

Was the Egyptian Uprising Really a 'Revolution?'



By: Cornelis Hulsman, Editor-in-Chief, *Arab-West Report*, 23 June 2012

CAIRO, Egypt (AWR) – The standoff between Muslim Brothers and Egypt's ruling military continues, but seems to be turning into a victory for the army over the Brothers.

The Muslim Brothers organized large demonstrations at Tahrir square on Friday. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf) issued a statement saying the Brotherhood's claim that their candidate won the elections was premature and unjustifiable. Was this statement made to prepare the public for the inevitability that Shafiq has won? Leaks in government sources suggest Shafiq won the elections. Is this another indication to the public that they should be prepared for a Shafiq presidency instead of a Mursi presidency? No formal announcement, however, has been made yet by the Presidential Election Commission.

A few days ago I attended a lecture of Abdallah Schleifer, Professor Emeritus & Senior Fellow Kamal Adham Center for Television & Digital Journalism at the American University in Cairo. Of course, we had a long talk about the uncertain developments in Egypt. That was before he wrote his very insightful article for *The Forward*, a Jewish daily in the USA, on June 19, 2012.

Schleifer states, correctly, that there never has been a revolution in Egypt. It was a coup d'état of an army that had enough of the efforts of Gamal Mubarak to succeed his ailing father. But the fundamental illusion was that this was a revolution "was fed by a romantic foreign press corps that flooded into Cairo, entranced by the appearance of a brave, relatively non-violent revolution. Since then, there have been some concessions wrung from the army by successively less massive demonstrations, like the demand to bring Mubarak back from his internal exile to stand trial along with his sons and top aides.

"They were paid for by the disenchantment of an Egyptian silent majority who saw months pass with little or no change in their lives. This state of disenchantment was ignored to a great degree by the foreign media."

True! On April 15, 2011, at a European-Arab conference in Crete, I questioned whether this was a revolution or merely a revolt. I was then sharply criticized by Egyptian Islamist Abu Eila al-Madi, founder of the Islamist Wasat Party. He found it shameful that I dared to question whether this was a revolution or not. Al-Madi immediately received support from other Egyptian Islamists who were attending.

It is now obvious that for Islamists this HAD to be a revolution. Ideology precedes facts, of course! It was not only a fundamental illusion fed by a romantic foreign press corps, but also indulged by Egyptians who WANTED this to be a revolution.

Schleifer is right that foreign media did not see the disenchantment of what he calls the silent majority. These are the people hit hardest by the economic hardship that followed this so-called revolution.

Both the Muslim Brotherhood and Ahmed Shafiq are claiming victory, but Schleifer is wrong that 50 million votes were cast. The total electorate is 50 million and I would wish all Egyptian voters would have participated in these elections. Reports state 42 percent of the electorate voted, making the total around 21 million.

The final round voting ended Sunday night June 17. Scheifer reports that “by Monday evening, the Muslim Brotherhood’s political arm was claiming victory for its candidate, Mohamed Mursi, by about 1 million votes, based on unofficial reports from the thousands of polling stations throughout the land.” In fact, the first claims that Mursi had won came in minutes after closing the polling stations. That immediately raised questions about their claims.

Fact is that both candidates, Mursi and Shafiq, obtained close to 50 percent of the vote and fact is that this outcome was disastrous. It would have been better for Egypt if there would have been a clear victory for either of the two candidates. This outcome suggests a very deeply divided country.

As I wrote in my previous commentary, the parties of Mursi and Shafiq have much reason to distrust each other. Neither the Muslim Brotherhood, the old National Democratic Party elite, or the military, who have been so closely allied to the National Democratic Party, has forgotten the clashes between the Brotherhood and ruling governments.

It is possible, Schleifer writes, that both parties are “quietly coming to some sort of edgy understanding. At least that is what, late this evening, many thoughtful people in Cairo are hoping for.” I am one of those people who express that hope.

Schleifer referred to my meeting with a member of the now-dissolved parliament just before I met with him. It is true that both parties deeply fear each other and both have good reasons for this fear. If Shafiq comes to power, he could indeed make efforts with help of the army to repress the Brotherhood. If the Brotherhood would come to power, they would try to get control over the security forces that have suppressed them for so many decades. Thus, both have a lot to lose.

“In fairness,” Schleifer writes, “the Brotherhood has been sounding rather more conciliatory and pluralist minded over the past few days.” True, but deep mistrust

exists over whether those statements are truly sincere or only aimed at paving their road to power.

With this outcome of the elections, I think it would be suicidal for Egypt if either of the two competing parties would take all power to themselves. I deeply hope that both parties use the delay in making a statement about the outcome of the elections to negotiate and come to an agreement that will guarantee that the deepest fears of both sides will not come true -- thus no renewed persecution of Muslim Brothers, no control of the Brothers over security and army, nor over the ministries of education or culture (because this could be used to change the Egyptian cultural identity). First there should be four years of working together towards economic growth and welfare for all Egyptians and then only after this period let the Egyptian electorate decide in what direction they want to go.

About the so-called revolution Schleifer writes:

“There was an uprising that began at Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011. It was not a revolution – which means a change of power from the old establishment to the new forces. Yes, there was a coup d’etat in Egypt. But it did not take place this past week . It occurred on February 11, 2011, when the Tahrir demonstrations grew so massive that the military had to choose between Mubarak and saving their own skins.

"Not surprisingly, the armed forces command opted for a soft coup d’etat. They told their old comrade-in-arms Husni Mubarak it was time to go and to take his family with him. He went quietly, if not into the night, at least to the Sinai resort town of Sharm al Sheikh.

"The Tahrir 'revolutionaries,' brave, heroic and self-sacrificing as they were, did not overthrow Mubarak. It was the armed forces, driven into into crisis mode, that did it.

"It was a coup d’etat, not a revolution. And in effect, it has changed very little, except to usher in this strange 16 months of stasis. There is all-pervasive listlessness, escalating unemployment and poverty and street crime, a lot of garbage strewn streets, and more petty corruption than ever.

"Yes, everybody declares himself to support this illusionary revolution. Everyone from the army brass to the Muslim Brotherhood whose youth movement did battle alongside the liberal and socialist youth at Tahrir. The Brotherhood itself pointedly stayed on the sidelines until the last days, when even Barack Obama didn’t need a weather vane to know which way which way the wind was blowing.

"Even Mubarak in his pathetic last speech, allegedly written by his son, Gamal, declared he was with the revolution. That was when he declared he was not stepping down. The next day, he was sent packing by the army.”

Indeed, it is now clear that it was not a revolution, but simply young revolutionaries and Islamists who wanted it to be. The military made them believe it was a revolution, participated in calling it as such. Egyptian and foreign media followed. I have used the word as well to avoid discussions such as the one I had with Abu Eila al-Madi. I wonder if he still believes this was a revolution.