

## What Is to Be Done?

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The most debated question now in Egypt is; what is to be done? What is to be done in order to claim back a lost revolution and in order for Egypt to become a developed country both on the political and socio-economic level? At the moment, as an expected result of the seemingly endemic political instability and chronic economic recession, no one seems to know the exact answer to that crucial question. And as more time passes by since the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution, it seems that there might be no answer to this question at all. This looming confusion and depressing helplessness lead many to believe that the only promising future of the Egyptian youth that shocked the world three years ago, lies in immigrating to Canada. Three years ago when millions of protesters who took to the street, the answer to this question was rather simple; they believed that all they needed to do was to remove the old dictator, and everything would become better accordingly. This assumption has proved to be both short sighted and naive, while the answer to the paradoxical question proved to be more complicated. Even though the old dictator was removed, people felt that the long awaited winds of change were finally about to arrive, three years on, the economy is still dwindling while democracy is getting further away, except for the highly celebrated and merely ceremonial elections that are neither fair nor free as they are not adequately monitored neither financially nor procedurally, making them more a cosmetic indication of ballot-ocracy than of true representative democracy.

After the ousting of Mubarak and until today, a lot of reports were published exposing some of the still largely hidden corruption scandals that seems to have transformed from an exception into a norm in the transformed Egyptian society. These networks of corruption and cronyism resemble a spider web still able to survive despite increasing demands for reform. The more we know about how Egypt was governed, the more the problems we discover and the harder it becomes to solve the urgent dilemma of what is to be done, and from where shall we start. In an attempt to find a solution, before asking what is to be done, the first question should be what is the real problem, or rather what is the root to all problems? This single root to all Egyptian problems has been argued to be poor education. While legend says that the Egyptian child is the most intelligent over the world, Egypt's primary education has ranked last in global competitiveness report (Al-Youm). Moreover, the adult illiteracy rate is a staggering 26%, leading many to believe that the real problem in Egypt is not corruption, not poverty but poor education for if the educational system was reformed, everything else would consequently improve (Unicef Egypt Statistics). But if poor education really is the sole reason behind our apparent backwardness, then why does India, the country tops in adult illiteracy with the largest population of illiterate adults, reaching 287 million (UN Report), some 37% of the population, still function as a democracy with a powerful economy ranked in the 10<sup>th</sup> place globally by GDP and poised for further rapid growth? Despite the non-debatable fact that poor quality education is on the top of the problems list, apparently it is not the deepest hitch. Thus, we have to dig deeper.

Some argue that it is not the poor quality of education but rather the very large population that sucks out all wealth and stands as an obstacle in the face of development. Despite the fact that Egypt is the most populated Arab country and the third in Africa after Nigeria and Ethiopia, this population, if trained and provided with job opportunities, could become one of Egypt's greatest assets. After all, China, the most populated country in the world has the highest annual growth rate in the world averaging at 10% a year. A large population after all is not necessarily a curse and can actually turn into a blessing if it is wisely utilized (World Bank China Overview). Indeed, China's one child per family may have been ill advised as it will diminish the country's healthy growth rates as on the long run it shall deprive it from one of its most important assets, human capital. Poor education, large population and deteriorating health care are all grave problems, but they can be regarded as the observable symptoms of a yet unidentified illness, but, not the illness itself. In order to cure the illness, one must not stop at trying to temporarily remedy syndromes, and should seek instead to identify the hidden, seemingly indirect cause of the illness and trace it back to its origins, to the virus that has started it all. Applying this analogy to Egypt takes one step deeper and forces us to look beneath the observable effects of the commonly known symptoms.

Dr Galal Amin a renowned Egyptian economist argued that the root of our country's problems lies not in any human or financial capital deficiencies but rather in Egypt being a weak state, a state that is not able to implement and enforce its laws (Mourad). I personally find this argument appealing as it has become evident that the Egyptian community has been plagued by three C's; chaos, corruption and carelessness and all three can be argued to be the result of the absence of the rule of a fair, impartial and indiscriminate law. Chaos is highly observable on the Egyptian streets. Street vendors occupying large areas designated for public transport, minibuses blocking the traffic and more importantly old cars with faulty engines spreading poisonous exhausted are normal sights that are witnessed daily and can only indicate the absence of any form of law enforcement. Moreover, corruption inside municipalities and public offices has been institutionalised. The word bribery itself was replaced by more publicly accepted words such as tea, gift and tip that are commonly used to politely describe the bribery of public officials. As for carelessness, any random visit to a public facility whether that be a school, hospital or even an orphanage will expose the inhumane treatment and the absence of working ethics that have prevailed in most of not all of these places. Again, this can be attributed to the absence of monitoring and effective law enforcement. The question then becomes, why can't the state implement its laws? What makes Egypt a weak state?

I believe that the state is unable to apply its laws because it chooses to apply them discriminately on some sectors of the society, mainly the working and lower class, especially those who are not connected and do not enjoy any patronage, while turning a blind eye towards the business elites, police officers, military generals, judges, ambassadors and any sector that is included in the

composition of the ruling elites. This differential treatment and inequality of citizens against the rule of law is what causes most Egyptians to regard laws as tools of oppression and means of forcefully collecting money for a government that does not offer them in return any services or protection, instead of regarding them as tools for regulating civilian life and maintaining public order. In Egypt, which is ranked 110<sup>th</sup> globally in the ease of starting up a business, a solid indicator of the widespread of crony capitalism, getting things done is unfortunately a matter of who you know, not what you know (Abe).

In any society the organisation that is required to enforce the law is the police. In Egypt police officers usually do not apply these laws on agents of the ruling regime whether inside or outside government and their cronies, in addition to their colleagues in the security apparatus, they constitute a diverse yet highly consolidated group of untouchables, a group that is able to do as it wills and still escapes the punishment. From a philosophical and a psychological point of view, even if the abstract law aims to spread justice, its differential application will only result in spreading the opposite; that is the sore feeling of injustice that will eventually lead disfranchised sectors to adopt all necessary measures to dodge this law whenever possible. Thus it is neither the lack of civilisation, nor the inherent tendency of the population to disrespect the law that weakened the state, but rather it is applying the law on some but not the others. This further narrows down the search for a definitive answer of what is the main problem in Egypt. Now we just have to know why this group of untouchables was formed in the first place. Because if the real problem behind the absence of the rule of law was the domination of the ruling authoritarian regime over all state institutions, then the remedy to this problem would be to free these co-opted institutions from the powerful grip of the regime. There for, understanding how this grip was established, and how the regime itself was able to survive all these years in the first place, is crucial to figure out how to weaken the regime, in order to strengthen the state. As Samer Soliman argued in his book *The Autumn of Dictatorship* that Egypt has a weak state a strong regime, a regime that feeds on the state wealth and has sustained itself past its decaying time, through extending its control over all state institutions, to the extent that the line separating state institutions from regime agents presiding over them is not visible anymore. At the moment, the two very different terms regime and state are used interchangeably which indicates how grave the regime has succeeded in deforming the public conscience.

The regime that is governing Egypt at the moment can be attributed and traced back to the origination of what is called the Officers Republic, that had its seed sown 60 years ago by the free officers' movement. The domination of military officers over civilian posts and the subsequent militarization of the Egyptian cabinet that followed the rise of Free Officers to power in 1952 was what paved the road for the security apparatus hegemony over the economic and political arteries of the country (Sayigh). After their rise to power, despite enjoying periods of public support, the free officers lacked legitimacy; they relied on their monopoly of violence to sustain their rule. Moreover, instead of reforming state institutions

to enhance its performance, they infiltrated them in an attempt to establish total control. The military domination over civil posts did not stop ever since, leading to proliferation of generals in posts that do not relate to their areas specialisations. At the moment, senior retired officers are granted bureaucratic posts ranging from monitoring agencies to municipalities and even in ministries such as the ministry of environment where their security background will not be of added value, leading to poor management, low performance and the institutionalisation of nepotism as promotion became based on personal relations instead of being based on merit and performance (Magd). This military domination has resulted in increased corruption, as officers are now assigned posts in the army, in the ministries, in the public sector, and in the agencies supposed to be monitoring all of the previous like the administrative monitoring authority and the central auditing agency. This domination was intentional, an attempt to solidify the grip of the authoritarian regimes that governed Egypt over the past 60 years with the same tactics but with different names under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. Now is the time to reverse this domination process that has created a state within the state and made most members of the public strive to become members of the entourage of security personnel in order to gain their protection and be safe from their harm. This regime has grown in both power and size over time and succeeded in infiltrating all state institutions including those concerned with law enforcement, making the law a tool in the hand of the regime, not a check up on it.

To sum up, the main problem in Egypt is that ever since the intrusion of military officers in civilian affairs, the security apparatus has been controlling both the political and economic spheres of the country. Politically, only those who are connected and who are aligned with the state were allowed to participate in the democratic facade, while others were rounded up. Economically, most of the major posts of the state are assigned to retired officers who with no adequate training gain social and financial benefits in addition their pensions as a reward for their political acquiescence during their time of service. This domination of the security apparatus has spread the culture that connections and cronyism are valued more than merit and qualifications, and has transformed the police from an entity that is entitled to protect the public into an entity that solely protects the regime.

Getting back to the first question, what is to be done? All members of the society need to be equal under the rule of law. This equality must be achieved, prior to any legal reform, for as long as there is injustice; laws are not going to be respected. Achieving the rule of law requires strong political will from the executive branch: it must withdraw all financial benefits and moral rewards from the security apparatus and to revoke all laws that aim to buy their loyalty rather than enhancing their performance. It must also start a decentralisation process through which state institutions will act independently of the incumbent politicians to ensure the neutrality of the state. A determined legislature will also be needed, not to draft new laws as Egypt has plenty of them, but to revise legislation concerning state owned enterprises in order to ensure that promotion is to be based on merit rather than favouritism and nepotism. In addition, the state should remove its control

over economic sectors that aims not to regulate the market or to encourage its growth but rather to ensure political acquiescence; for example the banking sector needs to be reformed in order to stop the politicisation of the loan granting process. Deregulation of tightly state-controlled economic sectors, accompanied by the withdrawal of the military from the economic sphere to focus exclusively on national security, will help end the alarming phenomena of crony capitalism that breaks the trust of potential investors, no matter how attractive the incentives for investment that the government tries to offer. Most importantly, the executive branch must be separated from other state institutions, and the ministry of interior must be restructured and granted independence from the executive branch to ensure it functions as a tool for protecting the public, not coercing them. For the ministry of interior is like the white blood cells in the body, they are not controlled by the brain and must be kept at proportionate size, or else its unnecessary expansion will change it from a guard against disease into a disease in itself. The same applies for the police, if it increased in size without need, it transforms into a social cancer, just like the biological leukaemia. As for youth's groups, they should organise and form a pressure group to urge the government to start the reform process. This should be done through planned and coordinated organisation, not random protests and violence.

Apply the law equally to everyone, and everyone shall respect the law. Egypt will not move forward as long as one class oppresses the other: our country can only move together as one. Will the next president fight for establishing equality, or will he try to maintain this injustice in order to gain the services of the security apparatus on his side? Only time can tell.

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