

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES ANALYSIS SERIAL

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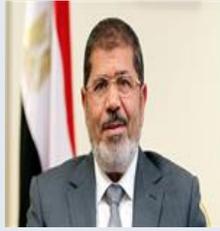
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International Legitimacy in the Middle East

Bilal Yıldırım

On July 3rd of 2013, the first democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi of Egypt was overthrown by coup led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. Much has been said so about whether the coup was legitimate. Some argued that President Morsi did not keep his word, and defended the coup; others believe that he was the legitimate authority and only one year to deal with the problems of Egypt was not enough, and opposed the coup. Both sides of the argument had previously united in their support of the Arab Awakening of Egypt. They had insisted on Hosni Mubarak stepping down and demanded the establishment of democracy in their country.

However, in spite of their earlier unity their opinion was divided.



Overthrown President
Mohammed Morsi



The Coup Leader General
Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi

One group defended the coup while the other supported Morsi.

Both sides were the losers, and the army, representing the old, anti-democratic regime, was the winner. We hope that they will come together again and defend their claim to democracy. So much has been said but there is still so much to be said, and done. The Egyptian people have emerged as agents of their own history and they must now learn to negotiate and co-exist in order to re-establish their short-lived democracy.

Generally all coups require foreign support and aid. The Egyptian coup has again shown us that foreign support legitimizes the coup and its actors. During the Egyptian coup, some Western and Middle Eastern countries provided this

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Center for Knowledge and

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support. This fact demonstrates that democracy or democratic regimes alone are not enough to produce international legitimacy. Western democracies, who shaped a coalition

humanitarian intervention. That means that, if a state violates the basic human rights of its own people, it loses legitimacy in terms of international society.

explains social facts on the basis of ideas. If actors in a social structure, e.g. states in international system, mutually believe in an idea and become socialized to it, this idea makes possible, as well as restricts their actions. If they believe an action is right, they do it. If they believe it is unjust, they refrain from it. briefly stated, an idea is that what makes a social fact what it is.



Supporters of Democracy in the Square of Adeviye

and fought a war in order to establish democracy in Iraq (and later in the entire Middle East as they had intended), and Middle Eastern dictatorships came together and left Morsi, the first democratically elected president of Egypt, alone.

What I mean by international legitimacy is that in order for any state, regime or government to survive it is necessary to be perceived as acceptable by other states. It should be enough to have a democratic regime but actually it is not. In fact, there is no definition of legitimacy in international law that determines whether a state is legitimate or not. However, according to the UN Charter, if conditions in any country threaten international peace, other countries will have the responsibility of

international intervention has not always occurred. Western democracies have often ignored these facts. Why did Western democracies ignore the violations in the region? Why did they become closer to dictatorships in Egypt?

The answer is the perceived national interest.

Nevertheless, before elaborating

on this, we have to explain the changing nature of international legitimacy. The coup in Egypt should draw our attention to the socially constructed nature of it.

As an approach to international relations, Social Constructivism

Human rights violations have always existed in

the Middle East but an

International legitimacy in general in the Middle East, and specifically in Egypt after the coup, is not constructed on the basis of democracy or international law but on the basis of national interest. That is how the coup, which killed thousands of people, was made legitimate. States in the West have prioritized their national interests



Anti-Morsi camp celebrating the coup in Tahrir Square

because the region is rich in terms of energy supplies, namely oil. Western states do not want the states in the region more powerful than they already are in that they want to get oil cheaply.

Oil rich countries of the region have the potential to get stronger but dictatorial regimes of these countries do not utilize that potential. These regimes do not have domestic legitimacy before their people. Therefore they gain the legitimacy they need from outside by providing cheap oil in order to keep their regimes alive. Egypt is not an oil rich country but once democracy has been established in the country it will create domino effect in the region. That is why Western states provide support for coups and why dictatorial regimes in the region come together with Western democracies. This necessity explains why they provoke differences in Egypt, and in the region.

In conclusion, all these facts support the idea that regional democratic developments will not reach legitimacy with the help of international society. They will either keep quiet and/or support existing regimes. The solution is perhaps in the determination and insistence by Middle Eastern people on democracy. Through emerging agencies in the region, they will find their own way to democracy, write their own history and construct their own legitimacy.

It is necessary for them to socialize into their own democratic norms or ideas. That is why they must learn to negotiate with each other and coexist.



A Map of the Middle East