



## MONA MAKRAM EBEID

Former Member of Parliament, Egypt, Distinguished Lecturer, American University in Cairo, Member of the National Council for Human Rights

I will start, because I started in French. I would first like to thank our friend Thierry de Montbrial, truly, for this extraordinary conference. And for giving me the opportunity to address such an eminent gathering, as well as for giving me the inspiration for my speech with a striking expression that he used yesterday: a revolution gone awry. That is exactly what is happening in Egypt today, since you asked me.

Yes, today we are faced with two Egypts which are no longer able to communicate, which refuse to recognise each other and which do not listen to each other. Six months after his election as President of Egypt, the first President of post-revolutionary Egypt, the Head of State, Mohammed Morsi has assumed exorbitant powers that even the previous president did not have.

The constitutional declaration of November 22, which provoked the violence you are witnessing, grants the President complete immunity as well as control over the judiciary and legislative powers, turning the fragile balance of powers on its head.

One could be tempted to explain this surprising decision by the immediate context. On the eve of the decision, the truce between Hamas and Israel was announced in Cairo with great pomp. Praising, as Hillary Clinton did, Morsi's leadership. Does this triumph, supported by the United States, explain the authoritarian coup announced the following day?

I would like to respond to Ambassador Djerejian.

You said that Putin said you might be naive, because you are supporting the Islamists. Are you naive? Tell me after.

The fact remains that by making the first move, Morsi is letting it be understood that he has built up enough credit to enter into a power struggle. Fatal confrontations between supporters of the government and opponents of all persuasions have plunged the country into mourning since 27 November.

The revolution of January 25 in which I took part for eight days, and which brought about the fall of a dictatorial regime, in no way prefigured the Islamists seizing power. This popular, spontaneous revolution had no other idea, no other plan, than the hope of the rule of law for all Egyptians, respect for the dignity of citizens and social justice.

By proclaiming himself, through the decree of November 22, above the law, the Head of State has made a remarkable and very serious mistake, because in doing so he has shown that he does not know the Egyptians, who despite their patience and their pacifism are clear about those who govern them.

That is why much of the country is now opposed to this drift towards an autocracy. Including almost all of Egypt's judges and, behind them, not only the young revolutionaries, but also the left, the liberals, the Nasserists, the Christians, the secular, and eminent Muslim theologians. Even the judges who are very close to the Brotherhood, such as the Vice-President, the justice minister and the head of the constituent assembly, have rejected the constitutional declaration.

Since the withdrawal, in March, of the liberals from the constituent assembly, of which I was a member, the judges are now in the front line against Islamic power and the Islamists; because the judicial power is now the last resort of the opposition. Faced with the escalating violence, seven of Morsi's advisors announced their resignation in the space of two weeks.



No doubt Morsi had, wrongly, banked on the opposition being extremely divided and disorganised, unlike his own camp. But, although fragile, this opposition has proved, by its numbers, that it is capable of coming back out into the streets in the form of a mixed coalition of men, women, workers, businessmen and activists, to rekindle the spirit of an incomplete revolution.

Since the liberals' withdrawal in March, we have witnessed this regression. Not to mention the fact that the draft constitution, which was hastily drafted in 17 hours, voted on by a constituent assembly which backs the Islamists, and which must be put to a referendum on December 15, was rejected by the entire opposition. The content of this constitution contains articles which oppose freedom of conscience, it limits trade-union freedom, limits press freedom, threatens gender equality and violates minority rights in several places. All of which prompted the withdrawal of the constituent assembly, the church and all the non-Islamist parties, as well as Al-Azhar, the highest authority in Islam.

Let's take a look at Mr Morsi himself. Coming from an extremely conservative faction, Morsi has harmed the values of liberal democracy, including the multi-denominational heritage, as discussed by Ambassador Djerejian, bequeathed by the Wafd (liberal party of the 1920s), and has greatly increased the religious polarisation of society.

Amongst the Salafis, who are allied with the President, the tone has become even more violent and they are even calling for the murder of demonstrators, Christians, liberal political leaders and non-government media.

Faced with this catastrophic and very serious situation, the opposition, using Nobel prize-winner Mohamed ElBaradei as its mouthpiece, declared itself ready for dialogue, but only if the constitutional decree was withdrawn and the referendum postponed. That is what we will find out tonight or tomorrow.

If he decides to keep the referendum on December 15, he will face a campaign of boycotting by the opposition, and numerous judges charged with supervising the ballot who have refused to do so. Even if he reverses his decision, he will have lost a lot of credibility, because he comes across today as the man of a single faction of society, i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood, and not as the President of all Egyptians.

The fact remains that there are huge tensions within the Brotherhood. Ultimately, the grave responsibility for the first deadly confrontations between Egyptians since the revolution will lie with Morsi. On the other hand, the divisions among the non-Islamists since the revolution, due to the appetite for power and highly-developed egos in each group, certainly favoured the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies in the last elections. It is to be hoped that the unity which has arisen during the fight to oppose this new dictatorship will last until the next elections which will take place within two months, and that they will be able to obtain at least 50% of the seats.

Until now, the army has been silent. But for the past few days, the army has communicated that it will not accept this escalation in violence and will side with the people. In this country which for 60 years was governed directly or indirectly by the army, it could be suggested that the army has influenced the President's latest decisions. To my mind, we are entering a period of turbulence which may destabilise the country and the region, without however eliminating the Muslim Brothers.

The triumphal welcome given by Gaza on Friday to the head of Hamas, Khaled Meshaal, confirms that the Islamists are the rising force in the Middle East. The world should not forget that Egypt is the region's pivot country and that, from the late 1970s on, it opened up the path to peace with Israel.

I will conclude as I began: we are faced with two Egypts whose ideas of the future are hard to reconcile. One is marked by years of repression and clandestineness, and its idea of democracy is limited to majority rule. It is convinced that the election winner should be authorised to govern on its own.

The other, which is us, harks back to a liberal and modern past, and to the intellectual influence which Egypt has exercised over the region for more than 200 years since Napoleon's expedition and the reign of Muhammad Ali, and wants a civil, democratic, modern and egalitarian State. Will these two Egypts be able to coexist and find common ground one day?



Can Mr Morsi reconcile an Egypt which has broken from itself over the past few months, and construct a model Islamic system for the region, based on good governance, economic efficiency, democratisation and above all social justice?

Allow me to finish with a beautiful quote from Martin Luther King: "The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice." Thank you.