the council further. Like a tragic hero, it became unable to disentangle itself from a dynamic leading it to destruction.

Such has been the narrative of recent months. By July, the military finally understood the plan it had drafted was likely to give Islamists a majority in the next parliament as well as a free hand to write the constitution. It then accepted the liberals' call for a document of 'basic rights and principles' to be drafted ahead of elections, but in yet another example of political blindness, the military added clauses giving them a permanent political role. Ironically, the Islamists managed to rally the liberals, especially the youth, who were more angry at the council's slight than worried about Islamists' future domination.

So, the Islamists have played the crisis brilliantly. And unfortunately for the liberals, it is on the liberal activists that the council poured its wrath. As the violence continued last weekend, the council met representatives of political parties, notably Islamists, and

reached a new deal: the Islamist-friendly political plan will be maintained and – as a bonus – presidential elections pushed forward. Now protests by the youth continue, the council is digging in and the Brothers – more satisfied than ever – have stayed on the sidelines

As I write, [security forces are again killing Egyptians](#) who dare to challenge their authority. This seems to be an all-out attempt to break the will of those who kindle the revolutionary fire. The apparent assumption of the security forces is that the silent majority will acquiesce if those revolutionaries are broken, but they won't be broken. What the council fails to understand is that Egypt has changed, and profoundly. The new Egyptians have discovered politics. They want to stand up and will pay the cost. Ahmad Harara, a dentist, lost an eye to a sniper's bullet in January. He came back to Tahrir Square this month and lost the second eye. He is pledging to continue the struggle.

Despite the cost, [a younger and less politicised crowd](#) is joining in. My elder daughter, 21 years old with no political affiliation, is with her friends in Tahrir Square 'because they have had it with the military's despotism.' She and my 17-year-old son, also in the square, are aware of the cost, as am I. Like all parents, I am worried about the risks, but I know this is the cost of their standing up. Just like our newborn, who is trying to stand up and keeps falling. We can't spare him this cost. This might read like a cliché; for us it is daily reality.

In a nutshell, authoritarianism in Egypt is gasping. The security forces have lost their threat of deterrence: the more violence they inflict, the more protestors they draw on to the streets. Authoritarianism will be defeated, it is clear.

As for the other dangers of democratisation, it is too early to tell. If I write for the Financial Times again – say in another nine months – my article will most likely be about Egypt's next struggle, the one with Islamic fundamentalism. That might be a more difficult and protracted struggle, and will have an uncertain outcome. But it will be, I believe, the last political obstacle standing between us Egyptians and a liberal democracy.

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