

MONA MAKRAM-EBEID

Egyptian Senator, Distinguished Lecturer at American University in Cairo

Steven ERLANGER, London Bureau Chief, The New York Times

This is a subject that touches many people here. I think that at least four journalist friends I know have disappeared inside Syria trying to describe it to all of us who sit safely outside. In any case, I have nothing that is not banal to say here, so I will turn to Egypt. Mona Makram Ebeid is a former senator and has been adviser to the military. She was in Tahrir Square to begin with and has been pushing for democracy and human rights. She lectures at the American University in Cairo. I hope that she will give us an idea of whether she thinks in the end the military is bringing Egypt to somewhere where the world needs it to be or has the world been craven or cowardly in the face of yet another military coup in the face of a democratic movement?

Mona Makram EBEID, Egyptian Senator, Distinguished Lecturer at American University in Cairo

Thank you. I have reservations about the term 'military coup'. This was not a military coup, although it appeared to be. It was a popular impeachment where 30 million people – or 17 million, as you say in the West – took to the streets to oust a president who failed his mandate and violated every sense of human rights. The question is the struggle for Egypt's future over? I would say that it is not over and if the Islamist regime collapsed before it became an irreversible theocracy, political Islam is still with us and will remain with us. How do we deal with political Islam? That will be the real challenge in the future.

What we must remember is the overwhelming support for the popular impeachment from the people of Egypt, and that is what the West is unable to understand. How can you support a military regime after you have fought for perhaps 30 years for a civilian regime? It was because the civilian regime was a disaster. That is the first thing. Secondly, having the military take over is very popular. They have immense support and are looked upon as a saviour, saving Egypt from the brink of chaos and civil war. Of course, if the leader of the military runs for election – which he has refused to do up to now, although I do not know for how much longer he will refuse – he will be elected without any competitor. That is what we believe.

Is this a good or a bad thing for Egypt? We know perfectly well that the military are not the sons of Mother Theresa, but they have enough popularity today to be able to impose on the people the difficult decisions that need to be taken, which Mr Ahmed has spoken about, which is an economic plan. How can you do anything today when the country is so polarised and there is a feeling of revenge?

Where are the Muslim Brothers in all that? The leaders are in prison, but the rest are there. Are they going to be included? Those who have not committed or incited crimes will be able to participate in political life and the [inaudible] *politique*, as they call it. I therefore believe that they will take part in the next elections, possibly as independents or along with another party. However, they will take part. The popularity that they had two years ago has of course been totally lost and the people who are fighting them today are not the Army or Government but the people themselves, for whom the bestiality and brutality that took place throughout that whole year is just unforgivable. People are therefore not ready today either for national reconciliation, as many in the West are pressing for, or inclusion. There is no inclusion now and the people do not want to have a dialogue because they themselves are rejecting dialogue. There is therefore no point in have dialogue with people who are rejecting it and are insisting on there being daily crimes and violence against the people of Egypt.

One thing that the West is unable to understand is that the Egyptian military has been entrenched in a critical and difficult daily fight in Sinai against major terrorist cells which were allowed to establish a major stronghold in the one-year rule of the Muslim Brothers. This reality directly jeopardises both Egyptian and Israeli national security and threatens regional stability.



Another point of concern in the West is the new rapprochement with Russia. I think that this rapprochement was forced on Egypt. Of course, the Syrian tragedy and the outcome there has allowed Russia to return. Their only stronghold previously was Syria, but the suspension of military and financial aid to Egypt at a time when the military is fighting the war on terrorism has allowed Russia to come back – and to come back the next day, in fact – and offer its services. What is Egypt's position? Egypt's relationship with the United States is a priority. It will never give it up or substitute it for any other country. However, today it is forced to broaden its allies and friends and to guarantee security needs in the future. There is therefore no need for this concern.

However, we should also not forget the position of the Russian church, which is gaining a lot of influence among the Christian populations in the region. As you know, the Christians in the region have been the target of violence. In Egypt, 80 churches have been torched and ransacked and many individual Christians have been killed simply because they were Christian. The new rapprochement with Russia should therefore not be seen as a pivot away from Washington because, as I said, the relationship has always depended on military and security cooperation. However, to use this partnership as a bargaining chip for shaping domestic Egyptian politics is totally counterproductive to the interests of both countries.

What needs to be done, then? Firstly, we have the young people. As someone said today, 'The young people, the young people, the young people', jobs and what they were asking for. I remember what they asked for before the revolution where they used to say 'A voice and a job', which is exactly what they still want today.

The second thing is to prevent radicalisation at the grass roots. What we are scared of is that the Muslim Brothers will resort to even more violence if they feel totally excluded. That is why I say that those who have not been guilty of crimes during the past two years should have a role to play.

The third thing is, of course, economic reform and income distribution, which Kemal Dervis so incisively mentioned is paramount. One of the main slogans of the 2011 revolution was *Aish*, which means both bread and life, with life meaning improving people's lives.

As for democracy, Egypt is increasing by 1 million every month. It already has 90 million, so I can give you an idea of what it will be in 10 years' time. You have to teach women. There is no solution but the education of girls and women. Otherwise, there will be no solution in this region. For Egypt to advance, it has to go back to the slogan of the 1920s, which was 'Religion is for God and the homeland is for all'. Otherwise, there is no future.