

Toward a Solution for Egypt



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Mass public protests demanding the release of senior Muslim Brotherhood figures who were duly appointed following elections, and insisting upon their return to their assigned offices, are being held in the Egyptian capital, Cairo. The deaths of at least 120 people and the injury of another 4,500 or so by the current junta on July 27th in a massacre of those engaging in their right to "democratic and peaceful protest" has created considerable unease across the world.

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While one might expect democracies to be supported at a time when there is a great need for peace in the Middle East, the events we have witnessed in Egypt in recent days appear to foretell a new era that may lead the Middle East into even greater turmoil.

Referring to the latest massacre, EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said she "deeply regretted" the incident and called for an end to the violence. British foreign secretary William Hague called for the Egyptian authorities "to recognize the right to peaceful protest and bring those responsible for the carnage to justice." U.S. State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell issued a similar statement. However, these statements are not intended to change the course of events and bestow a new impetus, and go no further than being expressions of hope.

Egypt's interior minister Ibrahim's latest reference to the persisting peaceful protests as "a threat to national security" is unacceptable. An official charged with putting an end to the peaceful protests in Rabaa al Adawiyya and al Nahda squares using language seeking to justify the use of force makes the severity of the situation crystal clear. These antidemocratic words give rise to concerns that the slaughter will continue. We must not forget that the call issued by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi before the July 27th protests empowering "the people to take to the streets against terror and anarchy" -- is the product of that same mentality. The idea of using violence to neutralize one section of society's democratic rights with the aim of establishing the security of society is a blatant violation of universal human rights.

The uncertainty surrounding Mohammed Morsi and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were unlawfully detained and subjected to hours of illegal

interrogation on a daily basis, is another source of unease. It is unacceptable to use "regarding ideas as troubling or dangerous" as an excuse for "removing people from their posts at gunpoint and keeping them in detention in an unknown location." Not even Hosni Mubarak, the deposed Egyptian leader, engaged in such repressive and violent actions against the Muslim Brotherhood.

It will be useful to reiterate this fact; one may not support Morsi and the Brotherhood, and one may even hold views wholly opposed to theirs. But arresting duly elected officials in an illegal manner and then keeping them detained on dubious charges that have nothing to do with reality is a violation of the universal declaration of human rights. Even if they are believed to have committed crimes, investigations must be carried out in a transparent and democratic manner, in line with the constitution and with the precepts of criminal law that we see in democratic societies.

The USA, the EU and Gulf countries must carefully consider policies that openly support the junta; for Middle Eastern countries to come to a position where they support antidemocratic processes against one another will lead to endless regional hatred, rancor and fighting. It will also pose an insoluble dilemma for Western countries and lead to the emergence of a climate that cannot be pacified. The current approach of the Gulf countries is not one of demanding democracy, but to the contrary, is intended to impose new dictatorships under a totalitarian or even sectarian perspective. For the Middle East to turn into a highly unstable region will damage prospects for peace, and that in turn will severely damage all those countries that do business with and enjoy bilateral relations with the region.

At this point, the USA and the EU need to follow a more active policy in Egypt. The important thing for Egypt is not necessarily for the Brotherhood to return to power and for Morsi to be the leader again: What matters is an immediate end to the violence, for the detained politicians to be released and for the people of Egypt to go back to the ballot box by democratic means. Ignoring the emergence of radical elements while claiming to be adamantly opposed to the growth of radicalism will also inflict severe damage on the West in the long term.

Remaining silent in the face of the current injustices, illegality, oppression and slaughter, being content to watch from the sidelines and failing to issue the necessary strong warnings will inevitably lead to questioning of the West's title of "the cradle of democracy." That in turn will lead to a decrease in confidence in the West across the world, and to a loss of belief in democracy. The USA and the EU will definitely lose out in such circumstances

Intermediaries must become involved in Egypt before it is too late, and the acts of violence must come to an end. If that is not done, it is likely that the junta will increase the state of repression for the foreseeable future and shed even more blood and deepen the wounds still further. In the same way, Morsi and the Brotherhood need to be convinced, for the democratic health and safety of the Egyptian people, not to insist on re-assuming the leadership on their own. As with Tunisia, the way needs to be cleared for the establishment of a government with broader participation. At every point and under every circumstance, the sides need to be convinced of demands that will bring about the maximum benefit and meet on an auspicious basis. This transitional process, should it be followed through with, will be extraordinarily positive in showing that the Brotherhood sincerely desires advanced democracy and social peace.

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