

EGYPT UPRISING

SETTING THE STAGE

A dramatic year

Mohammed Morsi's political career went from the best of times to the worst of times in just over a year. Egypt's first democratically elected civilian president won the mandate of the nation in the summer of 2012. A year later, Morsi was sent packing as the military puts its support behind a popular movement that claimed that the president's turbulent first year in office was taking Egypt on a downward trajectory that could ruin the nation.



Morsi's presidency

Mohammed Morsi rose to prominence after the Arab Spring swept through Egypt in 2011. Egyptian protests led to the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak, an authoritarian leader who ruled Egypt for almost 30 years. In the wake of his departure, several politicians emerged to try to fill the power vacuum Mubarak left behind. As the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Morsi found himself well positioned to assume the reigns of power. Accomplishing this wasn't easy. By the time, Egypt's national elections took place in June 2012, many different factions were vying for power. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood eventually set themselves up as front runners, winning a narrow election victory thanks to the backing of many of the nations moderates and liberals.

Morsi's mistakes

Once in power, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood made the mistake of assuming too much control. Morsi had promised to be a president for all Egyptians but he soon resorted to the unpopular tactic of granting himself powers that were beyond judicial oversight — a move that, for many, harkened back to the

The Arab Spring

Beginning in late 2010 as citizens of many nations in north Africa and the Middle East demanded change; calling for more democratic (and less authoritarian) forms of government.

Mubarak days. He also centralized power among his Muslim Brotherhood colleagues, leaving the rest of the nation to wonder if Egypt was about to become an Islamic state. However, the real straw that broke Morsi's political back came in his inability to deal with the nation's economic woes and to improve the lives of so many impoverished Egyptians.

Tamarod

All these things combined to create a recipe for regime change. A small non-violent, protest group called Tamarod scheduled a mass demonstration on the anniversary of Morsi's election victory. The response was stunning as 800 000 protestors took to the streets in Cairo alone to demand the president's resignation.

Morsi agreed that mistakes had been made but he refused to step down. Eventually, military leader General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi gave Morsi

48 hours to comply with the demands of the protesters and resign. When the president refused, al-Sisi and the army forcefully removed him from office. The majority of Egyptians celebrated the army's bold move.

Definition – TAMAROD

Translated from Arabic, *tamarod* means rebellion.

Tumultuous period

What followed was a tumultuous period that eventually led to a major clash between al-Sisi's armed forces and pro-Morsi protesters six weeks after the crisis began. Weary of two Muslim Brotherhood encampments in Cairo calling for the reinstatement of Morsi, the Egyptian army

was intent on breaking up the camps. They staged two raids that led to deaths of over 600 people (the Muslim Brotherhood put the number of killed closer to 3 000). Even with the camps destroyed, pro-Morsi protests continued to surface well into the fall of 2013.

What's next

Many wonder where Egypt is heading next. The worst-case scenario for Egypt would be a bloody descent into civil war. The best-case scenario would be the emergence of a form of governance that would bring the Egyptian people a degree of peace and prosperity. Which scenario will play out remains a matter of speculation.

To Consider

1. What made the election of Mohammed Morsi a "first" for Egypt?
2. How did Morsi assume power in Egypt?
3. What mistakes did Morsi make that cost him his grip on power?
4. What did General al-Sisi do to capture power? How did the majority of Egyptians respond to his assumption of power?
5. How did General al-Sisi handle opposition from the Muslim Brotherhood?
6. What are the best- and worst-case scenarios for Egyptians going forward?

VIDEO REVIEW

Pre-viewing

If the Canadian army were to conspire with a popular protest movement and oust a democratically elected government, people would cry foul at the inherent illegality of such a move. When the Egyptian army removed President Mohammed Morsi from office, the people chanted “The people and the Army are one hand” as they celebrated the change in regime. Morsi was the first democratically elected civilian president in the nation’s history and he had spent just one year in office.

1. Why do you think Canadian’s would cry foul if the military removed our prime minister from office?

2. What does the removal of Morsi from office say about the relationship between the Egyptian army and the Egyptian people?

3. Democracy is a very new concept for the Egyptian people. Do you think Egypt’s limited experience of democracy influenced their decision to turn their back on their elected leader?

While viewing

1. Why was Egypt ready for change when the Arab Spring arrived in late 2010?

2. How did President Hosni Mubarak handle opposition to his regime?

3. How long did the 2011 protests last before Mubarak stepped down?

4. What power shift signalled the end of Mubarak’s reign in what reporter Nahlah Ayed calls a “verbal coup d’état”?

5. Why was the joy expressed by protesters short-lived?

6. What is the name of the place that reporter Sasha Petricic refers to as the “iconic centre of Egypt’s revolution”?

7. a) Who became Egypt’s first civilian president?

b) What social concerns did Egyptians want their new president to address?

8. Why did Egyptians return to the streets on the second anniversary of the ousting of Hosni Mubarak?

9. How were the actions of the Egyptian military evidence of a “textbook military coup”?

10. a) Why were many Egyptians reluctant to call the actions of the military a coup?

b) What did they prefer to call the removal of Mohammed Morsi from office?

11. What does Egypt’s Ambassador to Canada mean when he says that introducing democracy to Egypt “is a process, not an event”?

Post-viewing

The Canadian military is responsible for national and regional defence as well as maintaining domestic stability in times of crisis (mapleleafweb.com). As an organization, the military follows the direction of the federal government. In Canada, the most powerful social institution is the government itself.

In Egypt, the military is the most powerful social institution. This is why you see Egyptians pleading with their army — not with their government — when they want change. In fact, General al-Sisi, after backing the anti-Morsi movement and ousting the president, claimed to be the guardian of the will of the people.

Do you think it is wise to allow the military play such a prominent role in the governing of a nation? What are the potential pitfalls of such a power structure?

CANADIANS IMPRISONED IN EGYPT

Minds on

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, over 1 600 Canadians are currently being held in foreign prisons. The vast majority of those incarcerated are being detained on legitimate charges and convictions. However, some Canadians are being unlawfully detained and it is the responsibility of Canadian diplomats to try to secure their release.

Work with a partner and answer the following questions:

1. What do you think the Canadian government can do to secure the release of people that they believe are being unlawfully detained?
2. What sanctions should the government impose if foreign nations are unwilling to release Canadians that our government believes are being held unjustly?

The Doctor and the Filmmaker

Dr. Tarek Loubani of London, Ontario, went overseas to help train emergency room doctors in Gaza. Filmmaker John Greyson of Toronto decided to document the physician's efforts. What started as a mission with the best of intentions turned into an absolute nightmare for the two Canadians.

Caught up in a raid

Loubani and Greyson were hoping to make their way to Gaza via Cairo, Egypt, but a raid by Egyptian authorities on a Muslim Brotherhood encampment just a few blocks from their hotel prevented this from happening. The Muslim Brotherhood was protesting the removal of President Mohammed Morsi from power by the Egyptian military some six weeks earlier. Curious about the altercation, Loubani and Greyson left the confines of their hotel and made their way a few blocks from where they were staying to witness the raid.

What they encountered was a brutally violent scene — one that put both men to work. Loubani began treating the wounded while Greyson

filmed the clash between the armed forces and Muslim Brotherhood protesters. The two men say they saw upwards of fifty people killed in the clash. When they tried to make their way back to their hotel, they were arrested and thrown into an Egyptian jail. Later, Egyptian authorities would claim that they conspired with members of the Muslim Brotherhood to attack a police station.

Held without charges

Loubani and Greyson were held without charges for 51 days. During that time they staged a 16-day hunger strike to draw attention to their plight. Meanwhile at home, friends and family rallied to raise awareness about the unlawful detention of the two men. They leveraged public pressure to convince Canada's Foreign Affairs personnel to secure Loubani and Greyson's release.

As the crisis wore on, many wondered how Canadian citizens could be held without charges for such a long period of time in a country that was considered to be an ally.

Life in prison

Thirty days into their captivity, Loubani and Greyson managed to get an account of their detainment to a friend who posted their story on his blog. They described life in a 3 metre by 10 metre cell with 36 other detainees “sleeping like sardines on concrete with the cockroaches; sharing a single tap of earthy Nile water.” They went on to say:

“...we were: arrested, searched, caged, questioned, interrogated, videotaped with a 'Syrian terrorist,' slapped, beaten, ridiculed, hot-boxed, refused phone calls, stripped, shaved bald, accused of being foreign mercenaries. Was it our Canadian passports, or the footage of Tarek performing CPR, or our ice cream wrappers that set them off? They screamed 'Canadian' as they kicked and hit us. John had a precisely etched footprint bruise on his back for a week.” (cbc.ca, September 28, 2013)

To consider

1. Why did Loubani and Greyson go to Cairo?
2. Why were the two men arrested and imprisoned?
3. What efforts were made to secure their release?
4. What was life like for the two men while they were in prison?

Reflection

While Loubani and Greyson did not deserve to be thrown into an Egyptian jail for 51-days, they did take some risks the day they were arrested. Consider the following questions:

- a) What risks did they take that contributed to their arrest?
- b) What could they have done differently to avoid a confrontation with Egyptian authorities?
- c) The two men initially set out on a humanitarian mission to train doctors in Gaza (one of the most volatile areas in the world) and to document their efforts. Clearly they were not averse to taking a “risk.” Based on this fact, are the questions listed above relevant? Didn’t the two men know that a humanitarian mission to Gaza via Cairo could have unforeseen negative consequences?

Diplomatic efforts

With public pressure growing at home, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird reported that “high-level” diplomatic talks were netting positive results. The Canadian perspective: Loubani and Greyson were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Still, the two men remained in prison with prosecutors suggesting that they had resisted security forces and that charges were forthcoming.

Release

Eventually, the Egyptian authorities conceded to Canadian pressure and Loubani and Greyson were released after 51 days in captivity. In an unfortunate twist of fate, the two men were initially prevented from flying home because their names appeared on an Egyptian “no fly” list. Nonetheless, a temporary stay in a hotel in Cairo, under the watchful eyes of Canadian consular officials, was preferable to the squalor and degradation of an Egyptian prison.

WHEN A COUP IS NOT A COUP

Minds on

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a coup (or coup d'état) is “a sudden, violent and illegal seizure of power from a government” (oxforddictionaries.com).

1. Have you ever heard of a country changing governments as a result of a coup?
2. Have you ever heard the word coup used in another context?
3. Use the word coup in a sentence. You can wait to answer this question until after you have read the following article on the Egyptian coup (?)* in the summer of 2013.

The ‘Coup’

US President Barack Obama found himself in a quandary after General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi backed a popular movement to oust democratically elected Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi. When Morsi refused to resign, al-Sisi’s army removed him from office. The military action had all the characteristics of a coup d’état; Morsi and many of his Muslim Brotherhood allies were arrested and detained as the army took control of the government of Egypt. However, President Obama and his administration had to be very careful not to call the regime change a coup. Here’s why: U.S. law prevents the government from providing aid to nations who depose their leaders through coups. This would suspend \$1.5 billion in aid slated for the fledgling democracy (\$1.3 billion of it scheduled to go to the military).

Obama’s refusal to refer to the ousting of Morsi as a coup was met with international condemnation. General al-Sisi’s aggressive takeover came as a shock to most international observers. Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood supporters almost immediately responded to what they characterized as a coup by setting up protest encampments in Cairo. Eventually, al-Sisi raided the encampments, killing as many as 600 protesters, in the bloodiest day of the post-Morsi era. Meanwhile Egypt’s top prosecutor charged former president Morsi — who has been under house arrest since al-Sisi took over — for inciting the killings of protesters.

While President Obama verbally condemned the violence and expressed dismay at the turbulent political climate in Egypt, he made sure his rhetoric never ventured toward the word “coup.” His only concession was to cancel a joint U.S.-Egyptian military exercise scheduled for the late summer of 2013.

To consider

1. Why is there a question mark in brackets after the Egyptian coup is mentioned in the *Minds on* section?
2. What do you think: was the removal of Mohammed Morsi’s democratically elected government by General al-Sisi a coup or not?