

Egypt When all Masks Fall

Bassma Kodmani

ARI's Executive Director

The Egyptian showdown on this second Friday since the launch of the movement is both dramatic and fascinating: Dramatic because the lives of young peaceful demonstrators are now exposed and some have already been lost. These youngsters were out to express frustration in a civic manner. Once they were confronted with violence from mobs of thugs who in the name of security were ordered to savagely assault them, they were confronted with a very different set of options: were they prepared to use violence, to risk their lives and to expose entire neighbourhoods to insecurity? Had they prepared a set of demands other than asking for the departure of Mubarak? Did they connect with any existing political groups and did they have in mind a scenario for the future? Their current behaviour, their refusal to be controlled by any existing force is a reason for pride and they should be encouraged to continue as only pressure from the street can impose concessions on the interim leaders to start dismantling the tentacles of authoritarianism.

But the showdown is also fascinating in that it suddenly brought to the surface all of the existing forces of the authoritarian system which were so far mostly opaque and secretive. They now stand all on one scene as if this was the final act of a play that everyone inside and outside Egypt was waiting for. They are each having to define their relationship to society and testing their true role within the power system. From the president to the government, the security forces, the army, the ruling party, the business community. Each of these forces is now making the fateful choices that will determine their future.

While the jockeying and competing between them is not new, they now have to integrate this brand new player, the ordinary Egyptian people, in their calculations, and choose the way in which they want to relate to the real Egypt in the years to come. In moments of truth, individuals begin to make their own choices based on their conscience and true nature. Key businessmen are not following their peers in supporting Mubarak and in financing the assault of the thugs on the demonstrators, and have sided instead with the opposition figures who are working on a political formula for a political transition; members of the ruling party are defecting; rich families have fled the country; military leaders are said to be divided. The ruling elite warned about the advent of chaos if it yielded power, and claimed it was holding the wolf by the ears. The wolf in its mind meant the society but it turns out that the society is much more civic than the leadership. It is now the people's turn to hold the real wolf by the ears to prevent it from reasserting its control of power.

- This month read our policy briefs: ["The Political Regime in Tunisia at a Crossroads"](#) by Salah Eddin Jorshi, ["Egypt: Before and After"](#) by Virginie Collombier, and ["The Political Future of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt Following its Exit from Parliament"](#), by Hossam Tammam (also in Arabic)

- And have a look at our latest interviews with [Bassima Hakkaoui](#) and [Asma Khoder](#) about Women and Reform (also in Arabic).