



**CDFAI**

CANADIAN DEFENCE & FOREIGN AFFAIRS INSTITUTE

# **A President Soon? Where is Egypt Heading To?**

by Ferry de Kerckhove  
May, 2012



# POLICY PAPER

---

## **A President Soon? Where is Egypt Heading To?**

by Ferry De Kerckhove

CDFAI Fellow

May, 2012



Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute  
1600, 530 – 8th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 3S8  
[www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org)

©2012 Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute  
ISBN: 978-0-9737870-4-7



If one reflects on the last 18 months of tumultuous events in Egypt, one can identify three phases of the Arab Spring: First, the well-known series of events leading to the demise of the old regime, the so-called 18 days revolution from January 25 to February 11, 2011; second, an emerging, partially democratic, phase of legitimacy with a new – majority Islamist – Parliament, from February 11, 2011 to February 26, 2012; and what is likely the third phase, with the end of transition – hopefully by June 30 – and the transfer of executive power to a democratically elected President. The key question is simple: will it really be the end of a turbulent 18 month transition and will the subsequent period be more stable, more predictable, with a level playing field as a much more profound and longer term transition phase opens up?

The end of the first phase, once Mubarak is for all practical purposes “deposed” by the military, corresponds to the formal takeover of power by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Phase two is marked by the strange coexistence between a democratically elected Parliament and a military executive flanked by a lame civilian government.

The SCAF’s initial measure focusses on 8 essential changes to the Constitution to allow democratic presidential and legislative elections with, however, little clarity on the sequencing of these as the military had not made up their minds as to what would be more beneficial for them both in terms of protecting their interests and easing them back to the barracks. The proposed changes touched upon enlarging the eligibility criteria for the presidential elections, two-mandate limitation, and better judiciary supervision of the elections.

It then dawns upon the secular revolutionaries that a) the proximity of the elections plays in the hands of the Islamist forces and b) none of the proposed constitutional changes guarantees a secular/civilian state. The March 19, 2011 referendum on the proposed changes pits the overwhelming Islamist “yes” (75%) against the weak secular forces of the “no” (25%) and thus at once opens up the most formidable divide in the Egyptian society.

In the ensuing weeks and months leading to the legislative elections, the well-organized Muslim Brotherhood (MB) will prove to the world that it is the main force in the country, only to be outdone at times by the Salafists who, in a span of six months, mutated from a disparate battered group into a major extremist force.

Realizing that Egypt’s institutions would likely become deeply entrenched into an authoritarian Islamic theocracy, the secular forces continued to demand the adoption of a new constitution, or at least fundamental constitutional principles agreed to by all parties and to be enacted prior to the elections. Despite the support for a secular, democratic State by Grand Sheikh Tayeb of Al Azhar, the pre-eminent institute of Islamic teaching in the Sunni World, the MB, while paying lip service to the Grand Sheikh’s Charter, continues to call for an Islamic basis of the State. The gap widens.

Instability becomes pervasive; the economy spins downwards; the powerless civilian government is increasingly ineffective and, despite the forthcoming elections, demonstrations continue; violence increases and the authorities respond with more force – e.g. the Copts’ march of October 9th, the burning of the famous “Institut d’Égypte” in December, and the horrifically deadly Port-Said football match of February 1st 2012.

Yet, in the midst of poor preparations, sectarian intimidations, violent demonstrations and brutal repression, the elections take place in relative calm and with limited fraud. But the results



confirm the triumph of the Islamist forces with over 70% of the seats (MB 46%; Salafists 25%). Democracy won the day but the secular forces' loss will likely be the defining result of the Egyptian Spring for years to come.

Phase three is all about the forthcoming presidential elections and the return of the military to the barracks. The success of the Islamists in the legislative elections may not necessarily translate into victory at the executive level. Indeed, the MB's renegeing on the commitment not to present a candidate for the Presidential elections, coupled with the disqualification of their star candidate Khairat al-Shater and his replacement by low profile Mohamed Morsi has created a dent in their reputation – some speak of a crisis within the MB. That crisis is underscored by the fact that the MB dissident Abdel Moneim Aboul Foutouh – who declared his candidacy at a time when his party opposed presenting a candidate – continues to enjoy a lot of popularity. But his falling-out with the MB could cost him the presidency. What is unclear is where the support of the Salafists will go now that their own candidate has been disqualified: Foutouh or Morsi? Party officials have endorsed Morsi but what if there is a second round? In all likelihood, support will go towards whoever is closer to the Islamist tenets of governance.

On the secular side, there is first and foremost the very popular former Secretary General of the Arab League and former Foreign Minister of Mubarak, Amr Moussa, going strong at 75, whose road to glory includes a stellar stint as Foreign Minister under Mubarak, a forceful helm as Secretary General of the Arab League with consistently harsh positions against Israel. He should get at least 25% in the first ballot. In second comes General Ahmed Shafik, close associate of former President Mubarak but on the other side of the Gamal clique. His disqualification has been reversed and despite his association with the previous regime, he benefits from a solid reputation as a manager in addition to being a very likeable character.

While there are other valuable candidates, none has achieved sufficient drawing power to be still in the race if there is a run-off ballot – most likely.

So where is Egypt going?

On the plus side for the future, the quality of the Parliamentary elections stands out and allows us to believe the presidential elections will be held with the same fairness. This is not to say that the military have not played a major role in ensuring the process serves them in the end. A run-off between Amr Moussa and Abdel Moneim Aboul Foutouh would suit them perfectly: either a solid, respected secular man who embodies the Egyptian nation past and present, or a dissident Islamist who would break the complete monopoly of the MB. The only question here is how the populace will react to the results. Will Tahrir Square be occupied once again? Never count the capacity of Egyptians to bring their sorrow, angst, or anger to that famous square now that all the safety valves have been blown away.

Then there is the question of the new Constitution supposedly to be drafted by a “Committee of the 100” selected by the Parliament and mandated to produce a new text within six months of its designation. Again the MB overplayed their hand by trying to control the nomination procedure and provoking massive protests from various groups, ultimately leading to the cancellation of the selection process by the Constitutional Court. The next stage is unknown but there is an agreement that full consensus must prevail. A new Constitution will not be ready by the time of the second round of the Presidential elections and thus the extent of the powers of the President will have to be decided subsequent to his election. Whoever is elected president will have an



impact on the powers the “Founders” will grant him. Stay tuned for another referendum! This uncertainty is one of the factors that undermine the whole transition process.

The record on the military – the SCAF – is mixed: successful elections, very poor on human rights and somewhat abysmal on poverty alleviation and very weak on the economy where it not for the “rentier” side of the economy - the Suez Canal, remittances, tourism (albeit at less than 50%), and the oil and gas sector. But then, until the armed forces return to the barracks, Egypt’s regime is, and will remain, a military administration, as amply demonstrated by the SCAF’s secretive, non-consultative decision-making process. The only thing going for them is that it could have been worse! And when they leave, the lines on the sand will have been drawn and they will manage to extract a) exoneration for all and any act or decision by the SCAF; b) some degree of continued control over some of their economic assets; and c) full control on the military budget, including its secrecy. And more broadly, they will continue to play a role in the political life of the country, somewhere between that of their counterparts in Turkey and Pakistan.

History will be the ultimate judge of the success of the Egyptian revolution. While nearly 1000 Egyptians died as a direct result of the convulsions of their country, their sacrifice has not been in vain and we should all pay tribute to them. There are uncertainties and misgivings about the democratic fiber of the Muslim Brotherhood and more concerns about the Salafists – although we tend sometime to ignore the number of different undercurrents to their movement. But Egypt is unique. Its culture and its history might help the country go through more travails and pains on the road to democracy. The historical – if sometime battered of late - sense of humour of the Egyptians should prevail in the end and the new freedom of speech has added substance and hope to the unending discussions around a chicha in all the cafés of the country.

And Canada should pay attention to history in the making in one of the most turbulent regions of the world.

## ► About the Author

---

**Ferry De Kerckhove** was born in Belgium in 1947. After attending secondary school Graduate I in France, he did his military service in 1965-66 (2nd Lieutenant Tanks). He has a B.Soc. Sc. Honours in Economics, an M.A. in Political Science from the University of Ottawa and pursued Ph.D. Studies at Laval University in Québec City. Mr. de Kerckhove has published several papers on international relations as well as on the relationship between the Muslim world and the West in specialized journals.

After working as an intern at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Mr. de Kerckhove became a Researcher at the Québec Centre for International Relations and then later headed up the International Security Section at the Canadian Institute for International Affairs (Québec section).

In September 1973, Mr. de Kerckhove entered the Canadian Foreign Service. After a stint in European Affairs, he was posted as Third Secretary to the Canadian Embassy in Tehran. When Mr. de Kerckhove returned to Canada in 1976, he became Assistant Secretary, Inter-Departmental Committee on External Relations then moved to East European Affairs (Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania). From 1978 to 1981, he was responsible for Canada-France relations. From 1981 to 1985, he was Economic Counsellor at the Canadian Delegation to NATO.

Back in Canada, Mr. de Kerckhove became Deputy Director of the Political and Strategic Analysis Division, then Director of the Economic and Trade Analysis Division in the Policy Planning Bureau. In 1989, he became Director, Economic Relations with Developing Countries Division. In September 1992, he was posted to Moscow as Minister and Deputy Head of Mission.

Mr. de Kerckhove returned to Ottawa in September 1995 to become Associate Chief Air Negotiator. In January 1996, he became Deputy Head of the Policy Branch and Director-General, Federal-Provincial Relations in Foreign Affairs and International Trade. He remained in this position until being named Canada's High Commissioner to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in August 1998. He spent three years in Islamabad. On September 13, 2001, Mr. Ferry de Kerckhove presented his credentials as Ambassador to the Republic of Indonesia. He was also accredited to Timor Leste.

Mr. de Kerckhove returned to Ottawa in September 2003 and joined the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa as a Canadian Center for Management Development Diplomat in Residence.

On August 9th, 2004, he returned to the Department of Foreign Affairs and became Director General, International Organizations. In July 2006, he added to his responsibilities the function of Personal representative of the Prime Minister for Francophonie.

From September 10th 2008 to September 10 2011, Mr. de Kerckhove was in Cairo as ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt.

He retired from the Foreign Service on September 23d, 2011.

## ► **Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute**

---

CDFAI is the only think tank focused on Canada's international engagement in all its forms - diplomacy, the military, aid and trade security. Established in 2001, CDFAI's vision is for Canada to have a respected, influential voice in the international arena based on a comprehensive foreign policy, which expresses our national interests, political and social values, military capabilities, economic strength and willingness to be engaged with action that is timely and credible.

CDFAI was created to address the ongoing discrepancy between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically, Canadians tend to think of foreign policy – if they think of it at all – as a matter of trade and markets. They are unaware of the importance of Canada engaging diplomatically, militarily, and with international aid in the ongoing struggle to maintain a world that is friendly to the free flow of goods, services, people and ideas across borders and the spread of human rights. They are largely unaware of the connection between a prosperous and free Canada and a world of globalization and liberal internationalism.

In all its activities CDFAI is a charitable, nonpartisan organization, supported financially by the contributions of foundations, corporations and individuals. Conclusions or opinions expressed in CDFAI publications and programs are those of the authors and speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute staff, fellows, directors, advisors, or any individuals or organizations that provide financial support to CDFAI.

