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**Sent:** Monday, February 4, 2013 4:49 PM  
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Egypt's Hard Economic Choices

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The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs

An Interview with James A. Baker, =ormer Secretary of State

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Article 1.

The Economist

Egypt: to the=barricades, again

Feb 2nd 2013 -- WIT= angry crowds across the nation baying against him, Egypt's president wagged his finger at the people in a late-night televised speech. He declared a curfew for some cities, he called for support for the police, he deployed the army to the streets. Seemingly as an afterthought, he added a conciliatory call for dialogue with his political opponents.

As on January 28th 2011, so on January 27th 2013. As with President Hosni Mubarak, so with President Muhammad Morsi. And in both cases to little effect. After both televised addresses vast throngs gleefully defied the curfew, freshly deployed soldiers ignored the revellers and the head of the army warned of a collapsing state, prompting rumours of an imminent coup. Opposition leaders demanded a government of national unity. Ordinary citizens braced for the unknown.

The drama that has been unfolding since January 25th, the anniversary of the beginning of the uprising which toppled Mr Mubarak two years ago, would have looked peculiarly familiar even without the eerily precise coincidence of the dates. Some are tempted to see the similarities carried through to the outcome, hoping that Mr Morsi, a stalwart of the Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's first freely elected president, will soon fall too. "It is amazing how history accelerates," was the catty remark of a prominent defector from the Brotherhood. "Morsi has got to the point Mubarak reached after 30 years in just six months."

Forbidding ways of custom

But though the situation may seem similar, the country itself has changed a great deal since what was at the time seen as a revolution (many shy from the term today). Egypt's economy has foundered dangerously in the absence of firm government policy. Politics has polarised between an ostensibly empowered Islamist camp and a disgruntled, alienated or outright hostile minority that includes much of the educated, urban elite. Amid this mess, fearful for the future and dispirited by haggling politicians, most Egyptians have little appetite for another big upheaval. The army, which stepped in to shunt Mr Mubarak aside and then lingered too long, is reluctant to dirty its hands again.

The young hotheads at the heart of today's protests might like nothing more than to see Mr Morsi forced into an ignominious, Mubarak-like exit. But the broader demand is for him to change, not to go—to act more like a leader for all Egyptians and less like a front man for the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood has shed much of the appeal that won it various recent elections and tentatively protected it against doubts, not least among foreign powers, about Islamist rule. At home its cult of secrecy, hazy pan-Islamic agenda and sense that it rules by entitlement now provoke suspicion and resentment even among many fellow Islamists.

Whatever its specific focus, the mounting unrest presents an increasingly dangerous challenge to Egypt's battered and creaking state. There would have been protests to mark the anniversary anyway, but the sentencing to death of 21 football fans from Port Said on January 26th wound them up to a new level of intensity. Football fans have been among the most eager activists; the judgment on the fans from Port Said, who were held responsible for the deaths of 72 people at a game in Cairo last year, sent a crowd swarming to the prison where they were kept. Panicked police opened fire, killing 30 people. They fired again at the mass funeral of those victims, killing yet more. The mix of seemingly twisted justice—the people of Port Said think their fans are being scapegoated—brutally unaccountable police and haughty disdain for working-class provincials revived precisely the rage that fuelled revolution two years ago.

Rioters have disrupted trains and traffic. Arsonists have attacked buildings used by the government and the Brotherhood. Three big cities on the Suez Canal, Egypt's prime strategic asset, are in a state of defiant, if largely peaceful, insurrection. Radical Islamists and secularists accuse each other of forming armed militias, an ominous development.

The country is sending Mr Morsi a loud message about the need for political inclusiveness. The question is whether Mr Morsi and the Brothers are listening.

Two years, two stories

When Egyptians of all classes and persuasions united against their dictator of three decades in 2011, the call was for bread, freedom and dignity. The results under all three headings have been mixed and each gain has come at a price. The brief unity is long since gone; accounts of what happened to it, and to the country, depend strongly on who is telling them.

The version favoured by Islamists is a saga of success. Founded in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood endured decades of suppression. Drawing inspiration from a wide range of hierarchical institutions, from the Boy Scouts to the Communist Party, the Brothers worked assiduously to spread a culture of resistance to Western influence.

Their message, expanded by a disciplined network, resonated more and more under Mr Mubarak. Faith provided solace and strength in the face of poverty and political repression. And Mr Mubarak allowed the Brotherhood just scope enough to spook Western powers, who could reliably be worried by Islamist bogeymen. This cynical ploy gave the Brotherhood a level of political experience no other opposition to Mr Mubarak could match.

The temporary military rulers who followed Mr Mubarak saw the Brotherhood as a partner capable of harnessing the Egyptian "street" while subject to the sort of discipline with which military men feel comfortable. They took its advice when crafting their transition plan—which, promoted by Islamists as a vote for the faith, was passed with a thumping 77% majority in March 2011. This plan deferred the drafting of a constitution, calling first for parliamentary elections: parliament would then select a constituent assembly to write a constitution. Once that had been written, Egypt could hold a presidential election.

Aware of its electoral advantage, the Brotherhood initially promised to run for only a third of parliamentary seats. But it changed its mind, and the elections of December 2011 to January 2012 gave the Brothers 47% of seats. To widespread surprise Salafist parties, representing an even more conservative Islamist tendency, claimed nearly a quarter of the vote. "We have tried socialism and capitalism," was the simple refrain voiced widely in Egypt's sprawling slums and villages, "so why not try Islam?" In many constituencies voters had no other choice. Secular parties had little reach outside cities, and could certainly not match the Islamists' provision of charity, cheap goods and useful services. They scarcely bothered to compete for seats in the Shura Council, the weak upper parliamentary house, which was elected on a tiny turnout in February 2012.

Understandably, the Islamists saw parliamentary elections as a vindication of their claim to represent Egypt's silent majority. But as the new parliament, well stocked with what many educated Egyptians regarded as bearded yokels, fell into bickering and grandstanding, a backlash began to build. The generals, still in power until the June 2012 election of a new president, began to share fears, felt deeply by Egypt's Christian minority and also by the country's entrenched establishment, that the Islamists' agenda could prove dangerously divisive. Courts dismissed the parliament's first choice of a 100-person constituent assembly, ostensibly on technical grounds but really, it appears, because it was seen as insufficiently representative of non-Islamists. Though the constitution was delayed, the army decided presidential elections should go ahead regardless.

When the Brotherhood broke an earlier promise not to run a presidential candidate, the army-appointed elections board disqualified its first choice, Khairat al-Shater, a businessman seen as the group's intellectual strongman. Mr Morsi, its reserve candidate, was a professor of engineering known for unquestioning loyalty to the Brotherhood's "guidance bureau".

Despite the Brotherhood's powerful and well financed machine, Mr Morsi garnered just 25% of the vote; more than any other candidate, but a lot less than expected. Overall, non-Islamist candidates captured a slim majority. But the one among them with the most votes, and thus Mr Morsi's second-round opponent, was Ahmed Shafiq, a suave air-force officer and a minister under Mr Mubarak—a past that many non-Islamists could not stomach. Their votes were crucial in giving Mr Morsi his eventual narrow win. To soothe their fears, Mr Morsi resigned from the Freedom and Justice

Some lurking right

Mr Shater, a heavy-set veteran of Mr Mubarak's prisons, is widely seen as more powerful than the prime minister. The Brothers' chief foreign-affairs spokesman, Essam Haddad, in effect bypasses the foreign ministry to conduct international relations. Their most senior economist, Hassan Malek, a rich businessman, exercises a powerful influence on economic policy behind the scenes. Mr Morsi has inserted Brothers as provincial governors and ministerial under-secretaries while seeking to widen his powers of appointment in the courts, the state-owned banks, and the trade unions. At the same time he has needlessly offended other constituencies, for example by neglecting to attend the enthronement of a new Coptic pope.

On the other hand

The revolution's descent into a power grab is the other way of telling the story of the past two years. This counternarrative to Islamist triumphalism is often ascribed to "secular opinion", but it is more broadly held than that phrase would imply. People who see things

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