

Letter from Egypt 6

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What's happening in Egypt and why?

Monday November 21, 2011

Greetings Friends.

I am sure you have been following what has been taking place in Egypt these last few days but just in case you have not, here is a summary of events and some background.

Current Clashes and Violence:

- The economic and political situation in Egypt has been gradually worsening over the last months and the future seems to be more like the Mubarek regime's rule than any improvement. The ruling power, the Military Council, has made attempts to "govern" and move toward elections, but not having experience in the political arena and having significant self interest in keeping all their perks, financial assets, companies, and independence, they have behaved in such a manner as to stir discontent among almost all Egyptians. Consequently, numerous demonstrations have occurred all during this period with no effective results. The dissatisfaction and tension has been building and finally erupted last Friday.
- During the day last Friday, November 18, the Islamists, Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists, plus others, called for and held a large demonstration in Tahrir Square in Cairo. It was one of the larger demonstrations but drew only several hundred thousand people. Their message was clear: that the Military Council must relinquish power to a civilian government as soon as possible and then themselves submit to that civilian government. The demonstration was peaceful and without incident.
- Friday night most of the protesters left the Square but **some remained behind** in order to secure the area for an ongoing presence to enhance the message. Many of these were family members of those killed in the January and February demonstrations which led to Mubarek's resignation. After Mubarek resigned and passed his power over to the Military Council, the demonstrators all left the square and, in doing so, relinquished the area to the Military Council. This exiting of Tahrir Square has made it difficult to again enter Tahrir Square and continue to use this very important symbolic space as a place to "speak" to the powers that be, namely, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, as the Military Council is officially called. These demonstrations are the only "voice" the people of Egypt have. To date there is no elected body in all of Egypt. Only the Military Council which has all the ruling power and all the weapons.
- Friday night the Riot Police, as ordered by the Ministry of the Interior (appointed by the Council), came into the Square and tried to forcefully remove the protesters who remained and were putting up their tents. Tents are an indication of the intent to stay for a longer time. From the perspective of the protesters, securing the Square was important because they knew more messages needed to be made clear to the Military Council.
- Friday night, the clash between the protesters and the Riot Police began violently with the police shooting and beating protesters as they attempted to forcefully evict the relatively few that were in the Square. The protesters did retreat into the

surrounding streets only to return once the police left the Square. In the meantime, the word went out to others all over Egypt that this conflict had turned violent with a few deaths and many injured in Tahrir Square. In the minds of the people presence in mass numbers in Tahrir and similar locations in other larger cities throughout the country is the “only” means of making their demands known. Beginning Friday night with the violent aggression by the police which has continued into today, anger is not only being vented but is also increasing rapidly. As things got worse, more and more protesters joined in the demonstrations not only in Cairo but also in Alexandria to the northwest, in the Suez to the east, and in Aswan to the south. Now Egypt is a boiling pot of anger which most likely will not cool for some time. The violence will continue and spread throughout the country until their demands are met. Many will die and very many will be injured.

What are their demands?

- the immediate resignation of the Supreme Council (which by the way are all from Mubarek’s regime),
- a timetable for the speedy relinquishing of power by the Supreme Council to an elected civilian government, and
- those responsible for the current violence be identified and prosecuted.

The Egyptian *AlMasry AlYoum* online news stated it as demanding that the Military Council publish “a timeline (and) include the start of parliamentary elections next week as scheduled, followed by the formation of a national government by the newly elected parliament, then presidential elections in April 2012 to ensure that the ruling military council passes both legislative and executive powers to elected civilians by next May (2012).” According to the Supreme Council’s current timetable, the next cabinet will be appointed by the Council and a presidential election will not be held before 2013. This means that the Military Council will remain in power at least until 2013 and it sounds like the newly elected Parliament will have little governing to do.

A little background giving rise to this anger in Egypt.

This past summer a statement was published by one of the Cabinet members appointed by the Military Council as “supra constitutional principles” which would be included in any new Constitution created by the new Parliament. In that document it stated that the Military Council intends to incorporate protective measures in any new Constitution which would preserve special powers for the military after the handover to civilian rule. Also, these protective measures would give the military veto power not only over a new constitution but also prevent any scrutiny of their budget. As it is stated, such action would create a “military state” within a civilian state which would be dominant over the civilian government. Any elected government would be subservient to the military. That translates into a military state even worse than that of the Mubarek’s regime.

Given all of the above, the hard won Revolution and accompanying freedom of January and February where over 600 died in the protests, would be lost. All of this unrest has been simmering and has finally come to the surface as the same Revolution of January but has created a “stage 2” going on now throughout Egypt. The January phase of the Revolution was too costly to retreat now. This current stage may be even more costly, but there are sufficient numbers of Egyptians who are willing to “die for their country and their freedom” to continue on until a new freely elected government is installed. How long this will take remains to be seen. I personally know of some individuals who are involved in this struggle

and they have told me they do not want to return to the tyranny and fear of the past. They are in this to the death. God be with them. Let us give thanks for our freedoms and follow Egyptians with prayer.

These facts and reflections are derived from my conversations with Egyptians over the past month while I was in Cairo, from current online conversations with friends there, from my ongoing research of any news sources I can peruse in English in Egypt as well as worldwide sources, and from my own thoughts given what I know.

If you have any comments, questions, or suggestions regarding these updates and their content, you are welcome to write me at mapevas@gmail.com. Let us all hold all our friends in trust and prayer.