

EGYPT IMBROGLIO

FROM MUBARAK TO EL-SISI VIA

Jayantha Dhanapala assesses the state of politics in Egypt and laments the impact it is

In marked contrast to the vibrant exercise of democracy in India recently, a military coup toppled a controversial but democratically elected government in Thailand – an Asian Buddhist country with which Sri Lanka has ancient bonds and shared traditions. Worse still, an election was held between 26 and 28 May in Egypt – a founder member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) – resulting in recently retired Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Abdel Fattah el-Sisi securing an incredible 96.9 percent of the votes, in which only 47.5 percent of eligible voters cast their vote.

In LMD's September 2013 edition, I wrote about the 3 July 2013 coup which deposed the democratically elected President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. It said: "Much now depends on the Interim Government and its ability to pave the way for fresh elections, when a genuinely representative government will emerge. The Muslim Brotherhood must also change and settle for a compromise, and for reconciliation in the larger interests of the stability and prosperity of Egypt and its people."

BETRAYAL OF HOPES

Nothing of the sort happened. The betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the predominantly youthful protesters at Tahrir Square is now complete.

Financed (to the tune of an estimated US\$ 12 billion) by the monarchies of Saudi Arabia and others in the Gulf with medieval



mindsets, and secretly encouraged by the Islamophobic US (despite its opportunistic alliance with Al-Qaeda, in Syria) and the EU, former presidents Hosni Mubarak and Morsi languished in jail, while the new strongman el-Sisi consolidated his position.

Stability was the watchword, as the army stole the clothes of the revolutionaries, pledging freedom and social justice – the slogans of the 2011 revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood was banned, and 528 of its members sentenced to death. US-based Democracy International and

the European Union's Election Observation Mission – who were among the election monitors – released preliminary reports that criticised the political climate and its impact on the outcome of the election. Former US President Jimmy Carter was more direct, in saying: "I am gravely concerned that Egypt's democratic transition has faltered."

All the while, Israel has remained the winner, as the Arab world continues to self-destruct. Now, the only positive sign of Palestinian resistance to the systematic consolidation

of occupied Palestinian territory is the unity Government between Hamas and Fatah, grudgingly accepted even by the US.

Isolated, Israel has mounted a fierce opposition to this, and rejected all talks on Palestine. The tragedy is that the only country that could have provided credible leadership for the Arabs to support the Palestinians was Egypt. That opportunity is lost for the moment, as Egypt tries to refurbish its credentials.

After his election victory, el-Sisi tried to reaffirm his

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TAHRIR SQUARE

having on the Middle East and beyond



CAIRO'S NEW ORDER? Egyptians celebrate in Cairo's Tahrir Square on 3 June, after ex-army chief Abdel Fattah el-Sisi won 96.9 percent of the vote in Egypt's presidential election. The new President urged his countrymen to work to restore stability and achieve "freedom" and "social justice," in a speech following the election. El-Sisi was sworn in as Egypt's President on 8 June.

democratic intentions, severing his connections with past military dictatorships.

FORMIDABLE FORCE Since Tahrir Square was the vortex of the aspirations of Egypt's youth, it is relevant to cite the 2010 Human Development Report of the UNDP on Youth in Egypt.

According to that report, Egypt's youth can be a formidable force for development, if conditions for an inclusive society (where all young Egyptians feel valued and are afforded opportunities to learn, find decent work, have a voice, engage productively in the community, afford marriage and establish their own homes)

are put in place. That is unlikely to happen with el-Sisi.

In a report issued recently, the US-based Carter Centre expressed concerns about "the restrictive political and legal context surrounding Egypt's electoral process, the lack of a genuinely competitive campaign environment and the deep political polarisation that threatens the country's transition."

That context is highlighted by the trial of three Al Jazeera English-language journalists – Baher Mohamed, Peter Greste and Mohammed Fahmy – who have been imprisoned since December on charges of

broadcasting false news and providing a platform for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. An international campaign is on to secure their release.

Al Jazeera is the widely influential Qatar-based TV network, and the prosecution of the journalists must be viewed in the context of the Saudi-Qatar rivalry in the Middle East.

It is understandable that Egypt's current leaders don't want the religious extremism of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially with minorities like the Coptic Christians who comprise 10 percent of the population. However, policies of repression will not help,

especially in the declining economic conditions the country faces. It will also affect the international initiatives that depended on Egypt for leadership.

LEADERSHIP VACUUM NAM, G77 and non-nuclear weapon states in the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) regime are crying for leadership at this juncture of international affairs. The new Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, alone, cannot fill the vacuum of leadership in the Global South.

Samir Amin – the distinguished Egyptian economist and author of the Centre-Periphery thesis, who heads an African think tank in Dakar, Senegal – recently wrote imploring NAM to reinvent itself.

Drawing lessons from the past, he wrote: "We have the right to choose our own path of development. The powers that were and are the beneficiaries of the existing order should accept to adjust themselves to the requirements of our development. The adjustment must be mutual, not unilateral. It is not the weak who have to adjust to the strong, but rather the strong need to adjust to the needs of the weak... We reject the tenets of globalisation that are currently in place."

In the context of disarmament, Egypt led the charge in 2010, which helped NAM achieve a strong Final Declaration at the NPT Review Conference, emphasising the need for progress in the Middle East as a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone.

With the next conference due in 2015, NAM is leaderless to protest over the inaction on this issue caused by Israeli obstructionism.

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