

Briefing Memo

The Arab Spring and Beyond-The Development of the Egyptian Political Situation since 2012-

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Introduction

Two years have passed since the so-called Arab Spring started. How are these countries' situations after that? As a case study, this paper will analyse Egyptian political situation since 2012.

Parliamentary and Presidential elections

In Egypt, after the collapse of the old regime in February 2011, many new political parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood's the Freedom and Justice Party were founded. In the People's Assembly (lower house) election from December 2011 to January 2012, the Freedom and Justice Party became the dominant party and the Nour party became the second party. And in the Shura Council (upper house) election from January to February in 2012 too, these two parties won and got the largest and the second largest seats.

Subsequently, the Presidential election followed. Traditionally in Egypt, the authority of the president is much greater than that of the parliaments. Therefore, the presidential election is extremely important. The Muslim Brotherhood initially had declared that it would not field its own presidential candidate. It seems to have made this statement in order not to cause concerns from the military and secularists against it. However, after the victory in parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood deepened confidence in itself and decided to withdraw its former declaration at the end of March 2012. At that time, all presidents since the establishment of the republic in 1952 were from the military, and the military seemed to hope to maintain that "tradition", namely the chains of military presidents. So, major figures from the military also announced their candidacy, for fear of losing their interests if a candidate from outside the military took the presidency.

In the end, two generals, namely former prime minister Ahmed Shafik(a former air force commander) and former vice president Omar Suleiman (former head of the intelligence service and a major general in the army), and two senior members of the Brotherhood, that is Khairat Al-Shater, the deputy chairman of the Brotherhood, and Mohammed Morsi, the Head of the Freedom and Justice Party, ran for the president. The reason the brotherhood fielded two candidates was to have a reserved candidate in case any contingency occurred for its main candidate, Al-Shater. In addition to these four persons, , civilian politician Amr Moussa and others also filed for candidacy. At this point, Suleiman and Al-Shater seemed to be the two leading candidates. However, in a prior examination by the Election Administration Commission, ten persons including these two became disqualified. After all, the presidential election turned out to be a contention between two candidates, the former prime minister Shafik and the party head Morsi.

In this respect, I would like to point out the reason why a senior military official of the Mubarak regime emerged as a leading candidate. After the collapse of the regime, people started to enjoy freedom of speech and political activities. However, due partly to their inexperience demonstrations frequently became riots. This condition, in combination with the debilitation of the police, caused a decline in public order. Therefore, numbers of foreign tourists plummeted and tourism deteriorated and it caused an economic downturn. The anti-Mubarak demonstrations started against a backdrop of economic dissatisfaction. People participated in them because they expected a better economic situation. However, after the collapse of the regime, both security and economy worsened. Therefore, disillusioned people looked to a senior member of the former regime in seeking recovery of public order and economy.

The election was held on May 23-24, with Morsi of the Brotherhood coming out on top garnering 24% votes, and Shafik followed with a narrow margin. As no candidate gained a majority of votes, a runoff was held between the two. As the voting dates of June 16-17 came close, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which had charge of the interim administration operated actively. On May 31, the state of emergency which had been activated since 1981 expired. It was a symbol of oppression by the old regime. Then, on June 14, based on a supreme constitutional court ruling, the People's Assembly was dissolved and legislative power was transferred to SCAF. While the dominant party of the assembly was the Freedom and Justice Party, this damaged to the Brotherhood. This measure seems to have been taken in order to arrange an environment for maintaining the military interests in case Morsi won.

Under such hectic movements, Morsi defeated Shafik by a narrow margin and became the first president without military background. Immediately after his victory, Morsi announced his withdrawal from the Brotherhood and his party. Nonetheless, he virtually continues to be a member of them. At the end of June, Morsi assumed his position as the president. On that day, the administration of SCAF expired and the transfer to civilian rule was completed.

On the other hand, the defeated candidate Shafik left Egypt at the end of June and has stayed in the UAE. After his departure, a warrant of arrest for him was issued, so he can not return home. This kind of case, namely issuing a warrant of arrest against a loser was same as what occurred after the previous presidential election in 2005. In that election more than one candidates ran for the first time. And after the victory of the incumbent Mubarak, the runner-up candidate Nour was arrested and it was regarded as a public flogging. The situation where losers of elections were punished describes a developing stage of democracy in Egypt.

Administrative Management of President Morsi (Domestic Politics)

As a president, Morsi assumed administrative authority at the end of June. Then in July, he ordered a reconvention of the People's Assembly. Prior to its dissolution, the Brotherhood was the biggest power. Morsi sought to bring back legislative power to the parliament and the Brotherhood from SCAF. However, because the supreme constitutional court rejected Morsi's initiative to reconvene it, his attempt failed. After that, on August 2 a new cabinet was inaugurated and Defense Minister Tantawi (chairman of SCAF) stayed on, although he had a rivalry with Morsi. However, in the same month, against a backdrop of deaths of 16 soldiers of the Egyptian armed forces in the Sinai Peninsula, the president removed Defense Minister Tantawi and Chief of Staff Anan from their posts. It

seemed that by means of that incident Morsi went ahead with their dismissal. Furthermore, the president issued a constitutional declaration and transferred the legislative power from SCAF to himself. Through this measure, the president gained control of both administrative power and legislative power. On the other hand, when Morsi dismissed Tantawi and Anan, he appointed them as presidential advisors and gave them medals, namely the president bestowed an honor on these two senior military officials. By these appeasement measures, Morsi tried to avoid intensification of confrontation with the military.

Since then, the president stepped up his authoritative approaches. In August, utilizing the Shura Council's authority over personnel issues for government-controlled media, he replaced editors-in-chief. As a result, government controlled papers refrained voluntarily from criticism over the regime. Although after the collapse of the Mubarak regime these papers had announced self-criticism against their pro-regime stances, in less than a year after that, they returned to their traditional stances, namely, pro-regime ones. In addition, in August, an editor-in-chief of a newspaper adopting critical stance against the regime was temporarily arrested. This also seemed strengthening control over media by the president.

In November, the president issued a new constitutional declaration which gave his decisions virtual immunity from judicial interference until the establishment of a new constitution and implementation of the People's Assembly's election. Thus, the president who had already grasped administrative and legislative power increased his authority overwhelmingly, by placing his power outside of the judicial system. However, this step caused mass demonstrations against him. As part of protest, many independent newspapers suspended publication on December 4. In the end, these efforts forced Morsi to withdraw this constitutional declaration.

Meanwhile, in November, the regime-led Constituent Assembly drafted a constitution, and in December, a referendum on it was held. Due partly to the low voting rate, the new constitution was approved. Thereafter, as a preparation for the People's Assembly election, drawing up of a new election law is underway. However, at this moment, the schedule of a new election is not fixed yet.

President Morsi's Diplomatic Policy

To improve bilateral relation with Iran to some extent and to perform a balanced diplomacy are characteristics of Morsi's diplomatic policy. When the Iranian Islamic revolution occurred in 1979, Iran criticized Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and severed diplomatic relations with Egypt. However, immediately after the collapse of the Mubarak regime, Egypt under provisional administration of SCAF permitted Iranian warships to transit through the Suez Canal, and the relationship between two countries showed a sign of improvement. As shown in this example, although the improvement of the bilateral relationship had started before Morsi's Presidency, under Morsi's regime Egypt further improved it. For instance, in August 2012, in order to participate in the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran Morsi visited Iran for the first time as the president of Egypt since 1979. However, in the summit, Morsi criticized Syrian Bashar al-Assad regime, a friend of Iran. Because excessive improvement of relationship between Egypt and Iran would lead to concerns of countries like the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia, in order to dispel such anxieties, Morsi seemed to deliver the speech so as not to show rapid improvement of bilateral relations. In February 2013, when Iranian President Ahmadinejad visited Cairo to attend a summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation,

Morsi showed a sense of balance. Although Morsi himself welcomed Ahmadinejad at the Cairo airport, he held only informal talks with him. Furthermore, the head of Al-Azhar, the Sunni Muslims' premier Islamic institution, met with Ahmadinejad and criticized Iranian intervention into Sunni Arab countries. This kind of performance which facially dispelled the improvement of bilateral relationship probably reflected Morsi's policy. On the other hand, bilateral relations have steadily improved. In March Iranian tourists started visiting Egypt and commercial flights between the two countries also began. However, due to the intensifying protest by Sunni Salafists in Egypt, these flights were forced to be suspended.

Although the bilateral relationship has been improving, whether Egypt will restore diplomatic relations with Iran remains to be determined. The Morsi regime which needs economic assistance from overseas does not wish to deteriorate diplomatic relations with donor countries like the U.S.. Morsi's aim of the improvement of bilateral relationship with Iran seems to establish a balanced foreign relations because decades-long severance of bilateral relations between the two regional powers is an unnatural condition.

Conclusion

While Egypt is in a transition period in a positive light, it is in a chaotic period in a negative light. Although the collapse of the authoritarian regime has caused some improvements, it has also worsened many problems. Democratization and the freedom of speech are among major improvements. The People's Assembly election, the Shura Council election, presidential election and constitutional referendum were held democratically. However, the voter turnout has steadily declined since the first election, that is the People's Assembly election. In terms of freedom of speech and press, Egypt is the most advanced among Arab countries. Although the regime's control on the press remains to some extent, independent newspapers and televisions criticize the regime every day. Meanwhile, deteriorating economy and public order are among serious problems caused and escalated by the regime change. As the recession has stemmed from the stagnation of the tourism, and the slump in the tourism is due to worsening security, the restoration of public order is essential to solve these problems. However, deteriorating security is partly due to economic problems such as a shortage of gasoline. In other aspects, this problem has emerged from the weakened police system. Although reinforcement of the police system and deployment of armed forces in cities may improve security, such measures could lead to a resurgence of an authoritative regime. Nonetheless, actual security situation in Egypt is much worse than before. Therefore if this situation continues, the majority of citizens may wish revival of a powerful regime in the future.

(Completed on May 7, 2013)

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